

“Fiddler on the Roof, a revival of the musical, music by Jerry Bock; lyrics by Sheldon Harnick; book by Joseph Stein. Now playing at the Huntington Beach Playhouse, Huntington Beach Central Library Theatre, 7111 Talbert Ave., Huntington Beach, CA 92648, through December 1, (714) 375-0696, www.hbplayhouse.com ; ticket prices: \$20, Seniors \$18. Running time: 2 hours 55 minutes.

Community theatres rely on the theatres cash cows. A cash cow is a theatrical piece that brings audiences in continually over the years. They are the comfort food for audiences. Opening in New York in 1964, “Fiddler on the Roof” has been a cash cow for theatres, and especially community theatres, ever since. It is now being presented in a good production by the Huntington Beach Playhouse.

Based on the stories of Sholem Aleicheim, “Fiddler on the Roof” tells the story of Tevye (Michael Castro). Tevye is the milkman in the village of Anatevka. It is a time of trouble for the villagers. A Jewish community in the pre-revolutionary Tsarist Russia, they are trying to survive. How do they survive? Mostly by honoring their traditions, which are rousing told to us in the opening number, “Tradition”.

Tevye and his wife Golde (Megan Cherry) have five daughters. The oldest, Tzeitel (Carole Louise Duffis), loves the tailor Motel (Chase Evans). They want to be married. But in Anatevka the tradition is that marriages are arranged by the parents. They are given help, for a fee, from the local meddling matchmaker, Yente (Dee Shandera). She arrives before Sabbath to announce that she has a match for Tzeitel, the older, but wealthy butcher, Lazar Wolf (Jason Robert Hoskins).

Love wins out, and after a very funny production number, “The Dream”, the young lovers marry. It is a start of the breaking up of the traditions that have been the glue of this village. These strays from the traditions is what elevates “Fiddler on the Roof” from being entertainment only. With two of his other daughters breaking tradition there is a parallel as to what is happening world-wide. It is not just the little village of Anatevka that is changing. When you add the charming Jewish-American humor to the powerful drama of a flight of a segment of mankind fleeing persecution, then you have some of the reasons why “Fiddler on the Roof” has continued to succeed.

Any production of “Fiddler on the Roof” turns on the performance of the actor playing Tevye. At Huntington Beach Michael Castro gives a good, though not great, portrayal of the man who implores “If I Were a Rich Man”. The biggest flaw in his performance is his annoying habit of upstaging himself, often. He is pleasant enough in the role, but makes mistakes that are easily avoided.

The supporting cast is led by Dee Shandera as Yente the Matchmaker. Shandera is the best of the large cast at embracing the Jewish-American humor and the appropriate accent. She takes a character that isn’t liked by the other characters on stage and brings a warmth and glow that had the audience eating out of her hand on opening night.

Many of the readers of this column have seen "Fiddler on the Roof" many times since 1964. I have lost track of how times I seen it or performed in it. This production has enough unique touches by director Larry Watts to warrant another viewing of "Fiddler on the Roof". When humor is written as well as it is in this musical, a revisit is always welcome. - *Larry Blake*