

GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

Fiddler on the Roof



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Fiddler on the Roof

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
Goodspeed Opera House
June 27 - Sept 12, 2014

Music by
JERRY BOCK

Lyrics by
SHELDON HARNICK

BOOK BY
JOSEPH STEIN

Based on Sholem Aleichem
stories by special permission of
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Directed by
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The Max Showalter Center for
Education in Musical Theatre

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CHARACTER SUMMARY

Fiddler on the Roof



Adam Heller as Goodspeed's Tevye. ©Diane Sobolewski

TEVYE: A local dairyman, respected member of the *shtetl* community, and patriarch of his family. Tevye is a traditional Jewish man blessed (or cursed, depending on his mood) with five progressive daughters.

GOLDE: Tevye's wife and his more practical counterpart. She is a no-nonsense woman who takes pride in teaching her daughters how to be traditional Jewish women and wives.

TZEITEL: Tevye's oldest daughter who is in love with Motel the tailor. She is struggling with her duty as a traditional Jewish daughter and is pushing Motel to ask her father for her hand in marriage before another match is made for her.

HODEL: Tevye's second oldest and most ambitious daughter. She has her sights set on the Rabbi's only son until the forward thinking Perchik enters her life.

CHAVA: Tevye's middle daughter and a great lover of books. She is constantly looking for opportunities to read and often sneaks books into the barn where she can read uninterrupted. Her love of literature attracts the attention of the Russian man, Fyedka.

SHPRINTZE: Tevye's second youngest daughter.

BIELKE: Tevye's youngest daughter.

YENTE: The local matchmaker and a source of much gossip in the community.

MOTEL: A timid tailor who is in love with Tevye's daughter, Tzeitel. He is desperately trying to work up the courage to ask Tevye for his permission to marry Tzeitel.

PERCHIK: A young idealistic revolutionary and student who falls in love with Hodel. He believes that society is in need of a major change.

FYEDKA: A non-Jewish Russian man who falls in love with Tevye's daughter, Chava. He begins to question the prejudices of his comrades when he falls in love with a Jewish woman.

LAZAR WOLFE: The wealthy local butcher and the man that Yente matches with Tzeitel.

MORDCHA: The innkeeper.

RABBI: The town's religious leader.

MENDEL: The Rabbi's son.

AVRAHM: The bookseller.

NACHUM: The town beggar

GRANDMA TZEITEL: Golde's dead grandmother who comes to Tevye in a dream.

FRUMA SARAH: Lazar Wolfe's first wife.

CONSTABLE: The local Russian authority.

SHAINDEL: Motel's mother.



Adam Heller as Tevye in
Goodspeed's Fiddler on the Roof.
©Diane Soblewski.

the local Russians are high and a group of Russian men corner Chava as she is walking through the village to Motel's tailor shop. Fyedka saves Chava and tries to initiate a conversation with her but leaves abruptly when Motel appears. Motel and Tzeitel are married in a traditional Jewish ceremony with the entire village in attendance. Perchik shocks the crowd when he breaks tradition and asks Hodel to dance with him. She agrees and performs the forbidden act of dancing with a man. The rest of the guests follow their lead and join in the festivities with spirited dancing. The Constable and his men burst into the wedding and stage a pogrom, destroying everything.

ACT II

Tevye rehashes some recent events in a one sided discussion with God. While Tevye is conversing with The Almighty, Perchik asks Hodel to marry him. He is going to Kiev and would like Hodel to come join him there in a few weeks. Hodel accepts the proposal and the couple go to Tevye to ask for his blessing. At first, Tevye is shocked that they are asking for his blessing and not his permission but he sees how much his daughter loves Perchik and agrees to the marriage. Weeks later, on a trip into town, Tzeitel is approached by Yente with an (accidentally) opened letter from Perchik and the news that she has seen Chava with the Russian, Fyedka. Tzeitel takes the letter and Yente goes to spread her news about Chava through town. After Hodel reads Perchik's letter she decides to join him in Siberia, he has been arrested and is being held there.

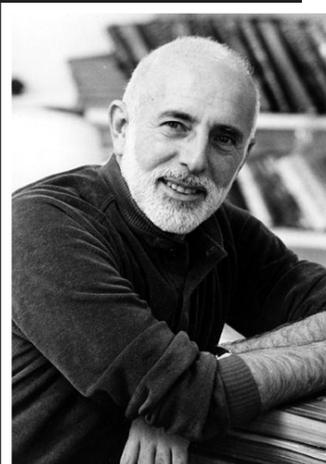
Hodel explains her feelings to Tevye and says goodbye to her family.

Life in Anatevka has continued after Hodel's departure and the town is enthralled when Motel gets a new sewing machine. While people are distracted by the new contraption, Chava and Fyedka meet in front of Motel's shop. They are in love but Chava will not allow Fyedka to speak with her father about getting married, she promises to talk to him about their relationship soon. When she next sees her father, Chava tries to broach the subject of Fyedka with him but Tevye becomes angry and forbids her to ever mention Fyedka again. When Tevye arrives home that night, Golde tells him that Chava has run away and married Fyedka in a non-Jewish ceremony. Tevye is heartbroken by Chava's marriage and declares that she is now dead to her family. When Chava approaches Tevye to ask for his forgiveness, he cannot bring himself to speak to her and ignores her pleas for acceptance.

The village soon learns, from the Constable, that everyone in Anatevka is ordered to sell their homes, goods, and leave in three days time. As the family is packing, Chava appears with Fyedka and tells everyone that they are leaving, too. The edict only applies to people of the Jewish faith but the young couple does not want to live among people who can treat others so badly. Chava and Fyedka are going to Cracow, Tzeitel and Motel are going to Warsaw, Hodel and Perchik are in Siberia, and the rest of the family will be traveling to America; Tzeitel bids her sister goodbye and though Tevye does not speak directly to Chava he asks Tzeitel to state "God be with you." The family goes their separate ways and the villagers leave Anatevka.



JOSEPH STEIN (*Book*) was born in 1912 in the Bronx, New York to Charles and Emma Stein. He received his Bachelor's Degree from the City College of New York in 1934 and his Master's Degree in social work from Columbia University in 1937. Mr. Stein worked in psychiatric social work for several years and wrote comedies on the side until a fateful lunch in 1942. The story goes that Mr. Stein was having lunch with a friend when he happened to strike up a conversation with a budding comedian. The comedian needed some new material for a radio monologue and, upon finding out Mr. Stein was a writer, asked him to throw out some ideas. The comedian liked the ideas and paid him \$15. The young comedian was Zero Mostel, who would eventually star in *Fiddler on the Roof*. After Mr. Stein earned his first commission from Mostel as a comedy writer he went on to write for the television program "Your Show of Shows" starring Sid Ceaser before writing for the stage. He was already an established writer when he began to collaborate on *Fiddler on the Roof*, but had never experienced a writing process quite like this one—it took several years to bring *Fiddler on the Roof* up to the production standards of, notoriously finicky, Jerome Robbins. Supposedly, Mr. Stein was asked to make so many rewrites and changes to the script that he and Robbins were not on speaking terms by the time the show opened on Broadway. Despite its difficulties, *Fiddler on the Roof* was a smash hit, won nine Tony Awards, and remains one of Mr. Stein's best-known works. His other works include *Mrs. Gibbons' Boys*, *Plain and Fancy*, *Mr. Wonderful*, *The Body Beautiful*, *Enter Laughing*, *Zorba*, and *Rags*. Mr. Stein passed away in 2010 at the age of 98.



JEROME ROBBINS (*Original Director/Choreographer*) was born Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz on October 11, 1918. Mr. Robbins grew up in Weehawken, New Jersey and showed an early aptitude for the arts when he began playing the piano at age three. He studied chemistry for one year at New York University, but dropped out to begin a career as a professional dancer in 1936. Mr. Robbins soon found his way to the experimental dance troupe of Gluck Sandor and was cast in the chorus of several Broadway musicals. One of his stage roles brought Mr. Robbins into contact with George Balanchine, who eventually convinced him to join the corps de ballet of The American Ballet Theatre in 1939. He quickly moved up the ranks of the ballet company and began dancing the lead in works created by ballet legends like Balanchine, Fokine, Massine, and de Mille. Though he was having incredible success in the traditional ballet world, Robbins began to feel that the American Ballet Theatre's repertoire was a bit oppressive; he wanted to create dances that were relevant to him and his life. Robbins recruited a young, then unknown, composer by the name of Leonard Bernstein to write a score for him and created a jazz influenced ballet about three sailors on shore leave called *Fancy Free*. The ballet premiered in April of 1944 and received twenty-two curtain calls at its opening; eight months later Robbins and friends had re-imagined the ballet and turned it into *On the Town*. *On the Town* marked the first major musical theatre contribution of both Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins and the show was eventually turned into a movie starring Gene Kelley, Frank Sinatra, and Ann Miller. After the commercial success of *On the Town*, Jerome Robbins was in high demand as a choreographer and, eventually, as a director with shows like *Billion Dollar Baby*, *High Button Shoes*, *Two's Company*, *Call Me Madame*, *Peter Pan*, *Gypsy*, *Bells Are Ringing*, and many more. Though a tremendous amount of iconic shows have been linked to the Robbins name, the two that arguably had the deepest impact on Broadway were *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Both *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof* were conceived, choreographed, and directed by Mr. Robbins and took musical theatre in a modern and fresh direction. Both musicals reflected a commitment to moving the story along with dance and song without using the traditional glitz and glamour of previous Broadway hits. Robbins co-directed the film version of *West Side Story* with Robert Wise and though he was fired before the musical finished filming, he still won an Academy Award for co-direction and his choreography. *Fiddler on the Roof* was the last original musical Jerome Robbins worked on and it became the longest running musical of the 1960s with 3,042 performances. After leaving Broadway, Mr. Robbins explored experimental theater before returning to ballet full time. Jerome Robbins passed away in July of 1998.

unnecessary elements and let the story take center stage. This challenge has always inspired my creative team. One very exciting element unique to our production is that we will have a real fiddler in the company. The emotional connection between the Fiddler, Tevye, and this beautiful score will shine differently with a live musician.

"A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof, trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck..."

Our set designer, Michael Schweikardt, has designed another physical production that is not only beautiful, but skillfully creates an emotional landscape in which this particular story can live freely and simply. There is no automation and no painted drops. Organic textures combine to create a world of great detail and specificity. Our choreographer, Parker Esse, is honoring the brilliant work of Jerome Robbins in the movement of the show. In collaboration with Mr. Robbins' estate, he will re-create and re-imagine for our intimate stage the iconic dance we have come to associate with *Fiddler on the Roof*. The result will be a unique blend of great story-telling and spectacular dance.

As one would expect, one of the most defining choices when producing *Fiddler* is the choice of the actor to play Tevye. He is the emotional center of the show. We have the great fortune of having Adam Heller as our milkman. I wanted a very human, honest Tevye—an actor who would not approach the role as we have seen it before, but connect deeply with the humor and vulnerability of the character. Adam brings those qualities and his amazing talent to our production. When I was first asked to direct *Fiddler*, I immediately thought that Adam would be a great fit. The audition process proved my instincts were correct, and this production will mark our fourth collaboration together.

The rest of the company is wonderfully talented. Lori Wilner brings a remarkable

strength to Golde; the lovely Barrie Kreinik, Elizabeth DeRosa, and Jen Brissman will portray the three central daughters Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava; the three men who change their world by loving them are David Perlman as Motel, Abdiel Vivancos as Perchik, and Timothy Hassler as Fyedka; John Payonk, who delighted audiences last season in *The Most Happy Fella*, will play the butcher Lazar Wolf; and the quirky and delightfully talented Cheryl Stern will play Yente the Matchmaker. An ensemble of 15 completes the cast 25 (plus 2 swings!).

This show has never been produced on the Goodspeed stage, so it is particularly exciting to bring this musical to Connecticut audiences in this theater. It is also a show that I have dreamed of directing since I saw my first production as a very young man. I remember to this day my first experience with *Fiddler on the Roof*—being moved and entertained in ways that inspired my own life in the theater. Hopefully, this production will bring a fresh and original perspective to the piece, and I remain very grateful at the opportunity to tell this story here at Goodspeed, a place I consider a very important artistic home. Enjoy!



A shtetl



CLICK HERE
to learn more about
life in the shtetls

<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtetl>

Fiddler on the Roof reflects the poignancy and grief that comes with extraordinary change, while celebrating the traditions and principles that maintain the identity of a people. Perhaps most remarkably, *Fiddler on the Roof's* universal appeal and commercial success has been virtually boundless.

It is filled with touching songs and themes that evoke an emotional response from people regardless of their religious, racial, or cultural background. Additionally, it marks the end of an era and the beginning of an exciting new one in musical theatre history. It is a musical theatre masterwork without comparison that gave artists the chutzpah to push the boundaries of audience expectations. Indeed, it set the stage for such shows as *Hair*, *Cabaret*, *RENT*, *In the Heights*, and *The Color Purple*, where an audience is immersed in the society, values, and culture of a realistic yet unfamiliar community.



Jerry Bock (center), Sheldon Harnick, Joseph Stein, and Jerome Robbins

Fiddler on the Roof is derived from the stories of the "Jewish Mark Twain," Sholem Rabinovich, who went by the pen name Sholem Aleichem ("Peace be with you"). Composer Jerry Bock and lyricist Sheldon Harnick were intent on adapting one of Aleichem's works into a musical. They shared the novel *Wandering Star* with librettist Joseph Stein, but he did not think it was appropriate for the stage. When a friend suggested

Aleichem's story *Tevye's Daughters*, they read it and immediately knew they had found the source material they needed. This would be the first time in their careers that they would initiate a project of their own choosing. They were accustomed to being hired by a producer who had already identified the show. They brought the idea to Hal Prince, who eventually agreed to produce it once Stein's script began to materialize and Jerome Robbins was available to choreograph and direct the piece.

Prince knew that Robbins was the man for the job, and he was absolutely correct. Robbins had the opportunity to visit a *shtetl* (a small town with a large Jewish population in Central and Eastern Europe) with his parents when he was six years old, before those communities were obliterated by incessant pogroms and the atrocities of World War II. The experience was ingrained in his memory because his ancestors came from one of the small Jewish communities. Throughout the entire process of working on the show, he conducted a vast amount of research to accurately portray *shtetl* culture so it could be preserved for another 25 years. Robbins was unrelenting in his pursuit of authenticity, and he brought a comprehensive vision to the piece. Moreover, Robbins was driven to identify what the show was truly about. He pushed the other collaborators to discover that the show was about "the dissolution of a way of life." This revelation prompted them to change the opening number from "We Haven't Missed a Sabbath Yet" to "Tradition" so they could begin the piece by focusing on a number that describes the traditions that will later be threatened by the forces of change. This brought a universality, focus, and cohesion to the piece that it desperately needed to satisfy audiences.

Fiddler on the Roof opened on Broadway at the Imperial Theatre on September 22, 1964. Its seemingly drab story of persecution and struggle defied the rules of commercial success by closing as the longest running musical in Broadway history (3,242 performances). It also went on to win nine Tony Awards and become one of the most widely-produced and celebrated classics of the American stage. At a time when glitz and cartoon-dimensional characters abounded on Broadway, *Fiddler on the Roof* proved that there was a market for modest characters, challenging pieces, and authentic heartfelt stories with universal themes.

SHOLEM ALEICHEM AND YIDDISH LITERATURE



Sholem Aleichem

Sholem Aleichem is not the first writer to make a lasting impression on Yiddish Literature and he will not be the last, however, he is the Yiddish writer with the most notoriety. With a quick and witty writing style, his stories of *shtetl* life keep pace with the modern world and modern viewpoints. If there is any confusion as to how a man who began writing in 1883 can

have any relatable views to 2014, perhaps people should be directed to the long running and instantly recognizable musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Sholem Aleichem's collection of short stories entitled *Tevye's Daughters* was the inspiration for the beloved musical and has gone on to sell thousands of copies in dozens of languages.

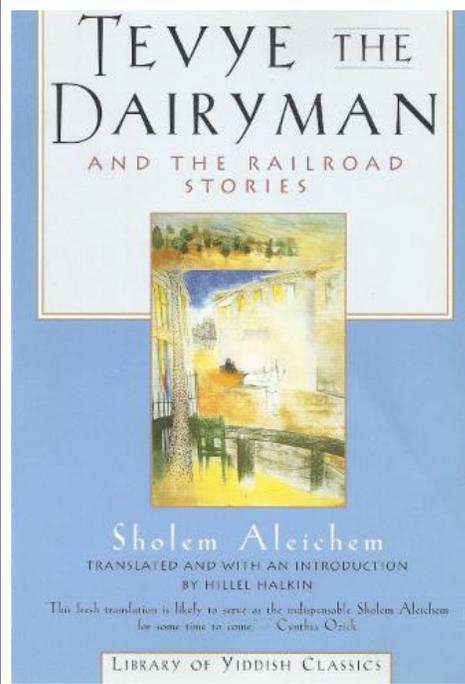
Sholem Aleichem began writing professionally in 1883 and discarded his given name of Sholem Rabinowitz for the pen name of Aleichem. The nom de plume that he chose should have given his readers a hint at the wry humor in each of his stories since the phrase sholem aleichem is very common in Yiddish conversations and literally means "peace unto you"—though its more casual meaning would be something like, "how do you do." The very recitation of his name could create a Yiddish comedy routine, "Peace be unto you. What's your name?" "Sholem Aleichem" "Yes, thank you. Peace be unto you, but what's your name?" His lighthearted pseudonym could also have been a way to let his readers know that he would be writing about Jewish life and culture in a more universal way. It's more practical purpose was to protect him from people who might be offended by his satirical characters.

SHOLEM ALEICHEM was born in 1859 as Sholem Rabinowitz in Pereyaslav, Russia. Mr. Aleichem wanted to be a writer from a very young age and arrived at Sholem Aleichem as a humorous pen name in 1883. At the age of 17, Aleichem became a private tutor for a wealthy family but was let go when it was discovered that he was romancing his student. From 1880-1883, Aleichem became a court rabbi or record keeper for the small Russian town of Lubny. It was in Lubny that Mr. Aleichem published his first story in Yiddish—he had previously only written in Russian or Hebrew due to the social stigma attached to Yiddish in Russia. Mr. Aleichem married his former pupil, Olga Loyev, in 1883 and though he acquired some wealth through his advantageous marriage, he had to rely on his wife's money as well as paid readings to support his family.

In 1905, Aleichem and his family immigrated to New York where they were warmly welcomed by the Jewish community. By this time he had become a popular folk writer and was often referred to as the "Jewish Mark Twain." Despite the family's welcome into Jewish society and his status as a celebrity, Mr. Aleichem was unable to find a steady writing job. He had originally set his sights on writing for the theatre and, in fact, had two plays produced by the dueling Yiddish theatre impresarios, Jacob Adler and Boris Thomashevsky. Though both shows were presented at Yiddish theatres and were highly advertised, neither did very well with the public and quickly closed. With his immediate hopes of theatre greatness dashed and no consistent income, Mr. Aleichem and his family returned to Europe where they lived mostly in Switzerland. When WWI broke out, Mr. Aleichem and his family fled back to America with the exception of his son Misha, who was very ill with tuberculosis. Sholem Aleichem died on May 13, 1916 and had over 40 works published at the time of his death. He never achieved the acclaim he craved during his life but has become known as one of the foremost writers of Yiddish literature in the world.

Yiddish Literature is often broken down into three basic periods, there is Old Yiddish Literature that was created between 1300-1780, Haskala (The Jewish Enlightenment) that was created between 1755-1880, and Modern Yiddish Literature that was created between 1864-present. During the start of the Modern Yiddish Literature period many "serious" Jewish writers were not actually writing in Yiddish. Yiddish was scorned by the proponents of the Haskala movement and intellectuals of the time; it had a reputation for being a language used by the unlearned. Sholem Aleichem had been educated at a Russian high school and worked as a tutor for a wealthy estate owner so his first essays on Jewish life and education were written in formal Hebrew to avoid any social stigma; however, when the editor of a local Hebrew journal decided to publish a Yiddish edition, Aleichem jumped at the chance to be a part of the new publication. According to his autobiography, Aleichem remembered his grandfather reading to guests from a Yiddish book one evening and upon hearing their laughter, decided then and there to become a writer. With this new opportunity, he had the chance to live out his childhood dream of being a true Yiddish writer.

SHOLEM ALEICHEM AND YIDDISH LITERATURE



The Yiddish language began rising in popularity after the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 and the subsequent rise in anti-Semitism. The Jewish people began to associate the Yiddish language with their autonomy and used it as a binding agent in their struggle for a cultural identity and dialogue.

anti-Semitism, the pogroms, the exile, the loss of tradition, and the inevitable societal change that accompanied these events, then so could they.

Sholem Aleichem began to advance Yiddish Literature as an art form with his enduring characters and attempted to create novels centered on Jewish life. He kept the name of Sholem Aleichem throughout his career and eventually fashioned himself into a folkshrayber or folk writer and though Aleichem was a well-educated bilingual Russian businessman who spoke Russian to his family, he became the Yiddish voice of the people. His stories and characters were written in a way that the average

person living in the *shtetl* could relate to them and his most famous character, Tevye the dairyman, could have been their neighbor. The cheeky dairyman made his first appearance in the writings of Sholem Aleichem in 1894 and the Tevye cycle was

completed by 1909. Tevye faced the same daily struggles that many of Aleichem's readers were confronted with and his unique blend of realism, humor, and social commentary struck a chord with a traditional people constantly faced with the destruction of those traditions. Despite a sequence of tragedies, Tevye managed to maintain his sense of humor and his faith in a world that was constantly testing his traditional sensibilities.



Marc Chagall's oil painting "The Fiddler." (1913)

Sholem Aleichem set out at the start of his career to be a writer—he may have even dreamed of becoming the most exulted writer of his generation, but he became even more. He was the

voice of Jewish society during a time when people desperately needed a way to express themselves and though Tevye is not Sholem Aleichem's only character, he is the character that provided readers with a sense of balance. If Tevye could face the



Shabbat dinner

"Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything – how to eat, how to sleep, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God."

Fiddler on the Roof is a musical that revolves around the idea of tradition and the role it plays in the daily lives of the residents of Anatevka. During the show, Tevye explains a few of the traditions that are part of

his life as a Jew, but there are several customs that are never explained. For example, Tevye tells the audience that there are traditions for how the people of Anatevka eat, but he does not explain these dietary restrictions. Tevye is referring to the custom of keeping kosher. The term kosher refers to the foods that are allowed by Jewish dietary laws which regulate which animals can be consumed and how the animal providing the meat should

be killed. Several more Jewish customs demonstrated in *Fiddler on the Roof* but not explained are:

MATCHMAKING: In Anatevka, it is customary for a matchmaker to pair the village's single occupants together for marriage. The father would have the final approval of his daughter or son's match.

The matched couple could have a significant age gap, a matched man could have had several previous marriages, or the couple may not meet until the day of the wedding. Marrying for love was not an option and as Tzeitel points out to her sister Hodel, "you're a girl from a poor family. So whatever Yente brings, you'll take, right? Of course right!"

SHABBAT: Shabbat or the Sabbath is the day of rest in Judaism. The Sabbath is an observance of how God rested on the seventh day and all work must cease from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. Customarily, the Sabbath is ushered in by lighting candles shortly before sunset and eating a traditional meal with family and friends.

WEDDINGS: A traditional Jewish wedding would have the following elements: a ketubah (a marriage contract), a wedding canopy or chuppah, a ring given to the bride, and the **breaking of glass**. The wedding ceremony takes place under a canopy or **chuppah** as a symbol of the home that the new couple will build together. The groom gives the bride a ring signifying the moment when the marriage becomes official. After the bride receives her ring the **ketubah**, or marriage contract, is read and outlines the duties of the couple. A glass is placed on the floor, and the groom breaks it with his foot. This serves as an expression of sadness at the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and marks the end of the official ceremony.

DANCING: In some branches of Judaism, Dance is an expression of life and joy and athletic dances are often performed at weddings. Men and women are discouraged from dancing together and are separated into two different areas. Perchik makes a point to ask the Rabbi if men and women dancing together is truly forbidden (it's not) and scandalizes the conservative minded villagers by dancing with Hodel.

Tradition is a well-worn path for the villagers of Anatevka and most of them would never consider straying from the comfort and safety of the road most traveled, however, Tevye's daughters have no such compunction. The story of *Fiddler on the Roof* unfolds around the traditions of a simple community and the upheaval that ensues from the destruction of those traditions.



A chuppah



Breaking of glass

JUDAISM AND MUSICAL THEATRE CONTINUED



CLICK HERE to watch the PBS documentary *Broadway Musicals: A Jewish Legacy*

community used the world of pretend to make their observations and concerns easier for the general public to understand.

Think back to the musicals that you have seen over the years and try to find one that does not have, at the heart of its story, a struggle between two opposing ideas. *Fiddler on the Roof* uses the very realistic and accurate struggle of Russian Jews against Cossacks, *The Wizard of Oz* tells the story of a young girl battling an evil witch, *Into The Woods* has a community of characters trying to survive in a world where nothing is what they thought it was, and *Guys and Dolls* shows the struggle between gambling outlaws and polite society. At their core, these stories are all about finding a way to adapt to a new world. They are about

misfits trying to find their place and the group to which they belong. The extraordinary Jewish writers of the Golden Age of Broadway were able to take their feelings of displacement and exclusion and turned them into musical romps that spoke to the feelings of isolation that everyone had experienced. By appealing to a feeling of divergence in their audiences, writers were able to share their longing for inclusion and religious traditions in a way that never mentioned Judaism. All classic Broadway shows aren't about Judaism and all Broadway stars aren't Jewish, but there is enough history and evidence to make you wonder if *Spamalot* might be onto something with the lyric, "To get along on Broadway, to sing a song on Broadway, to hit the top on Broadway and not lose. I tell you, Arthur king, there is one essential thing... There simply must be, simply must be Jews."

Documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/episodes/broadway-musicals-a-jewish-legacy/watch-the-full-film/1499/>

UNIVERSAL CONNECTIONS

Yiddish theater never crossed into the mainstream audience and Broadway never strayed into explicitly Jewish topics until 1964 with the unveiling of a musical inspired by the works of Sholem Aleichem about a devout milkman and his independent daughters. *Fiddler on the Roof* was a very risky musical venture at the time, and many people were unsure if the show would be appealing to anyone who wasn't Jewish.

The creative team, who were all Jewish, had to deal with many difficult decisions during the evolution of the show, but kept going because they believed that the production was about more than the struggles of a Jewish dairyman—it was about tradition. And like Tevye tells his audience, "Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as... as... as a fiddler on the roof!"

The creative team was proved right when *Fiddler on the Roof* was a resounding hit and returned backers 352% on their original investment. *Fiddler on the Roof* has played all over the world and had countless professional, amateur, and school theaters mount a production of the show. It has been translated into French, Japanese, German, Russian, Turkish, Danish, Hebrew, Spanish, and Yiddish. It is said that a Japanese man, after seeing the show performed in Japan, came up to Joseph Stein and asked if the show had truly been a hit in the United States. Stein confirmed that it was and the man said he couldn't believe that Americans would relate to the show, it was so Japanese!



Zero Mostel as Tevye
Courtesy of the Friedman-Abeles Collection.

Fiddler on the Roof is an amalgamation of incredible talent and vision by everyone involved with the original production, but the heart of the show is certainly Tevye. The effusive dairyman is the driving force of the show and it takes a talented actor to make Tevye's emotional transformation from comfortable traditionalist to unwilling refugee a believable one. The Tevye of the Sholem Aleichem stories faces more loss than his musical counterpart and gives the impression of slowly being beaten down by the hardships of his life.

The writers of *Fiddler on the Roof* took the idea of Tevye wearing away literally and were envisioning a worn, gaunt looking man on stage. They considered actors like Howard DiSilva, Danny Kaye, Tom Bosley, Danny Thomas, and Alan King for the role, but none of them seemed exactly right. To this day, the creative team is not sure how Zero Mostel's name came up, but once his name was raised they knew they had to have him. With his charisma and surprising grace onstage, Mostel gave Tevye the unswerving faith and vulnerability that was needed to make him a bittersweet hero.

While Zero Mostel was not the image of Tevye that the writers had seen in their heads, he certainly set the standard for

all of the Tevyes who would follow in his footsteps right down to the performance and staging of "If I Were a Rich Man." It's a little known fact that Mostel was hit by a bus in 1960 and suffered severe permanent damage to one of his legs, he had virtually no circulation in his damaged limb and it would go completely numb after a few moments of standing. He would dance away onstage each night hoping that he would not injure himself or break his leg without feeling it. His handicap directly affected his staging for "If I Were a Rich Man" causing him to sit on various props across the stage. This staging, born from a brutal injury, is still used in productions of *Fiddler on the Roof* across the world. And although he was undoubtedly the star of the original *Fiddler on the Roof* cast and is inexorably tied to Tevye in peoples' minds, it is important to note that the show was not and is not dependent on Zero Mostel for its success. The show has managed to stand the test of time; it has had four successful revivals on Broadway and is slated to undergo its fifth incarnation in 2015.



 **CLICK HERE to watch Zero Mostel perform "If I Were a Rich Man" at the Tony Awards**



Zero Mostel as Tevye



 **CLICK HERE to see Sheldon Harnick speak about Zero Mostel**

Zero Mostel Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahAOU1HZXlc>
Sheldon Harnick Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QUzcZaZJ8M>



The writers of *Fiddler on the Roof* drew heavily on Russian history to shape the events portrayed in their story and set the show in the year 1905 during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II. The predecessor to Nicholas II, Alexander III, came into power in 1881 on the heels of his father's violent assassination. Alexander III issued the **Temporary Laws** which instituted new restrictions on the everyday life of Jewish people and allowed Christians to evict Jews from their midst. **Pogroms** began to take place with regularity and continued into the 1900s and the reign of Nicholas II. A particularly devastating pogrom took place in 1903 in Kishinev in April 1903. Mobs, inspired by local leaders with governmental permission, murdered, pillaged, and destroyed property without any interference from police. When authorities were finally told to intercede, the mobs had slaughtered 45 Jews, wounded 1,600 people, and looted 1,500 Jewish homes. Although more severe than most planned attacks, the Kishinev pogrom

was fairly typical in most respects and the people responsible were not punished. The violence and religious intolerance in Russia during the late 19th and early 20th century helped instigate the Russian revolution in 1917 and the downfall of the Tsarist autocracy.

Fiddler on the Roof is one of the most loved musicals in the world and while audience members are aware the show takes place in Russia towards the end of the Tsar's rule, many people may not realize it occurs in 1905, just two years after the Kishinev pogrom. Though it's easy to get lost in the poetry of the show, *Fiddler on the Roof* deals with the very real and dangerous issues that people were facing during this time period. When you consider the condoned violence, dwindling rights, forced evacuations and harassment occurring during this time, the sentiment of "God bless and keep the Tsar far away from us" takes on new and passionate meaning for the villagers of Anatevka.

PALE OF SETTLEMENT

From 1791 until 1915, the Jews living in Eastern Europe were confined by the Tsars of Russia to an area known as the Pale of Settlement. The Pale consisted of 25 provinces including Ukraine, Lithuania, Crimea, and part of Poland. Although large in size (approximately 472,590 square miles), and containing areas of dynamic economic growth, the Pale was considered the greatest legal restriction imposed on the Jews of the Russian empire. The light yellow area in the map to the right depicts the Pale territory.

The Pale was created in order to rid Moscow of Jewish business competition, reflecting the growth of anti-Semitic sentiment in Russia. Russian Jews were forced to pay double the taxes and were forbidden to lease land, run taverns, or receive higher education.



YIDDISH

Yiddish is the historic language of Jews in Ashkenazic (Central and East European) and is the third principal literary language in Jewish history, after classical Hebrew and (Jewish) Aramaic. The language is characterized by a synthesis of Germanic dialects with Hebrew and Aramaic.



CLICK HERE to learn more about the Yiddish language

<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx?Language/Yiddish#id0en2ae>

Today, we find many Yiddish words and phrases ingrained in our everyday language. Here are some you might recognize:

AY-YAY-YAY: a joyous, or at times sarcastic, exclamation.

CHUTZPAH: nerve, gall

KLUTZ: an awkward, uncoordinated person.

KOSHER: food that it prepared according to Jewish law. More generally kosher means legitimate.

MAVEN: an expert, a connoisseur.

NOSH: to snack.

OY VEY: "Oh, how terrible."

PUTZ: a term of contempt for a fool, or an easy mark.

SCHMALTZ: overly emotional and sentimental behavior.

SHLEP: to carry or to move about.

SHMOOZ: to hang out with, a friendly gossip talk.

SHNOZ: a nose.



CLICK HERE to learn more Yiddish words

http://www.sbjf.org/sbjco/schmaltz/yiddish_phrases.htm

DOWRY: money or property that a wife or wife's family gives to her husband when the wife and husband marry in some cultures.

EDICT: an official order or proclamation issued by a person in authority.

KOPEK: an aluminum-bronze coin of Russia, the Soviet Union, and its successor states, equal to a 100th part of a ruble.

L'CHAIM a Hebrew toast, meaning "to life," used in drinking to a person's health or well-being.

MATCHMAKER: someone who arranges marriages.

MAZEL TOV: literally translated as "good luck," it is a Hebrew/Yiddish expression of congratulations and best wishes.

NAZDROVIA: "cheers" in Russian.

POGROM: the organized killing of many helpless people usually because of their race or religion—specifically Jews.

RABBI: a person who acts as a spiritual leader and religious teacher of a Jewish community.

REB: a Yiddish title of respect for a man, similar to "Mister."

SABBATH: a day of religious observance and abstinence from work, kept by Jews from sundown on Friday until nightfall on Saturday.

SHTETL: the Yiddish term for town that commonly refers to small market towns in pre-World War II Eastern Europe with a large Yiddish-speaking Jewish population.

TSAR: a Russian emperor (until the year 1917).

THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE: Key Locations in *Fiddler*



DID YOU KNOW... *FIDDLER ON THE ROOF* TRIVIA



Maria Kamilova, Bea Arthur, and Zero Mostel recording the original cast album for *Fiddler on the Roof*.
©Marvin Lichtner

- Over 10 actors have portrayed Tevye on Broadway including Zero Mostel, Paul Lipson, Luther Adler, Harry Goz, Topol, Alfred Molina, and Harvey Fierstein.
- \$650,000 in tickets were pre-sold for *Fiddler on the Roof* when it opened in 1964, which would equal a pre-sale of over \$4 million today.
- Bea Arthur, of “Maude” and “Golden Girls” fame, was the original Yente in *Fiddler on the Roof*.
- Luther Adler, Zero Mostel’s replacement in the original Broadway production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, was the son of Jacob Adler, a Yiddish theater owner and actor that worked with Sholem Aleichem in New York City.
- Motel Kamzoil was the first role to be cast for the original Broadway production of *Fiddler on the Roof*.
- Austin Pendleton, who played Motel Kamzoil in the original Broadway production *Fiddler on the Roof*, voiced the character of Gurgle in the movie *Finding Nemo*.
- *Fiddler on the Roof* was the last original musical that Jerome Robbins participated in.
- Jerome Robbins would not let dancers featured in the bottle dance secure the bottles to their hats in any way. If a bottle fell off of a dancer’s head, he had to retire from the dance for that night.
- “Tradition” was not the original opening number for *Fiddler on the Roof*.
- Before Bock, Stein, and Harnick considered the Sholem Aleichem stories, Rodgers and Hammerstein optioned the rights and considered writing a musical based on the Tevye stories.



The bottle dance

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