Fiddler on the Roof Dalriada 2018 Review

Fiddler on the Roof is the story of life in a small Russian *shtetl* in 1905, when Russia was still an empire, ruled by Tsar Nicholas II, head of the dictatorial Romanov dynasty. It is set in the fictional town of Anatevka and tells the story of Tevye, an impoverished milkman, and his many conversations with God as he faces one loss after another: from his poor old horse to his beautiful daughter Chava to his sense of Hebrew tradition and how it shapes his understanding of all of life.

With antisemitism on the rise,it is a timely production, and Dalriada is to be commended for telling so well an important tale of human rights abuses, which were fuelled by propaganda to incite fear and hatred of Jews among many non-Jewish citizens, and often leading to violence. The three-year period from 1903 to 1906 was a particularly terrifying time for Russian Jews, as one pogrom after another raged in Western Russia. (A pogrom is defined as the "organized killing of a minority.") The voices ringing out from the stage in the John Armstrong Hall stand as witnesses to the suffering, past and present, of minorities all around our world and this reviewer is glad, for one, to have heard this invaluable story told so well. As the Good Book says, "Out of the mouths of children…"

Firstly, the set was excellent in its simplicity: a back wall of rooftops (for the beautiful opening moments as the Fiddler himself tuned us in in his spotlight); a few significant, signature pieces of stage furniture (a doorway, a clever, multi-functioning table,) and a very important central staircase, through the orchestra pit, all revealing that Miss Brown was focussed on telling the story of these people's lives, not the everyday clutter that gathers round their lives. I really liked this directorial choice. And well done to **Dave Reed** and **Joe Millican** for constructing of Miss Brown's vision of Anatevka so well.

The Stage and **Props Teams** have to bring this set alive and they worked very well together**,** balancing the demands of the huge items as well as the hugely important, symbolic little things like candles and pillows**.** These two teams seamlessly glued the scene changes in and ensured a good pace – good job! The **Costume Team** made sure everyone was suitably dressed for the time period and managed a lot of changes as actors doubled up as Jewish villagers one minute and Russian dancers the next. Or village women in one scene and ghostly brides in the next. Well done backstage costumiers; that's a huge job, very smoothly managed. And this reviewer appreciated the colour palette created by the costumes particularly, the subdued hues and tones of poverty but also warmth - perfect for Anatevka.

The **Hair and Make Up Team** had a number of challenges, what with beards and old-age and ghosts! But they stepped up to the mark with excellence and made sure everyone looked the part. Well done to you all.

The lighting needs to be relevant, enhancing and accurately delivered. The **Lighting Team** in this production did all three. It is at its best when you don't really notice it because it is serving only to illuminate the story and enhance the mood. Good job! The **Sound Team** have A LOT of mics to look after, keep working, keep track of and it can be hectic. So well done to this team who made sure the audience missed not a word.

Emily Brown did a super job in **choreographing** the dance sequences with Miss Brown. They were energetic and exuberant when required and gentle and tender when necessary. It was the kind of choreography that draws attention to the life of the story and not just the dancing and for that – congratulations.

The **Business and House Teams** ensured smooth operations, being attentive to audience needs and details that often go unseen and unsung. So this reviewer thanks you for your contribution.

The job of the **Prompt** is one of the hardest. Even if lines are perfect, you can never take your eyes off the page and you have to know the difference between a dramatic pause and a panic pause. Alice Christie had it down to a tee - very well done!

The **Orchestra** overcame with ease being split in two – or, at least, made sure it appeared so, and we enjoyed the timeless score, from roof-raising songs about embracing life to tender questions asked between a man and his wife, "Do you love me?" Every moment was enhanced by the sensitive performance of this family of musicians made up of current and past pupils as well as some of their tutors – a true Dalriada tradition! Beautifully done, music-makers, and thank you for the senstive and powerful emotional support from below the stage. And Mrs Montgomery just makes it look easy! Congratulations, Mrs M, they did you proud.

The Fiddler, Sean Turner, was brilliant. Up and down from the orchestra pit to the heights of the staged roof, his mournful playing did indeed make an excellent contribution to the tone and mood of each performance.

The Male Chorus excelled in providing a strong backdrop of traditional Jewish and Cossack dancing men, who all committed fully to some of the most vigorous and demanding moves seen on the stage in years – well done, I was very impressed by your energy and skill. Bottle dancing and Cossack dancing - both brilliant!

The Female Chorus was a delight, adding warmth and comfort to every scene, from the exhilarating wedding scene to the moments of grief as the villagers were forced from their homes in Anatevka, the cast moving slowly down the central staircase, through the audience. It is a tribute to the fine directing skill of Miss Brown that each of these villagers brought the emotion with them. Rebecca Scott stood out as her face communicated all her sense of loss at leaving her village forever.

Josh Watson's photography needs a mention here. The sneak preview shots and the performance photographs posted on the school's Facebook page really capture the landscape of this production, the muted colours and lighting styles, the expressions, the faces, the crowds, the individuals, the moments. Josh has made a stylish and artistic collection and should be congratulated enormously for it. Thank you, Josh.

Shprintze and **Bielke** were played beautifully by Madeleine Millar and Eibhlin Maginn respectively. Two little girls watching as their sisters change the traditions of their home and way of life. Watching and learning and fitting perfectly into the family scenes. Especially the final scene, of departure and displacement and loss. They were both a solid and convincing part of the fabric of life and we feared for their future, as the youngest, most vulnerable citizens without a home. Well done, girls.

Caitlin Morgan and Katy Gault were very convincing ghosts of **Fruma-Saraha** and **Grandma Tzeitel,** bringing real horror to Tevye's important nightmare story. The female cast were thrillingly disturbing as they haunted their way to persuading Golde that Motel was the true match for Tzeitel. This was a great scene with the traditional dry ice adding to the atmosphere of terror. Super choreography and fabulous shriek-singing gave Tevye what he needed and the audience a great thrill!

I thought Daniel McCollum gave a great performance as the **Russian Constable**, bringing a gravitas and sincerity to the role of a man conflicted by two different kinds of loyalty: to his orders and his

friendships. His is a pivotal role for the audience to grasp the depth of such a struggle – the very struggle of good versus evil that exists in each one of us. He obeys his orders yet we see that sympathy and empathy have allowed him to see past prejudice. Even so, he makes that terrible choice. He is Everyman, just as Tevye is, both trapped by circumstances, both seeking to make sense of it all.

There was excellence too in the minor roles, so vital to a successful production. Emily Gregg was just right in her **Beggar** role and Kathryn Finlay made much of a small role as **Motel's Mother** at his wedding. These may seem small parts but they make up the very fabric of the play and deliver a sense of realism in the details. Good job, girls!

Well done to Daniel Telford as the **Bookseller**, Jonathan Diamond as the **Rabbi's son** and Oliver Doyle alternating with Joshua McAuley as Mordcha the **Innkeeper,** who all kept that realism alive. They each delivered convincing performances which really took us to this little village and introduced us to the many lives lived there. This part of story-telling - the little people who live in the background - this part is so crucial in this play especially, as the audience gets to meet and know the individuals and therefore we resist stereotyping, we resist the 'identity politics' and see the people for who they are in their uniqueness.

Rabbi Jordan Watton certainly succeeded in bringing the light relief: his singing, his dancing, his body language – the whole package! A born performer and entertainer, he was a brilliant, spindly wee rabbi with a prayer for everything. I particularly enjoyed his very drunk wedding dancing!

Lazar Wolf, you fabulous **Butcher**. You were hilarious in the milk-cow mix-up; you were utterly convincing as the embittered loser in the wedding scene and you had perfect comic timing in your last line, "I hate him!" A thoroughly enjoyable performance from 'One to Watch' for future productions. And what a singing voice – very well done! And I will definitely leave your chickens out of this!

Sophie Fox made a superb **Matchmaker Yente**, always bossing, talking over, yet hoping, in the end, for Jerusalem and poignantly reminding the audience that all people everywhere long for home, in one way or another. A very strong performance from a young debuting actress; I look forward to her future performances on this stage.

The three suitors, **Motel**, **Perchik** and **Fyedka** each provide Tevya with successive and increasing challenges to his sense of order and tradition. And yet, each time, as the orchestra beautifully held the room, as the actors froze and the subtle lighting change dressed the scene, his conversation with God brought him to the right place. The last one was the hardest road for him, but, in his way, he got there, giving blessing to **Chava**, no longer dead to him. That was a deeply moving moment, when compassion trumped tradition, expertly delivered by both Papa and daughter, well done.

Jon-Lee Walker as the Tailor **Motel Camzoil** perfectly captured the nervous persona of this lovable character and brought humour and warmth to the role. His solo, the brilliant Miracle of Miracles, was performed with an appealing authenticity and charm and revealed a very talented young actor and singer. Jamie Moorhead was born for the role of **Perchik**, the student from Kiev. He wooed both Hodel and the audience to himself as a character of passionate political views, who was no hypocrite because he was prepared to take a stand for what was right, no matter the cost to himself. His lively, convincing performance of Now I Have Everything was just splendid. When **Fyedka** jumped up onto the table in the inn and introduced himself with that magnificent note, the audience realised this was someone who meant business – and also - that's how to debut! Brendan Patterson gave us a really sensitive portrayal of a critical character, because here we get to disrobe ourselves of our prejudices against the aggressor, the Russian army, and we see – it is essential that the audience sees – this young

man as an individual, trying to find his way through the circumstances of his life, challenged by the arrival of love. He excelled, in this reviewer's eyes, in delivering a key message of the story, in a thoughtful and acutely sensitive performance. Well done.

The elder daughters, **Tzeitel**, **Hodel** and **Chaval,** Anna Jane Murphy, Sarah Hadden and Hannah Baxter, provided a strong set of "blessings" for their Papa as each one broke with tradition. Each displayed their own individuality in their roles, yet worked so well together in their first number, Matchmaker. It was a moving moment as they realised they did not long for the Matchmaker at all and life was about to change irrevocably for each member of this family. Again, simple but effective choreography served to adorn the story-telling and the girls' voices were a pleasure to listen to, individually and blended. As each discovered love and began their journeys away from their Mama and Papa, we were treated to some lovely, tender moments. Anna Jane Murphy, as **Tzeitel**, opened the door for her younger sisters and joyfully thanked her Papa for his blessing. Sarah Hadden performed her role as **Hodel** with great wit and grit, exactly what is needed as she makes her moving farewell to her Papa at the railway station, bound for Siberia and her husband-to-be. It was a very touching scene, Far from the Home I Love, and Sarah sensitively brought life and heart ache to it. Well done. And so to **Chava**, Hannah Baxter. She takes the audience beyond the limits of tradition and asks the hardest questions of her Papa. But this young actress more than delivered. Her soft, tender character was genuinely portrayed from the very beginning and her story with Fyedka was utterly believable – so crucial to this musical's emotional and indeed, socio-political underpinnings. Very well done, Hannah.

Golde, as Tevye's wife of twenty-five years and mother of his five daughters, is an efficient helpmate and traditionalist, faced with the changes of a new world. She has a sharp tongue and wit. And boy, did Robyn Maddox know exactly how to deliver this role! She responded brilliantly to her husband as she in turn chastised him, warned him, was confused by him and loved him. There's a Sabbath prayer dotted with candle lights in her home and the houses beyond, the haunting "Sunrise, Sunset" during a wedding scene, the moment when her fears of losing her daughter forever are washed away in a single line of blessing – all these are shown to us as Robyn opened Golde's heart to us. Watching her sing over her daughter's wedding was incredibly moving, her face and voice and whole body expressing both the hope of such a match but also the first loss of a daughter. Her packing up of her home to leave it forever was sensitively done, revealing the strength of this character but also her brokenness. A former play producer in Dalriada used to say, "It's all in the eyes." Well, this girl's eyes said everything as she watched her town empty before her. Jewish neighbours, friends, some were heading Poland, their final end we can only dread to imagine. Golde's eyes told us her struggle, her grief. I was profoundly moved. This is one very fine actress. A golde star, for sure.

The last time this reviewer heard Samuel McIlmoyle sing he was a boy soprano singing, "Where is Love?" in Oliver! Well, six years later, as **Tevye**, he has found the answer in Golde as he asks her, in one of their many perfect duets, "Do you love me?" A tender scene, enacted with grace and humour – two key ingredients in any marriage and consistently portrayed in this well-cast stage marriage. Tevye, as narrator, holds this musical play together. And Samuel McIlmoyle gave us a completely engaging, authentic and convincing Tevye, a man cast into a bittersweet dance with tradition. It is this man's heart that filters the whole story and Samuel gave his whole heart to the role. He captured nuance, completely avoiding the trap of a sentimentalised performance. He delivered both the comedy and the tragedy with vigour and tenderness. And, boy … what a voice! He filled the stage with his natural ease and he filled the auditorium with his powerful and moving voice. His timing was perfect, his dancing very apt and his story was told for this present generation of political and social upheaval, as displaced people continue to haunt the stage of the world.

I particularly loved the poignant closing moments as the Fiddler himself tuned us in and the spotlight closed in on the violin, left behind in Anatevka. Miss Brown, you made me cry. A bad Director will be highly visible. A good Director wears a cloak of invisibility – that was you, Miss Brown. All we saw was the story, being told by the actors. Your skill was in making it look like it happened just by itself. I loved it. It was amazing.

This Fiddler raised the roof.