

## **Fiddler on the Roof**

### ***Vivid portrayal of personal story***

The lives and problems of a small community of Jews in Tsarist Russia were vividly portrayed in East Surrey Operatic Society's production of "Fiddler on the Roof" last week. A small theatre is the best place for this essentially personal story. From the rousing opening chorus, in which the villagers describe their traditions and beliefs, to the poignant ending when as refugees, they leave Anatevka courageously determined to make a fresh start outside Russia, the audience's attention and interest were held.

The musical score, by Jerry Bock, was highly evocative: a blend of Jewish and Russian melodies appropriately harmonised. Singing by both: principals and chorus, was of a high standard - a credit to the Society's new musical director, Christopher Pratt. The orchestra though slightly too loud at times, gave positive support.

Drab staging and shabby furniture were exactly right for the village. Lighting was used with imagination and climatic effect to project the action. The story centres round Tevye, the kindly, humorous milkman with an endearing habit of addressing God direct whenever he has a problem. And he has many. Three of his five daughters insist on choosing their own husbands, rejecting the services of the Matchmaker. The eldest, Tzeitel prefers Motel, the penniless tailor, to the wealthy middle-aged butcher, while Hodel chooses Perchik, a radically-minded student determined to change the world. The third daughter, Chava, marries a Russian, which Tevye finds hard to forgive.

Fred Harrison was an excellent choice for the role of Tevye. He has stage feeling, which ensures a balanced and well-timed performance. The conversations with God were particularly well handled. His fine singing voice was heard to advantage in many songs from the famous "If I were a Rich Man" to his duet with wife Golde. Molly Greaves as the sharp-tongued Golde blended in the softer side of the character most convincingly. Her singing was, as always, a great pleasure. Gillian Jarvis, a vivacious Tzeitel, and Susan Rowlinson, the courageous Hodel who travelled alone to Siberia to join her fiancé, both gave excellent performances and sang well. A poignant moment was Hodel's farewell song "Far from the Home I Love".

As Yente the Matchmaker, Diana Silvertown tended to overact, bordering on caricature, Trevor Muller was a fine, confident Perchik. The role of Motel, the timid tailor was taken over at extremely short notice by Robert Sears and was creditably played. Of the many village characters, particularly noted were Lazar Wolf the butcher (Leonard Headde); Mordcha the innkeeper (Dennis Pratt), and Roger Missen as the gentle Rabbi. As to the Russian commander ordered to evacuate the villagers, Andrew Glass conveyed well the policeman's reluctance for the task.

Production by Rex Baines was smooth-running and most imaginative. A particularly effective scene in Tevye's home on the Sabbath, lit only by candles was artistically grouped to enhance the movingly-sung Sabbath Prayer. In contrast the men's celebrations at the inn, culminating in a breath-taking bottle dance (all balanced perfectly on their hats) was extremely enjoyable. The final winding trail of refugees, carrying their pitiful belongings, was ingeniously contrived.

This was a thoroughly creditable production which will long be remembered.

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