

YESPA Fiddler on the Roof Review

Having never seen Fiddler on the Roof before and generally not being a fan of older musicals, YESPA's production had a lot to prove. From the beginning, seeing the whole cast during the opening number, 'Tradition' I was staggered by the sheer number of bodies on the stage, and did not envy the task of John Harries-Rees, Jamie Cordell, Keir Gilbert-Halladey, Lindsay Swift and the rest of the team. Throughout the song and for the rest of the show I was really impressed with the complexity of the choreography (by Lindsay Swift) and the efficiency with which the cast executed it with almost military-like precision. I barely saw a foot go wrong and that alone deserves credit. Not only did the whole ensemble move well, but they also sang excellently - I don't think I heard one bum note during the whole show, and that is genuinely surprising for both amateur and sometimes professional shows alike. However, although their movements and singing were spot on, I did often look at ensemble members and find that their faces were entirely neutral - it seems as though the concentration of the singing or the dancing meant that the acting suffered as a result. I think most of the ensemble could have benefited from stronger characterisation and the reminder that there is never a time when on stage where they shouldn't be expressing their character one hundred percent.

The next song began, 'Matchmaker' (one of the few songs I recognised!), where the three older sisters played by Ruth Cheek, Hayley Turner and Frankie McArdell all sang and acted beautifully. A special mention should be made of Ms Turner's voice, which was just lovely, especially during her solo later on in Act 2, 'Far From The Home I Love'. I also found Ms Cheek's acting to be both truthful and touching. The matchmaker being referred to, as played by Caitlin Maden was so much fun to watch! The characterisation was great; from the expressive hands to the wiggle of her hips whenever she walked. It was a shame however, that during the precursor to this song the blocking of some of the characters meant that I only had the pleasure of profiles, and sometimes less, of speaking characters. I noticed a few times throughout the show blocking which did not serve the actors, where some dialogue was aimed upstage instead of down, which was a shame.

Next came 'If I Were A Rich Man' (the only other song I knew), performed with real feeling and great vocal control by Piers Spicer. Mr Spicer had quite the challenge in the role of Teyve, who is rarely off stage and usually either singing, talking at length or hauling a massive cart. He did an excellent job of all three; portraying a character who I imagine is quite a lot different to his usual self. I found his performance to be funny, engaging and curiously relatable. Cesca Ritchie absolutely blew me away when I heard her voice in 'Sabbath Prayer', and every other time she opened her mouth to sing. She also portrayed the role of tired but loving mother wonderfully and she was a real stand out in a production of already very high standards.

The rest of Act One continued to be thoroughly enjoyable, with Aiden Caffyn as Lazar Wolf and Ewan Murphy as Motel both acting and singing their parts commendably. Again however, I noted, this time with the principal cast, that often when singing most of the acting would fall to the wayside - and of course the singing was stunning, but the acting is equally as important so it was a shame to bid farewell to it whenever it did happen. The comedic highlight of Act One and

the whole show really was The Dream scene. What can I say? From the eerie masked dancers, like porcelain dolls come to life, to the husband and wife huddled together in their little bed, to Luca Crawford as Fruma-Sarah bursting onto the scene as a ghostly apparition, metres above everyone else, wielding their fan with gusto! It was an absolute delight to behold. Credit to Mx Crawford for all of their roles, which they portrayed with complete commitment to the various characters. I found my eye always being drawn to Mx Crawford, although perhaps they should be aware of not being too gracefully poised for every role (as beautiful as their posture was!).

It has to be noted that regardless of how slick and talented the cast is; if the production *looks* bad, a lot of the fantasy for the audience is ruined. So it is very gratefully that I acknowledge the excellent work of the backstage team; the costumes all looked authentic and well fitted thanks to the work of June Yasuda and Tracey Brammar and the set was simple but effective, and beautifully lit, with credit to Amelia Hulbert and Will Perkins respectively. The live band was an absolute delight and did their job perfectly - I never particularly noticed them, because they stuck to accompanying and not to dominating the songs.

On to Act Two, where Giles Carden gently blew me away, along with Hayley Turner again, during 'Now I Have Everything'. Mr Carden possesses an absolutely beautiful voice and made Perchik a sweet and likeable revolutionary. As much as I thoroughly enjoyed this song I found that the first few bars were undersung - the quiet beginning was perhaps too quiet, as I struggled to fully hear his singing over the band.

Although there were fewer times for the ensemble to delight in Act Two, they still continued to enhance the production whenever they were on stage. I found Sam Gillett as the Rabbi very entertaining and an excellent example of someone who did not let their character slip for even one moment. Niamh Ogle as Bielke committed beautifully to her singing, where her acting continued to shine through as well, and Amelia Hulbert also committed to every of the many parts she played and I often found myself searching for her on stage to see what she was up to. Wesley Kent-Hargreaves as Fyedka had a lovely little scene with Frankie McArdell as Chava, although I found his posture to be lacking for a character who was supposed to be a soldier.

The last scenes of the show played out with the tragic conclusion of the play. During the final chorus number, it was good to see all of the faces of every member of the ensemble, some of whom I could have sworn I'd never seen before! And then, finally, we are left with Teyve hauling his cart away from his home, the Fiddler at his back, silhouetted - a beautiful final tableaux. If audience reaction is anything to go by then this production was a complete success. There were standing ovations, much cheering and an abundance of clapping. If my reaction is anything to go by, the production was also a complete success! I found myself laughing, smiling, looking at my companion in genuine awe at the voices I was hearing and just generally enjoying myself thoroughly. The fact that everyone was so entertained is to the credit of every single member of the cast and crew, and I can't wait to see what YESPA has to offer next!