



<http://www.juf.org/news/arts.aspx?id=44764>

## Tzivi's June '09 Spotlight: Chaim Topol headlines authentic Fiddler in Chicago

---

"Tradition," Tevye declares at the start of each performance of *Fiddler on the Roof*. That's how we "keep our balance!" And yet, just as Tevye learns to embrace modernity ("Did Adam and Eve have a matchmaker?" he asks when Perchik and Hodel want him to bless their engagement. "Yes, they did."), so every *Fiddler* production must seek its own perfect blend of old and new.

When Chaim Topol arrives in Chicago this month on his Farewell Tour, he will be framed by a production highly sensitive to all these nuances. Director Sammy Dallas Bayes was a dancer in the original Broadway production, so he remembers the very first cast and crew with love and affection. Nevertheless, "I'm sure that if Jerry Robbins was alive and doing it today for the first time, he would have a whole different visual concept," Bayes told me. "In 1964, sets were based on curtains called 'drops,' and you played a scene in front of a drop while they were setting another scene behind it. My concept here was to eliminate drops and flow from scene to scene."

Scenic Designer Steve Gilliam explains: "Sammy's a choreographer, and he's created this show without any stopping points. Sammy said: 'We need to keep the show running fluidly,' and that's when Tevye's house started to move around. People are used to watching scenery move on stage now, and Tevye's house is the core of the show symbolically. So we took Boris Aronson's original idea and totally rebuilt it." According to Bayes, locating Tevye and his family on a three-dimensional "working farm" fed his imagination. "How you make cheese, how you store cheese, we incorporated this into the set," he said. "It helped me when I was blocking the show with the actors—give them moves that have a reason for happening."

When I spoke with Musical Director David Andrews Rogers, he also stressed authenticity. "In the 1960s, Broadway audiences expected to hear a big brass section

## *JUF News* Spotlight for June '09: Topol's Farewell Tour!

and a big string section; that was just the style," he told me. "But thanks to our orchestrator, Larry Blank, we have an almost entirely acoustic orchestra. What our audience hears is as authentic a klezmer sound as one can find doing this show."

"With every single performance, every night looking up from the pit, we see half a dozen little-bitty faces, children peering over the pit rail, and then half a dozen people that are my parents' age," Rogers said. "That reminds me how blessed we are to have a show that transcends age barriers and culture barriers and everything else."

"I got a lot of things from Jerry Robbins; he was very good to me," Bayes reflected. "One thing he told me: 'Listen to the classics—don't try to figure them out, don't try to understand them, just listen. By process of osmosis, when you start choreographing your own compositions, you will understand when you're heading in the wrong direction just because of the fact that you've listened to the classics.' Jerry was really a terrific mentor."

"Well, the composition of *Fiddler* is just like a classical composition," Bayes concluded. "Read the play from beginning to end; watch it; listen to the music. It doesn't go up any blind alleys or dead-end streets. It's done in a very fresh yet classical formal composition, and that makes it what it is."

*Fiddler on the Roof* will play at the Ford Center/Oriental Theatre on Randolph Street from June 10 through June 28. You can purchase tickets in person at all "Broadway in Chicago" box offices or Ticketmaster ticket centers. For phone orders, call (312) 902-1400. To purchase tickets online, visit [www.BroadwayInChicago.com](http://www.BroadwayInChicago.com) or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).

To read my review of the new production and/or more from the interviews noted above, visit: <http://www.films42.com/fiddler/TopolFarewellTour09.asp>.



Joan Marcus © 2009. All Rights Reserved.  
Chaim Topol stars as "Teyve"  
in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

## SIDEBAR

Tzivi  
chats with  
Chaim Topol:  
In his own words...

"I was very lucky to be molded into the part by two geniuses: Jerry Robbins, who directed me on stage in London in 1967, and Norman Jewison, who directed me for the film in 1971.

## JUF News Spotlight for June '09: Topol's Farewell Tour!

"When I started to perform as Tevye, I was 32. I was married nine years and my eldest daughter was 8. I sang: 'Do you love me?' and Golde answered: 'For 25 years...' And I was sitting there thinking to myself: '25 years? God, how do you keep the marriage going for 25 years?' Now I'll be married to Galia for 52 years, so when Golde says '25 years,' I look at her and I say to myself: 'What's 25 years?'"

"In the song "Sunrise, Sunset," when Tzeitel marries Motel, I sing: 'What words of wisdom can I give them? How can I help to ease their way?' At 32, I had no idea what it means to give away your daughter. Galia and I were two children of 21 when we married, but I didn't think we were children. I thought we were old adults."


"But when I gave away my first daughter to a stranger, and I stood there under the canopy, I know what I wished then, what I prayed for and so on and so forth. So when I stand now under the canopy with Tzeitel, I know what a father really hopes for."

"So the perspective has changed. All the basic training by two geniuses, Robbins and Jewison, is now supported by my own experience in life."

"When *Fiddler* started, everyone thought this was a show for the Jewish community. I remember, when we opened in London, I knew a very good producer who said to me: 'Oh Topol, it's a waste of time. After three months, you've exhausted all of the Jewish community and that's it. So don't worry, you're not here for long.'"

"But look: I can tell you from my experience after 2,500 performances! In Australia, to see half of the audience is Asian, who would have thought these people will come to see *Fiddler on the Roof* by Sholem Aleichem? And when you ask them, they say: 'Come on, it's exactly what happens in my family!'"

© Jan Lisa Huttner (June 1, 2009)



Tziviah bat Yisroel v'Hudah (Jan Lisa Huttner) is the managing editor of *FILMS FOR TWO®: The Online Guide for Busy Couples* ([www.films42.com](http://www.films42.com)), a website devoted to promoting films of interest to both male and female audience members. Jan writes a regular monthly column called "Tzivi's Spotlight" for Chicago's *JUF News*. Her award-winning articles have also appeared in *All About Jewish Theatre*, the *Connecticut Jewish Ledger*, the *Forward*, *Jewish Film World*, and the *World Jewish Digest* in addition to numerous other non-Jewish publications and websites.

Address comments &/or questions to [tzivi@msn.com](mailto:tzivi@msn.com)  
&/or  
call Jan at 312.663.5832

"Second City Tzivi"  
© Sharon Rosenzweig

Posted: 6/8/2009 3:05:37 PM

© 2001-2009 All Rights Reserved  
Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago  
Ben Gurion Way • 30 S. Wells St. • Chicago, IL 60606-5056 • 312-346-6700