MTG’s ‘Fiddler’: a classic delightfully done

By Tina Krontiris

A delightful and vivacious production of Fiddler on the Roof opened last Friday in Kresge Auditorium. This musical, by now a classic, captures a moment of life and fills it with song, laughter, festivity, emotion and sentiment.

The musical, based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem, deals with the customs of a Jewish community in the small Russian village of Anatevka. While it encloses the whole village, it centers on one family and abounds in local color.

The village represents a primitive microcosm that seeks happiness within its own strong tradition and is adverse to any changes. Although the events take place at the turn of the century, there is a sense that things have always been the same in the lives of the villagers.

There is a touch of tragedy, however, in that in spite of all efforts to remain isolated, the village is constantly threatened by outside forces — by the real world, one might say — and is doomed to eviction.

There is a sense that God's help is long coming. No one can forget the surprised Golde gives him: "Do you love me?" and "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," for, as he says, "that way, all the world would be blind and toothless."

Constance V. Miller plays Golde, the wife of the good dairyman. Golde provides a contrast to her kind and gentle husband; she is blunt and lacks the sentimentality. But those are not defects; they are qualities that prevent the musical from becoming overly sentimental. An instance of this nice balance comes when Tevye, after twenty-five years of marriage, asks his wife, "Do you love me?" and the surprised Golde gives him a realistic and pragmatic answer.

Tevye’s three eldest daughters provide most of the action in the show with their boldness in refusing to follow the matrimonial traditions of the village. Sharon Lowenheim, Lynn Sanker, and Katie Spillars provide Tevye with many hair-pulling melodramas as they reject the matchmaker’s choices for their husbands. All three are excellent.

The rest of the cast easily keeps up with the leading character’s pace and style. They are backed by a strong chorus of villagers, all of whom can dance as well as they sing. The stage numbers — especially in the wedding scene, where four of the villagers dance with wine bottles balanced on their heads — are beautifully choreographed by director Nancy-Ellen Rainer.

John Q. Peers Jr. has been doing MTG sets for some time — his masterpiece perhaps being the giant set designed for Celebration last fall — and has lived up to his usual high standards with the simple design chosen for the village. The costumes combine with the set to create an atmosphere of Old World charm and "tradition." — the cement that keeps life together in Anatevka. Lighting is excellent, especially in Tevye’s solo scenes where a single spotlight plays on him — and Golde.

The MIT Musical Theatre Guild deserves high praise for this production. I think everyone should see it.

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