

# Theater | Review: Drury Lane has an essential 'Fiddler on the Roof,' both timeless and brand new

 [chicagotribune.com/2024/02/05/review-drury-lane-fiddler-on-the-roof-both-timeless-and-brand-new/](https://chicagotribune.com/2024/02/05/review-drury-lane-fiddler-on-the-roof-both-timeless-and-brand-new/)

Chris Jones

February 5, 2024



Mark David Kaplan and company in "Fiddler on the Roof" at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace. (Brett Beiner)



By Chris Jones | [cjones5@chicagotribune.com](mailto:cjones5@chicagotribune.com) | Chicago Tribune

UPDATED: February 7, 2024 at 4:25 p.m.

Neither the famed fiddler nor the titular roof make an appearance in the truly remarkable new Drury Lane Theatre staging of the beloved musical masterpiece by Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick and Joseph Stein, inarguably among the greatest Broadway musicals ever penned and a timeless show about tradition, parenting, change and the last days of an oppressed Jewish community in Anatevka, Russia.

Motel's sewing machine has gone AWOL too, although there is still a blessing from the Rabbi. You won't see dancers dance with bottles on their heads. Most striking of all? We don't even see Tevye pushing a cart.

What, you wonder? Unheard of, absurd? (As Tevye famously sings when his longstanding beliefs run smack up against his boundless love for his daughters.)

I'm here to tell you that you will miss none of those things, because director Elizabeth Margolius's production pays such beautiful attention to the emotional trajectory of this show and offers so moving and powerful a manifestation of its humanity, beauty and resilience.

Frankly, I remember leaving Barrie Kosky's similarly atypical 2022 production at Lyric Opera of Chicago and thinking it was what I like to term a "category killer," a definitive production that makes you think you never want to see another version, lest it fail to compare. (For the record, the current Broadway revival of "Merrily We Roll Along" is another one of those.)

I adored Kosky's "Fiddler" but I loved Margolius' staging, which obviously does not operate with comparable resources, especially in the pit, even more. This title can be a bit of a Catch-22 for a critic who wants his readers to experience an exceptional show: On the one hand, "Fiddler" is known as the musical that always finds an audience. On the other, people tend to roll their eyes and think, been there and seen that.

No you haven't. Not like this. Just in case I've not made my point clearly enough.

What's so great? As ever with musical theater, any "Fiddler" is rooted not just in its individual moments, achingly emotional as so many of them are, but in how a director sweeps from one to another. Here, it's as if Margolius went through the show and noted out everything she deemed nonessential to the core themes of how you bend without breaking, how you change without denying yourself, how you know when to go along to get along, and how you know when you must stand your ground lest you lose yourself and all you love.

As far as I can tell (and I've seen 'Fiddler' more than 20 times), every lyric is there and so is every word of the book. And yet it often feels like we've left the world of Jerome Robbins, brooms and bottle dancers for what is inside the character's heads. The best way I can explain all this is to say that Margolius, a Chicago-based director surely doing the best work of her career in collaboration with the designers Jack Magaw, Mike Tutaj, Jason Lynch and Linda Roethke, among others, has done to the traditional "Fiddler" what the musical "Once" did to the sourcing movie. How's your heart, indeed.



- Abby Goldberg, Michael Kurowski, Emma Rosenthal, Yael Eden Chanukov, Janna Cardia, Mark David Kaplan, Estella McCarthy Schultz, Lea Grace Biber and Zach Sorrow in "Fiddler on the Roof" at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace. (Brett Beiner)



- Janna Cardia and Janet Ulrich Brooks in "Fiddler on the Roof" at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace. (Brett Beiner)



- Mark David Kaplan and Yael Eden Chanukov in "Fiddler on the Roof" at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace. (Brett Beiner)



- Bill McGough and company in "Fiddler on the Roof" at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace. (Brett Beiner)





- Yael Eden Chanukov, Emma Rosenthal and Abby Goldberg in "Fiddler on the Roof" at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace. (Brett Beiner)

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Abby Goldberg, Michael Kurowski, Emma Rosenthal, Yael Eden Chanukov, Janna Cardia, Mark David Kaplan, Estella McCarthy Schultz, Lea Grace Biver and Zach Sorrow in "Fiddler on the Roof" at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace. (Brett Beiner)

Expand

The other key here? Stakes. They feel enormous, whether they are flowing from Mark David Kaplan's wounded Tevye (a masterfully moving performance utterly shorn of the typical avuncularity), or Abby Goldberg's Chava or Emma Rosenthal's Tzeitel, or Yael Eden Chanukov's Hodel. For better or worse, this is a show fundamentally about a father and his three daughters and that quartet of performers creates a bond that flows forwards and backwards with restlessness of spirit and deep familial love.

These are not the only strong performances in a cast that includes Janna Cardia as Golde, Janet Ulrich Brooks as Yenta and Jeff Parker as a Constable who takes what's usually a rote role and shows you a man at once horrified by and inured to his own actions.

This is not a huge dance show and the orchestra is relatively small. But it still sounds and moves beautifully; the essence of this highly sophisticated staging is the way the live actors interact with their environment, often including Tutaj's textured projections, many of which focus on the faces of the actors themselves. Remarkably, the result isn't anachronistic in any way; it just deepens the original setting as it explores the tensions between individuality and collective responsibility.

As one producer once said to me, all the great American musicals feature communities under stress. Few compare to this one.

I don't think I've ever seen so superbly acted and directed a "Fiddler." Don't even think about not bothering to go.

*Chris Jones is a Tribune critic.*

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**Review: "Fiddler on the Roof" (4 stars)**

When: Through March 24

Where: Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace

Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes

Tickets: \$85.75-\$96.25 at 630-530-0111 and drurylanetheatre.com

Originally Published: February 5, 2024 at 3:00 p.m.

# At Drury Lane: A Profound Interpretation of 'Fiddler on the Roof': Review

[news.wttw.com/2024/02/03/drury-lane-profound-interpretation-fiddler-roof-review](https://news.wttw.com/2024/02/03/drury-lane-profound-interpretation-fiddler-roof-review)

## Hedy Weiss: Theater Reviews

Hedy Weiss | February 3, 2024 7:51 pm



Yael Eden Chanukov, Emma Rosenthal and Abby Goldberg in "Fiddler on the Roof." (Brett Beiner)

It is difficult to describe just exactly how Elizabeth Margolius — the innovative, Jeff Award-winning director — has interpreted and very subtly modernized the ever-remarkable musical "Fiddler on the Roof" for a new production at the Drury Lane Theatre in suburban Oakbrook Terrace.

Suffice it to say that Margolius has remained fully faithful to this ever-sensational 1964 work — with its superb score by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick and a tragicomic book by Joseph Stein (based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem, who grew up near Kyiv).

The story, set in 1905, focuses on a poor Jewish family that lives in Anatevka, a fictional shtetl (the Yiddish term for a small Jewish town) in the Pale of Settlement in Imperial Russia. But as the show unfolds on stage — and as it is described in an excellent program note by



Margolius — it suggests something deeper than the problems of a man with a wife and five daughters, several of whom are approaching marital age.

Margolius refers to the quest of the musical's original director, Jerome Robbins, and the importance he placed on a quote he found that noted "this is the story of the dissolution of a way of life." And that quote clearly has inspired Margolius, too, as her production vividly captures a period of dramatic social and political change in subtle but powerful ways. A most impressive achievement.

Of course, at the center of the story is Tevye (winningly played by Mark David Kaplan), a poor Jewish milkman who is married to Golde (Janna Cardia), a rather bossy wife and the mother of their daughters, three of whom are of marriageable age. Clearly there is a dramatic social change in the air as these young women begin to rebel, and as they openly express their desire to freely choose their husbands rather than agreeing to the finds of Yenta (Janet Ulrich Brooks), the local matchmaker.

And then comes a sudden order from the Russian powers that be who oversee Anatevka who pronounce that all the Jews who have called this town home must pack up and leave within three days. The result is a dramatic immigration to the U.S., Jerusalem and elsewhere, as well as the marriage of one of Tevye's daughters to a non-Jewish young man — something that comes very close to upending him.



Mark David Kaplan and company in "Fiddler on the Roof." (Brett Beiner)

In addition to an outstanding cast, this Drury Lane production thrives on a superb orchestra ideally conducted by Christopher Sargent; deft choreography by Rommy Sandhu; the clever use of projections by Mike Tutaj; and a spare but effective set by Jack Magaw with lighting by Jason Lynch, costumes by Linda Roethke and meticulous sound by Ray Nardelli.

The actors (including a skilled chorus of singers and dancers) are uniformly winning. Along with Kaplan's ideally natural but deftly temperament-shifting Tevye, there is Emma Rosenthal as Tzeitel, his oldest daughter, who boldly rejects the marriage arranged by Yenta, who is determined to pair her with Lazar Wolf (Joel Gelman), the town's wealthy butcher who is probably as old as her father. From the start Tzeitel's heart belongs to Motel (Michael Kurowski), an initially shy and penniless young man who plans to become a tailor once he is able to acquire a sewing machine. And so he does. An extremely elderly rabbi (ideally played by Bill McGough) oversees their marriage.

Next in line for a partner is Hodel (Yael Chanukov), who plans to wed Perchik (Zach Sorrow), the poor but educated young Marxist rebel who has come to town from Kyiv, but who soon heads back East to become part of a political revolution. And when Perchik ends up in a Siberian prison, Hodel bravely gets on a train and travels there to support him. As for Hodel's sister, Chava (Abby Goldberg), the third daughter in line, she enrages her father the most by doing the unthinkable — marrying a sweet gentile boy, Fyedka (Grant Kilian), who shares her love of books. As for Tevye, he and the rest of his family prepare to head to America.

Overall, what is most remarkable about this production — a true breakthrough for Drury — is the way Margolius has so subtly yet powerfully tapped into this extraordinary musical in a way that infuses it with timely echoes of the chaotic world in which we live now. She has devised a remarkable interpretation of an enduring classic that could not be more profound for this moment in time.

"Fiddler on the Roof" runs through March 24 at the Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Lane in Oakbrook Terrace. For tickets, visit [drurylanetheatre.com](http://drurylanetheatre.com) or phone 630-530-0111.

Note: Coming up at Drury Lane during the 2024 and early 2025 seasons are the following productions: "Guys and Dolls" (April 10-June 9); "Ain't Misbehavin': The Fats Waller Musical Show" (June 26-Aug. 18); "The Audience," a British play (Aug. 28-Oct. 20); "The Little Mermaid" (Nov. 6-Jan. 12); and "Beautiful: The Carole King Musical" (Jan. 29-March 30, 2025).

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February 2, 2024

## Theater



Rabbi (Bill McGough), center, presides over the wedding of Motel (Michael Kurowski) and Tzeitel (Emma Rosenthal) in Drury Lane Theatre's production of "Fiddler on the Roof."  
*Courtesy of Brett Beiner Photography*



Tevya (Mark David Kaplan) and the cast of “Fiddler on the Roof” shine at Drury Lane Theatre. *Courtesy of Brett Beiner Photography*  
Posted February 02, 2024 5:56 pm

Marni Pyke



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**“Fiddler on the Roof” — 4 stars**

The village of Anatevka and its inhabitants live again at Drury Lane Theatre with a touching production of “Fiddler on the Roof.”

The unlikely musical intertwines the fate of impoverished milkman Tevya and his three eldest daughters with the realities of Jewish pogroms during czarist Russia.



And like the fiddler's difficult balancing act, the challenge for the players is the shift from comedy to romance to tragedy.

Veteran actor Mark David Kaplan is an able Tevye, his strong voice powering through unforgettable songs like "Tradition" and "If I Were a Rich Man."

Kaplan hits his stride alongside co-star Janna Cardia, who gives Tevye's wife, Golde, a dignity not always afforded to the character.

The two shine in a very funny rendition of "The Dream" sequence with Susan Hofflander spot-on as a dead but no-nonsense Grandma Tzeitel.

When Jewish tradition bumps up against a changing world as daughters Tzeitel and Hodel seek unconventional marriages, the cast deftly portrays the conflicting emotions.

Tevye is torn when Hodel (Yael Eden Chanukov) and husband-to-be Perchik (Zach Sorrow) say they don't need his permission to wed but seek a blessing.

"You have my blessing ... and my permission," Tevya triumphantly tells the couple to laughter.

But there's no comic relief when Tevya declares daughter Chava (Abby Goldberg) is "dead" to him by marrying Russian Fyedka (Grant Kilian), who is outside her faith.

It's a short scene between Kaplan and Goldberg, but they both convey the heartbreak of the moment.



Tevya (Mark David Kaplan) and the cast of "Fiddler on the Roof" shine at Drury Lane Theatre. *Courtesy of Brett Beiner Photography*

"This is a memory play," director Elizabeth Margolius writes in a message to audience members.

The play is based on stories by Yiddish author Solomon Rabinovich that are "recounted to the writer from Tevye's perspective," Margolius explained.

"I began to consider how Fiddler would look and feel if I approached it completely from Tevye's memory."

The theme of remembrance is furthered by black-and-white images of characters projected onto the stark set. They evoke grainy photos from an antique album, a powerful dramatic tool although occasionally distracting.

Fiddler wouldn't work without a tightly bound ensemble. From the opening anthem "Tradition" to the gossipy fun of "The Rumor" song, Drury's cast offers a real community.

Minor characters like Joel Gelman's surprisingly likable Lazar Wolf and Bill McGough's comic timing as the rabbi contribute significant nuances to the show.

The choreography is also a vital part of the production, with energetic ensemble scenes as well as the intimate first dance between Hodel and Perchik.

Another standout is the Drury Lane orchestra with Heather Boehm on violin for the iconic opening notes that introduce Anatevka and later accompany its Jewish villagers as their exodus begins.

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**Location:** Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace, (630) 530-0111, [drurylanetheatre.com](http://drurylanetheatre.com)

**Showtimes:** Various times and dates through March 24

**Tickets:** \$85.75 to \$96.25; \$5 discount for seniors on Wednesday and Thursday matinees

**Run time:** 2 hours 30 minutes with a 20-minute intermission

**Rating:** For ages 5 and older

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