

# *Fiddler on the Roof* Initial Design Concepts

## **GENERAL CONCEPT:**

First and foremost, we needn't strive to reinvent the wheel. There are a great many design choices that are acutely affixed with audiences' general expectations for the look of the show. To that end, I don't think we need to drive ourselves crazy with a total re-imagination. Having said that, there are many thoughts and main avenues I do want to mandate in the overall design. Additionally, the show's firmly cemented themes and symbols should not be ignored by the student designers.

## **SCENIC DESIGNS:**

Let's begin with the basics. I don't want to entirely remove the cyc. It will provide too many wonderful opportunities for highly stylized lighting effects in the face of a design primarily rooted in realism. Having said that, I would like to make some use of backdrops for a few of the locales. My only concern with their use is that we'll destroy do substantial harm to the uniformity of our design. So, I do want be careful. Additionally, I don't think it would necessarily kill us to mix backdrops, depending on the directions that are taken with the major pieces of scenery. Okay, let's get down to specifics. The two things I know I want are double-sided, rotational structures positions USL and USR and three actual bare trees across CS. More on the trees in a bit. Both structures serve as 1) exterior building facades of traditional small town Ukrainian structures of the period and 2) interior facades of the same.

The USL structure would represent the exterior/interior of Tevye's home. It would also double as part of the generic village corner façades used during a few scenes of the production. The USR structure would represent the exterior/interior of Motel's tailor shop. And, again, it too would be used to represent the generic village corner façade during applicable scenes. The overall design choices for these structures can be left up to the kids, but their decisions must include:

- Sloping roofs: Both structures should have prominent sloping roofs. Additionally, the USL structure's roof must be accessible by the fiddler from the "indoor" side of the design. The angles and slopes of the roofs can be determined by the kids, but they offer wonderful opportunities for contributing to the themes of the show.
  - o Think about the conflict between the past and the present
  - o Think about the multiple directions and beliefs of Tevye's daughters and Tevye's attempts to keep them bound to the well-tested roots of tradition
- Rough-cut and rustic boards. The vast majority of designs I've come across show rustic, unfinished boards. We might play with some cracks though which lighting can pour. We can also play with certain patterns in the design that again help to support our themes.

I have to admit, the concept of the trees placed CS simply intrigues me ever since I came across a stunning design that utilized them. See image "A" on the next page. The trees evoke the rural setting, the bare and unpretentious nature of life in Anatevka, and almost seem to suggest something in mid-cycle. We assume the trees are going to bloom again, but their state at present is fragile and frail.

Image "B" evokes the feel for the rotational structures I would like to capture. It offers the rustic qualities I want the design to embody. It also plays up the freedom choices that the designers can enjoy when it comes to filling the space.

Image "C" also offers a wonderful sense of the modesty of Tevye's abode. I *love* the touch of the wood-burning stove. This design also allows for the use of open space within the walls as a function of the slated boards. Truthfully, though, I think I like a mix of plaster as well. If we do have open cracks in the wall sections, they should be much more mild and thin.

Image "D" takes a very different approach and ops for flying in the façade. That ruins the ability to play with any real differences between interiors and exteriors. It also probably limits the actors' ability to practically "use" the structure.

Image “E” is the external façade of image “B,” but it’s sloppy. It really feels too artificially boxy. The overall shape seems to be what ruins the design. The wooden shingles and plain board siding are interesting, as is the small chimney pipe.

Image “F” is a totally unique approach. I don’t like it, but I respect its distinct nature. It serves to accentuate the sense of pressure on Tevye and his world. I’ll come back to this design later with some lighting images. Interesting anyway.



A.



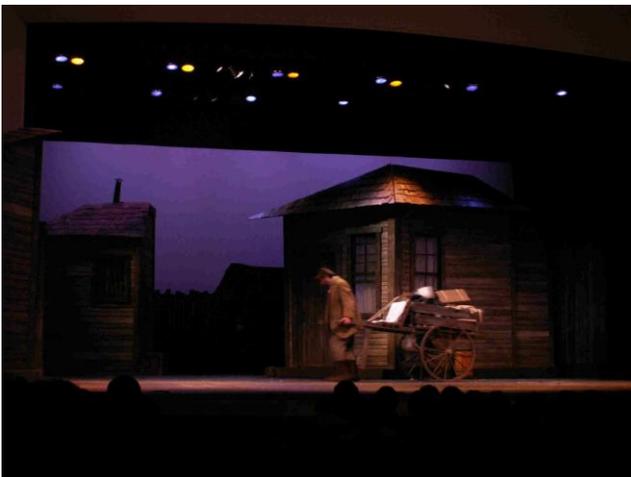
B.



C.



D.



E.



F.

## **THEMES AND CONCEPTS:**

As a general rule, most designs I've come across show a world with dark edges, muted and earth-toned colors, and reasonably bright light on the center. And you think, "Yeah, that's pretty much a theatrical set." Seriously, though, that's the through-line of the designs I've seen for this show. I think they're reasonably uniform in that (yes, somewhat general) sense. We should play off of these guidelines as well. They fit.

Overall, when considering all design choices, consider the following concepts/themes:

- The role of prejudice at play within the world of our characters
- The role of religion and its relationship with lives of the characters
- Concepts of assimilation into a larger society and the struggle to preserve the unique culture of smaller groups
- The comforts and difficulties of traditional life
- The changing face of life and reality at play within the village and the tension that exists as a result of changing circumstances
- Think about the multiple directions and beliefs of Tevye's daughters and his attempts to keep them bound to the well-tested roots of tradition
- The roll and definition of love in an arranged marriage versus the love found in a marriage to a person of one's own choosing
- The balance between happiness and misery, and the perceptions of what creates both states

## **LIGHTING AND SHAPE:**

Let's spend a few minutes discussing lighting and backdrops, and not necessarily in that order. The lighting for the show should follow the general mandate laid out at the end of the first page. There are a few additional moments I want to definitely play with as well. If we go back to image "E" and see what they achieved during other moments of the show, we see images "F" and "G" and the *highly effective* use of cyc lighting.

I have to admit, I really want to play with prominent use of backlighting in conjunction with spots during a few moments of the show. Image "F" is WONDERFUL. Here, we have Tevye in the foreground. The background displays an amazing visual of his entire world- his daughters. Beautiful visual. AMAZING lighting.

Image "G" is also pretty impressive. By adding the façade of the house, the designers have substantially softened the harsh nature of the extreme vertical lines. The shapes and lighting create a just-right mixture for the feel of the scene between the two young lovers. There is optimism here. There is hope for tomorrow. Very pleasant.

Image "H" and "I" are quick glances at what is for me, one of the most iconic moments of the show- The Dream Sequence. Image "H" presents Fruma-Sarah with a nice bolt of white lighting and pool of lower blues and greens for her supporters and victims. For my money, "I" is a better lighting design. I really like the idea of painting a patch of red at her base. I suppose the surrounding areas will be predominantly dictated by use of the chorus during this number.

Image "J" is something that REALLY stood out for me. The sharp definition and brutal nature of a silhouetted soldier carrying a bayoneted weapon is all too striking. This, in conjunction with the bare trees, is a wonderful visual I would like to replicate.

Image "K" brings us to something I've been told we can borrow from the Hillel Day School. I want to see what their Chuppah looks like. I feel as though it can and *should* be truly important moment of the show. Aside from the characters themselves, it's the strongest physical representation we have of all that is good, hopeful,

and sacred in an otherwise brutally challenging world. It MUST BE RIGHT. It needs to beautifully counterbalance the stark realities the action at the close of Act 1.



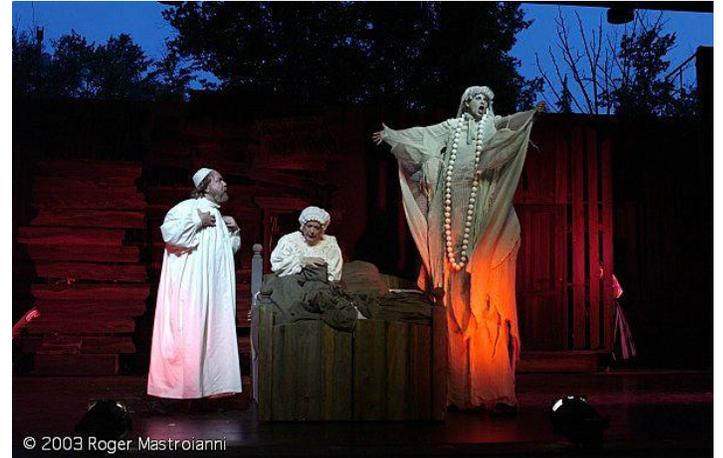
F.



G.



H.



I.



J.



K.

### **BACKDROPS:**

It's worth discussing backdrops for a few scenes. Principally, they might come in handy for the inn and the barn, although I give greater stock in the need for the latter versus the former. Image "L" shows a pretty effective barn interior. What's strikes me as being important is its greater ability to blend with the overall design of the show.

Image “M” presents a bit more a challenge. I do have some concern that it won’t lend itself to uniformity of design. However, I also have concerns about using a single drop. I feel like if we use one, we should absolutely opt for a second. To that end, a less-than-perfect second drop may do less damage than no drops at all.

Images “N” and “O” are included, but I doubt they would be utilized. Maybe. They offer some stunning visuals for the opening, closing, and possible other moments of the show. I guess it depends on what we’re able to achieve through lighting by relying exclusively on the cyc. I need to know how closely we can come to the effect displayed on image “F” before we decide on use of any sunset backdrops. Each of the backdrop images displayed are from Grosh, with the exception of image “K,” which is one of the drops on-hand at Tobins.



L.



M.



N.



O.

**OVERALL STAGING AREA PLOT:**

USR to MSR: Exterior of Motel’s shop	USL to MSL: Exterior of Tevye’s home
Full-Stage:	
All street scenes, The Inn, The Dream Sequence (may be confined to CS), Sabbath Prayer, The Wedding	
R of C: Rail Station	L of C: A bench outside Tevye’s house
MSR: Sec. Tevye’s yard, int. of Motel’s shop	MSL: Outside Tevye’s house, Int. T’s house
DSR: Street outside Inn, A1 & A2 Prologues	DSL: The barn