

Fiddler on the Roof – Synopsis

During the Prologue (Tradition"), Tevye explains the role of God's law in providing balance in the villagers' lives. He describes the inner circle of the community and the larger circle which includes the constable, the priest, and countless other authority figures. He explains, "We don't bother them and so far, they don't bother us." He ends by insisting that without their traditions, he and the other villagers would find their lives "as shaky as a fiddler on the roof."

Three of Tevye's daughters, Tzeitel, Hodel, and Chava, wonder if the matchmaker will ever find them the men of their dreams ("Matchmaker"). The matchmaker, Yente, tells Golde that she has selected the butcher Lazar Wolfe as a match for Tzeitel.

Tevye reflects on how much he wishes he had a small fortune ("If I Were a Rich Man"). A group of villagers, including an outsider, Perchik, approach him with news of a violent pogrom in a nearby village. Tevye invites Perchik, a young revolutionary student, to come to his home for Sabbath dinner and arranges for him to instruct his daughters.

Motel, the tailor attempts to ask Tevye for Tzeitel's hand, but gets tongue-tied. The family and their guests welcome the Sabbath ("Sabbath Prayer").

Tevye goes to meet Lazar Wolfe, the butcher, and agrees to the match with Tzeitel. A boisterous celebration ensues involving the villagers and the Russians who also congregate in the tavern ("L'Chaim").

As Tevye staggers home, he meets the Constable, who warns him that a demonstration is going to be planned against the Jews of Anatevka. In his inebriation, Tevye conjures The Fiddler, who plays his violin as Tevye dances his way home.

Tevye appears and tells Tzeitel about her engagement to Lazar Wolfe. Golde rejoices, but after she leaves, Motel tells Tevye that he and Tzeitel gave each other a pledge to marry. After a struggle with himself, Tevye agrees to their marriage. He leaves and Motel and Tzeitel rejoice ("Miracle of Miracles").

Tevye decides to manufacture a wild nightmare ("The Dream") to convince Golde that the match with Lazar will result in Tzeitel's death at the hands of the butcher's first wife, Fruma-Sarah. Golde is so horrified that she insists on a marriage between Tzeitel and Motel.

The villagers are gossiping in the street about the mix-up in Tzeitel's wedding plans. As Chava enters Motel's tailor shop, a group of Russians on the street taunt her. Fyedka, a Russian youth, insists that they stop. After they leave, Fyedka follows Chava into the shop. He tries to speak with her, but leaves quickly when Motel enters. Motel places his wedding hat on his head.

The musicians lead us to the wedding. The company sings ("Sunrise, Sunset") as the traditional Jewish ceremony takes place. To the villagers' dismay, Perchik asks Hodel to dance with him and she accepts, performing the forbidden act of dancing with a man. Everyone else follows suit. As the dance reaches a wild high point, the Constable and his men enter. They destroy everything in sight. Perchik grapples with a Russian and is hit with a club. The constable bows to Tevye and says "I am genuinely sorry. You understand?" Tevye replies with mock courtesy, "Of course." The family begins to clean up after the destruction.

ACT TWO

During the Prologue, Tevye chats with God about recent events. Perchik tells Hodel that he is leaving to work for justice in Kiev. He proposes to her and she accepts ("Now I Have Everything"). He promises to send for her

as soon as he can. Tevye approves in spite of his misgivings. After they leave, he asks Golde if she thinks their own arranged marriage has somehow also turned into a romance ("Do You Love Me?").

On a village street, Yente tells Tzeitel she has seen Chava with Fyedka. The news Yente has gleaned from a letter from Perchik becomes gossip for the villagers, who turn it into a song that totally distorts the truth ("The Rumor").

Tevye takes Hodel to the railroad station. She is going to Siberia where Perchik has been sent after his arrest ("Far From the Home I Love").

The villagers are once again gossiping about a new arrival at Motel and Tzeitel's.

At Motel's shop, we learn that the new arrival is a sewing machine. Fyedka and Chava speak outside the shop. She promises to speak to Tevye about their love for each other. Tevye appears and Chava tries to talk to him about Fyedka. Tevye refuses to listen to her and forbids her to ever to speak to him about Fyedka again.

Tevye returns home to learn from Golde that Chava and Fydeka have been married by the priest. Tevye says that Chava is dead to them. He sings of his love for Chava ("Little Bird"). When Chava appears to ask his acceptance, he cannot allow himself to answer her plea. Chava exits as unseen voices sing ("Tradition").

Yente is trying to fix up Tevye's remaining daughters with two boys as future husbands. The Constable brings the news that everyone in the town has to sell their houses and household goods and leave Anatevka in three days. As the villagers think of their future, they sing fondly of the village they are leaving ("Anatevka").

The family is packing the wagon to leave. Tzeitel and Motel are staying in Warsaw until they have enough money to go to America. Hodel and Perchik are still in Siberia. Chava appears with Fyedka. Tevye refuses to acknowledge her. Chava explains that they are also leaving because they cannot stay among people who can do such things to others. They are going to Cracow. Tzeitel says goodbye to them and Tevye prompts Tzeitel to add, "God be with you!" Chava promises Golde she will write to her in America. Chava and Fyedka leave. Final goodbyes are said and Tevye begins pulling the wagon. Other villagers join the circle, including The Fiddler. Tevye beckons to the The Fiddler to follow him. The Fiddler tucks his fiddle under his arm and follows the group onstage as the curtain falls.

***Fiddler on the Roof* – Character Descriptions**

TEVYE (Baritone/Bass): Tevye is our center. Serving in the role of a narrator who guides the audience through the show, Tevye also exists as a prominent member of his community. The father of five daughters and no sons, Tevye lives a life of considerable stress. In an age and society where arranged marriages and dowries still persist, what is a poor milkman to do? Well, Tevye's answer is try to find the most suitable matches for his beloved children. A genuinely amiable and good-natured man, Tevye ultimately compromises his adherence to tradition as he decides to grant his daughters' happiness defined on their own terms. However, true to so many men, Tevye doesn't always arrive at these decisions without a degree of kicking and barking. An intermediary between the Jewish community in Anatevka and the Russian population, Tevye also strives to keep his people informed of changing circumstances and threats to their way of life. While some actors may find the road towards portraying this character decidedly obvious, I urge them to look beyond what may be their oversaturated history with this man. Yes, it's a bit difficult to look beyond the performances of those who have dominated this role in the most famous productions of the show. Still, there is ample room to explore this character and find your own sense of his truth. The actor who seeks to play Tevye will display an amazing sense of balance and understanding.

GOLDE (Mezzo/Alto): And what would our Tevye be without his Golde? *Not* the same man, on this point we can all agree. Golde brings balance to our show's signature character. Exceptionally pragmatic, marvelously adept at marital mediation, and lovingly devoted to her family, Golde is the glue that stabilizes what would otherwise be a chaotic household at best. For me, Golde's core is best summed up in her opening scene with her children and her duet with Tevye, "Do You Love Me?" The actor who seeks to fill Golde's shoes should display a wonderfully savvy ability to play off of Tevye's every move in perfect harmony. Well, harmony in the sense that she compliments his deficiencies. She offers balance. She offers glue. She is Tevye's rock. Having said this, Tevye is hers as well, and the strength provided by one for the other changes back and forth during different moments of the show. The actor who truly understands these changes will be able to clearly display them during the audition process.

TZEITEL (Mezzo, dance required): Eldest daughter of Tevye and Golde, Tzeitel does not fit traditional personality of one who exists in this position of the family. Truthfully, the role of birth order can be debated heavily. In fact, it *is!* Check it out: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_order Nevertheless, most people would argue that the oldest child usually displays a greater propensity towards developing a dominant personality. Tzeitel doesn't entirely display this trait. Her next youngest sister, Hodel, really seems to have a greater fire in her belly. So, who is Tzeitel? You're making me upset. I've already explained who she is. Fine, I'll do it again. She is the eldest daughter of Tevye and Golde. Seriously, who is she? Well, my mind paints her as the refined and polished product of her parents' first attempts at child-rearing. She's well-mannered, steady, and of even temperament. In a household of so many children, and given her age, we may argue that Tzeitel is conditioned to be Mama's first lieutenant in the household. I've given only peripheral parameters for my sense of this character. I'm curious to see what the actor seeking this role will bring to the table during auditions to add color between the lines.

HODEL (Soprano, dance required): Second-oldest daughter of Tevye and Golde, Hodel is a wonderfully fiery, quick-witted girl. I credit Hodel with a bit more learning than her older sister. I find her commentary of Perchik's lesson to her younger sisters amazingly telling about her personality. She's passionate, but not volatile. She's willing to speak her mind, but she also finds balance in her dealings with others. Her understanding of when to push and when to hold back are wonderfully displayed throughout the course of the show. Still, like so many characters, she can and should be played with depth. The actor seeking to fill this role should exhibit a certain flair in her singing and reading for the part. Where Tzeitel would be contended marrying Motel and living out her days in Anatevka, we get the sense Hodel would never have settled for remaining in her shtetl all her years. She seemed destined to be caught up in the motions of the greater world, beyond the boundaries of Anatevka. All it took was the love of a young, educated revolutionary to set her departure in motion. Even so, the tear she experiences as destiny pulls her "far from the home" she loves is agonizingly painful. Hodel *exclusively* owns one of my favorite numbers from the show. I want to vividly hear and believe her inner struggle on the part of those who chose to sing for this role. Impress me, ladies!

CHAVA (Mezzo, dance required): Chava enters the show fairly late in the first act. She initially proclaims to be the Tzar's last surviving daughter, Anastasia. Furthermore, to clarify the discrepancy that Anastasia had not yet been murdered by the Bolsheviks during the time period that the show takes place, she claims that she has traveled to Anatevka from the future. In an attempt to break Rasputin's spell over her mother, the young duchess attempts to convince Tevye to sell his newest milk cow to her on the pretense that it can produce a magical elixir. Okay, I get a little distracted by this point as I'm writing. Sorry. Back to the show. Chava has, to me, less definition than her older two sisters. Clearly, she's something unique. She's brazen enough to actually do the unthinkable and marry outside her faith. This action supports our presumption that she is truly her own person. If we float back to birth order (and we credit the validity that birth order can have in personality development) we might be willing to buy that the middle child struggles to flesh out an identity. Perhaps this can be the best pathway into exploring Chava's inner workings. Truthfully, I have a rather vanilla definition of Chava in my mind at present. To that end, she's quite open to interpretation. One thing I do know, I want the actor portraying her to give her a vividly separate life from those of her sisters, whom I've defined

much more specifically. Show me something in audition. Give her something to make her unique. This is a *great* role to sneak in and take, ladies! Far too many may have their eyes elsewhere!

SHPRINTZE & BIELKE: They are the youngest daughters. Those seeking to fill these roles will be able to play their youthfulness to a tee. I want to buy that they are genuinely younger girls. Most calls sheets place Shprintze and Bielke's ages at 10-16 and 8-14, respectively. We've already got teenage girls playing the eldest daughters. As such, I want to express a greater separation in ages. Still, steer a bit further away from the youngest sides of the spectrum. Split the difference. I don't have much envisioned for these roles. Play youthful innocence and kidom, but don't go crazy with it. Word to the wise, those who look a bit younger do have an advantage when pursuing these parts. We reserve the possibility that the role of Bielke may be given to a member of our children's chorus.

MOTEL KAMZOIL (High Baritone): Humble and good-natured, hard-working and simple, Motel is a young tailor in the village of Anatevka. He has known Tzeitel since they were children, and has found himself in love with her as an adult. Although Tzeitel's feelings for him are the same, all is not well. With Tevye's agreement to the match Yente made between Lazar Wolf and Tzeitel, the young couple's future seems entirely jeopardized. However, Tevye soon melts to the wishes of his daughter and allows her to choose her own husband, the financially insecure but utterly loving Motel. The actor seeking this role should play his interactions with Tevye's subtly but effectively. Yes, he is certainly intimidated by the patriarch of the family. Even so, he is *not* to be played as a complete weakling. Find balance. Have I mentioned balance before? I'm being facetious. Motel should not be viewed in the eyes of our audiences as an utter pushover. Give him strength in moments.

PERCHIK (Tenor, dance required): Idealistic and head-strong, Perchik is a man of passion and enthusiasm. He comes from Kiev where he had attended university. As is often the case, the youth whose head has recently been filled with new ways of thinking, new understandings of the world, and new desires for impacting the environment in a positive manner, place him at odds with those of opposing views. Poor Perchik, upon returning from the big city to the small village, finds that his bright new ideas are not shared by all. Still, this does not translate into a regression or reassessment of his thinking. Instead, he remains resilient and seeks instead to challenge the status quo. His lessons with Shprintze and Bielke are exceptionally amusing, as they speak to the naivety of his "advanced" thinking. Doctrines laid out in black and white terms are always to be taken with a grain of salt. Even so, while initially cynical towards his political ideologies, we soon discover the bright Hodel is drawn to him. Those seeking to fill the shoes of Perchik should express his new-found enthusiasm for fighting the good fight. They should display the brazen spirit of an educationally-privileged youth. Though written in the earliest stages of America's counter-cultural movement, Joseph Stein's take on Perchik was most likely influenced to some degree by the changes in views that had already begun to take root in students across many of the nation's universities. It would be very interesting to explore differences in the character between Aleichem's novel and Stein's book. Sorry. Back to the show. Anyway, show me a passionate, idealistic, but simultaneously naïve youth.

YENTE (Alto): Who wants to make audience members laugh? You do? GREAT! This may be the role for you. Yente is wonderful. A dizzying array of verbal contradictions, her long-winded monologue during her act one exchange with Golde is *wonderful*. How wonderful? It's included in the acting auditions, so *nail it!* She is a character in every sense of the word. I would love for the person seeking to gain this role to embody her larger-than-life persona. When Yente enters a room, the space is suddenly filled to capacity, and not necessarily happily! She's the woman who makes many sigh but who generally means well by others.

LAZAR WOLF (Tenor): Lazar Wolf is a wonderful character. He is a man of greater wealth, security, and comfort as compared to his peers in his community. And, given the fact that he is single, he truly is a solid opportunity for marriage to the right girl. Although odd by today's standards, it would not have been uncommon for a widower in this day in age to take on a second wife who was significantly younger. Tevye's recognizes what a marriage bond between his daughter and Lazar represents- security. Were she to agree to the

marriage, Tzeitel would not have to concern herself with finances for the rest of her life. What's more, the savvy Tevye recognizes that he and his wife's burdens would also be lessened in their twilight years were the marriage to take place. Those seeking to take on the role of Lazar should project him as being a bold man, fully aware of his own power and resources. Still, his inner-goodness and willingness to basically do what's right by others should also be displayed.

FRUMA-SARAH (Range Unimportant): Fruma-Sarah, Fruma-Sarah... Fruma-Sarah, Fruma-Sarah, Fruma-Sarah!!! A cameo role? Yes. Easily forgotten? NO! She's got one scene, but it has come to be known as one of the most memorable scenes of the whole show. Tevye's dream sequence thrusts Lazar's dead wife front and center as she lays down the law against ANY chance of Tzeitel marrying her husband. Luckily, Tevye's ability to starkly convince his wife of the folly that would unfold following the intended match does its thing. I want the actor seeking to take on the role of Fruma-Sarah to be willing to totally let go during auditions. This is not the role for a modest, understated performance. Knock it out of the park. Be comfortable and *show me* you are comfortable going all-out with this character. She can't be half-arsed! Really bring something big to the audition session, ladies!

FYEDKA: Ooooh, taboo! Yeah, yeah, he's the Russian soldier who pursues and actually manages to capture the heart of Chava. How? We aren't really sure. It must have been that frigging book! And THAT is where reading can lead you. We really aren't given much to go by in considering Fyedka. We know he does his duty as a soldier, but we also see him put on the breaks a bit when that duty begins to offend the object of his affections. I'm not sure entirely how we'll put Fyedka together through the course of rehearsal, so give me some of your thoughts in audition.

CONSTABLE FRUMA: Here be a part well worth the playing at the hands of a skilled actor. The constable is an interesting figure. He's not a bad man. Still, I can't justifiably say he's a good man either. We could get into discussions of universal morality and argue his flaws, or we could simply contend he the product of what time and circumstance have made him. In any case, he walks the line between peace and hostility in Anatevka, but his path side is squarely on that of the Tzarist Russians. He never fools us that he secretly sympathizes with the village's Jewish minority.

GRADMA TZEITEL: Golde's deceased grandmother, she a woman who still looks pretty good, despite her situation. Anyway, she's to be played as dear, amiable figure.

SHANDEL KAMZOIL: Motel's mother.

MORDCHA, THE INKEEPER: The inn-keeper and bar owner. Again, I can't be sure what I'm looking for here. He does have a decent amount of stage time. Play with your take on this role, and show me some ideas you have.

RABBI: The Rabbi. His part is subtle but wonderful. He wisely leads his people and steers them a path away from danger through intelligent, minimal verbal responses.

MENDEL: The Rabbi's son.

AVRAM: A book seller.

NAHUM: A beggar.

YUSSEL: A hatter.

SASHA: A Russian villager and one of Fyedka's friends.

MAN: A village bagel vendor. He only sells what he *claims* are fresh bagels. We'll see, bagel vendor. We'll see.

1st & 2nd MAN (Act 1 dialog): Jewish villagers who, among other things, are in attendance at Motel and Tzeitel's wedding.

1st – 5th MEN (Act 2 dialog): Russian soldiers who serve under the Constable. A band of men who represent the Tzar's interests in the village. Tolerant of the Jewish population, they still take far too many liberties against them as they feel self-assured of their dominance in the relationship. Hmm, this seems to be a common behavior among groups with differing degrees of power all the time, doesn't it? Doesn't make it right though.

THE FIDDLER: Male or Female of any age, but will be made to look like a male, age 30-40. Must be nimble and an actual violinist. Sorry, this role's already been snagged by Emily Vrbensky!

THE VILLAGERS ENSEMBLE: Create the feel of a community where everyone knows each other; will be used in several song segments.

RUSSIAN DANCERS (Male or Female): Integral part of dance sequence; will need to be energetic and technical to perform in the spirit of Russian dance.

RUSSIAN VILLAGERS: Depending on our numbers, we may cast a few students exclusively as Russian villagers. They will represent the non-Jewish civilians of the community.