“A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof, trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn’t easy. You may ask, why do we stay up there if it’s so dangerous? We stay because Anatevka is our home. ... And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in a word ... Tradition.”

— TEVYE
“The word ‘fiddler’ connected the show with music.”
- Sheldon Harnick, lyricist

“I think the perspective of being on the roof is a perspective of seeing better, and making music up on a roof is one of trying to get a good look at things. It’s a powerful, unique symbol of surviving joyfully, and that’s why I think people respond to it. It’s a beautiful sound but it’s in a precarious place, so you’re kind of feeling the balancing act that goes into something like fiddling on a roof, but you’re making a beautiful sound; you’re making a sound of who you are, you’re keeping an eye out, but you’re in a precarious place.”
- Bartlett Sher, Director

In 1961, writers Joseph Stein (book), Jerry Bock (music), and Sheldon Harnick (lyrics) set out to adapt three stories from Sholem Aleichem’s “Tevye’s Daughters” into a Broadway musical. Bock and Harnick were fresh off their Pulitzer Prize win for the musical Fiorello!, which was produced by Harold Prince, who also collaborated with them on the “Tevye’s Daughters” adaptation.

The result was FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, which opened on September 22, 1964, directed and choreographed by Jerome Robbins and starring Zero Mostel as Tevye. It won nine 1965 Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Book, and Best Score. It also received a special 1972 Tony for becoming the longest-running Broadway musical of the time (3,242 performances).

The show has enjoyed four other Broadway revivals, several U.S. Tours, and countless productions around the world. The show has been praised for its universality: A successful film was made in 1971, directed by Norman Jewison and starring Topol as Tevye. Many of the show’s songs have gone on to become standards, including “To Life (L’Chaim!),” “If I Were A Rich Man,” “Sunrise Sunset,” “Matchmaker, Matchmaker,” and “Tradition.”

Now, Tony Award-winning director Bartlett Sher reunites his Tony Award-winning creative team from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s South Pacific and The King and I—Ted Speeling (music director), Michael Teareng (scenic designer), Catherine Zuber (costume designer), Donald Holder (lighting designer), and Scott Lehrer (sound designer)—to bring a fresh and authentic vision to this beloved theatrical masterpiece. The new revival will also feature stunning choreography from acclaimed Israeli choreographer Hofesh Shechter, based on the original Jerome Robbins staging. A wonderful cast (led by Tony Award nominees Danny Burstein and Jessica Hecht) and a lavish orchestra tell this heartwarming story of fathers and daughters, husbands and wives, and the timeless traditions that define faith, family, and community.

This production will introduce a new generation to this uplifting Broadway classic.

www.FiddlerMusical.com

**TEVYE** The poor, jovial, pious, and hard-working dairyman who always tries to be optimistic about life. He is a proud father of five daughters, and he is firmly grounded in his family’s traditions.

**GOLDE** Tevye’s sharp-tongued but affectionate wife of twenty-five years. Golde’s wish is that her daughters find good husbands and have better lives than she and Tevye have had.

**TEVYE AND GOLDE’S FIVE DAUGHTERS:**

**TZEITEL** Tevye’s eldest daughter, who is in love with Motel the Tailor. She is loyal to her family, but she questions the village’s traditions. She can be quite stubborn.

**HODEL** Tevye’s second-eldest daughter, intelligent and opinionated, who falls in love with Perchik and later marries him. After Perchik is arrested, she leaves Anatevka to join him in Siberia.

**CHAVA** Tevye’s sweet middle daughter, whom he loves dearly. She falls in love with Fyedka, a Russian soldier, and runs away with him, even though she knows her family will disown her for marrying a Christian.

**SHPRINTZE** Tevye’s second-youngest daughter.

**BIELKE** Tevye’s youngest daughter.

**THE DAUGHTERS’ SUITORS:**

**MOTEL** The poor but hard-working tailor who is in love with Tzeitel. He is sensitive and nervous, but sincere and friendly.

**PERCHIK** The outspoken student who visits Anatevka and falls in love with Hodel. He continually challenges the traditions of the village. He is arrested and sent to Siberia.

**FYEDKA** A strong, young Christian soldier from Russia who falls in love with Chava. He is outraged by the Russians’ treatment of the Jews, and he runs away with Chava.

**YENTE** The meddlesome matchmaker and the village gossip.

**LAZAR WOLF** The wealthy, older butcher who wishes to marry Tzeitel.

**SPOTLIGHT ON JOSEPH STEIN**

Joseph Stein won the Tony Award and Drama Critics Circle Award for Fiddler on the Roof. His other musicals include Zorba (Tony nom.), Rags (Tony nom.), The Baker’s Wife (Laurence Olivier Award, London), Juno: Take Me Along, Irene (starring Debbie Reynolds), The King of Hearts, So Long, 1746th Street. He also coauthored, with Alan Jay Lerner, the musical Camerline and, with Will Glickman, Mr. Wonderful (starring Sammy Davis Jr.) and Plain and Fancy. His plays are Enter Laughing, Before the Dawn, Ms. Gibbons’ Boys. He began his career in TV and radio, writing for “Sid Caesar Show,” “Your Show of Shows,” “Henry Morgan Show,” and many others, and for personalities including Tallulah Bankhead, Phil Silvers, Jackie Gleason and Zero Mostel. He wrote the screenplays of Enter Laughing and Fiddler on the Roof, for which he won the Screen Writers Guild Award.
SYNOPSIS

SPOTLIGHT ON JERRY BOCK

MUSIC

Jerry Bock was born in New Haven on November 23, 1928. Thirty years later he and Sheldon Harnick gave birth to The Body Beautiful in Philadelphia. In between was Catch a Star and Mr. Wonderful (starring Sammy Davis Jr.). Bock and Harnick’s celebrated collaboration yielded five scores in seven years. The Body Beautiful, Fiorello (winner of the Broadway triple crown: Tony Award, NY Critics Circle Award, Pulitzer Prize for Drama), Body Beautiful, Mr. Wonderful (winner of the Broadway Circle Award, Pulitzer Prize for Drama), and Fiorello. Bock and Harnick have been inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

SPOTLIGHT ON SHELDON HARNICK

LYRICS

Mr. Harnick’s career began in the 1950s with songs in revues both on and off Broadway (e.g. “The Boston Beguine,” “The Merry Little Match”). With Jerry Bock he created a number of memorable musicals including Fiorello (Tony Award, Pulitzer Prize), She Loves Me (Grammy) and Fiddler on the Roof (Tony). Other collaborations: Rev (Richard Rodgers), A Christmas Carol (Michel Legrand), A Wonderful Life (Joe Raposo), The Phantom Tollbooth (Arnold Black / Norton Juster) and The Audition (Marvin Hamlisch). He has written two musicals himself: Dragons and A Doctor in Spite of Himself. Mr. Harnick is a member of the Dramatists Guild and the Songwriters Guild. This season, in addition to Fiddler on the Roof, Bock and Harnick will be represented in New York by Rothschild and Sons at the York Theatre and She Loves Me on Broadway by the Roundabout Theater Company.

PROLOGUE

During “Tradition,” Teyve the dairyman introduces us to the tight-knit inner community of the village of Anatevka, and he describes their devotion to God. Traditions are of the utmost importance to the people of Anatevka.

ACT ONE

Three of Teyve’s daughters—Tzeitel, Hodel, and Chava—wander if Yente, the village matchmaker, will ever find them the men of their dreams (“Matchmaker”). Yente tells the girls’ mother, Golde, that she has selected the older butcher Lazar Wolf to marry Tzeitel, the eldest daughter.

Meanwhile, Teyve reflects on how he wishes he had a small fortune (“If I Were a Rich Man”). A group of villagers and a young scholar, Perchik, approach him with news of a violent attack (a pogrom) in a nearby village. Teyve invites Perchik to join the family for Sabbath dinner at their home, and he arranges for Perchik to teach his daughters.

Motel, the meek tailor, attempts to ask Teyve for Tzeitel’s hand, but he becomes flustered. The family and their guests celebrate the Sabbath (“Sabbath Prayer”).

As Teyve stumbles home from the tavern, he meets the Constable, who warns him that flowers are being stolen. The family and their guests celebrate the Sabbath (“Sabbath Prayer”).

When Teyve arrives home, he tells Tzeitel that he has arranged for her to wed Lazar Wolf. Golde is thrilled, but later Motel tells Teyve that he and Tzeitel have pledged to marry each other. Torn between tradition and his daughter’s wishes, Teyve agrees to let them marry. But how will he break this news to Golde? After he leaves, Motel and Tzeitel celebrate (“Miracle of Miracles”).

Teyve decides to concoct a wild nightmare (“The Dream”) to convince Golde that the butcher’s late first wife, Fruma-Sarah, will kill Tzeitel if she marries Lazar Wolf. Golde is horrified when Teyve explains this, and she insists that Tzeitel and Motel marry.

The controversial change in Tzeitel’s wedding plans causes much gossip amongst the villagers. As Chava enters Motel’s tailor shop, she is taunted by a group of Russians. Fyedka, a young Russian man, insists that they stop. After they leave, Fyedka tries to speak with Chava.

With the end of Act One comes Tzeitel and Motel’s wedding. The company sings “Sunrise, Sunset” as the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony occurs.

Perchik tells Hodel that he is leaving to work for justice in Kiev. He asks for her hand in marriage, and she accepts (“Now I Have Everything”). He promises to send for her as soon as he can. Teyve approves of the engagement. Later, Teyve asks Golde about their own arranged marriage of twenty-five years (“Do You Love Me?”).

On a village street, Yente begins gossipping with Tzeitel, and soon all of the villagers are gossiping about Teyve’s daughters and their suitors (“The Rumor”).

Perchik has been arrested and is living in Siberia, so Hodel leaves Anatevka to join him (“Far From the Home I Love”).

Fyedka and Chava speak outside of Motel’s tailor shop. She promises to tell her father about their love for each other. However, when Chava tries to speak with Teyve about Fyedka, Teyve grows angry.

When Teyve returns home, he learns that Chava and Fyedka have been married by the priest. Teyve says that Chava is dead to him. He deeply loves Chava (“Chava Sequence”), but when she appears to ask for his forgiveness, he cannot allow himself to speak to her; he is too grounded in his traditions.

The Constable brings news that everybody in the town must leave Anatevka in three days or risk death. The villagers ponder their future while reminiscing about their past (“Anatevka”).

The family is packing the wagon to move to America. Tzeitel and Motel are staying in Warsaw until they can afford the journey to America, and Hodel and Perchik are still in Siberia. Chava appears with Fyedka, but Teyve refuses to acknowledge her. Chava explains that they are also leaving to go to Cracow, because they cannot stay amongst people who can do such things to others. Teyve says goodbye to them and Teyve prompts Tzeitel to add, “God be with you!” Final goodbyes are said and Teyve begins pulling the wagon, as they begin their new journey.

“I belong in Anatevka Tumble down, workaday Anatevka Dear little village, little town of mine.”

“Soon I’ll be a stranger in a strange new place Searching for an old familiar face From Anatevka.”
Fiddler is a unique project for you because your family has a close connection to the people depicted in the musical.

My father was born in a shtetl in Lithuania, and when he was three years old my grandmother put him on a train and came up through Canada and all the way across to Southern California. My grandfather came through Ellis Island. So, I've always had a sort of connection to the tale, but it's only an imaginary one. I don't actually know what that was like. My grandparents spoke Yiddish, but I don't have much of a memory of what that meant to me. In a way, I think that's similar to a lot of people who read these tales. They think they should understand better than they sometimes do. The stories are very powerful, but you can't really explain why. It's more in the spirit of them—the spirit of going forward, the spirit of enduring, the spirit of holding on, the spirit of living by your faith, the spirit of living by your family. This piece allows audiences to—in the same way as it did in South Pacific—discover their own past all over again, in the same way as I'm using the show to discover my past. There is a lot of joy in the journey, even though the journey is marked by suffering.

So many people know and love this show. How do you honor the tradition of the show while also making it appeal to 21st-century audiences?

When you go to a revival of a show, you want two things at once: You want to experience what it was like when it was originally made and why people loved it so much, and you want to feel like you understand why it's happening now. I have to deeply honor it, rediscover it, and push it forward.

What do you hope modern audiences will get out of this production?

Audiences will come to Fiddler and experience a full orchestra and the world and the village of Anatevka coming to life. In that exploration, they get to enjoy the thing that musical theatre does best, which is creating vivid, bold life within the community and lives of the family, and that will be very clear and very satisfying in The Broadway Theatre. I want to honor as deeply and magnificently as any work by Bock, Harms, Stein, and Robbins. I think they're great-grandfathers of my work, and I would like to create a production that lets people see how good their work is.

The legacy of the show itself is built on the collaboration of Jerome Robbins, Sheldon Harms, Jerry Bock, and Joseph Stein, but we're living in 2015, so our audiences are slightly different. I have a different choreographer than Jerome Robbins: I am using Halish Shechter, who is Israeli born, Israeli trained, and was in the Batsheva Dance Company in Tel Aviv. He knows this culture very intimately. He is going to re-explore Robbins’ work and re-shape it in his own way. He brings a very special point of view to it as a boy growing up in Israel and growing up in the tradition of these dances that go into the battle Dance, go into L’Chaim.” It’s in his body, and it’s in his contemporary world.
WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF FIDDLER OF THE ROOF?

Sheldon Harnick: At the heart of Fiddler on the Roof, I think, are two different stories. One has to do with our leading man, Tevye. Three of his five daughters are at marriageable age, and they are breaking away from the traditions that Tevye himself believes in. It is very hard for him to accept that they are breaking away from his values, and eventually he does accept it, but it’s a struggle. That is something that I think audiences identify with, because any parent who has children hopes that they will grow up observing his values and when they don’t, it could be very difficult. That’s one aspect of Fiddler.

The other is the aspect of a minority culture, trying to cope with the majority culture in which it in lives. Joe Stein, Jerry Bock, and I felt that what we were writing was not just about a Jewish family, but that it was universal. The Jewish group in the village of Anatevka are subject to abuse, they are subject to persecution, and this is something that I think reminds people of what is happening to other minorities around the world. Black, Hispanic, where persecution persists. I think those are the two aspects of culture which are paramount.

After the show opened, we had our first Actors’ Fund benefit, where the audience is filled with actors. At intermission, my friend Florence Henderson came running up the aisle and said, “Sheldon, this show is about my Irish grandmother!” And I thought, “we have succeeded!”

HOW DID YOUR UPBRINGING INFLUENCE YOUR WRITING?

The starting point for Fiddler on the Roof was, of course, the stories themselves: several stories from Sholem Aleichem’s major work, Tevye’s Daughters. That was the basis for the show. Once we started to work on that, it reminded me of the way I grew up in Chicago. Although it was a non-Jewish neighborhood, we did have the other men, somehow, raise the money to rent a hall to use as a synagogue, they later raised money and bought an abandoned church, and that became our synagogue. I remember the fervor of which those men prayed in synagogues and many of them, if not most of them, had come from the old country. Many of them looked like the photographs I had seen of the survivors of the Holocaust; they were kind of thin and they looked like they had had very difficult lives, so all of those images were in my mind.

Also when growing up—as I said, it was a non Jewish neighborhood—there was a little Italian kid who lived down the block from me, and anytime he saw me and there was no one around, he would throw me to the ground and start punching me. They were not heavy punches, and they didn’t really hurt that much, but it was humiliating. So I got to know what it was like to be Jewish in a community, where there were very few other Jews, and that was something I could identify with the community that we were writing about in Fiddler.

I like to think that those experiences that I had growing up being Jewish in various situations meant a great deal to me, and the memories of those experiences are still vivid. I like to think that I was able, through those experiences, to convey something in the lyrics of what it meant to feel those things so that others could identify with it.

DISCUSS THE COLLABORATION WITH BOCK AND STEIN WHILE WRITING THE SHOW.

When Jerry Bock and I worked with the bookwriter, Joe Stein, Joe always started writing book scenes first. I had familiarized myself with the Sholem Aleichem stories, and there were certain aspects of those stories that I felt that, no matter what Joe does, there will be things that he will have to preserve. So I thought those were things where I could start looking for lyrics.

Jerry Bock and I had a very specific way of working; I’ve never worked this way with any other composer. Jerry would go into his studio and start to write numbers and when he had anywhere from about seven to eight of those numbers, he would record them and he would then send me the tape. When I listened to the tape, they would always start with “Shel, I think this number is for the butcher” or “Shel, I think this may be for the wedding.” I would listen to all the songs, and although there may have been ten or more songs, I was always happy if there were two that coincided with the ideas that I had. It was wonderful to have that music to work with because some of his tunes were just so catchy and so ingratiating that I just couldn’t wait to put lyrics to them. So that’s the way we always started.

At some point in the collaboration, I would have an idea for a number and there was no music that Jerry had sent me, so I had to write the lyric first. Eventually, we would get together with Joe Stein and we would compare what we had written with the book scene that he had written, and then we’d do a little carpentry to make sure that the song was introduced correctly and let out of correctly, and that the whole thing was integrated.

A theatre lyricist has to be also something of a playwright, because you have to investigate the character who is singing, thinking, “what is the situation he is a part of,” and, “emotionally, what would he be thinking? What would he want to express? Is it something that is emotional enough or funny enough to demand music?” and then finding the words for that. Then of course, the style of the music has to mesh with the character that the book writer is writing: the words, the sentences have to sound like they are coming out of the same people. The vocabulary and the style that we write would have to exactly match with the style and the character that Joe Stein would write, or else it would sound very peculiar.

Jerry and I have written songs and played them, and then the writer or the director has said, “you know something, that might be better spoken. That is not really such a terrific idea for a song. Let’s convert that into dialogue.” I’m kind of delighted when I see any of my shows and I hear a line and I thought that was originally a lyric, and now it’s dialogue and nobody knows that but me.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE MEMORY OF WRITING THE SHOW?

Jerry Bock wrote the music to a Russian waltz, and I heard it and I thought, “isn’t that beautiful,” and I had an idea for it. It turned out to be “Sunrise, Sunset.” Jerry, at that time, was living in New Rochelle, and I went to his studio in his basement, with my lyrcs, and we sang the song a couple of times and I changed a lyric or two once I heard how it sang, and when we had the idea we wanted it, we called Jerry’s wife, Patty, from upstairs, because we wanted to get a reaction. So Patty came downstairs and we sang the song. When I auditioned a song for somebody I look at the wall above them or to the side, I don’t look in their eyes. At the end of the song, I looked at Patty and, to my astonishment, she was crying.

A couple of weeks later, I was in Bethesda where my sister lived, and although I’m not a pianist, the piano accompaniment to “Sunrise, Sunset” is simple enough so I could master it, and I played it for my sister. I turned the music away from the piano and looked at her, and she was crying, and I thought “My goodness, this song must be something very special.” And it has turned out to be!

Jerry and I were just delighted when people began to use it at their weddings. I was asked to tweak the lyric a bit so it could be used at same-sex weddings, which I was happy to do.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST WITH THIS NEW REVIVAL?

Well, of course, having a show on Broadway is always exciting to begin with! It costs so much money to put on a show on Broadway that simply having it there is an accomplishment. In this particular case, when we realized that last year was the fiftieth anniversary and that there would probably be a production, Jerry Bock and Joe Stein had already died, but I had a long meeting with Joe Stein’s widow and we talked about directors, and the director we wanted was a man named Bartlett Sher. We met with him, and we were delighted when he said yes, he wanted to direct the show. He just directed The King and I, which is gorgeous, so we are curious and very excited about what he will do with this show, because he is a superb director and I can’t wait to see what he does.

LYRICIST SHELDON HARNICK ON THE MUSICAL’S ORIGINS AND LASTING POPULARITY
“Fiddler on the Roof” — created by Jerry Bock (music), Sheldon Harnick (lyrics), Joseph Stein (book) and Jerome Robbins (direction and choreography) and based on the stories of Sholom Aleichem — was a blockbuster success when it opened in 1964, smashing all box office records in its day. The initial production played 3,242 performances, the longest-running show on Broadway for years. There have been four Broadway revivals and countless national tours; some 200 schools across the country put it on each year. It was added to multicultural curriculums and later moved to the Lower East Side. Yiddish was spoken and later moved to the Lower East Side. Yiddish was spoken community of some 230,000 Jews in Brownsville, Brooklyn, in children to carry forward. The family lived in the concentrated practice his parents maintained and expected their eight rebelled against, and came deeply to resent, the Orthodox way of saying, “I don’t care what they think.”

Like Robbins, Mostel fought an inner war over Jewish identity, virtuality — the ineffable “it” — that make a Broadway star. Whoever played Tevye first would have to combine the universal, struggles between stasis and change, mourns and singsong intimations; they quickly eliminated anyone who seemed to have arrived at the audition hall directly from Second Avenue, which was largely the erstwhile home of the Yiddish theater district, or from the borscht belt. (They did, however, arrange with the Hebrew Actors’ Union — the 65-year-old association of Yiddish performers — to audition some of its members.) Robbins’s notes on the show repeatedly sound his contempt for representations of Jews as “lovable schmucks,” and his collaborators shared his concerns.

How could a commercial entertainment do all this? How does a work of popular culture glow with a radiant afterlife, illuminating for different audiences the pressing issues of their times? The answer lies in large part in where “Fiddler” came from and how it was made.

“It never entered our minds that it was Jewish,” Hannick recalled. “We all felt the same way about the stories, that they were just very beautiful and we couldn’t wait to work on them.”

Or as Stein liked to put it, “These were stories about characters who just happened to be Jewish.” Robbins kept searching for what he called a special “ordinary” quality for his cast — he didn’t want actors who looked too polished or flashy to be convincing as poor Jews. Yet he and his collaborators also didn’t want actors who, in their view, overplayed some put-on idea of Jewishness. They rejected stereotypical portrayals that showed vestiges of the American vaudeville “stage Jew” with Old Country accents, fumbling hands or singing intonations; they quickly eliminated anyone who seemed to have arrived at the audition hall directly from Second Avenue, which was largely the erstwhile home of the Yiddish theater district, or from the borscht belt. (They did, however, arrange with the Hebrew Actors’ Union — the 65-year-old association of Yiddish performers — to audition some of its members.) Robbins’s notes on the show repeatedly sound his contempt for representations of Jews as “lovable schmucks,” and his collaborators shared his concerns.

Beyond its continuing vibrant life in the theater, “Fiddler,” like no other musical before or since, has seeped into the culture more widely, functioning in sometimes contradictory ways, which makes sense: since the show’s essential gesture is dialectical: it looks backward and forward, favors both ways, which makes sense, since the show’s essential gesture

感人的艺术——他们认识到并尊重别人的才能。甚至更多，画中的肖洛姆·阿莱切姆先生的背影突出了他们的相互分歧和分歧。

"Fiddler on the Roof" is also regularly serves as a Jewish signifier: "Now I don't like each other. So Robbins’s eagerness to cast Mostel, and Mostel’s zeal for the part, spoke to both men’s prevailing sense of artistry — they recognized and respected each other’s talents. Even more, the draw of the Sholom Aleichem character trumped their mutual distrust and dislike.

Two more opposite temperaments are tough to imagine. Mostel was confident and free as an actor could be, Robbins a lack of insecurity as a director. Their very bodies exemplified the contrast: an uncontrollable, jiggling mass on the one hand, an utterly Rabbit-free, erect carriage on the other.

For both of these Jewish artists, albeit in vastly different ways, this project was personal. Mostel would have seemed the perfect choice to Robbins for a deeper reason, too. He represented an image of Jewishness that Robbins had done all he could do to distance himself from but that exerted a pull on him all the same. He described it in one of his journals as a “crude, vulgar, but healthy and satisfied” way of being, a way of saying, “I don’t care what they think.”

Like Robbins, Mostel fought an inner war over Jewish identity, but the enemy fire came from a different place. Mostel never sought to evade his Jewishness — on the contrary — but he rebelled against, and came deeply to resent, the Orthodox practice his parents maintained and expected their eight children to carry forward. The family lived in the concentrated community of some 230,000 Jews in Brownsville, Brooklyn, in 1915, when Mostel was born (his given name was Samuel), and later moved to the Lower East Side. Yiddish was spoken at home and in the neighborhood. Mostel would have made an excellent rabbi, his father thought. Mostel understood that choosing to pursue painting and performance meant leaving his family’s world behind.

The past offered a kind of vindication, a reconciling of Mostel’s past with his present, a means of honoring the background he had to reject in a form that, in itself, expressed, even celebrated, that rejection: playing Tevye on Broadway, he could have his kippelach and eat it too.

Robbins, in contrast, had run from a specter of weakness that rose from his ignorance and fear and from his desire for acceptance. Mostel knew what he had given up and could represent it with affection as a trace of the past. Robbins was joyously discovering a cultural wealth that he’d been denied and that the show could display as a gleaming treasure — but cruelly, one from long ago and far away.

In different fashions, both men were internally making the show’s primary contradictory gesture: embracing Jewish practice at arm’s length. Through “Fiddler,” Mostel and Robbins — and millions of spectators in the decades to come — could cherish, honor and admire a legacy in the safely secular, make-believe space of a theater.

When Mostel blasted into rehearsals after the second week, he started ridiculing Robbins right away. “A couple of weddings in Williamsburg and that putz thinks he understands Orthodox Jews!” he’d snort with a roll of the eyes that seemed to trace the full circumference of the globe. Day after day he found a way to entertain his fellow cast members at Robbins’s expense. And most of the company — especially the younger actors — cheered him on with their laughter.

When they argued at all, it was over substance, and often over Jewish substance. “What are you doing?” Robbins demanded at one rehearsal as Mostel touched the doorjamb of Tevye’s house and then brushed his fingers over his lips.

Mostel offered the obvious answer: “I’m kissing the mezuzah.”

Robbins responded bluntly, “Don’t do it again.” But Mostel insisted that Tevye, like the Orthodox Jews with whom the actor had grown up, would never neglect to make the customary gesture of devotion that acknowledges the significance of sacred parchments affixed to doorways of Jewish homes.

Robbins bristled. Mostel held firm and kissed the mezuzah again. Without raising his voice — in fact, the more emphatic he became, the more firmly and calmly he spoke — Robbins demanded that Mostel stop. The actor retorted. And then, when he walked through Tevye’s doorway once more, he crossed himself. He’d made — and won — his point. The mezuzah kissing stayed in.

No one was surprised that “Fiddler” swept the Tony Awards, winning as best musical as well as for book, score, direction, choreography, costumes, production and performances by Mostel and Maria Karnilova (as his wife, Golde).

Mostel famously accepted his statue noting that, since no one else from the show who had been on the podium that night had bothered to thank him, he would thank himself. Then he carried on a bit in Yiddish.
MEET THE STARS

DANNY BURSTEIN

TEVYE

BROADWAY: Mr. Burstein is a Shuley Tony Award nominee whose 15 Broadway credits include Cabaret (Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Award nominations), My Fair Lady, The Snow Geese, Golden Boy (2013 Tony and Outer Critics Circle nominations), Fosse (2012 Tony, Aria, and Grammy Award nominations), Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards), Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown, South Pacific (Tony and Drama Desk nominations, Outer Critics Circle Award); The Donny Osmond Show (Tony and Outer Critics Circle Award); The Drowsy Chaperone (Tony and Ovation Award nominations), Saint Joan, The Seagull, Three Men on a Horse, A Little Hotel On the Side, The Florentine Peach, A Class Act, Titanic and Company.

OFF-BROADWAY: Talley’s Folly (Lucille Lortel and Drama League nominations), Mrs. Farnsworth, Psych: All in the Timing, Meny We Roll Along, Weird Romance and I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change.

OPERA: He recently made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Frasch in the Jeremy Sams/Douglas Carter Beane production of Die Fledermusen.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN REIMAGINING THIS CLASSIC MUSICAL AS YOUR BROADWAY DEBUT?

I am looking forward to bringing it back to life, bringing to life the energy and emotions of the period and the culture. We hope to make something punchy that grabs you and puts you in the midst of the shtetl and it’s energy.

JESSICA HECHT

GOLDE

BROADWAY: Ms. Hecht received a 2010 Tony Award nomination for her performance in Arthur Miller’s A View from the Bridge opposite Liev Schreiber and Scarlett Johansson. Her other Broadway credits include The Assembled Parties, Harvey, Brighton Beach Memoirs, Julius Caesar opposite Denzel Washington, After the Fall, and The Last Night of Ballyhoo.

OFF-BROADWAY: Representative roles: The Three Sisters (Classic Stage Company), Stage Kiss, Lobster Alice (Playwright’s Horizons), The House in Town (Lincoln Center Theater). Flesh and Blood (New York Theatre Workshop), Stop Kiss, King Lear (The Public Theater).

REGIONAL: She has spent 10 seasons at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. Credits include: A Streetcar Named Desire, The Three Sisters, Legacy, Autumn Garden and The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told.


OFFICE OF THE PRODUCTION MANAGER

Fiddler on the Roof (2015)
The presence of Jews in Russia can be traced as early as the 7th century.

In 1791, due to growing anti-Semitism and increased business competition in Moscow, Czar Catherine II (Catherine the Great) restricted all of the Jews in Russia to a district along the western border of the country, known as the Pale of Settlement. The Pale of Settlement included much of what is now Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, and Ukraine, in addition to parts of western Russia.

Life within the Pale was not easy. Most people lived in small, poor villages (shtetls), constantly in fear of an attack from the government. In an attempt to drive the Jews out of Russia, the government organized violent riots called pogroms, in which an army of Russian citizens would loot and destroy Jewish homes and businesses within the shtetls, resulting in injuries and deaths.

In 1882, the May Laws were established by Czar Alexander III, which forbade Jews from living outside of towns and shtetls. It also prohibited them from conducting business on Sundays and Christian holidays. Trade and farming opportunities were now limited for the Jews, resulting in lives of poverty. To escape these harsh conditions, Jews could emigrate from Russia or convert to Christianity to avoid starving to death. Two million Jews immigrated to the United States between 1881 and 1914, with many others settling in Israel, Germany, Canada, Australia, and other countries.

Living in the shtetls caused Jews to form tight-knit communities, filled with traditions, charity, and strong family values. Shtetls were deeply rooted in Jewish faith, as depicted in Fiddler on the Roof.

The Pale of Settlement was abolished in 1917, after the overthrow of the Czars, and most of the shtetls were destroyed with the Nazi occupation during the Holocaust.

Solomon Rabinovitz (Sholem Aleichem) was born in Kiev, Russia, in 1859. “Sholem Aleichem” literally means “Peace be unto you,” or “How do you do?” He lived most of his life in Kiev, where he was the owner and editor of a Ukrainian newspaper. He moved to New York City in 1906, after witnessing the pogroms in Southern Russia. He died in New York in 1916.

Sholem Aleichem remains one of the greatest and most beloved of all writers in Yiddish. His works include The Adventures of Menahem-Menoll, Adventures of Mottel, The Cantor’s Son, Tevye the Dairyman, Hanukkah Money, Inside Kasrilevka and The Nightingale.

His legacy lives on even today. Monuments of him have been erected in Kiev and Moscow, and postage stamps featuring him were issued by Israel (1959), the Soviet Union (1959), Romania (1959), and Ukraine (2009). There is also an impact crater on the planet Mercury named after Aleichem, and the National Bank of Ukraine issued an anniversary coin celebrating him on March 2, 2009 (150 years after his birth).

The World of Sholom Aleichem, a celebration of his work, played Broadway in 1982, starring Jack Gilford.

“Sholem Aleichem was Russian and Jewish—his wife was Russian but he grew up in a Jewish community—and he wrote out of a tradition of Yiddish, which is almost lost now. He then traveled to America where he struggled to get a footing because there were so many divisions in the Jewish community, some of whom embraced it and some of whom didn’t. In his own life, he experienced the same sort of struggle as someone like Tevye. So he’s a folk writer, and that’s very different than you have of a national story in South Pacific or this strange tale of exotic, faraway Siam in The King and I. I’m getting very interested in his approach and the kind of things he went through to tell this story, and I find that fascinating.”

– Bartlett Sher
MUSICAL THEATRE AND DANCE

On YouTube, view some other choreography by Jerome Robbins from his musical retrospective, Jerome Robbins’ Broadway. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE8Kd74KbqE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE8Kd74KbqE)).

Then, look up some of Hofesh Shechter’s past work in the world of classical and modern dance. ([https://vimeo.com/user9326973](https://vimeo.com/user9326973))

How do Jerome Robbins and Hofesh Shechter’s work compare to each other, and how do they differ? How does each relate to the choreography that you saw on stage in this production of Fiddler on the Roof?

TRADITIONAL RUSSIAN CULTURE

Find some videos online of traditional Russian Jewish Dancing. Pay attention to both the movement and the music.

How does the dancing in Fiddler on the Roof compare to the dancing in those videos?

How does the music in Fiddler on the Roof compare to the music featured in those video clips?

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Examine a modern culture in which a minority group is living as a subset of a larger group of people. How does that compare to the Jews of Anatevka living in Russia during Fiddler on the Roof? How are these minority groups oppressed? How do they try to overcome this oppression?

Discuss anti-semetism and its history, from ancient times through modern day. What other events in history resemble the pogroms in Russia during the time of Fiddler on the Roof?

Research two other historical cultures with arranged marriages, and compare and contrast them with the traditions of Russian Jews. What are the similarities and differences? If these rules were ultimately abolished: how and why were they abolished? How do those cultures behave today?

Find two other literary, film, or stage works that deal with the idea of an arranged marriage. How are they portrayed, and how is that portrayal different from Fiddler on the Roof? Do you think that a less-than-perfect marriage would be better than no marriage at all?

THE STORY CONTINUES

Imagine it is five years after the final scene in the musical. Where are all of the major characters from Fiddler? What is life like for them wherever they are living now? Did some of them remain as a tight-knit community, or have they all gone their separate ways? What remains of Anatevka? What was it like for them to become part of a new culture of people?

SHOLEM ALEICHEM

Read some of the “Tevye” stories by Sholem Aleichem. What are the similarities and differences to the plot of Fiddler on the Roof? How different are the characters in those stories from the characters in the musical?

Compare those stories to another satirical work, fable, or story, and discuss the differences and similarities. What similarities can be found between Sholem Aleichem and other writers from other cultures and time periods?

THE CHARACTER OF TEVYE

Tevye begins the show speaking directly to the audience as a narrator in the Prologue. He also has frequent “asides,” in which he speaks to God in prayer. Why do you think the authors chose to have him do this?

Choose two other theatrical works in which a character speaks directly to the audience. Analyze its use. How does this theatrical device enhance or burden the show?

Tevye is one of the most richly complex characters in the musical theatre canon. Analyze Tevye as a character, and then defend or criticize him. Do you feel he is right to stand by his traditions? Why does he feel so strongly about his traditions?

How does the character of the Fiddler serve as a metaphor in Tevye’s life and to the people of Anatevka?