Written by Mike Schulz
Tuesday, 12 July 2005 18:00

It's too bad that so many of us greet the news of another area production of *Fiddler on the Roof* with an audible groan, because the show itself is really, really good. The music is marvelous, the characters are enjoyable, the story is well-plotted and touching, it's always funnier than you remember it being … if you're a musical-theatre fan and if you've never seen it, you have no excuse. But, let's face it, it can be a daunting musical to sit through. "I love that show," you'll hear people say, "but,
Jesus
, it's long … ."

The biggest compliment I can pay the Quad City Music Guild's current production of *Fiddler on the Roof* is that, even at nearly three hours, it isn't the slightest bit taxing. Director Robert Williams has staged a handsome, thoroughly engaging version of this beloved work, and he handles the sheer size of the show with mastery. One of the things the Music Guild can give to a production that no other area venue can match is scope, and the group numbers here – the "Tradition" opening, especially – are appropriately, impressively grand; I can't imagine the logistics involved in creating stage business for a group of more than three dozen, but Williams, aided in no small measure by choreographer Martha Taylor, makes it look effortless.

So does John VanDeWoestyne, who plays Tevye. It's easy for the dairyman to be played so broadly that he overwhelms the production, but VanDeWoestyne is just about flawless, his line delivery assured – he achieves great comedic effects by letting the ends of his sentences trail off into the ether – and his voice spectacular. Yet he's also a generous enough actor to make everyone around him look good. Dolores Sierra, who plays Tevye's wife, Golde, provides a serene, affecting counterpoint to her stage husband's flamboyance, and terrific performers such as Sarah Walker, Jodi Leonard, Dick Lafrenz, Joe Urbaitis, and Becky Hinton all make vivid impressions.

And audiences shouldn't underestimate the power that a live orchestra gives to a production of *Fiddler*
(as does the presence of a live, onstage
fiddler
, which Tim Schwaegler enacts beautifully). With both musicians and performers playing at the top of their game, Music Guild's
Fiddler on the Roof
is strong and effective, and even if you've seen the show numerous times, this production is a welcome reminder of why many of us keep going back for more.
L'chiam!