

All the Boys and Girls Looked Jewish

Written by Ari L. Noonan

Thursday, 03 August 2006

First Person

Children's Civic Light Opera production of "Fiddler on the Roof," partially benefiting the Museum of Tolerance, plays Friday, Aug. 18, at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 19, at 2 and 7:30, and Sunday, Aug. 20, at 2, in the Norman J. Pattiz Auditorium at Hamilton High School. Preview: Sunday, Aug. 13, at 1:30, in the Museum of Tolerance Theatre, at the corner of Pico Boulevard and Roxbury Drive. Dress rehearsal: Thursday, Aug. 17, 5 p.m., Hamilton High. www.CCLO.org or 310.478.5886.

For an hour and a half this morning while watching the utterly brilliant cast of the Children's Civic Light Opera rehearse, I thought I had fallen asleep and the whole world had become Jewish. Every single one of the 40 boys and girls I watched sweeping through their paces for the production of "Fiddler on the Roof" two weekends from now looked Jewish. Some are. Some are not. But they had me convinced. They looked so authentically Jewish that I will be disappointed if I do not see them in my synagogue on Saturday morning.

Going Home to Anatevka

As they cheerfully danced, forcefully sang and animatedly performed the rituals of daily Jewish life 125 years ago in the village of Anatevka, I was transported back to the bitter days of Czarist Russia. Quietly, I will acknowledge the talented, bushy-haired young man who was

Tevya, the key player, may not have been Jewish. His first name is Roberto. I stopped counting the letters in his surname (Pasqueriello) when I reached 20. He was really good, absolutely convincing, which is an actor's main mission. Sitting beside Steve Frye of the Culver City News, my learned teacher on all matters entertainment, I nudged him a couple of times and said, "See, just like my wedding." In the classic barn-like stage setting that is the AmVets Post #2 building behind the Vets Auditorium, the boys and girls morphed into 19th century Russian Jews.

She Who Must Be Obeyed

Under the demanding but loving tutelage of a lady we may call Mother — who otherwise is Diane Feldman Turen, the founder and Artistic Director — magic was worked. The cast comes in so many different sizes that I don't imagine any two of them could fit into a common sized olive drab tee-shirt that each one was wearing. This is where the magic of Mother, Ms. Feldman Turen, plays a crucial role. Even though we were only a few feet off Culver Boulevard and Mr. Frye was perched beside me, I felt as if I were in Czarist Russia. Even though every one of the boys and girls was a different height, from pretty short to pretty tall, they looked uniformly like Russian Jews to me. Their ages range from 7 to 17, and as it goes in summer theater, most of them were girls. Whatever

role they were assigned, that was who I believed they were. Mother, amazingly, seemed to have four or five hands as she pounded out the familiar, lilting melodies of "Fiddler" on a piano that could not be heard more than two blocks away, directed individual actions, eyed the entire rehearsal area at a glance, correcting several minor flaws, all while subtly applauding their hard work. But my favorite moments were admiring the nimble, gliding, curling, pretzeling movements of the young choreographer Teresa White. The lithe Ms. White, in her first summer with the student company, seemed to be in two places on the floor simultaneously. With velvetized feet and a soothing but sturdy voice, she strokingly educated children of all ages. Ms. White demonstrated how they should carve their own personal spaces in the air while relating a story to the audience by the ways they contort their bodies.

Dipping into Their Background

The Children's Civic Light Opera, a summertime company for Westside students that is in its 19th season, is classy enough to play Broadway, not off-Broadway. The talent, the energy, the genuine spirit of the children illuminate the barn of a room. They are polished to such a lofty degree that a guy could shave in the glow they throw off. They have fun, too. Today was Media Day, another high gloss production, spearheaded by parent volunteer Chris

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Nevil who knows how to stage a sophisticated party. A circular table in the entryway was crowded with professionally designed credentials for media people. Each of us was given a bulging, technicolor press packet, in the olive drab color scheme, containing pages of useful information. It wasn't timed this way on purpose, but the Children's Civic Light Opera introduction of "Fiddler on the Roof" to the greater world of the Westside came on the mournful Jewish holiday of Tisha B'av, the Ninth Day of the Month of Av. The major catastrophes of Jewish history are poignantly recalled through prayers and underscored by a 25-hour fast. For those of us who are fasting until 8:37 this evening, the meaning of "Fiddler" was emotionally enhanced by the intersection of Tisha B'av, "Fiddler on the Roof," and the aching heart-break of the Middle East War. My wife and I have spoken this week of going to Israel to provide assistance

and support to the Jewish people. The power of Ms. Feldman Turen's splendid cast is so strong and so pervasive that I wanted to dash out of the AmVets building, take Diane by the arm and fly off to Tel Aviv this afternoon.

Postscript

Playing before an audience of truly activist, involved, beaming parents, two women from the Museum of Tolerance and the media, Mother stepped out of character for a moment to make an announcement. She invited the audience to gather in the center of the rehearsal stage while the performers encircled us. Solemnly, they closed their eyes and sang to us, echoingly, movingly. I was so shaken I don't remember what the song was, just that it was royally beautiful. What the adults surrounding the Children's Civic Light Opera are doing needs to be known. Through Keith Jeffreys, Vice Commander of the AmVets

Post and producer-artistic director of Los Angeles Area Veterans' Artists Alliance, the cast yesterday performed for the needful, often forgotten men and women at the Veterans Administration Nursing Home. V.A. patients such as Alice Keikley, Matthews Rupnick and Robert Tottle thanked the ensemble for remembering them when others do not.

The relationship between the Children's Civic Light Opera and the Museum of Tolerance, led by Rabbi Marvin Hier, is developing this summer. Both groups say they hold the same communal goals in common. The student cast and the scores of participating adults associated with the Children's Civic Light Opera deserve your support. Remember their stagings, starting a week from Sunday. They are the cream of our future *



Children's Civic Light Opera
www.cclo.org