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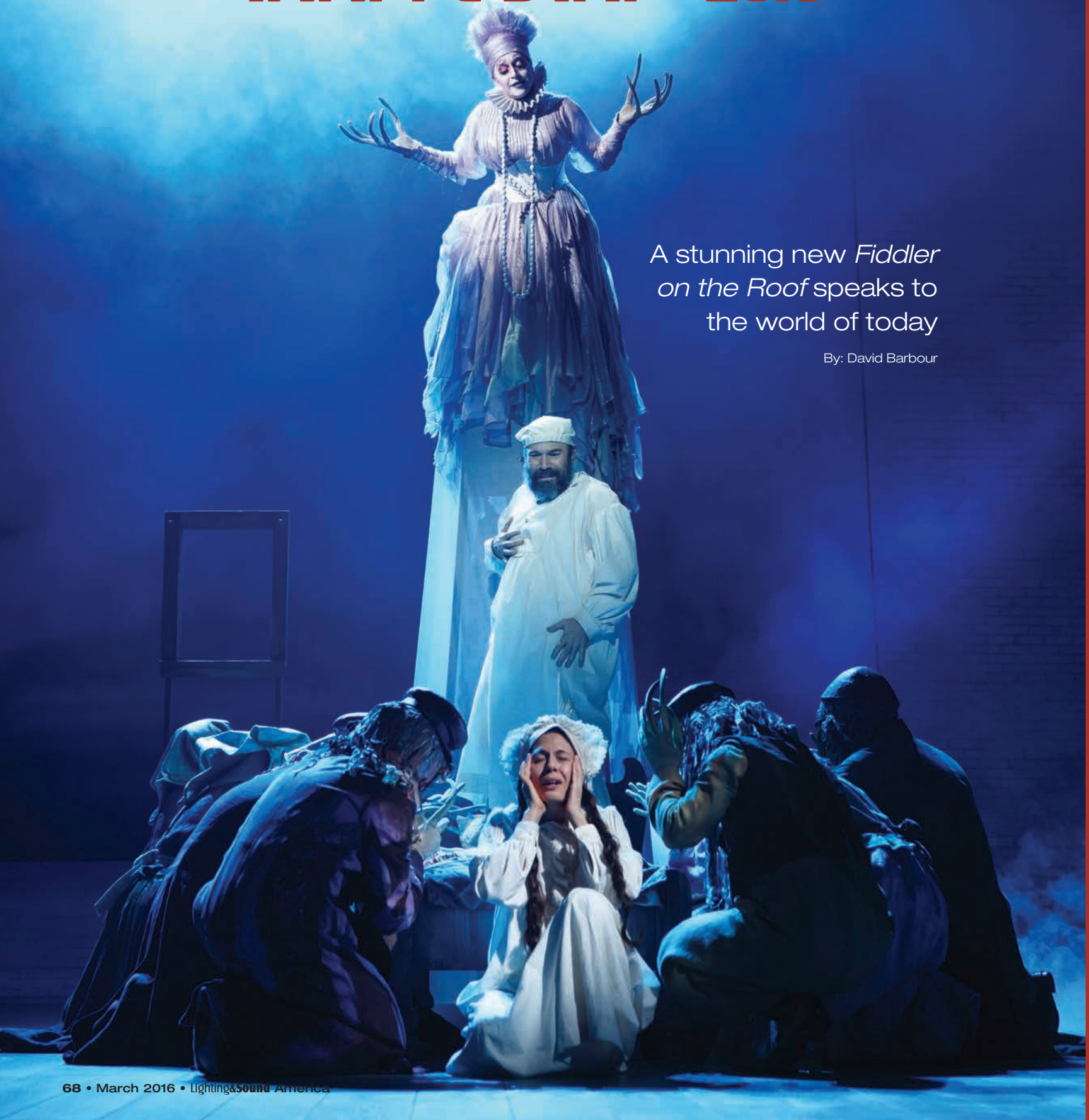
# ANATEVKA: 2016



## A stunning new *Fiddler on the Roof* speaks to the world of today

By: David Barbour

The actor Danny Burstein appears on a nearly empty stage; the only bit of scenery is a sign saying, "Anatevka." Burstein is a tourist in modern dress, featuring an orange windbreaker; he begins to read from a guidebook, but the words are the opening speech of Joseph Stein's book for *Fiddler on the Roof*.

As he reads, the title character rises up into the flies, along with a turn-of-the-century Russian farmhouse. This effect is also a cunning diversion; when we return our attention to Burstein, he is in period costume, having assumed the role of Tevye, the milkman, inhabitant of a shtetl in the Russian Pale of Settlement, circa 1905. Even as we are taking in this transformation, the entire company appears at the back of the stage, entering via a concealed set of stairs; the actors march downstage, ready to pull us back into a lost world. A rip in time has occurred; past and present have been conjoined, startlingly. We are on notice that this is very much a *Fiddler on the Roof* for the 21st century.

Bartlett Sher's new Broadway production, now at the Broadway Theatre, has done something that once seemed impossible: It breaks the spell of Jerome Robbins' original staging. As *Wonder of Wonders*, Alisa Solomon's authoritative history of *Fiddler on the Roof*, reveals, it was Robbins, the original production's director/choreographer, who pushed Stein, composer Jerry Bock, and lyricist Sheldon Harnick to turn their musical, a fond recollection of shtetl life based on the stories of Sholom Aleichem, into a much bigger statement about the breakup of a way of life. It is this quality that has made *Fiddler* so enduringly popular around the world.

Sher devised an approach to *Fiddler* that, with only a couple of tweaks, reframes for the world of 2016. He also has assembled a design team that, breaking away from the iconic original design by Boris Aronson (scenery) and Jean Rosenthal (lighting), gives the show a distinctive look in support of the new directorial vision. Both the production's lighting and sound designs benefit from the latest technological developments. This is a production that honors the past even as it looks to the future.

## Scenery

Michael Yeargan, the scenic designer, says that he learned a great deal from watching Sher's workshop staging, and from Hofesh Shechter, the choreographer, who gives the show's dances a vigorous new spin. Yeargan adds that, from the beginning, the assignment was to create a style that would stand apart from Aronson's original, which drew heavily on the work of the painter Marc Chagall. "We didn't want it to be too whimsical," the designer notes, adding that, in this production, "Tevye is almost like Father Courage." The reference is apt, for Yeargan's design makes use of many Brechtian staging devices.

From his discussions with Sher and Shechter came the concept of period objects placed in an obviously theatrical space. Yeargan is quick to note that there is no metaphor involved, as some have suggested: "It's just a real non-illusionistic space—like a dream backstage." He adds, "Bart wanted the image of the house floating up out of the floor at the beginning, followed the chorus coming up from behind the stage. He also wanted to add a passerelle to bring Danny Burstein's monologues out into the house." The flying effects were supplied by Flying by Foy.

Yeargan points out that the backstage surround, which appears to be made of light-colored brick, is in fact painted velour. "We did something like it in [the recent Broadway revival of] *Golden Boy*, We took a velour that is the color of mortar and used stencils to paint the bodies of the bricks. It reads better than plastic vacuform brick. Hudson Scenic [the show's scenic supplier] did an amazing job."

The scenery in *Fiddler* is spare, suggestive, and, at times, slightly surreal. In "Tradition," a simple wooden wall is pulled apart to reveal the various groups—fathers, mothers, sons, daughters—who make up the community. Tevye's home consists of a farmhouse exterior, a barn that floats above the deck (as does a row of grass), a tree, a well, and a crude fence made of whittled tree branches. The farmhouse has sliders that extend themselves, turning it into the building's interior. "The details came from our research into shtetls," Yeargan says. He says that the floating buildings are his tribute to Chagall, adding that "we were trying to give it a lightness, a sense of levity." Noting that many of the buildings have a tumbledown quality, he says, "Chagall didn't just make them look like they were falling down; they really were that way."

During the number "Sabbath Prayer," Tevye's family gathers around the menorah; the house and barn fly out, revealing a tableau of the entire community in its religious observance. The tavern where Tevye and Lazar Wolf, his putative son-in-law, perform "To Life," is defined by a low-rise sideboard wall plus a bar, a few tables and chairs, and hanging lamps. Outside the tavern, we see a floating streetscape. For the scene in which Tzeitel, Tevye's daughter, gets married, a beautifully painted drop, depicting a sunset sky, is brought in, attached to a frame. "We didn't want the drop to fill the stage," says Yeargan, "and the sunset look gives the scene a different quality."

In the second act, the number "The Rumor" takes place on a bare stage with the village of Anatevka floating above, using dimensional cutouts to depict the village streets and houses. A skeletal train station stop dominates the scene in which Hodel, another daughter, sings "Far From the Home I Love." One of the boldest theatrical gambits takes place when Tevye, learning that his daughter, Chava, has fallen in love with a Gentile, disowns her. As he sings the lament, "Chavaleh," she and two dancers appear behind a half-height scrim. "When I saw

All photos: Joan Marcus

The wedding sequence, with the famous "Bottle Dance," takes place against a painted drop attached to a frame in full audience view.

the scene in the rehearsal room, I said, 'It's the perfect place for a Brechtian half-curtain.' It's designed to look a little rough and to hang crookedly."

The number "Tevye's Dream" posed a rather unusual assignment. In this song, Tevye, trying to convince his wife, Golde, to release Tzeitel from her engagement to Lazar Wolf, conjures up a nightmare starring their late relative Fruma-Sarah. "Bart said that Fruma-Sarah had to be 20' tall. I had done *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Metropolitan Opera [a production that features several extremely tall figures, who are moved by stage hands under framed, rolling "hoopskirts"], I designed the framework, and Cathy [Zuber, the production's costume designer] did the costumes." The number also features a massive staircase.

Of course, there were many details to handle, including Tevye's milk cart, one of the more iconic props in musical theatre history, and the tree outside the house, which sheds its leaves to show the passage of time. The final scene, when the citizens of Anatevka are about to be expelled, takes us, for the first time, inside Tevye's barn, for a very specific reason. "It has resonances of people herded into a space like animals. You've seen the barn all night long and, inside it, it is black; it kind of foresees what is going to happen later on." At the end of the scene, the barn flies out and the villagers, with those possessions they can carry, seen against a blindingly white cyc. They are leaving Anatevka forever, some for America, others for Israel or other parts of Europe. They are entering into the 20th century, a tumultuous and, at times, disastrous era for them and their descendants.

## Lighting

Many scenery-heavy Broadway shows create problems for lighting designers, reducing or eliminating key lighting positions. Then again, Donald Holder, the lighting designer of *Fiddler,* notes, a design as spare as Yeargan's poses its challenges, too. "Bart opened up the space to its extreme edges, so it was hard not to have exposed lighting positions. The space is also very pale, which, for me, was a daunting challenge." At the same time, he says, "The show was conceived with the idea that the lighting would

do a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of the storytelling."

Holder adds, "Bart wanted a kind of raw, unadorned beauty, a look that was poetic and, at times, stark, but always understated and very much a reflection of the world of the shtetl. He called me early on and said he didn't want anything but tungsten sources. He doesn't normally talk about technology, and I think he was saying something bigger—that he wanted a palette that felt organic, with nothing that couldn't exist in the world of the play. It's not like there are only tungsten sources in the show, but there many more than I would have had otherwise."

There was another major consideration, Holder says: "There are so many intimate moments in the piece that it was important for the rig to be very quiet. I had conversations with [the production's sound designer] Scott Lehrer about acceptable decibel levels and ambient noise levels." He notes that this concern dovetailed with the idea of using tungsten sources. "Everything in the front of house is tungsten and as much as 75% of the moving lights are as well. I used sources that I hadn't used before; for example, the wash light that does much of the backlighting is the [Martin Professional] MAC TW1." Noting the protest that erupted, especially among British theatre designers, when Martin threatened to discontinue the product, Holder says, "Now I understand why people feel the way they do." He adds that his rig contains "very few fixtures that produce more ambient fan noise than Scott's suggested maximum of 35dB. I really feel good that, in the second act, there are moments when you can hear a pin drop."

Upstage in this scene is the floating drop depicting the buildings of Anatevka.

The moving light component of the show includes 11 Philips Vari*Lite VL3500Q Spots, four VL3500 Washes, eight VL2500 Washes, seven VL1000AS units, ten Martin Professional MAC 2000 Performance Profiles, 12 Mac TW1s, six Clay Paky Sharpy Washes, ten ETC Source Four Revolutions, and five City Theatrical AutoYokes.

Also, the designer says, "Because so much of the space is exposed, I took an operatic approach, lighting the show with big, bold strokes, especially in the second act, which features big, single-source looks." Two of the more challenging numbers for Holder were "Tradition" and "Tevye's Dream." "I basically have a 12"-wide x 8"-deep lighting trough to work with, located at the bottom of a 32'-wide trap [from stage right to stage left] separating the back of the stage from the back wall; I had to find a way to graze this surface with color-changing light, to create a sense of the sky when necessary; also, when the cast ascends the stairs, I wanted to etch them in dramatic backlight. I remembered seeing the GLP Impression X4 Bar at LDI and thought it might be the only possible solution for this particular challenge. Mark Ravenhill, of GLP, was very open to the idea of lending eight fixtures to the production, and they're making their Broadway debut on *Fiddler*. The X4 Bars are fantastic, a big reason why that moment works from a lighting point of view. As an added bonus, they're backlighting the translucent drops that fly in, and they do a great job of uplighting the fog in 'Tevye's Dream.' It's interesting that, in a show where there was a mandate to stick to simple tungsten sources, LEDs played such an important role."

The tavern where "To Life" is performed is represented by a low-rise wall, some lamps, a bar, and some chairs and tables.

In "Tevye's Dream," Holder employs ballyhoos and other moving light effects to underline the number's nightmarish nature. In general, he adds, "The first act is more colorful than the second, following the arc of a musical that begins joyously then becomes progressively darker and sadder all

the way up to the near-tragic finale. “In ‘Anatevka,’ the barn flies out and the cast is set against a Gerriets gray RP, with ETC MultiPARs focused on a bounce drop. To make the reveal pay off took very careful positioning.”

The rest of the rig includes 346 ETC Source Fours in various models and degree sizes, eight Altman Lighting EconoCycs, six L&E ministrips, six Vegas-style ministrips, six ETC MultiPAR striplights, seven AC Lighting Chroma-Q Color Force 48s and two Color Force 72s, one Lycian 1293 and two Lycian M2 followspots, 60 Wybron Coloram scrollers, eight DHA Double Gobo Rotators, one Look Solutions Power Tiny and four Viper NT foggers, two Martin JEM Glaciator X-Streams, and two MDG Atmosphere hazers. The show is run on an ETC Eos console with ETC Sensor dimmer racks, Motion Labs power distribution, and wireless control by City Theatrical’s SHoW DMX system. Lighting gear was supplied by PRG.

## Sound

Scott Lehrer, the production’s sound designer, also notes the size of the space. “It’s a giant theatre and mostly an intimate story,” he says. “The Broadway has a gigantic open mezzanine: How do you get sound there without making it too loud and making it sound bad downstairs? I tried something new, using d&b audiotechnik’s ArrayProcessing system.”

According to d&b, ArrayProcessing, which is a function inside the company’s ArrayCalc software, “applies powerful filter algorithms to optimize the tonal (spectral) and level (spatial) performance of a line array column over the audience area defined by its mechanical vertical coverage angle. Within ArrayCalc simulation software, spectral and level performance targets over the listening areas can be defined, while specific level drops or offsets can be applied to certain areas, to assign reduced level zones. ArrayProcessing applies a combination of FIR and IIR filters to each individual cabinet in an array to achieve the targeted performance, with an additional latency of only 5.9ms. This significantly improves the linearity of the response over distance as well as seamlessly correcting for air absorption. In addition, ArrayProcessing employs the same frequency response targets for all d&b line arrays, to ensure all systems share a common tonality. This provides consistent sonic results regardless of array length or splay settings.”

“I’m just using it for the mezzanine system,” Lehrer says. “Upstairs, I have big left-right arrays of d&b’s V-Series speakers with ArrayProcessing. They’re hung at a height that makes sense for the front row of the mezzanine. The delay-steering aspect of it works all the way back to the last row of the mezzanine, with the left-right system delivering left-right information—in a number like ‘The Rumor,’ when individual performers are popping out with a single line, even in the back of the mezzanine

Behind this scene, depicting the farmhouse where Tevye lives with his family, is the faux-brick wall, which is uplit using GLP impression X4 Bars.

One of Holder's stunning backlighting effects during the opening number, "Tradition."

you are looking where you are supposed to. It's something that I could have only hoped for and never expected, not in the back of the mezzanine. I was amazed at how involved the audience was, all the way back there. The back row is 125' away and we're not using a delay system. It's a game-changer, in a way. You can set up a pair of line arrays and get really even coverage from 30' — 120' away from the speakers, and it sounds tonally similar and the levels are the same."

Another challenge for Lehrer was the use of the passerelle. "I've got two sets of front-fill speakers, one upstage and one downstage of the passerelle," he says. "There are times when actors stand right in front of the speakers. We had to do special presets for those moments, EQ-ing the speakers differently to avoid feedback. I've been using the TiMax 2 SoundHub delay matrix and it's pretty easy to program. With it, we can turn down the inside-left speaker when Tevye or Motel is standing in front of it, or EQ out some of the feedback frequencies. It's a challenge, but we have fun tracking the actors around the passerelle; the sound tracks him like the lighting does."

For his proscenium hang, Lehrer says, "Because I wanted to use V-Series for the line arrays upstairs, I also wanted a system with the same tonality. d&b was coming out with V-Series point source speakers; they hadn't yet released them, but they did a run of them for us; we had the first ones in the US. They worked out very well and they match the upstairs system." Additional fill is provided by d&b E6, E5, and E4 boxes, all chosen in part of their compact form factors.

Lehrer also says that one reason for the sound design's intelligibility is the cooperation of the lighting department: "We were able to do this because of how hard Don Holder worked to make sure his lighting rig was very quiet. This is especially apparent in Act II, during the train station scene and the song 'Far from the Home I Love.' There is so much focus and intimacy to this scene, and we were able to maintain that feeling sonically because we weren't fighting to have the actors heard over fan noise. It's so much more emotionally moving when we have this larger dynamic range to work with, thanks to Don's making low noise a priority in his lighting design."

In terms of foldback, Lehrer says, "The walls have soft materials and the actors don't get back much from the house. To deal with this, I create an early reflection reverb from a TC Electronic Reverb 4000 unit going into the onstage monitors, to give them a sense of the house coming back at them. They're not getting direct

monitoring; instead, they're getting reverb back from the house." The monitor package consists of d&b E8s on the electric ladders at stage left and stage right. A few musicians in the pit use Aviom personal mixing.

The principals are miked with DPA d:screet 4061 units, with Countryman B3 mics on members of the ensemble; everyone uses Sennheiser SK-5212 transmitters and EM 3532 receivers. The show is run on a DiGiCo SD7T. Sound gear was supplied by Masque Sound.

Additional personnel include Bess Marie Glorioso (production stage manager); Ana M. Garcia (stage manager); Suzanne Apicella and Katherine Shea (assistant stage managers); Mikiko Suzuki MacAdams (associate scenery designer); Caroline Chao (associate lighting designer); Alex Neumann (associate sound designer); Marc Salzberg (production sound engineer); Wilson Chin, Libby Stadstad, Reid Thompson, G. Warren Stiles, and Todd Potter (assistant scenic designers); Brandon Stirling Baker (assistant lighting designer); Scott Silvian (assistant sound); Don Oberpriller (production carpenter); Jimmy Maloney (production electrician); Robert Valli (deck automation); Chad Hersey (fly automation); Kevin Barry (associate production electrician); Jeff Brewer (head electrician); Bridget Chervenka (moving light programmer); Kathy Fabian (production properties supervisor); Neil Rosenberg (production properties master); and John Tutalo (assistant properties).

At the end, the production returns to the opening moment in a manner that is better seen than read about. Suffice to say that Sher and his team link Tevye, his family, and friends to the world of today, when hundreds of thousands of Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, and others are fleeing their homes for the uncertain embrace of the Western nations. It's a quietly stunning moment that makes a 1964 musical seem like it was written last week.

The number "Tevye's Dream," also seen on page 68, features some of Holder's most theatrical lighting effects.

The finale, with the company posed against a white cyc. The principals wear DPA d:screet 4061 mics while the members of the ensemble have Countryman B3s.