

Will-O-Way's 'Fiddler' captures show's spirit

By BARBARA MICHALS

With charm, zest and lots of genuine warmth, "Fiddler on the Roof" opened at Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre last weekend. The production, which will run through October, ranks as one of Will-O-Way's best.

"Fiddler" is the popular musical based on several of the short stories of Yiddish author Sholom Aleichem. Tevye, a poor dairyman in czarist Russia, is "blessed" with five daughters, a lame horse and the threat of exorbitant pogroms. Much of the play's humor comes from Tevye's frequent chats with God concerning his misfortunes.

No matter how able the supporting cast, "Fiddler" remains essentially a

one-man show, its success or failure resting with Tevye. Will-O-Way's Jack Cortes is nothing less than superb in the role. With a perpetual twinkle in his eyes, he sings, talks and conveys his way right to an audience's heart.

Cortes' deep, rich, powerful voice is most impressive as it fills every inch of the theater with such memorable Jerry Book-Sheldon Herrick tunes as "Tradition," "If I Were a Rich Man," "Sunrise, Sunset" and "L. Chayim."

WARMTH is the keynote of Cortes' performance. His comic antics are not as broad or as outright hilarious as those of Broadway's Zero Mostel. Tevye's creator and quintessence, but Cortes' Tevye is more lovable. When Tevye bellows at his wife Golde that

he is the boss of the family and makes the decisions, she retorts, "After dinner, remind me to faint." Like Golde, the audience knows that underneath the lion there lurks a pussycat.

Anticipating harsh reactions from Golde, Cortes is at his most endearing as his face turns rubbery (for a series of comic mugging).

Tevye's three eldest daughters, Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava, are danced convincingly by Tine Turner, Eileen

Theater

Weiss and Delores Bolling respectively. All three are as effective in the show's bitter-sweet moments as in the livelier ones. However, Miss Bolling's soft voice is virtually drowned out by the other two sisters in the "Matchmaker" number.

Miss Bolling also choreographed the production. The dancing is spirited and noteworthy, considering the

severe limitations of the small Will-O-Way stage. Mike Chorba and Ross Hanley impress with some fancy Russian steps.

Gerry Woughter is inconsistent as Lazar Wolf, while Charles Perkins' portrayal of the constable is weak and ineffective.

In addition to appearing as the fiddler of the title, Michael Pitanin does a commendable job as the show's musical director and piano accompanist.

According to director Celia Merrill Turner, Will-O-Way staged "Fiddler on the Roof" with less rehearsal than usual, making the results even more impressive. The usual kinds of opening night mishaps were minimal, while the show's appeal is maximal.

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