

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100

Thursday, December 25, 1986 O&E



(S.F.88)O7C

Family memories inspire his role

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

FILLING IN on 24-hour notice was no problem at all for Bob Carroll, who replaced Paul Lipson during rehearsals for the Birmingham Theatre production of "Fiddler on the Roof," opening Saturday, Dec. 27.

When Lipson was out of the show due to cellulitis, Carroll was asked to take over the lead role of Tevye. Although Lipson has played Tevye more times than any other actor—even the musical's original star, Zero Mostel—Carroll has played the part on a national tour from 1969 to 1972 and appeared twice in the show at Detroit's Fisher Theatre.

Carroll, who joined other members of the cast rehearsing in New York, spoke about the show over the phone from American Theatre Productions there, last week during his lunch break.

Not only does Carroll have lots of experience in the part of Tevye, he has a natural affinity for the role. "Don't let my name fool you," he said. "My real name is Mark Kaufman."

He's from a Jewish family and modeled the character of Tevye after his grandfather on his mother's side. "We were poor in Brooklyn," he said. "We had little." When the Russian peasant Tevye sings, "If I Were a Rich Man," probably everyone in the audience shares the feeling of what more money could do to increase happiness.

CARROLL, recalling his childhood, remembers good times despite a humble background. "Basically, the family was laughter-oriented," he said.

"My grandfather had a terrific sense of humor about himself. He had a fierce temper when he was upset. He had a red handbarber mustache that used to scrape me when he kissed me."

"He was really a character out of Sholom Aleichem," Carroll continued. Describing his grandfather's appearance, he said, "He looked more like a middleweight fighter than a farmer."

Similarities to Tevye didn't end with his grandfather's temperament. "He worked in a men's clothing factory. After one and a half years, he sent for grandmother and their seven children. This is all relevant to the kind of aspect Tevye has for a better life."

The topper, however, is, "They came from Kiev, where the show is actually set. My family lineage on that side was remarkably akin to Tevye's background."

Is Tevye's tantalizing "If I Were a Rich Man" Carroll's favorite song in the show? He replied, "I still love 'If I Were a Rich Man' but my other favorite song in the show he doesn't sing. It's sung by Tevye's daughter, Hodel, 'Far from the Home I Love.' Hodel sings it when she leaves to join the man she loves, a non-Jew, to whom her father has finally given his approval."

"Tradition is being broken one more time," Carroll said of the show's theme.

The actor-singer has performed in the Detroit area many times, most recently in July when he was guest baritone with the Detroit Symphony and Skitch Henderson and Margaret Whiting at Meadow Brook Music Festival.

HE APPEARED at the Fisher Theatre in "La Cage aux Folles,"

playing the father and understudying Peter Marshall in the lead role of Georges. He went on as Georges when Marshall was ill in Philadelphia.

"I began coming to Detroit in 1960, with 'Fiorello,'" he said. Carroll also played the Fisher in "Shenandoah."

He had just finished with the "La Cage" tour and was home a few weeks ("Now I'm a Long Islander, I live at Port Washington, New York.") when the call came to do "Fiddler." Carroll was planning a vacation, which has been postponed until after the show closes Sunday, Jan. 25.

"I think the cast is going to be really super. They're so well chosen. It's a shame we're only going to be working for five weeks," he said.

Carroll's acting career has included roles in TV soap operas, "Edge of Night," "Another World" and "Texas." He also had an exchange of lines with Dudley Moore in "Arthur" and appeared as "a clerk and suitor" with Frank Sinatra in "Seventh Avenue." Both film parts were snipped before the movies' completion.

His biggest success has been performing in Broadway shows and singing as guest vocalist with symphony orchestras. He started out as a singer — "a boy vocalist, seated alongside Lena Horne in Charlie Barnett's Band. Then I was in Glenn Miller's Air Force Band — me and Johnny Desmond. Then I spent a year with Jimmy Dorsey."



Bob Carroll (left) as he appeared at Meadow Brook Music Festival last summer, singing with Skitch Henderson and the Detroit Symphony Pops, and (right) in his role as Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof." Usually Carroll grows his



own beard for the role, as shown here, but because he took over the part in the Birmingham Theatre show at the last minute, his beard this time will have to be a fake one.

FROM THERE he went to night clubs, recordings and variety television. In the late 1950s, he had his first job in stock, playing Sky Masterson in the musical "Guys and Dolls." "Then I did a whole raft of shows," Carroll said.

In the early '50s, he began singing with David Rose and other orchestras.

When he's at home, the entertainer likes to relax by doing carpentry work for fun, and home remodeling. He also describes himself as an amateur chef. After open-heart surgery and a triple bypass in 1983, he favors

Oriental cooking, making East Indian dishes from the American Heart Association Cookbook.

Cooking for friends on Long Island, he may use two woks. "When I'm on the road — in Birmingham — I will cook," with a single wok, he said.

He casually gave a couple of recipes over the phone, one for a fillet of fish dipped in flour and curry powder, pan-fried, with blanched walnuts. "Serve it, and I'll come right over," he said. Another recipe

is for Mandarin chicken, pan-fried, with mandarin oranges and juice over it.

Carroll and his wife, former Cover model Nadine, have four children and eight grandchildren. He also has a daughter, Chris, by a previous marriage, who is married to Veli Osmond, one of the Osmond brothers, and has seven children.

"Another grandson was born June 8, on my birthday last year," he said. "I'm up to my ears in kids and happy."

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