

Matt Showalter  
as Tevye.

Scott Blanton as The Rabbi.

◀ The Schrader family in  
costume: (left to right,  
back) Madalyn, Lynette,  
Tim; (front) AnaSophia,  
Alayna, Malia.  
(photo by Lynette Schrader)

# “May the Lord protect and defend you. . .”

RBC presents *Fiddler on the Roof*

— by Vicki Sairs —

The Fiddler played, Tevye danced, and the little village of Anatevka came to life on Rosedale Bible College’s stage November 13-15. With a combined cast, orchestra and production staff of almost eighty, *Fiddler on the Roof* was one of RBC’s most ambitious productions ever.

In fact, getting ready for the play influenced the atmosphere on campus—in a good way. Auditions took place the first week of the semester (classes began on September 22), and with a scant eight weeks till opening night, the push was on.

Every day, Dean of Students Matt Showalter could be heard whistling, humming, and singing as he worked on learning Tevye’s many lines and musical numbers. Every night (or so it seemed), cast members gathered in the chapel to rehearse. One group of actors worked onstage, while the rest of the cast settled into their own pew space and practiced lines, did homework, chatted quietly, or checked their phones.

It felt like a very large family gathering, complete with children. This year’s play also included adults from the community: Amy Blanton as Golde, Tevye’s wife; Pastor Mimi Ault as Yente; Babs Graber as the scary Fruma-Sarah; Jason Adelsberger as Lazar Wolf; Scott Blanton as the Rabbi; Andrew Wolf as the Constable; and Zendall Gingerich as a singing Russian, among many others.

Adding to the sense of the cast and crew as family was the actual participation of entire families in the play: the Blantons, with four children, and Tim and Lynette Schrader, also with four. Lots of siblings from other families were onstage as well.

Christa designed the set, and RBC Operations Manager Dave Troyer made sure things got done: he expanded the stage to accommodate the action, installed a functioning water pump, and oversaw the technical aspects of the production. Dave “works tirelessly,” says Christa. “Working with him is one of the main things I truly enjoy about staging a play at RBC.”

We asked the cast, crew and orchestra to reflect on their experiences with the play. Here’s what they had to say:

## What was it like for you to be a part of this?

**MATT SHOWALTER (Tevye):** Terrifying yet fun. I just didn’t want to ruin a character that is loved and cherished by so many people.

**BRITTANY KUEPFER (Grandma Tzeitel):** So much fun! I’ve never been a part of a musical or any big drama production before, so this was thrilling!

**BRANDEN HERSHBERGER (Mordcha):** I’ve always loved the theater and acting. But this was my first exposure to a musical. . . it could not have been a better “opening number” in my hopefully long career.

**ISAAC BIXLER (Mendel):** It’s a great feeling to be a part of something bigger than yourself, something that brings joy to the people watching.

**JANESSA MILLER (Backstage manager):** I have always enjoyed theater, but this experience reminded me of just how deeply I loved it, and just how much of a moving and impacting experience it can be.

**PASTOR MIMI AULT (Yente):** It was a great opportunity for me to participate in this production. It gave me an introduction to Rosedale Bible College and [a chance] for me to put my acting skills back onstage.

**JARED YODER (Perchik):** It was like being part of one big family that shared a common goal.

**CHARISSA RABENSTEIN (Hodel):** This was a bucket list item!

**JON LUKE BLANTON (Villager):** Kind of chaotic and intense.

**MAGGIE BLANTON (Villager):** A once-in-a-lifetime experience.

**CHRISTA WOLF (Director):** I thoroughly enjoyed directing this show. I researched and designed it as part of a grad school project years ago, so seeing it come to life was a very satisfying feeling.

**MORIAH BUDD (Villager):** Exciting, but tiring.

**BETTINA BUDD (Villager):** For me it was a lot of fun to have something to go to and do. I also really enjoy all the people you meet when you're a part of things like this.

**JESSE GRABER (Violin):** Being a part of *Fiddler* was one of the most fun things I've done in my life. To see so many loose ends and important details come together with such order and precision, and then to be a part of that, was incredible.

**BRETT SAMSEN (Clarinet):** The *Fiddler* experience was a whole lot of fun! Making music is never a chore, and *Fiddler* in particular is one of my favorite musicals.

## Talk about rehearsals and performances:

**MATT:** There was such a spirit of camaraderie backstage. Everyone was so encouraging. I would often get prayed for by random people. It was hard to get too nervous when everyone was rooting for you.

**BRANDEN:** (*Right after a performance*) Such a feeling of happiness and accomplishment over the entire cast, young and old.

**RHONDA YUTZY (Villager):** (*Right before a performance*) SUPER excited! (*Right after a performance*) Sad that it was over, but anticipating the next.

**ISAAC:** The moment before you go on for the first time is the worst. This was especially true for me because I was responsible to lead a long chain of people on with the correct rhythm. But once you step onstage everything just seems to fly away.

**REBECCA GRISSOM (Shprintze):** (*After rehearsal*) It felt good to know that we were accomplishing something each time we practiced.

**JANESSA:** At the beginning of a performance, some of the questions that we were asking ourselves were: how will the audience react, how can we make transitions as smooth as possible, will the actors remember what needs to happen? Even though there were these questions, there was always an excitement about presenting what we had all worked so hard on to an audience who cared and wanted to see the best we could present.

**JARED:** (*Rehearsals*) I usually felt really tired because the majority of the time I had to be woken up from a nap to go to practice because I forgot about it. (*After rehearsal*) Tired and hungry. But mostly hungry. Very, very hungry.

**CHARISSA:** I really enjoyed rehearsals for the most part. Leaving home was not always fun . . . Bill (my husband) was very involved behind the scenes, which meant that he didn't go to rehearsals until the last two weeks or so. And being newly married made spending so many evenings apart less appealing than expected. He'd get home from work soon after 5, and I'd leave a bit before 5:30. But we have survived!

**THE BLANTON FAMILY:** (*Before a performance*) Pumped and excited.

**AMY BLANTON (Golde):** (*After a performance*) I looked forward to meeting and talking to audience members.

**CHRISTA:** (*Feelings about rehearsals*) Generally excited, though I do still get nervous at the start of the rehearsal process when I'm getting to know a new cast. I have to figure out how far I can push them, how to explain things in a way they'll understand, how to help them begin understanding their character on their own while passing on my vision, etc. (*Feelings before a performance*) Relaxed. We had a great cast and crew led by Taylor Herr, a stage manager I've enjoyed working with in the past and fully trust. (*Right after a performance*) Proud.

**MORIAH:** (*Right after a performance*) Ready for bed!

**BETTINA:** (*Right after a performance*) Overstimulated, still excited, not wanting to think or talk about anything else—so I guess it turned me into a toddler.

**THE SCHRADER FAMILY** (*On rehearsals*)

**ALAYNA (Bielke):** Excited! I couldn't wait to see my friends and to do some acting!

**MALIA (Villager):** I always looked forward to it and enjoyed it.

**TIM (Villager):** I was often hungry because I hadn't had time to eat supper! :)

**LYNETTE (Villager):** At first, it was kind of annoying to add to our busy life, but it soon became our new normal and I began to really look forward to it.

**THE ENTIRE SCHRADER FAMILY:** (*Before performances*) Extremely excited, but nervous too. (*After performances*) A happy feeling of accomplishment. Greeting people afterward was really fun.

**BRETT SAMSEN:** (*How'd you feel after rehearsals?* ) Tired, especially my chops! The clarinet part is not light on notes, so my lips were close to falling off by the time rehearsal ended.

**HOPE MOORE (Chava):** Before the first performance, everything felt surreal. What would it be like to perform in front of so many people? Stepping onto the stage for the first time was exhilarating. After it was over, I wasn't very nervous anymore. I loved how the audience was drawn into the story, and their enthusiasm gave me more freedom to be drawn into it myself.

### *What did you enjoy most?*

**MATT:** Throwing a temper tantrum: “I want to see Motel’s new machine now!”

**MANY CAST MEMBERS** liked “backstage life, hanging out with everyone: ad-libbing to songs, performing our own versions, trying to keep our laughter quiet so the audience wouldn’t hear us”; “There were some pretty hilarious renditions of ‘If I Were a Rich Man’ happening backstage while it was going on onstage.”

**BRANDEN:** Getting to know and appreciate everyone in the cast. The transition in itself from us being strangers, then a cast, then a family.

**RHONDA:** Being backstage with Jalisa and my new friends.

**KEN MILLER (Music director):** Making music.

**MEGAN TROYER (Trumpet):** Getting to watch the same play about six [times]. It’s such a meaningful story and it never got old. Also . . . I saw and felt so many similarities between Anatevka and the communities some of us are from who have Mennonite families and backgrounds. The work ethic, family structures, community life, regard for the Sabbath, and decisions regarding our faith and traditions struck me as particularly familiar and relevant.

**PASTOR MIMI:** Getting back onstage after a few years of not doing a production.

**CHARISSA:** Singing some of my favorite songs! And with a teeny tiny orchestra too! And definitely getting to know everyone involved so much better.

**AMY:** Putting it all together with the orchestra.

**JON LUKE:** The Bottle Dance.

**ELLIE BLANTON (The Fiddler):** Getting to know the cast members.

**MADALYN (Villager):** Connecting with people in a way you wouldn't normally because the dancing and acting forces you to be yourself with people. I also really liked being onstage.

**LYNETTE:** The beauty of the music. The orchestra was amazing, and I found the music filled my mind, even my dreams. And the people. Wonderful people! Also, the natural reserve and physical distance we keep from one another was broken as we had to join hands and dance together. It created more of a family feel.

**HOPE:** I loved getting to know the cast, especially those from the community. It was so cool to see all different kinds of people coming together because they loved to act.

### *What was scary and why?*

**RHONDA:** Going onto the stage—because it is the stage. Yet it was incredibly thrilling.

**KEN:** Matt—amazing that that many lines could take up new residence in his brain.

**JON LUKE:** Fruma-Sarah—I was afraid she would fall.

**ELLIE:** Climbing on the roof because I am a little afraid of heights.

**CHRISTA:** It is always scary putting something in front of an audience. You spend hours pouring time, energy, and creativity into the work of staging a production, and then display it for everyone's critique. Sometimes people appreciate the work, other times they just don't.

**BETTINA:** Auditioning was terrifying—so glad I did it though. Oh, and the makeup room had fears; seriously, it turned young people old. By the performance I had made a fool of myself in front of around 40 cast members, so I wasn't super worried about what I did on stage.

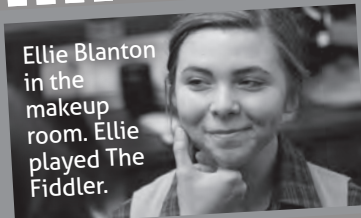
### *Funniest moment?*

**REBECCA:** During one of the practices Motel (Thomas) said “Don't forget the baby” and they walked off and forgot the baby.

**PASTOR MIMI:** It was not the funniest but it was my best moment, and that was during the last show and I was cheered and applauded by the audience, after my last scene.



Amy Blanton (Golde) listens to Pastor Mimi Ault (Yente).



Ellie Blanton in the makeup room. Ellie played The Fiddler.



◀ The Bottle Dance, performed during the wedding scene. Dancers in the rear, left to right: Tim Schrader, Isaac Bixler. Front, l. to. r.: Annie Harless, Jon Luke Blanton. (photo by Doug Mast)

"It's a great feeling to be a part of something bigger than yourself, something that brings joy to the people watching."

Hope Moore as Chava.

Charissa Rabenstein (Hodel) and Jared Yoder (Perchik).

**JESSE:** Neil Yoder, on the acoustic guitar, sitting behind me, entertained me throughout all performances and practices. No matter how many times we heard the funny parts of the play, Neil laughed as if it was the very first time he heard the joke. Sometimes the jokes themselves lost their hilarity; I was simply laughing at and with Neil.

**LYNETTE:** During one dress rehearsal, Fruma-Sarah forgot the words to her song and sang, "Blah, blah, blah, blah" instead of her words. In the song, the chorus always echoes her words, and without missing a beat, the entire chorus sang right on time: "Blah, blah, blah, blah." It was a cool moment of humanity, as we all had the same identical reaction without conferring with each other.

## What did you learn—about yourself, about others, about dramatic productions?

**MATT:** I learned that I have to rely on others. There were so many moving parts, but when we got to a place where we could trust those around us, what came about was amazing to be a part of.

**RHONDA:** I learned a lot about stage work, how I am actually pretty good at it, and that it was a lot of fun, and what all can be accomplished in a small amount of time if you work together

**KEN:** A new appreciation for the many levels of the word "production."

**PASTOR MIMI:** The harder you work, the better you do, and it takes everyone to make it work.

**SCOTT BLANTON (Rabbi):** I can grow a decent beard in three weeks.

**ELLIE:** Everyone's role, small or big, is important.

**CHRISTA:** It was really nice to cast people in some age-appropriate roles. The community cast members brought a fun energy to the stage and were all there because they wanted to be. That makes a big difference in the rehearsal process and atmosphere of the play. I also learned that Ken Miller is a musical genius. The live orchestra he assembled and conducted really made this show stand out. He was able to take a piece of music and adjust the timing and key, if necessary, to make a wonderful score for the performance.

**MADALYN:** You have to let yourself go and be free; otherwise, it won't work.

## Saddest moment?

**MANY CAST MEMBERS** expressed sadness over the scenes in which Tevye turns his back on his daughter Chava; they also used words like "empty" and "listless" to describe how they felt after it was all over: "Wishing to be with the cast more and wanting nothing more than for the moment of the last curtain call to stay with you forever." A very young cast member, **ANASOPHIA SCHRADER**, said, "I feeled sad, but I was happy to have more time at home."

**LYNETTE:** Christa cried at the last curtain call when Matt brought her up. Her words were something like this: "We directors do all we can to make you look good with lights and costumes and sound, and then you turn around and make us look good."

## What was it like to do this together as a family?

**SCOTT and AMY:** We never dreamed we'd be sharing the stage with our four children doing the same production that we did 23 years earlier in college. We're very grateful that RBC invited the community to participate.

**CHARISSA:** Bill and my dad and two of my sisters were also involved. That made all of it more enjoyable. Being able to see my family at random times was nice, especially considering that I haven't lived away from them for very long yet. And since *Fiddler* is a musical that all of my family have loved for years, being in it with them made it just that much sweeter!

**LYNETTE:** It was really special to do this as a family! It allowed us to have the same schedule, to learn to know the same people, and to share the same experience. To be part of this rich story, as the mother of four daughters (Tevye and Golde had five), was a beautiful experience. I remember watching *Fiddler* as a girl and identifying with the daughters. Now I found myself identifying with Tevye. The struggle to accept change, to discern in a rapidly changing world what we can live with and what we can't, what is worth fighting for and what isn't, is so beautifully and heartbreakingly portrayed. . . . *Fiddler* puts in words and music the struggle of humanity to adapt to and understand a changing world.

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