

Rep Theater stages first-class rendition of beloved 'Fiddler'

By CLARA HIERONYMUS

Tradition!

It's the theme, motif, clue and guide to the magnificent journey with *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tennessee Repertory Theater's production in Polk Theater.

It's shouted joyously on the stage and suggests a different meaning to an absorbed audience. Once a year, a *new* tradition might be the staging of this timeless musical drama ... with the same quota of style and mood-enhancing design.

Perhaps the best known of American musicals — 3,242 performances on Broadway — its plot needs little retelling after three decades and hundreds of productions nationwide. Based on Jewish tales by Sholom Aleichem, its story is about the Russian village of Anatevka under Tsarist rule in 1905.

Tevye, a poor dairyman, and his wife, Golde, have five daughters, three of them of marriageable age but without dowry prospects. As played by Armen Dirdadian, Tevye is vigorous, cheerful and undaunted by poverty. He has a sense of humor, often scolding God for his neglect but somehow making it seem man to man in mutual respect.

His wife (Mary Helen Fisher) is hardworking, a scold and, like all

Getting there

Fiddler on the Roof is performed by Tennessee Rep in TPAC's Polk Theater through Mar. 22, 8 p.m. Fri.-Sat.; 2:30 p.m. Mar. 10, 16, 17; and 7 p.m. Mar. 13. \$9.50-\$32, through Ticketmaster, 737-4849 or (800) 333-4849. Discounts and group rates; for group reservations call 244-4878, Ext. 129.

the villagers, staunch in adhering to tradition. The "Fiddler" of the title is a metaphor for the breaking of tradition, a troubling and ever-present threat.

Tevye's daughters break tradition by choosing their own husbands, and Tevye loves them enough to accept this change — except for one of the three young women whose choice he cannot condone. But the whole world changes; the village is uprooted and its peasants scatter, a little sad but not without hope.

Dennis Courtney's direction is artful; the cast skillful (including wonderful young men dancing Russian style), and there are exquisite scenes that are haunting and sometimes hilarious. Tradition in Anatevka has fierce strength, but like its people it's capable of change. ■