

## September 2, 2021 – Frank Loesser’s *The Most Happy Fella*

On the Thursday Night Opera House we’re celebrating Labor Day in America with Frank Loesser’s Broadway musical *The Most Happy Fella*. When the show opened on May 3, 1956, critics were divided over whether it was a musical comedy or an opera—or a combination of the two. Based loosely on Sidney Howard’s 1924 play *They Knew What They Wanted*, Loesser convinced playwright Samuel Taylor to eliminate all references to the labor movement and to focus exclusively on the love story.

The show opens in 1927 in a San Francisco restaurant. Tony Esposito (**Robert Weede**), a middle-aged winegrower from Napa Valley, leaves an amethyst tie pin and a letter proposing marriage to a waitress named Amy (**Jo Sullivan**), addressing it to “Rosabella.” Instead of enclosing his own picture, he sends one of Joe (**Art Lund**), his young and handsome foreman. Amy accepts the proposal and arrives in Napa Valley. Recognizing Joe from his photo, she cannot understand why he acts so aloof. Tony’s spinster sister Marie (**Mona Paulee**) tries to discourage Tony from marrying Amy, reminding him that he is neither young nor good-looking. Meanwhile, Tony, en route to meet Amy at the bus station, has broken both legs in an automobile accident. Only after Tony has been brought home does Amy realize that she has been duped and is to marry a man significantly older than herself. Having no job and no money to return to San Francisco, Amy decides to go through with the wedding ceremony that had been scheduled for that day. Later that night, Amy comes out of the house to be alone and breaks into tears. Joe finds her and tries to calm her by giving her a consoling kiss, which soon develops into a passionate embrace. The audience later learns that Joe and Amy have slept together.

Tony and Amy decide to restart their relationship. Thinking Amy might be lonesome, Tony hires her old friend Cleo (**Susan Johnson**) to paste labels on grape boxes. Cleo discovers she and Herman (**Shorty Long**) are both from Dallas. After her one liaison with Joe, Amy ignores him and devotes herself to taking care of Tony. Amy tells Cleo to tell Tony she wants him to treat her like a real wife. Tony is overwhelmed and decides to marry Amy that very evening. But when she finds that she is pregnant with Joe’s child, Tony is furious and orders her off his property. She leaves and Joe is at the bus station, preparing to leave town. Tony takes a pistol and heads for the station to kill his young foreman. But Joe has already left town. Tony realizes that Amy has no place to go and decides she must come home with him. When she gets off the bus, Tony forgives Amy and asks her to stay, saying that he would be happy to have the world think the child is his. They agree to start over—and Tony finally learns “Rosabella”’s real name.

**Herbert Greene** conducts an unidentified Orchestra and Chorus in this 1991 Sony Classical recording, originally released in 1956.

From Act II, **Robert Weede** and **Jo Sullivan** sing “My Heart is So Full of You”:  
[https://youtu.be/B-I2n\\_P3KCI](https://youtu.be/B-I2n_P3KCI).

As a bonus we'll hear American soprano **Eileen Farrell** in songs from the Great American Songbook by Cole Porter, Harry Warren, Victor Young, Vernon Duke, Hoagy Carmichael, and Vincent Youmans.