

GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

Frank Loesser's  
Musical

The Most  
Happy  
Fella



50th Anniversary

GOODSPEED  
MUSICALS®

The Max Showalter Center for  
Education in Musical Theatre

**THE MOST HAPPY FELLA**

Goodspeed Opera House  
Sept 20 - Dec 1, 2013

BOOK, MUSIC AND LYRICS BY  
**FRANK LOESSER**

LIGHTING DESIGN BY  
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PRODUCED FOR GOODSPEED  
MUSICALS BY  
**MICHAEL P. PRICE**

# The Most Happy Fella

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# SHOW SYNOPSIS

## ACT ONE

In the early 1950s, the staff of the Golden Gate Restaurant located in San Francisco, California, prepares to close the restaurant for the evening. Two tired waitresses, Cleo and Rosabella, sigh after a long day of work.

As they continue their closing routine, Amy notices an odd tip that was left on one of her tables. She sees that a customer, who she was too busy to fully notice, left her a tie-pin and a flattering note. Antonio Esposito, Tony for short, signed the note and he wrote his address requesting that "Rosabella" write to him. Rosabella is the nickname he uses for Amy since he does not know her name.

Rosabella responds to Tony's note and the two begin a love affair through letter-writing. Tony, back at his home in Napa Valley, says he's "the most happy fella" and hopes that Rosabella will come to his grape farm to marry him. In her most recent letter, Rosabella includes a picture of herself and asks that, before she visits his home, Tony send a picture of himself to her.

Tony's jealous sister, Marie, points out that Tony is not a young man anymore nor is he good-looking or smart. Feeling insecure, Tony sends Rosabella a picture of his younger and more handsome foreman, Joe.

In preparation for Rosabella's arrival, Tony, his neighbors, and his friends decorate for a wedding celebration. Everyone is there to welcome her, including Joe—whom Tony thought had another job lined up and would be gone by the time Rosabella arrived.

Quickly after Rosabella arrives, she and Joe realize the confusion that Tony has caused and she wants to leave. As she tries to exit, a woman screams and everyone sees that Tony has been hurt. There was a terrible accident and Tony's truck turned over three times.

Rosabella, suitcase in hand, is overwhelmed and wants to leave immediately, but Tony, barely conscious, asks that she marry him before his pain medication makes him pass-out. Feeling sympathetic and overwrought, Rosabella agrees and the town priest marries them in Tony's house.

After the ceremony, Rosabella, trying to hold back tears, removes herself from the house. Joe, who was standing outside, attempts to comfort her and the two unexpectedly end up kissing. The curtain closes as the kiss escalates into a passionate embrace.

## ACT TWO

The married couple, Rosabella and Tony, agree to become more acquainted with each other. The two are enjoying their time together and as Rosabella begins to steer Tony's wheelchair offstage, Cleo unexpectedly enters! Tony confesses that he offered her a job on the farm so Rosabella wouldn't be so lonely. Rosabella, touched by the gesture, admits to Tony that she likes it at the vineyard and that Tony is a nice, kind man.

As Cleo is settling in at the vineyard, she and Herman, a happy-go-lucky employee on Tony's grape farm, begin a quiet love affair. They spend a great deal of time together but Cleo becomes frustrated because Herman lets people push him around and doesn't stand up for what he cares about.

Meanwhile, Rosabella confesses to Tony that she loves him very much but she hates that he treats her like a child rather than a wife. Tony is elated with the information and professes that the love is mutual. He promises to treat her like his wife and they plan a large party to celebrate their love. At the party, neighbors and friends are having a wonderful time but Rosabella suddenly collapses and falls to the ground. After an examination, the doctor informs Rosabella that she is pregnant.

Rosabella tells Tony the truth and he immediately inquires who is responsible. Remembering her one-night fling when she had first arrived, Rosabella informs Tony that the father is Joe. Furious with her, Tony demands that Rosabella leave. She goes to pack her things and Tony is left alone. As he recalls how wonderful it's been getting to know Rosabella and being married to her, Tony realizes that he can forgive her.

Cleo enters as Tony comes to this revelation and encourages him to go after Rosabella. Marie also enters but she continues to put him down and discourages him from trying to get Rosabella back. Marie and Cleo get into a scuffle and Pasquale, another of Tony's employees, attempts to intervene. Just as Pasquale places himself between the two women, Herman walks in and sees Pasquale trying to separate them and accidentally pushes Cleo a little too hard leaving her sprawled on the ground. Herman, filled with anger for the first time, defends Cleo and slugs Pasquale. Cleo's love and admiration for Herman returns because he finally stands up for someone he cares about.

Meanwhile, Tony finds Rosabella just as she is about to leave town. The two reconcile and decide to raise the child together. They go back to Tony's vineyard where they have a large party.



Eloise Kropp, Natalie Hill, Kevin Vortmann, Christine Cornell, and Seth Danner. ©Diane Sobolewski.

# CHARACTER SUMMARY



Herman (Kevin Vortmann) and Cleo (Natalie Hill). ©Diane Sobolewski.

**TONY:** A middle-aged grape farmer who immigrated to the Napa Valley from Italy. He is big, exuberant, well-liked in his neighborhood and is known to be energetic and friendly. Tony cares deeply for the people in his life and tries to make his vineyard an enjoyable place to live and work. He can be impulsive and unpredictable but also, at times, lacks self-confidence.

**ROSABELLA:** A spirited waitress at a small restaurant in San Francisco. Rosabella believes in true love and takes a great leap of faith in order to find it. She is beautiful, young, and dreams of life's possibilities. Rosabella is empathetic towards the struggles of others and puts forth an effort to help in any way she can.

**MARIE:** Tony's jealous and controlling sister. She is overwhelmingly present in Tony's life, maintains a maternal presence over him, and always keeps him at an arm's length. She is ill-tempered and constantly reminds Tony of his flaws.

**JOE:** The foreman of Tony's vineyard, Joe is handsome and young. He is career-driven and is seeking new job prospects. He comes across as a loner but he can also be very seductive.

**CLEO:** Rosabella's former coworker from the restaurant. Cleo is boisterous, playful, silly, and often brings humor into any situation. She always speaks her mind and tries to help the people she loves.

**HERMAN:** A happy-go-lucky worker on Tony's land. Herman likes everyone he meets and befriends all who cross his path. Herman is receptive to the suggestions of others, especially Cleo.

**CICCIO:** A handyman on Tony's grape farm.

**PASQUALE:** A cook on Tony's grape farm.

**GUISEPPE:** A watchman on Tony's grape farm.

# MEET THE WRITER



**FRANK LOESSER** was born on June 29, 1910 in New York City. Although Loesser's father was a classical piano teacher, Loesser never formally studied music. As a child, Loesser fell in love with pop music, which inspired him to write his first song, "The May Party" at the age of six.

In his early teens, Loesser taught himself to play the harmonica and the piano. He attended Townsend Harris High School and later went on to New York City College but he dropped out during the Great Depression. Loesser took on many jobs during this time including selling newspapers, advertising, and editing a newspaper published in New Rochelle, NY.

In the 1930s, Loesser began singing and playing piano in New York nightclubs. This was when he began writing and performing his own music and lyrics. He later collaborated with Irving Actman and the two wrote five songs for *The Illustrators Show* which opened in 1936 and closed after 5 performances. Loesser married Lynn Garland in 1936 and they gave birth to a son and daughter.

After the closing of *The Illustrators Show*, Universal Studios and Paramount Pictures in Hollywood offered Loesser the opportunity to write songs for their films. In 1939, Loesser made his composing debut with music and lyrics for the title song of the film *Seventeen*.

In the 1940s, Loesser created his own music publishing company, Frank Music Corporation. His goal was to discover and develop new and popular young composers and lyricists. This corporation was instrumental in furthering the careers of many lyricists and composers including Richard Adler, Jerry Ross, and Meredith Wilson.

When World War II came, Loesser continued to write music and lyrics for over sixty films and was assigned to military special services. He provided

music and lyrics for camp shows. It was during this time that he composed the wartime hit, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition."

After the war, Loesser went back home to New York and began writing *Where's Charley*. It opened on October 11, 1948 and was Loesser's first major hit. This was followed by *Guys and Dolls*, which opened on November 24, 1950 and won the Tony Award for Best Musical. During this time, he also wrote many hit Tin Pan Alley style songs including "What Are You Doing New Years Eve?" and "Baby, It's Cold Outside."

On May 3, 1956, Loesser's next major achievement, *The Most Happy Fella*, opened on Broadway. It ran for two years and took five years for Loesser to write the book and lyrics. It was also the first show recorded in its entirety by Columbia Records. In 1959, Loesser divorced from Lynn Garland and was married to *The Most Happy Fella* star, Jo Sullivan. They had two daughters together.

In 1960, Loesser's *Greenwillow* opened on Broadway. It received seven Tony Award nominations but no wins. The show ran for 95 performances at the Alvin Theatre.

In 1961, Loesser wrote another hit, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, which won the Pulitzer Prize and seven Tony Awards. The show ran for four years at the 46th Street Theatre. It is the longest running of any Loesser show.

Frank Loesser died of lung cancer at the age of 59 in 1969.

In 1976, Frank Music Corporation was absorbed by Paul McCartney's music publishing company, MPL Communications. In 1997, Jo Sullivan Loesser created Frank Loesser Enterprises to help manage Frank Loesser's work and to ensure the development of new Loesser projects.



[CLICK HERE to listen to an NPR story on Frank Loesser](#)



[CLICK HERE to watch a clip from "Heart and Soul: The Life and Magic of Frank Loesser."](#)

# FRANK LOESSER



## FRANK LOESSER'S NOTABLE SONGS & MUSICALS

### Songs (click to listen)

- 1937: "Moon of Manakoora"
- 1938: "Heart and Soul"
- 1938: "Two Sleepy People"
- 1942: "I Don't Want to Walk Without You"
- 1942: "Can't Get Out of This Mood"
- 1942: "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition"
- 1943: "Let's Get Lost"
- 1943: "The Ballad of Rodger Young"
- 1944: "Baby, It's Cold Outside"
- 1944: "Spring Will Be a Little Late This Year"
- 1947: "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?"
- 1947: "I Wish I Didn't Love You So"
- 1948: "On a Slow Boat to China"
- 1952: "Inch Worm"
- 1952: "Thumbelina"
- 1952: "Wonderful Copenhagen"

### Musicals

- 1948: "Where's Charley?"
- 1950: "Guys and Dolls"
- 1956: "The Most Happy Fella"
- 1960: "Greenwillow"
- 1961: "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying"
- 1965: "Pleasures and Palaces"

### THE PROCESS

Frank Loesser was a man of many talents. To help himself write great music, he was known for seeking other creative outlets to find inspiration. Loesser drew, painted, sculpted and was a woodworker. When searching for inspiration, Loesser frequently asked his first wife, Lynn Garland, to drive him around the beautiful California landscape until an idea sparked. He would then go immediately to his home, sit at his piano, and play until something came together. Loesser also was a light sleeper; he rarely slept for more than four hours at a time and worked on his music in the hours between.

### COMPOSITION

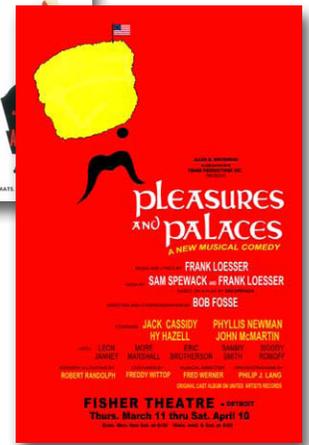
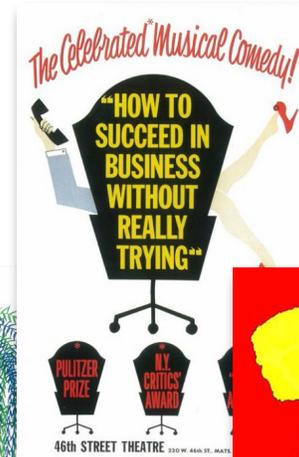
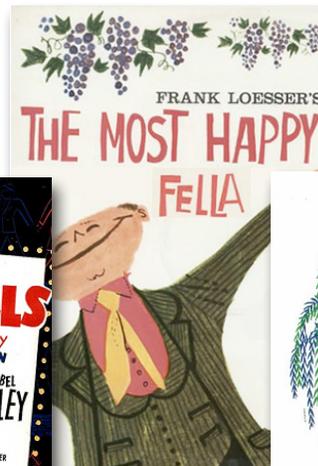
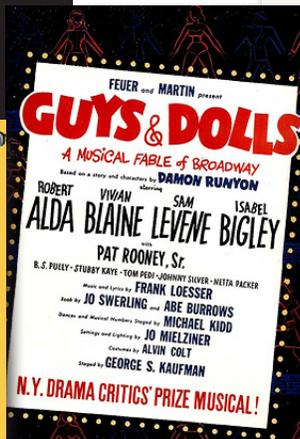
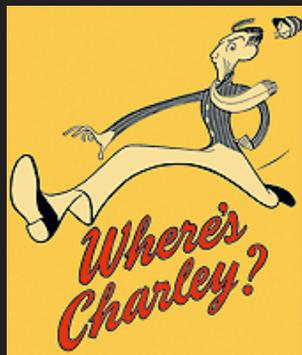
Frank Loesser was known for writing compositions that fell into many genres. More specifically, he gained an esteemed reputation for his songs in *The Most Happy Fella* which fell into the show tunes and opera genres. A show tune is a song written as part of a musical theatre score and serves in telling the story of a stage musical. A show tune fits into the context of a story. Opera is characterized by a Western classical music sound. It originated in Italy during the 16th century and consists of solo and choral singing, acting, and dancing all combined into a stage spectacle.

Frank Loesser's musicals, across the board, showcased many compositional techniques and styles. He wrote arias, duets, trios, and choral numbers while also writing pop standards and ballads.

Although Loesser is most commonly known for writing musical hits, he also built his reputation as a versatile composer by writing popular novelty, patriotic, and holiday songs. He also became known for his many Hollywood composition credits. He wrote more than 1,500 songs, many of which appeared on the top of the music charts.

### THE DREAM

In his early career, Loesser expressed interest in transitioning from songwriting and movie composing to writing the music and lyrics for musicals. In 1948, he began this transition with *Where's Charley* and continued writing musical theatre pieces until 1965, ending with *Pleasures and Palaces*. Five of the six compositions within those years went to Broadway. Throughout his career, Loesser received several Tony Awards, a Grammy Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for his music and lyrics.



# SOME LOESSER THOUGHTS ON *THE MOST HAPPY FELLA*

By Frank Loesser, 1956



Robert Weede, Herbert Greene, Frank Loesser, Jo Sullivan, and Morley Meredith rehearse for *The Most Happy Fella*, 1956.

**The Most Happy Fella is all about LOVE—acknowledged the world over to be a most singable subject and one which no songwriter dares duck for very long if he wants to stay popular and solvent.**

About 5 years ago, Sam Taylor suggested my musicalizing Sidney Howard's "They Knew What They Wanted." At that moment I thought the idea pretty bad, and told him so. I was recalling only the tragic element of the play because in my mind, it also had been the most memorable.

But at Sam's insistence I re-read the piece several times—stripping it as I went along of its difficult-to-sing-or-dance items, such as the topical stuff about the labor situation in the 1920s, the discussion of religion, etc. What was left seemed to me to be a very warm simple love story, happy ending and all, and dying to be sung and danced. So almost five years ago I started trying to make a musical out of it.

Today *The Most Happy Fella* contains not one but five love stories. The one that takes the most telling is about two romantic people who hit a couple of snags in their relationship but do live happily ever after. Both snags, however, are love stories in themselves. One involved good old sex with consequences. The other is about family possessiveness and jealousy. Attendant is the story of a community's affection for one of its members.

And thrown in for good luck, the career of an affair between a young

couple who meet, get each other's clear message, part briefly, and then happily meet again.

I guess I got carried away by my tendency to write emotional pieces about Love (of sweetheart, home town, mother, etc.) as well as by my feeling for what some professionals call "score integration." They tell me that means the moving of plot through the singing of lyrics. In *The Most Happy Fella* I found a rich playground in which to indulge both my "integration" and my Tin Pan Alley leanings. Sidney Howard had provided no obstacles. No talky plot scenes about who stole the jewels. No leading characters without distinctly emotional purpose.

And so now the thing is loaded with songs, a great number of them about LOVE—acknowledged the world over to be a most singable subject and one which no songwriter dares duck for very long if he wants to stay popular and solvent.



Robert Weede (Tony) and Jo Sullivan (Rosabella) in the original Broadway production of *The Most Happy Fella*.



Susan Johnson (Cleo) and Shorty Long (Herman) in the original Broadway production of *The Most Happy Fella*.

# PROGRAM NOTES

BY JOSHUA S. RITTER

A personal artistic triumph and arguably the most ambitious project of his career, Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*, like Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, built bridges between the world of opera and musical comedy. Both shows and a number of other productions in the musical theatre canon employ techniques traditionally used in the world of opera. When asked to weigh in on how to categorize his piece, Loesser steadfastly described *The Most Happy Fella* as "a musical comedy—with a lot of music!" More importantly, *The Most Happy Fella*'s lavish score and moving love story continues to delight audiences regionally, at opera houses, and on Broadway.

*Project Three*, later entitled *The Most Happy Fella*, began as a concept soon after Loesser's monumental success with *Guys and Dolls*. Playwright Samuel Taylor suggested to Loesser that he musicalize Sidney Howard's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *They Knew What They Wanted*. Taylor intended to write the book, but later changed his mind and suggested that Loesser try to write the score, lyrics, and libretto. It would be Loesser's first time adapting a play, but after some friendly words of advice from Taylor—"Any time you have doubts about what you're doing, write a song"—Loesser began work on the project.

The play was rather controversial when the Theatre Guild produced it in 1924. It reflected the changing mores of the decade, dealing with serious subjects such as infidelity, forgiveness, and compromise between male and female characters. Thirty years later, however, these subjects seemed tame, and the play had fallen into disregard. But, to Loesser's credit, he re-imagined the story by toning down or removing tragic, political, and religious elements, leaving "a warm simple love story, happy ending and all, and dying to be sung and danced." Loesser added new characters to shape the piece dramatically and to allow for more comedy. He included Cleo, Rosabella's coworker friend from Dallas; Herman, a farmhand also from "Big D;" Tony's sister, Marie; and three chefs named Pasquale, Giuseppe, and Ciccio.

Loesser spent five years adapting the piece and composing songs that ranged in style from traditional Broadway tunes to amorous duets, operatic arias, canons, trios, choral episodes, quartets, parodies, and orchestral interludes. Opening in 1956 during the competitive Broadway season that gave us *My Fair Lady*, *Bells Are Ringing*, and *Candide*, *The Most Happy Fella* was lauded as an outstanding and unique musical drama. It not only differed from Loesser's previous shows and the other musicals that season, it was unlike most musical hits of the past twenty years.

Thirty-five years after its first appearance on Broadway, the 1991 Goodspeed Musicals season began with Gerald Gutierrez's brilliant reinterpretation of *The Most Happy Fella*. The production realized Loesser's dream of using duo-pianos instead of a full orchestra. Not since *The Fantasticks* (in Goodspeed's premiere 1963 season) had so few instruments been employed in the Opera House pit for a fully staged musical. To offset the lack of musicians, over 26 people were cast in the show, the largest cast that had ever been assembled on the Goodspeed stage.



Bill Nabel, Mark Lotito and Buddy Crutchfield in Goodspeed's 1991 production of *The Most Happy Fella*. ©Diane Sobolewski.

After receiving unprecedented reviews by virtually every Connecticut newspaper plus *The New York Times* and *Boston Globe*, the show was picked up by an amalgam of producers with the intention of ushering it to New York. The production would become Goodspeed's thirteenth Broadway transfer, opening at the Booth Theatre in 1992. It was later recorded on a single disc by RCA Victor with Spiro Malas as Tony, Sophie Hayden as Rosabella, Liz Larsen as Cleo, Charles Pistone as Joe, and Scott Waara as Herman.

Rob Ruggiero is at the helm of Goodspeed's current production of *The Most Happy Fella*. Ruggiero recently directed *Carousel* and *Show Boat* at the Goodspeed Opera House, and this will be his seventh time directing a Goodspeed production. After careful consideration, Ruggiero decided to set the piece in the 1950s and, with Goodspeed Musical Director Michael O'Flaherty, chose to offer a chamber ensemble approach to the orchestration, with a predominantly acoustic sound built off of the piano. Ruggiero focused his vision for the production on the timeless story of love and forgiveness. He believes that most of us can relate to these themes as we continue to strive to find our "somebody, somewhere." *The Most Happy Fella* is a musical of enormous emotional intensity with soaring romantic melodies. We hope you enjoy this "Abbondanza" for the senses.

# DIRECTOR'S VISION BY ROB RUGGIERO



Rob Ruggiero. ©Diane Sobolewski.

The world of musical theater and opera magically blend in Frank Loesser's 1956 musical treatment of the play *They Knew What They Wanted* by Sidney Howard. According to Jo Sullivan Loesser (Frank's widow and the original "Rosabella") *The Most Happy Fella* was perhaps his most favorite and finest work before his untimely death in 1969. Audiences have connected deeply with this very moving and unusual love story for decades, perhaps because it is framed in a unique May-December romance.

When I first began my work on the play two things consistently struck a chord with me: trust and forgiveness—and the impact they have on relationship. Arguably the two most critical elements in a strong love relationship, these issues are challenged and ultimately conquered by the two central characters in *The Most Happy Fella*... in powerful and very unexpected ways. Both the aging grape farmer Tony Esposito, and the jaded waitress Rosabella have long given up on the possibility of love until that fateful meeting in a diner in San Francisco. Fear and insecurity trigger a series of events that potently challenge each character's ability to trust and forgive one another before they can experience true joy and unconditional, enduring love.

As an individual who personally is experiencing my own middle age, I feel a profound connection with both the fear of being without love in the final years of life, but also equally reminded of how one can become jaded on the possibility of love so easily. That vulnerability is key to understanding this story. In addition, my Italian-American heritage connects me to the unique sensibility of this world. All this strongly informed my approach to the storytelling of this rarely produced musical play.

One of the major differences that will define this production is the moving of the time period from 1927 to the early 1950s. This decision was made after months of processing and questioning in collaboration with my creative team. We felt an instinctual impulse that the piece spoke to that period in history. The musical motives/styles, the articulation of the lead women, and the overall voice of the piece "felt like" it belonged in the 1950s. It was exciting and even a bit shocking to see how easy that move ultimately was. It just fits—and somehow it feels even more accessible living in this time period.

Another exciting distinction is our choice to orchestrate the show with a more intimate, acoustic orchestration. The production will not have the huge sound typically associated with a Goodspeed show, nor will it be reduced to the spare two-piano approach of the last revival. Instead, it will embrace the intimacy and the emotional colors of a chamber orchestra. Hopefully this will allow the characters to lift and the musicality to serve the story in new ways.

With the support and approval of Jo Sullivan Loesser, I have also made some edits to make this production unique and accessible. On the strong advice of Jo, we have restored Marie's (Tony's controlling sister's) signature song "Eyes Like A Stranger" in Act One. This has proven pivotal in clarifying the relationship between Tony and his sister. As it is often done, we have combined Acts Two and Three into one act. There are also a number of economical and streamlined choices that help focus the story. This all hopefully adds up to an experience that enhances the story and the characters in new, efficient and interesting ways. I am certain Goodspeed audiences will experience the same authenticity and specificity they have come to expect from my team over the years. Interestingly the contrast from the urban reality of San Francisco and rural Napa is equally effective in this

# DIRECTOR'S VISION BY ROB RUGGIERO

later time period. This is another great story that speaks to all eras. The overall experience is surprisingly honest, funny, touching, and incredibly moving.

Our set designer, Michael Schweikardt and our costume designer, Thomas LeGalley have designed a physical production that—although framed in the metaphor of a wine vineyard—beautifully articulates two worlds: the dingy, cold, urban world of the city contrasted with the color, warmth and fertile world of Napa. The metaphor of the vineyard subtly also mirrors the story. Our choreographer, Parker Esse has worked hard to erase seams between the life of the characters and the moments of dance—so it all feels organic and inevitable. We felt there must be no boundaries, only the freedom to live freely in this story.

The result often feels cinematic and effortless. *The Most Happy Fella* speaks to lovers of all ages, and as in all timeless stories, there is honesty and an articulation of humanity that is entirely accessible. There is a humor and a truth that somehow feels irresistible.

One of the greatest challenges of the play is how to invest fully in the relationship between Tony and Rosabella, who represent two very different generations. This made casting the show so critical. The choice of who would play Tony and Rosabella quickly became two of the most important decisions. We are thrilled to have the brilliantly talented Bill Nolte and Mamie Parris lead our wonderful cast. Playing the charismatic and complicated foreman Joey is Doug Carpenter. The critical and challenging role of Tony's younger sister Marie is the delightful Ann Arvia. The comic leads (Cleo and Herman) are the vividly unique duo of Natalie Hill and Kevin Vortmann. And the charming and lovable Italian chefs are Martín Solá, Greg Roderick and Daniel Berryman. Finishing off the cast is an amazingly talented ensemble of singers and dancers.

This musical was first produced on the Goodspeed stage over 20 years ago. I did not see this production (which moved to Broadway in 1992), nor have I ever seen a production of the musical anywhere. Hopefully, this will insure I bring a fresh and original perspective to the piece. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to tell this story here at Goodspeed, and I continue to feel very fortunate to be able to collaborate with the extraordinary talent here. Together we bring a very special passion to this unique version of *The Most Happy Fella*.



Rosabella (Mamie Parris) and Tony (Bill Nolte). ©Diane Sobolewski.

# BEHIND THE SCENES

COSTUMES BY THOMAS CHARLES LEGALLEY

## 1950s FASION

In the 1950s, women's fashion was largely dictated by their focus on rearing children and keeping house. Thus, there was an emphasis on practical, but attractive housedresses, not only suitable for household chores, but for running errands or dropping off the kids at school.

The hourglass silhouette featuring full skirts reigned supreme. The emphasis on this silhouette created a dependency on foundation garments like bullet bras, corsets, waist-cinchers and girdles to pull the waist in and crinoline to lift and shape full skirts.

The '50s brought about ready-to-wear fashion and standardized sizing for the garment industry. America led the way with ready-to-wear, making high fashion affordable to the general population.



Rosabella

Cleo

Joe

Herman

Tony

# BEHIND THE SCENES SCENERY BY MICHAEL SCHWEIKARDT



# IMMIGRATION TO CALIFORNIA

## CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

Beginning on January 24, 1848, James Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California. Word spread that there was gold free for the taking in California, causing people from all over to flock to California to find their fortunes.

In 1848, a large population of Asian immigrants came to the U.S. after hearing stories of a land filled with gold. Civil war, homelessness, and famine in China enticed its people to head to the United States for a better life. The Chinese learned of a place in California called "Gold Mountain" where gold covered the ground. In steamships, many Chinese arrived in San Francisco harbor beginning California's Gold Rush. With this influx of Chinese immigrants, California became home to the very first Chinatown in the United States.

In 1882, immigration was restricted by the Chinese Exclusion Act. This law was enacted because, as a result of the population influx from the Gold Rush, the rate of American unemployment increased when immigrants gained a reputation for working for lesser wages. When the problem persisted, The Immigration Act of 1924, expanded from the Chinese Exclusion Act, forbade all immigrants from China and many other countries to enter the country at all. It wasn't until the early 1940s, when China and the United States were World War II allies that these restrictions began to be lifted.

Today, California is home to more than ten million immigrants. As a result of Chinese immigrants and their families settling in California in the early 1800s, large populations of California immigrants still originate from Asian countries. In the 1880s, however, many Italian immigrants faced struggles with overpopulation and the French capture of the Italian wine country; so many Italian people chose to leave their homes as well. The Italians were some of

the first European settlers to arrive in California. Most immigrants traveled through Ellis Island in New York and, over time, migrated to California. Today, roughly four of the ten million immigrants in California come from Italy.

## FROM ITALY TO CALIFORNIA

California was attractive to Italians because it had a small immigrant population. Cities like New York were known for being overpopulated with immigrant communities. Also, California was known for having a Mediterranean climate like Italy. Immigrants needed this climate for the type of crops that they were used to growing in their homeland. California had the perfect soil for popular Italian foods like eggplant, artichokes, broccoli, lemons, and grapes.

Similarly, many Italians came from the wine making countries of Tuscany and Piedmont. They migrated to California after learning about its stellar reputation for grapevines. As a result, grapes became one of the largest crops in California. In 1884, however, an insect-borne disease devastated farms in Southern California and killed their crops. By the 1890s nearly 25,000 acres of crops were destroyed. As a result of the declining grape farms in Southern California, northern vineyards in the Napa Valley and Sonoma County saw an increase in their businesses.

In *The Most Happy Fella*, Tony and much of his staff are immigrants from Italy. They came to California looking for more opportunities and found them in the beautiful landscape of Napa Valley.



Chinese immigrants. DN-0089489, Chicago Daily News negatives collection, Chicago History Museum



Italian immigrants arriving on Ellis Island, 1905.

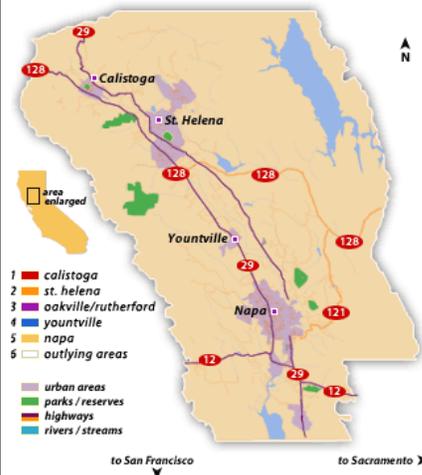
# GRAPE FARMING IN CALIFORNIA

## GLOSSARY

**Viticulture:** the cultivation, study, and production of grapes and grapevines.

**Viniculture:** when the cultivated grapes are used for wine making.

**Fermentation:** the process of bacteria, such as yeast, breaking down sugars into alcohol.



## HISTORY OF VITICULTURE

Viticulture, or the study of grapes, became popular in California in the late 1700s. Friars from Spain traveled to California to plant and pick grapes for the production of sacramental wines.

In the 1800s, more travelers came to California, this time looking for gold. The California Gold Rush increased the state population significantly and many realized the land's potential for grape farming and wine production.

## HISTORY OF VINICULTURE

Grapes are the one necessary ingredient for creating wine. A vintner must have access to a grape farm in order to start a profitable business. The process begins with picking fresh grapes and then follows a series of steps including fermentation.

Grapevines are one of the largest fruit crops in the world. In order to grow, the plants need specific weather conditions. The summers need to be warm and dry and winters cannot be constantly cold. Continuous cold temperatures kill grapevines very quickly. High humidity also kills grapevines.

There are many animals that present danger to the life of grapevines. Among many predators are spiders, mites, beetles, gophers, deer, raccoons, and birds. These predators can be kept off the plants with assorted sprays, fencing, and predacious insects.

Grape farming is a precarious trade. There are multiple factors that must be considered before entering this business. One of the most successful grape growing and wine producing areas in this risky field are based in Napa Valley, California.

## NAPA VALLEY

California is known for its rich farming industry. More specifically, the state has many highly esteemed grape cultivating regions. One of these regions, Napa Valley, is located about 50 miles northeast of San Francisco in the Bay Area and is the setting for *The Most Happy Fella*. The valley itself is roughly 30 miles long and 5 miles wide.

Napa Valley is one of the most well-known grape farming and wine producing regions in the United States. It was discovered in 1836 by George Calvert Yount and other settlers who recognized the land's potential for cultivating grapes. Yount was the first to settle on the land and established himself in a small town in Napa Valley, now called Yountville. In 1861, Charles Krug opened the first commercial winery in the Napa Valley and by 1889 more than 140 wineries existed in the Valley.

## NAPA VALLEY DURING AND AFTER PROHIBITION

From 1920 through 1933, prohibition hit the United States and thus the sale, production, and transportation of alcohol were illegal. As a result, grape farming and the wine industry drastically plummeted. Vintners from the Napa Valley and the surrounding areas had to find other jobs during this time period. Some wineries and grape farms were able to remain open under the exception of production of wine for sacramental purposes. For the most part, however, California vineyards were abandoned during Prohibition and the industry declined.

In 1933, the Napa Valley immediately began recovering from Prohibition and vintners came back to replenish the land. In 1944, a group of Napa Valley vintners met and created a plan to make the Valley more accessible for visitors. As a result, many restaurants opened in the area and Napa wines were being sold domestically and abroad. By 1968, Napa vintners enacted the nation's first Agriculture Preserve to protect the land from over-development.

Today, there are 400 wineries in Napa Valley and it is considered one of the premiere grape growing and wine producing regions in the world. It is estimated that roughly 4.7 million people visit Napa Valley each year.

In *The Most Happy Fella*, Tony owns a grape farm that produces wine. The musical takes place in the 1950s—a time when Napa Valley was thriving and just beginning to attract the considerable amount of tourists that now come to the beautiful wine country.



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