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Festival Opera to mark 20th anniversary with Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*

**Opening August 6, the long-running
Broadway hit will feature baritone
Theodore Weis, who founded Festival
Opera and Arizona Opera**

One of the hottest tickets this summer promises to be Festival Opera's first-ever production of Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*, in recognition of its 20th anniversary.

One of Broadway's longest-running hits, the beloved musical features such classic songs as *Standing on the Corner* *Watching All the Girls Go By*, and is considered to be Loesser's greatest artistic triumph (in a career that included *Guys & Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.)

Set in the Bay Area in the 1920s, *The Most Happy Fella* revolves around the complications that arise when Tony, an aging Napa Valley vineyard owner, proposes by mail to Rosabella, a young waitress who once served him in a San Francisco restaurant. Rosabella has no recollection of Tony, but accepts his proposal, largely because he has sent her a picture of Joe, his handsome ranch hand.

The production will feature Theodore Weis as Tony and Shawnette Sulker as Rosabella. This will be Weis' fourth turn in the piece since performing it at the Diablo Light Opera Company in 1996. His intense passion for opera led Weis to found the Arizona Opera in 1971, followed by Festival Opera exactly 20 years later. Through the years, he has amazingly found the time to perform with almost every company in the region, including San Francisco Opera, while maintaining a practice in Internal Medicine and Nephrology at Walnut Creek and Concord John Muir Hospitals, as well as serving as Medicine Dept. Chairman and President of the Medical Staff at Mt. Diablo Hospital in Concord. Sulker has appeared in three San Francisco Opera productions and sung around the world.

Raised in Chicago, Weis sang his first big role—George M. Cohen in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*—in the 6th grade. His father, a stockbroker, took him to see his first opera at the age of 16. He studied voice for three years in college, while completing his pre-med requirements, but says: “It never occurred to me to think of singing professionally.”

Following medical school and a tour of duty in Vietnam, Weis settled in Tucson to take a job as an assistant professor of medicine in nephrology at the University of Arizona. It was the first time since his undergraduate days that he had time to sing. Cast in a local production of a Gilbert and Sullivan musical, he enjoyed the experience so much that he decided to try opera next. The problem was, there were no companies. So he started one, which became the highly-respected Arizona Opera. Weis spent three years training under renowned tenor Léopold Simoneau. He made his operatic debut in 1975 with the West Bay Opera in Palo Alto.

Festival Opera’s *The Most Happy Fella* is scheduled for four performances only: August 6 and 12 at 8 pm, and August 9 and 14 at 2 pm. Location: Leshar Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek. Tickets: \$39 to \$100. (Student and group discounts available.) Purchase options: online at www.LesharArtsCenter.org; by phone (925) 943-SHOW; at the Leshar Center box office; or at Barnes & Noble Bookstore in Walnut Creek. For more information, visit www.FestivalOpera.org.

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