

'Most Happy Fella' is most happy experience at Morris county college

By SHEILA ABRAMS
Entertainment Editor

Charles May is a treasure. One of those rare people who are talented in many areas, the Hackettstown High School English and drama teacher is currently playing the title role in Frank Loesser's "The Most Happy Fella" at County College of Morris in Randolph.

May is well known in the area — in fact, throughout New Jersey — for turning high school students into first rate Shakespearean actors. Perhaps less well known is that he has an extensive professional theatrical and operatic background, and an absolutely beautiful singing voice.

The professionalism of Charles May could be a handicap if the rest of the production were nowhere near his standard. Fortunately, that isn't the case. The rest of the principals in this production, while not as good as May, are very good indeed. As community theater goes, "The Most Happy Fella" is a most happy experience.

Tony Esposito, May's character, is an aging Italian vinyard owner in the Napa Valley of California. He is single, living with his bossy and

possessive sister. On a trip to San Francisco, he is smitten by a young waitress, whom he calls Rosabella.

A correspondence begins, and Tony, thinking his looks won't appeal to the young woman, sends her a picture of his handsome foreman, Joe.

How does he plan to explain the difference when at long last Rosabella comes to Tony's ranch to marry him? We never find out. She arrives, and things begin to happen at a furious pace, with a lot of singing and dancing.

In terms of plot, this is a pretty good one for a musical — not too intricate or heavy, but not totally stupid either. In terms of score, however, it's a wonder. The role of Tony is written for an operatic voice, and the character has some gorgeous songs, the buoyant title song among them.

Rosabella, played by Valerie Resh, and Joe, played by Robert Duffy, also have some tender and beautiful songs, which they handle quite well.

As in most standard musicals (that is, those that came before "Les Miserables" and "Phantom of the Opera"), there is a comic couple whose romance provides a second plot line. In this show, that couple is Cleo (Maureen Thomson), Rosabella's girlfriend, and Herman (Bill Cater), a mild-mannered ranch hand. They are really sensational, especially in their big number, "Big D."

The show also has a couple of numbers calling for small groups of male singers: "Standin' on the Cor-

ner" (for four drugstore cowboys) and "Abbondanza" (for three chefs). These are also a delight, musically and theatrically.

At the heart of it all, though, is Tony in all his moods: optimistic, anxious, depressed, expansive and generous, brought vividly to life by Charles May. It is impossible to watch this show without feeling for him, and that's what makes good theater.

Marielaine Mammon of the CCM Music Department, who directed, had a substantial job, bringing together a group of people of widely disparate talent and experience and making a unified theatrical company of them. She succeeded handsomely.

"The Most Happy Fella" will continue its run at County College of Morris, Student/Community Center Auditorium, July 18, 19 and 20. A dinner/theater combination will be available for \$16, and tickets to the play only are priced at \$7. For ticket information, call (201) 328-5427.