



For Immediate Release:  
Thursday, September 22, 2016

## **STERN TEST FOR SONGBIRD IN GRADE 1 COTILLION**

Media contacts: [dlitfin@aol.com](mailto:dlitfin@aol.com); [jlawrence@ntra.com](mailto:jlawrence@ntra.com), [kjones@parxracing.com](mailto:kjones@parxracing.com)

BENSALEM, Pa. (Thursday, September 22, 2016) After taking Saratoga by storm with two virtuoso performances, Songbird returns East for an encore in Saturday's \$1 million Cotillion Stakes at Parx Racing.

A perfect 10 for 10 after decisive wins in the Coaching Club American Oaks and Alabama in upstate New York, the jet-setting Songbird takes on five rivals in the 50th running of the Grade 1 Cotillion, which has been won by five eventual champion 3-year-old fillies, as well as Close Hatches, who set the stakes record of 1:40.93 seconds in 2013 and was champion older mare the next year.

Songbird, the 2015 Eclipse Award winner as top juvenile filly, is the 1-2 morning-line choice, and expected to face a litmus test from Grade 1 Kentucky Oaks winner Cathyn Sophia. What's more, Carina Mia, winner of the Grade 1 Acorn, is back for another try after forcing the champ to draw a deep breath for the first time in the CCA Oaks.

After cruising through her first eight wins unchallenged, that gut check in the Oaks was what really impressed trainer Jerry Hollendorfer.

"She got challenged coming into the lane and drew away from (Carina Mia)...I thought that was a pretty important race, something she hadn't shown," said the Hall Of Fame conditioner, who ranks third all-time in career victories. "Saratoga is a very tough environment to win races. These kinds of horses are few and far between. I really do hesitate to compare horses from different era, so it's not really fair to compare her to some of the other horses I've had. She's making her own name by what she's done so far."

Songbird faced a prolonged pace challenge in the Alabama before pulling away by seven widening lengths. She continued to thrive after heading back to Southern California, and Hollendorfer doesn't foresee cutting back from 1 ¼ miles as a major a factor. "I'm not a believer - especially with this particular horse - that it's going to make a difference cutting back in distance," he said. "She has natural speed and she's drawn (post 5) as good as she could draw. She's done nothing different (since the Alabama) except maybe get better. It was nice to have her down at Del Mar, she loves it down there, and then we came back to Santa Anita, so she had two works there and did really well."

Kentucky Oaks winner Cathryn Sophia summered at the fabled Spa too, but after a busy first half of the year that began with a pair of Grade 2 stakes victories in Florida, she was given a designed freshening by John Servis and merely breezed every week to 10 days. She returned to the races in early September with a dominating victory in the Princess of Sylmar Stakes at Parx, where she burst onto the scene with a 12 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-length debut win last fall.

“She likes the cooler weather, she's not a big fan of the hot weather” said Servis, who developed the Parx-based Smarty Jones into the champion 3-year-old of 2004. “The comeback race was perfect, it didn't take much out of her and it set her up good for this race.”

With the seasoned Carina Mia breaking from the rail and stretching out after dueling for the lead against older mares in the Grade 1 Ballerina, and Songbird in post 5 outside the speedy Disco Rose, a potentially fast pace could favor a stalker like Cathryn Sophia.

“We'll see,” said Servis. “You don't know how it's going to set up. Everything changes once they leave that gate. Songbird has impressed me a lot. She has the talent to run horses off their feet and keep going.”

With the top three members of the division in the 1 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>-mile Cotillion, as talented a filly as Kentucky Oaks runner-up Land Over Sea is 10-1 on the morning line, as are the locally-based runners Disco Rose and Queena Esther.

Land Over Sea was in Songbird's rear-view mirror through five straight graded stakes, and finished in the money in four of them before winning the Grade 2 Fair Grounds Oaks and rallying for second behind Cathryn Sophia in the Kentucky Oaks. After a troubled trip in the Black Eyed Susan just two weeks later, followed by a failed experiment on turf in the Grade 1 Belmont Oaks, she could be the dark horse if a melee takes place up front.

“We really think her strength is routing on the dirt,” said trainer Doug O'Neill. “There's some good speed in there to set it up, so we're hoping to drop back, and it's going to be harder than heck for anybody to beat Songbird, but if you're able to run second in a Grade 1 for a million dollars, it'd be great to have on her record, and I think she has a big chance to run second, I really do. But Songbird has the speed and stamina and class...you'd probably have to go back before I was born to find anyone as good as her. I'd say her and Zenyatta would have to be the best two female racehorses, in my career, that I've ever seen.”

With a scheduled post time of 4:55 Eastern, the Cotillion is race 10 on Saturday's star-studded 12-race program and the third leg of an all-stakes pick four that climaxes with the \$1.25 million, Grade 2 Pennsylvania Derby. Both races will be broadcast on Comcast Sportsnet from 4:30 to 6:00 along with the Grade 3, \$300,000 Gallant Bob Stakes for 3-year-old sprinters.

Gates open at 10:00 am, with first post at 12:25.