

Respecting Equipoise in Guys and Dolls

The legacy of horse racing in Broadway musicals is a long one. Many of Broadway's composers and lyricists were racetrack habitués. A few of them were surely problem gamblers. They injected horse racing songs and scenes into a large number of post World War II musicals. There are scenes at the racetrack in *My Fair Lady* and *Do Re Mi*. There is a subplot in *Bells Are Ringing* about a bookmaker using a "Simple Little System" where the names of composers are substituted for racetracks. (If you want to bet the 5th at Belmont, you call for Beethoven's 5th). There's a reference to Dan Patch in the song "Trouble" from the *Music Man*. There was a musical named "Saratoga" about gambling in the late 19th century at the Spa. There were two musicals adopted from the show "Three Men on a Horse": *Banjo Eyes* and *Let It Ride*.

Let It Ride even featured an eponymous song with these not so-immortal lyrics. "Where would you and me be today if Columbus hadn't backed them three long shots in that boat race? Columbus took his chances recklessly, and his entries came in one-two -three. Big Julie Caesar didn't mope around his villa. He swept his toga around the world and took the whole megillah... The Greeks were losing to a stronger force till they bet their money on a Trojan horse."

But the top of the heap in Broadway horse racing musicals is *Guys and Dolls* which opened and was originally set in the New York City of 1950. A revival of the musical is set to open on Broadway in March of this year. Therein lies the problem. The show opens to three horseplayers singing about their bets in the "Fugue for Tin horns." One of the lines is "And just a minute, boys. I've got the feed box noise. It says the great-grandfather was Equipoise." Now that's Equipoise, the "Chocolate Soldier" who raced from 1930 – 1935. No horse in the era just before *Seabiscuit* was more beloved or highly thought of than Equipoise. He was the people's horse.

The problem is that at least in previews in 2009, they've depressionized the show. It's supposed to be set in the 1930's. In one other song in the show, a frame of reference was changed from 1948 to 1928. But Equipoise couldn't have had any great grand-children, grandchildren, or even children in the early 1930's. He was still racing. It shows no respect to Equipoise, the sport of horse racing, and the composer of the show, Frank Loesser, who knew what he was talking about. Let's show some respect to Equipoise. He ran for six years. He was horse of the year two times. He ran through a series of major injuries. He was close to the best handicap horse there ever was. He deserves to be treated honestly and fairly in this the best of all gambling/horse racing musicals.

Or maybe they'll adjust the lyric to read "And wait just a minute, sure. I've got the feed box lure. It says the great-grandfather was Man o'War." Where's Frank Loesser when we need him?