



'Rocky' packs one-two punch

The premise of "Rocky" (PG) is wildly unbelievable, an unknown, 30-year-old club bouncer gets a shot at the world heavyweight championship. Yet this is the kind of sentimental saga that everyone loves.

"Rocky" is a movie that harbors a treasury of myths: The success story myth, the gentle giant myth, the ugly duckling myth. To paraphrase a song, it's cornier than Kansas in August. It's also a wonderfully stirring and optimistic movie.

The performances are convincing, and the story develops with increasing momentum. Given this one-two punch, it's not difficult to suspend belief and empathize with the dreams and despair of Rocky.

Rocky is the American Dream, urban version, 1970s. He's "Joe" without the prejudices, Horatio Alger without the materialism. Rocky is a romantic idealist; he walks unscathed through the seamy ghettos, the sweaty gyms. He loves animals, finds beauty in a shy, awkward girl, tries to straighten out a brassy teenager, and is genuinely humble.

ON A GOOD night, when Rocky wins, he makes \$60 minus deductions for pummeling other losers like himself. For regular eating money, he works as a muscleman for a loan-shark operation. He's the collector, big and ferocious looking, who would own a gorilla.

Against all odds, "freak luck" as everyone tells him, Rocky is tapped to meet the world champion in a title bout. The original challenger broke a bone in his hand.

All other suitable candidates are unavailable or unwilling. So the promoters get down to the dogs, Rocky Balboa, the "Italian Stallion," as he calls himself.

The title holder, about as modest as Muhammad Ali, hypes this as a Bicentennial Match to be held in Philadelphia. He selected Rocky as an opponent because he fit the publicity requirements: An unknown local fighter, white, and of Italian lineage (and Chris Columbus was Italian, the black champ reminds us).

Rocky trains hard and zealously. The night before the fight he despairs. He's not in the same class as the champ, he says, the champ's too good. All he asks is that he can "go the distance," last 15 rounds. No one else has ever done that with the champ.

Rocky ultimately proves what winning is all about. Decent and honest, he doesn't lie, even to himself. When his girlfriend (effectively played by Talia Shire) asks him why he fights, he explains that he's dumb, that his parents told him he had no brains so he better develop his body. "But why do you fight?" she persists. "Cause I can't sing or dance," he answers.

SYLVESTER STALLONE plays Rocky in such an uncanny, natural way, it's almost no surprise to discover that he literally created the character. Stallone wrote the script, but it's his own interpretation and physical presence that make Rocky unforgettable.

He combines the massive build and bulging muscles of a heavyweight with a poetic Roman face. He looks like one of Picasso's classical figures of the 1920s.

It's difficult to assess Stallone's performance, or rather his acting ability, because the actor and the character seem inseparable. His performance as Rocky is excellent—the way he walks, the pacing of his speech, the host of individual mannerisms he uses—all combine to flesh out the character and make him believable.

Is Stallone a one-role actor? Can he play anything else other than a plodding gentle giant? We'll have to wait for future movie roles to find out.

Regardless of what that answer might be, Stallone as Rocky is the most engaging character to appear on the screen in the past year.

GLIMPSES

NEW RELEASES

THE ENFORCER (R). Violence and gun play in the "Dirty Harry" manner as Clint Eastwood shoots it out with a terrorist gang in San Francisco in this third film in the series.

KING KONG (PG). The big ape is back again with his same old destructive but sensitive personality. Jessica Lange plays the love in his life. Revised version with some tongue-in-cheek dialogue.

NETWORK (R). Fierce satire attacking the television industry and mass media generally. Top performances by Peter Finch, Faye Dunaway and William Holden in fast paced, grimly humorous film.

NICKELODEON (PG). Director Bogdanovich recalls the madcap, early days of movie making. Ryan and Tatum O'Neal, Burt Reynolds, Stella Stevens and Jane Fonda survive the perils and have some fun.

THE OUTER SPACE CONNECTION (G). Rod Taylor narrates film version of popular book citing "evidence" that beings from outer space visited earth.

THE PINK PANTHER STRIKES AGAIN (PG). More clowning with Inspector Clouseau (Peter Sellers) who humbles his way to victory. This time against the demoted arch-enemy who would destroy the world unless he's given Clouseau, dead or alive. **THE SEVEN-PEAK SOLUTION (PG).** Sherlock Holmes and Sigmund Freud join forces to solve an elementary case. However, location photography in Vienna and Robert Duvall's performance as Dr. Watson are excellent.

THE SHAGGY D.A. (G). A Disney movie about a politician with an unusual affliction. Silly slapstick fun for the whole family.

SILVER STREAK (PG). Gene Wilder, Richard Pryor, Patrick McGowan and Jill Clayburgh make tracks in this comedy-thriller about murder and mayhem on a train, and sometimes off.

A STAR IS BORN (R). Long-awaited remake with Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson as rock stars (rather than movie stars) whose careers head in different directions.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G General audiences admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X No one under 18 admitted.

Audience reaction is shock, disgust

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Things are heating up at Meadow Brook Theatre where the drama director Charles Nolte predicted would get a lot of audience reaction has done just that.

When was the last time (if ever) you saw members of the audience throw their programs at the actors on stage and then walk out? It happened Wednesday night, a Meadow Brook Theatre-goer reports. He also said a woman in the audience yelled out, "You call this crap entertainment?"

The actor who plays Teddy (Richard Hilger) in the production "When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder?" had to tell the woman, "Ma'am, you can leave. We're trying to finish this play," the theater-goer recalled.

According to the same amazed theater-goer, Mike Karsogian of The Rochester Eccentric, "People started walking out, things started heating up. I think, when Teddy ripped off the woman's blouse."

THE SCENE in the controversial play by Mark Medoff is one of high impact. The violence-prone Teddy, who has been abusing the patrons of a small-town diner both verbally and with vicious pranks, tears open the front of a blouse worn by Clarisse (Lynne Bradford). He also prods her obscenely with a violin that she, a concert violinist, has brought into the diner.

Teddy's language is frequently mocking and crude, and his gestures and comments equally vulgar. The

play, which was the hit of the Off-Broadway season in 1973, deals with violence in America among other themes.

The story exposes the weakness and strengths of the diner's patrons, as they come to grips with the shocking situation.

Meadow Brook Theatre, the professional theater on campus at Oakland University in Rochester, has generally stuck to the classics and not faced the dilemma of audience reaction to

contemporary drama.

MRS. MOSHER continued, "Some object to the nudity, others to the violence or language. Some question whether it's in good taste."

"We're here to produce the pieces of literature. We're presenting a balanced season. We have an obligation to be the sounding ground for new pieces. As Terry (Terence Kilburn, artistic director of Meadow Brook Theatre) said one day, 'We'd rather have people angry than bored.'"

She said there has been a lot of positive response to the play. Myself, as well as other metropolitan Detroit critics, praised the production highly.

(The play, which opened Dec. 30 at Meadow Brook, closed its run on Sunday.)

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