

Gonna Fly Now - the Autopsy of "Rocky Balboa"

Submitted by [miss_niki](#) [1] on January 5, 2008 - 7:22pm

spoiler alert

A new friend of mine insisted we watch “Rocky Balboa” the other day on DVD. He loved it & told me that if I didn’t, he’d watch any three movies of my choosing. If I did love it, I had to write about it on my blog. Well, I like to write & I like films, so I wrote about it regardless.

I didn’t hate it, but I didn’t love it, either. I’m actually having a most difficult time figuring out how exactly I did feel about the movie, because so many other components were at play.

So I’m going to try to separate the coziness of the circumstance from the edge of Ms. “At the Movies.” Not an easy task, if that tells ya anything at all.

Okay, so it’s a Rocky movie. There’s a formula for what makes a good sports film & Sylvester Stallone pretty much cornered the “feel-good” market on films about the down on your luck guy who braves incredible odds with charm & strength not only of body, but of character. I knew what I was getting into, & as an armchair Ebert, I have made it a point to always take into consideration the genre & expectation of the movie when passing judgment. Example: I think Drop Dead Gorgeous is a hysterical movie. So while I rate it as one of my favorite movies, I cannot, in good faith, rate it as one of the BEST movies I’ve ever seen.

Y’know what I mean?

Point is, I repeat, it’s a Rocky movie. Okay, for anyone who has watched Rocky or Rocky II or any of the various installments of Mr. Balboa, you should know what that means without me having to explain.

I’m going to try to break it down as simply as possible, as I believe this will help me gain perspective, again, on the movie itself, not the fact that I was really truly enjoying myself, sitting on my grandma’s old couch with my new friend.

I wish there was a way to convincingly type the Rocky theme song without resorting to “duh duh duh duh duh duh duh duh duh duh duh” or “da da DAAAAA da da DAAAAA da da DAAAA da da DAAA da da da da da da da da DAAAAA!” But alas, there is not. So ... cue Rocky theme music.

Whomever wrote the score (Ashley Irwin) certainly did so with the intention of drumming up that familiarity with the theme in order to force emotion at certain points of the movie. Of course, that’s the job of the score, right? To further along the story with a few piano tinkles here (sincere deep-emotion part), a few strong chords there (check out how powerful he is, what a manly man).

The problem was ... Rocky was going off on a monologue every other moment about something or other, some purposely poorly crafted words (he is, after, just an uneducated boxer from Philly, not a Harvard scholar) about some wise lesson he’s learned in the 60+ years he’s been tooting around. It bordered on overkill. Nearly every scene was as if Rocky was going to die at any second, so let’s get out the Oscar-winning moment now before he keeled over.

Rocky passes on life lessons to Paulie.

Rocky passes on life lessons to his son.

Rocky passes on life lessons to the son of a chick he walked home once, back in the day.

Rocky passes on life lessons to the boxing commission.

Rocky passes on life lessons to his competitor.

Rocky passes on life lessons to any tourist m.f. who walks into his restaurant.

I get it. He’s old. He misses his wife (& truth be told, so did I). He comes from the mean streets of South Philly & took his shots. He’s still a good guy, though.

& that part, I must say, was endearing, though. I’m conflicted here because while it was overkill, I still enjoyed that angle. I liked seeing him relive his stories while telling them to the patrons of his establishment. But, do you feel sorry for Rocky? Pity him? I mean, he’s Rocky freakin’ Balboa! Or was. Or still is. Or something.

& he’s still mourning the loss of his beloved Adrian. Now this is something that I can relate to — wanting to honor the memory, but how do you do that without becoming a walking talking, living breathing funeral procession every day of the rest of your life? If you didn’t know that Rocky loved Adrian before, you certainly know now. But like I said, I missed Talia Shire in this version. & really, I missed not knowing that story of their lives - how she succumbed to cancer, how Rocky dealt with that, how he survived what was quite possibly, most likely, the biggest fight of his life. THERE’S the story I’d have liked to have seen, but if that was the story, we wouldn’t have had ...

(wait for it)

... the training montage. Cue the Rocky theme song. Cue the gray sweats. Cue Paulie sitting in the corner with a cigar. Cue what’s his face looking grim & gnarly & yelling. Cue the backdrop of wintertime Philly. Cue the g.d. infamous “Rocky Steps” at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

GONNA FLY NOW!

The eyes rolled, but there was also a grin on my face because, as cheeseball as it is, it's the heart of the movie. It's what makes Rocky, Rocky.

"Oh who am I kidding? I wanna see this." - My new friend, rethinking his decision to not have me pause the movie at the training montage point while he went to the restroom.

I did like the way Sly tried to merge old with new, old-school Italian Stallion with hip-hop Mason Dixon (Mason Dixon? Seriously? Nickname? The Line. I kid you not.). Long gone are the days of "put 'em put, put 'em up" boxing & here now are the days of Vegas showboating. I know the casting of the Sin City for the final fight was more fluke than planned, but it made for a nice juxtaposition between the mean, hard, dirty streets of Philly & the sparkle, flash, filth of Vegas.

But my main beef was with the Little Marie storyline. Adrian is enough woman for this story, Sly. To bring in another chick just for the sake of having a woman in the story did us all a disservice. There was no real passion or conviction behind her & her son, just another example of "lookit Rocky, what a good guy, takin' care of the peeps in the 'hood." I rather preferred the pregnant restaurant hostess to her actually, she had more personality & verve, & the crux of the scene with her son was lost on the cutting room floor. Not only that, but the minute I saw her at Mandalay Bay with Rocky, I was like, "What the hell is she doing there? Who's taking care of the restaurant? Why is it necessary for her to be there?" The answer would seem to be, "She's the one who talked him into it — she gave him the big speech in the van." But really, did she? I mean, wasn't he already gonna do it, regardless? I never once felt like he wasn't going to take the fight. Mason Dixon's dudes had it right the moment Rock left the table ... he had already made up his mind right then & there.

What I would have liked to have seen more of, was a more fleshed out storyline between Rocky & his kid. & Rocky & Paulie. Take the scenes with Token Female out & put back in the restaurant gangway scene with Paulie. I had tears building up when we watched the Deleted Scenes & Paulie lamented about why he wasn't the one to die instead of Adrian. Of course, that could have more to do with the fact that I have contemplated that very thought about my own sister, but still ... Paulie packs more punch in the through-line than some girl Rocky once walked home thirty years ago. Paulie's a rapsclion, a guy ya love to hate & hate to love, but ya do regardless.

& while I didn't want it to be another "Over the Top" (oy), the father-son legacy vs. reality storyline could have been more concrete, too. Rocky has always been about his love for the most important people in his life, & I feel like we should have been privy to more of that than a new friendship with some broad, no offense, albeit a big "circle of life" deal. The story, instead, felt rushed, forced, let's-fit-in-a-reconciliation-before-our-two-hour-time-limit.

So, to recap: Good = Paulie, heart, old vs new, formula that made Rocky Rocky. Bad = new chick & her son, too much plinkety plink on the piano to indicate a sappy moment, too many "feel good movie of the year" monologues, no Talia Shire.

& to my new friend, I have to say we're at a draw, so no one wins, but no one loses. It's not a cop-out - you told me to be honest & here I am, being honest. I didn't love it, but I didn't hate it & quite frankly, the best part about it was the fact that you were sitting next to me, watching it.

So there. There's my own long monologue diatribe complete with my own parting sappy moment.

Cue "Gonna Fly Now."

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