

DVD Select: Stallone returns for a flyweight melodrama

by Robert J. Hawkins

Yo, Adrian's dead. And Rocky Balboa is none too happy about it. Feels cheated. Out of life.

Like he tells that useless lump Paulie, he's got a pain inside that needs to get out.

So, that's kind of how the Italian Stallion ends up fighting the heavyweight champion of the world in a Las Vegas boxing match at the age of - what? - I'm guessing 100, in the sixth film in that venerable underdog series "Rocky Balboa" (Sony, 2 1/2 stars).

Actually Sylvester Stallone is the same age as the current President Bush. Think about it for a minute.

'ROCKY BALBOA' - Sylvester Stallone reclaims his role and his glory in 'Rocky Balboa.' CNS Photo courtesy of John Bramley.

It is hard to tell what Rocky aches for more, his beloved Adrian or the chant of a Philadelphia crowd "Rha-key! Rha-key! Rha-key!" After a really maudlin start where Rocky visits all the places he and Adrian knew as a couple - the JM Tropical Fish store, the fallow ground where the ice rink once stood.

Even Paulie (Burt Young who looks exactly like his did in the first "Rocky" movie: old) loses his patience. "Time goes by too fast," mumbles Rocky. "Yeah, not fast enough," shoots back an exasperated Burt. Which is what I'm thinking at this point, too.

The Rocky walks into a bar and meets the barmaid Marie (Irish actress Geraldine Hughes). Turns out, when she was a punk teen, Rocky told her to quit hanging out on corners and stop smoking, to which Little Marie replied "Screw you!" (That is an authentic Philadelphia response to most anything.)

Not she's all grown up, has a teenage kid of her own and pushes drinks for a living. And she seems to have inherited some of the same low self-esteem qualities that drew Rocky to Adrian way back in the beginning. In a sweetly chaste turn, Rocky sort of adopts Marie and her son "Steps" (James Francis Kelly III).

But wait, didn't Rocky have a son, Rocky Jr.? He did. Little Rocky Jr. (Milo Ventimiglia, Peter Petrelli on "Heroes") is now a coat-and-tie stockbroker in a glass high-rise who is faintly embarrassed by his palooka pop and is also suffocating under the fact that everyone in Philly knows and loves his dad.

Rocky spends his nights in his Italian restaurant, Adrian's, telling guests about his 57 wins, 23 defeats, 1 draw and 54 knockouts. Like every aging champ, he poses for pictures, signs any scrap of paper and makes himself available to anyone who still cares.

While he's toying with re-entering the ring, an ESPN computer simulated match between him and the current heavyweight champ, Mason "The Line" Dixon (real boxing champ Antonio Tarver), has Rocky winning with a devastating nuke to the jaw.

Dixon's handlers, marketing idiots with no feel for human beings, decide an exhibition match in Las Vegas would be good for Dixon's image and his wallet - pay-per-view on HBO, etc.

And so, Rocky says yes. And yes, during his training he runs up the stairs and punches a side of beef.

The fight is kind of tough to watch, mainly because Stallone has no place being in a boxing ring as an actor or human being. But also because Mason Dixon is a nice guy who fans hate because he's had 33 knockouts, no defeats and can't find a piece of meat that will stand up longer than two rounds. For him, this fight is a no-win. Knock out the old guy and everyone hates you (even more). Let the old guy win and everyone laughs at you. Go 10 rounds and, well, people will talk.

In the next Rocky - Why not? Stallone is shooting another "Rambo" - I'd like to see the old guy take a kid who reminds him of himself under his wing and teach him how to be a champ.

For sentimental reasons, Rocky, it was great to see you fight one more time. But don't ever do it again.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Blood Diamond" (Warner, 3 stars) Absolutely riveting tale of two Africans: ex-mercenary Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio) and an exploited diamond miner Solomon Bo (Djimon Hounsou) who join forces to recover a fabulous uncut pink diamond - which they see as the key to their futures. Jennifer Connelly is an American journalist who aids their quest while falling for Archer. Violent and riveting.

"The Nativity Story" (New Line, 2 stars) Retelling of the New Testament story of the arduous journey of

Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, where the Christ child is born. Keisha Castle-Hughes ("Whale Rider" and "Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith") portrays Mary.

"Eragon" (Fox, 2 stars) Unfaithful adaptation of a popular youth novel has raised the ire of the masses - well, bad writing, acting and cheesy sets contributed to its demise. kudos to the dragon Saphira (voiced by Rachel Weisz), though. This was Djimon Hounsou's "other" film in 2006.

And still more: Ashley Judd is a boozy Southern woman in search of love (or the next best thing) in the Joey Lauren Adams' directorial debut "Come Early Morning"; a test of love takes on dangerous proportions in Claude Chabrol's "The Bridesmaid"; Ice Cube is the fall guy for conniving kids in the family-friendly road-trip comedy "Are We There Yet?"; animated family adventure and dream project of the late-Christopher Reeve "Everyone's Hero"; and the spiritual journey "Mana: Beyond Belief."

IT CAME FROM TV

The third season of "JAG"; the uncensored "Comedy Central Roast of William Shatner"; the first season of "Maude"; the fifth season of "NewsRadio"; the first season of British sitcom "Mile High"; and seasons three and four of "Miami Vice."

FROM THE VAULTS

"The W.C. Fields Comedy Collection, Volume 2" (Universal) This anthology contains five of the venerable comic's gems, including his last as a billed actor: "Never Give a Sucker an Even Break" (1941). Others are from the 1930s: "You're Telling Me!" the classic "Man On the Flying Trapeze," "The Old Fashioned Way" and "Poppy."

"Muriel" (Koch Lorber, 1963) Renowned French auteur director Alain Resnais' riveting drama explores the haunting consequences of memories and emotions in three people whose experiences are tied to the Algerian War.

"The Care Bears Movie" (Fox, 1987) Ye gods, it has been 20 years! When's the last time you thought about the once ubiquitous Care Bears? Care a little. Share a little. Ow! Stop me!

DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin

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