

ROCKY

A Movie Critique  
Ida-Rose Hall  
Humanities 101

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Rocky "Rocky"

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Ida Rose Hall  
Humanities 101

I attended, along with my family and two guests, the movie "Rocky". I regretted taking the guests or my family as I would have sat through it again to pick up remarks (such as the remark made by the Heavy-weight Champion to Rocky near the beginning of the fight. Was it this remark which made Rocky angry enough to really get in and start losing his "reverence" and what I considered a reticence to really "fight" the champ with all his heart? Or was he just gauging the Champ's weaknesses and strengths.

In reading the reviews on "Rocky" I found some differing points of view:

New Republic, Nov 27, 1976, by Stanley Kauffmann, found little to praise in it. He decried the plot as being "not as good" as the real life of the author. He finds it lacking in credibility. "It's a little harder to believe that Rocky is picked out of a catalogue of available fighters to replace a disabled contender in a match with the heavyweight champion of the world and is picked solely because of his nick-name "The Italian Stallion". That the contender doesn't hire a "manager", and that he is bothered seldom by the "media". He contends much of the dialogue is written to "justify" an unbroken nose by a "heavy-weight" contender, and the resultant "Nose break" in the final fight as "not very evident". He criticizes the inconsistency or irrelevancy of the entering "close-up" of Christ, into the savage fight ring. (I myself, kept looking for the tie-in of that opening shot to no avail. What WAS the purpose, if any--and if not ANY then surely it can only be laid down to irreverence for the image of Jesus Christ. It may have been a point of irony that in the shadow of the symbol of christianity and "brotherly love" image of the "Church" was a place where men earned their living by pummeling and disfiguring each other. However, if the movie intended to justify fighting, or to condemn it as "unchristian", it was not clear to me.)

Stanley Kauffmann indicated that the script cries out for "black and white", and if that was impossible to use muted colors. I liked the contrast of the blue-blue, intense sky in one scene to the slum scenes out of which "Rocky" jogs as he trains. I thought the camera used color to indicate differences within the city of "poor" and "rich".

He calls the story "phony" and the photography "Gooney". The picture was "sentimental". And I like that. I thought that Rocky and his sweetheart were "very consistent" throughout. Rocky, in spite of victory, in the end remained a simple, (even slightly retarded simplicity) underprivileged (but not embittered about it to any great length) man. While his sweetheart blossomed under the warming influence of a simple love, she did not blossom all out of reason.

I understand (I could not find reviews and reports on the Academy awards) that "Rocky" was awarded "best Picture" and that the picture itself received four awards.

I wondered if Kauffmann wasn't just a little chagrined by his "critique". It did not seem to carry that much weight with the judges. (Is that a sign?)

*Only that I mean may not find as reliable a consensus as a committee, but the committee has vested interests that bias their views too - for ex. Star of Network the best actor award he came to did?? I think most people felt Stallone more deserving, even if he was a punk upstart in his 1st film*

Judith Crist, writing of "Rocky" in the Saturday Review, November 27, 1976 had the complete opposite point of view. She calls it "a delightful human comedy that will undoubtedly end up as the sleeper of this movie year." (at Dick) She calls it "a romantic story of two "losers", and "a strong, unsentimental, and deeply stirring affirmation of human aspiration, of strength of character, and of simple decency." It is her personal opinion that it is somewhat autobiographical of ~~the~~ author, Sylvester Stallone, who wrote the story, acted in it and also acted as boxing choreographer. She calls him honest about himself-- honest with his choice of a woman, and that ~~his~~ pride about his nose is also honest and "touching", (My "touching").

She says that the "characters are as penetrating as the Philadelphia street atmosphere, with Talis Shire radiant in her flowering under the warmth of respectful love a fitting compliment to the emerging dignity of Stallone as a self-described "nobody" becoming an individual in his own eyes." She finishes glowingly "packed with moments of comedy, perception, and sensitivity, Rocky is a sincere, rousing little film that raises the spirits and gladdens the heart."

Two other reviews, those in "Time" and "Newsweek" bear her out. Janet Maslin moderates by saying "Stallone's gift for self-dramatization propels the action above and beyond it's underlying BANALITY. At heart his Rocky (Stallone's ) is that stock character--the gentle giant--but Stallone has endowed him with such vivid idiosyncrasies that the cliché takes on new life. Throughout Stallone is funny, immensely likeable, and so consistently monolithic that his acting ability is difficult to assess: at times he seems to be giving not so much a full performance as a brilliant monologue. By the time the heavyweight bout takes place, "Rocky" has become completely engaging."

Newsweek's review, unauthored, says that "Stallone is doing all he can for the new machismo." "Boggled by grim, paranoid plots like Marathon Man and savage heroes like the Taxi Driver, audiences may be ready to buy his gentler, uncomplicated machismo. Stallone is sure of it. "

The background of the picture is a "Cinderella" story in and of itself. The Actor, screenwriter, and director Stallone, apparently held out in the face of near starvation to do the film himself, and won. A rags-to-riches story. I felt that his egotism came out in the film, too. It was highly subjective--seen from the point of view of one person only--"Rocky". Even the female lead was an extension of him I thought. I liked the character "Rocky", however. He was warm, human, compassionate. He tried to help the "kids" on the streets--he allowed himself to be used--and forgave

his trainer his trespasses, so to speak, and let him coach his final bout. (Was it this "christian" aspect of Rocky's character that inspired the "christ" shot at the first of the movie? That is, can a man maintain christian characteristics and be a prize fighter?) (If Stallone's ego is as large as the critics maintain, he MIGHT have thought such a similie justified.)

*What does his ego have to do with his Christ image?*

He warmed the hearts of those with whom he dealt. You could feel his "slum" fans, gathered around the local bar T.V. (Now, you KNOW they have TV s in their homes) getting a vicarious "success" identification with Rocky. (A man (or woman) CAN rise above his environment.) By the time the final fight scene arrived I was cheering for him, too. I wanted him to "win", but at the same time, I knew he would not. At the same time, by determination, hard work, and sheer will he had "stuck" out the full 15 rounds. The final outcome was a "decision". He had made it--almost.

*It would have ruined the credibility & have had him win, don't you think?*

I noticed during the showing of Rocky, things I would not have noticed before taking this course. Close up techniques. The achieving of time and space and distance. These aspects cannot be achieved on the live stage. You could hear the labored breathing of the boxer as he reached the top of the stairs--but when he went down the stairs, you can view him in the perspective of the landscape--at a distance. In his second ascending of those same steps there was a contrast from the first time. He had more breath--more power--more ease of effort--he had conquered --he was ready for the test. The "greek-lookingw buildings made me think of the Greek runner who ran to Athens to announce the victory --was this symbolic of athletic excellence?

I did not approve of the language. I guess it was "realistic" of his environment, all right--but was it entirely necessary? And the brutality of the fight, as far as I was concerned, was unnecessarily bloody. And what about the "meat cleaver" aspect of his training? I presume it is this aspect of the movie that the critics refer to as "machismo" (1), but if so, then this was an inconsistency in his character. Can a man be sweet, simple, compassionate, and still be as violent as he was in these scenes?

It may have been an "uncomplicated plot" as Kauffmann indicated, but nevertheless one did not walk away from the theatre "unthinking." On the contrary, I have thought about the movie much since seeing it--and in this respect, for me, it had its elements of "greatness". In a way it was like "Death of ~~the~~ A Salesman". There is dignity in the common man, and he is capable of great things.

*me! file-in!!*

*Note: Some of the students are too lazy or too poor to copy the critical reviews. They simply "tear" them such missing on "Rocky". One of these was the New Yorker & there was only one copy.*

*as I understand the term it refers to excessive self agreement, related to male chauvinism*

(1) Machismo. I assumed in reading this word that it was derived from masochism. It was not in two dictionaries. If it is Not derived from masochism, I have used it incorrectly.

## Arts and Lives

### Stanley Kauffmann on films

#### Poor Folk

*Rocky* (United Artists). How's this for the story of a film? An Italian-American boy grows up in a dreary section of Philadelphia, is thin and spindly, develops muscle and good looks, tries to be an actor, flops, works as an athletic instructor at a girls' school abroad, comes back to be an actor again, has spotty luck, writes a couple of novels he can't get published, finds some small parts in TV and in films, writes a film script, is offered \$180,000 for it but turns it down though his wife is pregnant and they are broke because he wants to play the lead, is offered \$250,000 but still turns it down though his wife is still pregnant and they are still broke because he still wants to play the lead, finally gets low-budget backing (one million dollars) and the lead, makes the film, and, before its release, stirs up the biggest advance publicity fuss since Jack Nicholson blew in.

Well, that's the story *about* the film—about Sylvester Stallone who wrote it and plays the lead. The plot of Stallone's film itself isn't quite as good. Except for little embroideries of frankness and topical reference, this is just one more picture about a club fighter who "coulda been a contender" and suddenly finds he *is* a contender. There's the tough old gym manager who despises our hero because he had the gift but was lazy and who rallies to help him when the kid gets a title shot. And there's the girl (who takes off her glasses and, say, she's Beautiful) who pushes her way down the aisle after the fight to embrace him in the ring and say "I love you," and through puffy lips he replies "I love you," fadeout.

What must have attracted producers to this script was the fact that it hadn't been made in some time and that this latest version had some fancy touches. But not all those touches are credible.

We can believe that Rocky—yep, that's the hero's name—works as a strong-arm collector for a loan shark. It's a little harder to believe that Rocky is picked out of a catalogue of available fighters to replace a disabled contender in a match with the heavyweight champion of the world, and is picked solely because of his nickname, the Italian Stallion; and is picked by the champion himself, a Muhammad Ali type; and that he signs without a manager; and that the whole time he trains for this much-publicized fight he has only one visit from the media.

It's all pure Movieland, with updates. Stallone is chesty and pleasant, has big liquid eyes and a Roman nose—an unruly Al Pacino. (As author, Stallone had to write in a lot of lines to explain how this knockabout pug still had a high-bridged nose. It gets busted, we're told, in the big fight though we can't see it.) He has some appeal. He's a fair enough actor, though once in a while he slips out of mug tonality into something a bit more cultivated. I congratulate him on his double success although, so far, I'm not knocked out by his abilities in either way. (Most impressive moment: While training, he does a series of alternating one-hand pushups.)

The director is John G. Avildsen, not nearly as imaginative as he was in *Joe* or *Save the Tiger*. For instance, he begins hokily here with a closeup of a mosaic Christ on (I guess) the wall of a church hall, then pulls back to show us a savage prize-fight in the middle of that hall. Occasionally Avildsen finds a nice image, holding back in a long shot to let some action be neatly incised almost in silhouette. He handles the climactic fight well but not exceptionally, and he doesn't mind reminding us of other films. When Rocky and the girl, who is Nice, embrace for the first time, they sink to the floor of a dingy apartment like Brando and Eva Marie Saint.

A big handicap is the cinematography of James Crabe. This picture cries out—screams—for black and white. If that was impossible, then at least the colors should have been muted, not primary-postcard splotches. What we see contradicts what we're supposed to be feeling all through the picture.

What we're supposed to be feeling is grimness. The writing and the acting loll around in naturalism at its most sentimental, naturalism as display. Most of the cast were chosen for their ugliness (except Burgess Meredith, who is unusually restrained as the gym manager) and were encouraged to lay it on. No

chance is lost in look or sound to be gross, minatory, repellent. I don't suppose things are any prettier in the poor districts of Philadelphia than in other poor districts, but contradicted as the grime is by the gooey photography and phony story, this film becomes naturalism as romance.

*Bound for Glory* (United Artists). The credits give top billing to the cinematographer, Haskell Wexler, and quite right, too. The picture is based on the autobiography of Woody Guthrie. It begins in a small Texas town, deep in the Depression of 1936, then moves, via freight-train hopping, to southern California, mostly to migrant-worker camps. Wexler has managed, while working in color, to suggest the textures of Walker Evans and Margaret Bourke-White, an underlay of hopeless but indomitable pride. Within a relatively narrow range Wexler's chromatic plan has considerable variety. He wants to suggest that colors are not as bright as they have been, yet he never melodramatizes. He just manages to fill the air with an atmosphere—of the end of one kind of surety in America.

There are a few spectacular special effects, like a long shot of a dust storm billowing up on a Texas town, and I assume that the celebrated special-effects man, Albert Whitlock, had something to do with them. To complete the visual conspectus, the production design by Michael Haller and the costume designs by William Theiss are first-class; and the director Hal Ashby

(continued on page 40)

#### Films Worth Seeing

*The Marquise of O...* Eric Rohmer's exquisite film "placement" of Kleist's novella, in Kleist's language. A gem.

*The Memory of Justice.* Marcel Ophuls' huge, hugely intelligent essay on justice, beginning with Nuremberg and moving outward. Most of it beautifully made, all of it most welcome.

*Network.* TV power plays. Paddy Chayefsky's script is basically phony, but it crackles along. Cast and direction are slick.

*The Seven-per-cent Solution.* Sherlock Holmes meets Sigmund Freud—and high time, too, for both of them. A wonderfully acted romp.

mittee performances; reminders, all too fleeting but present, of the transient personality of the U.S. Supreme Court, of the cyclical shift from radical chic to conservative chic (and back, these days, to the former), and certainly of the innocent victims of temporal affairs. Accepted as a frankly one-sided view of a troubled and dangerous time, *Hollywood on Trial* should serve as a stimulant to reconsideration of an era that is as unforgettable as it is distasteful. Its flaw is its simplistic approach, all too clear in the jejune commentary voiced by the venerable John Huston, an approach that's all too acceptable, even to young adults for whom the twentieth-century past is a pop-culture blur.

*Judith Crist*

**T**HE pop-culture present is exploited to excellent effect in *Rocky*, a delightful human comedy that will undoubtedly wind up as the sleeper of this movie year. Very much a latter-day *Marty* in its romantic story of two "losers," it is a strong, unsentimental, and deeply stirring affirmation of human aspiration, of strength of character, and of simple decency. And it is a very personal film, written out of a picaresque youth by thirty-year-old Sylvester Stallone, a triple-talent who served as star and boxing choreographer as well. It is brought to gritty screen reality by

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*Sat Review - Nov 27, '76*  
*SR 11 27 76 by Judith Crist*

*Sat Rev*



Glenda Jackson as Sarah Bernhardt—"A woman liberated before her time."

director John Avildsen, whose credits include *Joe*, *Cry Uncle*, and *Save the Tiger*.

Stallone, whom you may recall as the big, dumb marriage patsy in *The Lords of Flatbush*, portrays, in the title role, a blue-collar Philadelphia slugger, a boxer who's all heart and no steam, a neighborhood loan shark's enforcer with more compassion than muscle, a man very much aware of his own limitations and of the possibilities of others. He is honest about himself—"I'm not graceful, but I can slug," he notes; his pride about his nose, unbroken after sixty-four fights; his acknowledgment that fighting is for morons. He is honest in his choice of a woman, the mousy, introverted sister of a loudmouthed pal—"We're a real couple of coconuts. I'm dumb and you're shy," he remarks, wooing her with awkward gallantry and disarming candor. Then lightning strikes: the Muhammad Ali-like heavyweight champion's scheduled Bicentennial exhibition bout with a coeval white contender falls through, and the "smart" decision is to stage it with not merely a local fighter but, better yet, with "The Italian Stallion," as Rocky bills himself. It's a \$150,000 payday for Rocky, and the exploiters gather. But Rocky, with the emergent womanliness of his true love to sustain him, keeps his unbright wits about him. It is not victory he's after but merely a chance to prove, for the first time in his life, that he isn't "just another bum from the neighborhood." And that chance

comes in a tough, unpretty, and ferocious fight sequence that stands with the best of the genre in its intensity of physical force and in its suspenseful staging.

The characters are as penetrating as the Philadelphia street atmosphere, with Talia Shire, hitherto *The Godfather* sister, radiant in her flowering under the warmth of respectful love, a fitting complement to the emerging dignity of Stallone as a self-described "nobody" becoming an individual in his own eyes. Burt Young as the girl's pathetically brutish brother, Carl Weathers as the pragmatic champion, Joe Spinell as the tolerant loan shark, and, above all, Burgess Meredith, simply brilliant as a has-been manager determined to pass on the knowledge he won by losing, all stand out in the excellent cast. Packed with moments of comedy, perception, and sensitivity, *Rocky* is a sincere, rousing little film that raises the spirits and gladdens the heart.

**F**OR once a great actress has been assigned the film role of great actress—and it is Glenda Jackson's portrait of Bernhardt that makes *The Incredible Sarah* indeed the tale of a woman worthy of the legends surrounding her career. The screenplay, by Ruth Wolff, is admittedly "a free portrayal of events in her early tempestuous career," but the resultant film, richly produced by Helen M. Strauss and tightly di-

rected by Richard Fleischer, is given total credibility. It takes the risks run by film biography and conquers all in the triumphant story of this "illegitimate half-Jewish daughter of a courtesan" who became the Divine Sarah, regarded as the world's leading actress in the course of a career that flowered in the mid-1870s in Paris and continued internationally until her death, at seventy-nine, in 1923. Freely associating fact with legend, the screenplay follows her from her triumphant audition with the Comédie Française and short tenure there in her teens to her early stardom. The film deals with her scandalous private life and international success, which alienated the French public, and then with her recapture of that public in her own theater.

It takes the remarkable Jackson, in bits and pieces of classical drama, to convince one of the power of the performer and make the legendary quality emerge therefrom. While the woman of whim and temperament and personal appetite is there, she is rounded out with the convictions of a woman liberated before her time and given quicksilver beauty that is so much Jackson's own and so becoming to Sarah. She gets good support from an outstanding British cast that includes Daniel Massey as her first producer, John Castle as the husband she loved so foolishly. The result is romantic biography, all too rare these days in the lavishness of its production, and the convergence of an outstanding contemporary actress with a legend of greatness.

### Other Movies

**Alex & the Gypsy**, derived by Lawrence B. Marcus from the novella *The Bondsman*, by Stanley Elkin, and directed by the gifted John Korty, is a disappointment. Jack Lemmon as the cynical and eccentric bondsman and Genevieve Bujold as his erstwhile gypsy lover, jailed on a murder charge, give yeomanlike performances that are vitiated by the complexities and pointlessness of the story.

**Keetje Tippel**, a Dutch film based on the memoirs of Neel Doff, who earned a Nobel Prize nomination thereby, is so pretty in its costumes and sets of turn-of-the-century Amsterdam and in its heroine (played by fresh-faced Monique van de Ven) that it momentarily entraps one in its banal and barely credible rags-to-riches tale, which is generously laced with dollops of pseudo-sociology and soft-core sex. But the moment is fleeting. ©

Nov 15, 1976

no author in *London* *with*

no indication in *Editorial* *copy* *of* *Stallone* *contribution*

## SHOW BUSINESS

### Italian Stallion

How's this for a plot: a street-wise Italian kid, who thinks of himself as "an intellectual caveman," grows up dreaming about being a tough fighter, a writer and a famous actor. He stumbles from job to job, then weaves his daydreams together: he writes a boxing movie, stars in it himself, and—even before the film is released—Hollywood hails him as the next Mitchum, Brando and Pacino rolled into one.

The plot is coming true for Sylvester ("Sly") Stallone, 30, a brash, genial bit-actor who wrote the script *Rocky* in three days, and held out against the producers, James Caan and Burt Reynolds, to star in it himself. Jaded preview audiences are giving it ovations, and much of Hollywood is assuming that star and movie will be up for Oscars next year. "I can't recall such excitement about a new movie and a new star since maybe *Giant* and James Dean," gloats United Artists Boss Mike Medavoy. Says TV's Norman Lear: "That movie sent me through the ceiling."

*Rocky* is a slum fairy tale, its plot simple even by Hollywood standards. A broken-down neighborhood fighter, who boxes, "because I can't sing or dance," is picked as a last-minute replacement to fight the heavyweight champion of the world, mainly because the champ sees the promotional possibilities of the hero's monicker: "the Italian Stallion." The hero produces a rousing fight and, of course, finds love. The movie is funny, unpretentious and relentlessly upbeat, sort of what *Mean Streets* would have been if Frank Capra had made it. Its only message—endure, reach your potential, be a man—is enough to give machismo a good name.

**Eating Grass.** Stallone is doing all he can for the new machismo. He has a will that seems more than a match for Hollywood. Producer Irwin Winkler (*They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*) says, "I still can't believe I did it. I mortgaged my house to put up the \$50,000 completion bond for *Rocky*." Winkler and Coproducer Robert Chartoff were stunned when Stallone insisted on playing the title role himself—and got his way, although he had \$104 in the bank at the time. He remembers telling his wife Sasha: "If you don't mind going out the backyard and eating grass, I'd rather burn this script than sell it to another actor. She agreed." United Artists put up a modest \$1 million for *Rocky*, and Director John Avildsen (*Save the Tiger*) shot the film in a brisk 28 days.

Though Stallone is no boxer, the film is clearly autobiographical. "Rocky is me," he says, "but he's more gallant and simple than I am." Like his hero, Stallone is a raffish charmer and hustler.

Reade theater in Manhattan, but was fired for trying to scalp a ticket for \$20 to a customer who turned out to be Walter Reade. Later he lived on bootlegged Walter Reade passes, which he made Xerox copies of and sold to students.

Born to a volatile Italian couple in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen, Stallone grew up in Monkey Hollow, Md., where his mother ran a beauty parlor. He attended twelve schools by the time he was 15, and was thrown out of most of them. "I was into J.D.," says Stallone. "If I saw a housefly on the hood of a car, I'd stamp him out with an iron pipe. A very nice kid."

**Seeing Paris.** When he was 15 Stallone and his mother moved to Philadelphia, the setting of *Rocky*. Soon bored with street-gamy life there, he took off for Europe and landed a job as a bouncer in the girls' dorm of The American School of Switzerland. "It was fox-in-the-hen-house time," says Stallone with a grin. The highlight of his bouncer career came when he chaperoned a group of girls on a visit to Paris, boarded them in a cheap pension and pocketed most of the ample hotel money. "What the hell," he says. "They saw the real Paris that way."

Stallone spent the past six years in New York and Los Angeles looking for acting jobs and trying to write. In addition to working the Walter Reade theater, he sold a few scripts and landed his only lead role (along with Da Fonz, Henry Winkler) in the 1974 low-budget turkey *The Lords of Flatbush*.

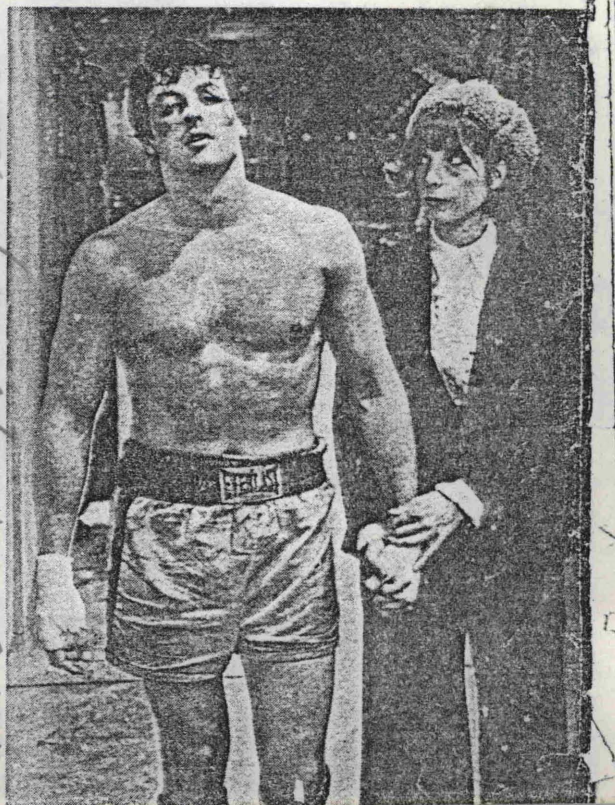
Now he is flushed by his rise "from roaches to riches." He has 10% of *Rocky*, which U.A. hopes will gross more than \$40 million and a five-picture contract with the studio. He is holding out for a seven-figure deal on his next project, a "great romantic gothic" movie about Edgar Allan Poe. He also wants to star in the upcoming version of *Superman*. But Marlon Brando, who will play Superman's father, has veto rights on casting. Says Sly: "I hope he doesn't think I do a cheap imitation of him in the love scene with the undershirt. Italians do wear undershirts."

On-screen, Stallone radiates more boyish bravado than Brando's brooding rage. Says Co-star Talia Shire, sister of Francis Ford Coppola: "Francis was an innocent when he first succeeded and so is Sly." Innocent or not, Stallone is probably onto the right screen image at the right time. Boggled by grim, paranoid plots like *Marathon Man* and savage heroes like the *Taxi Driver*, audiences may be ready to buy his gentler, uncomplicated machismo. Stallone is sure of it. At a private screening of *Rocky* for his mother last week he leaped on-stage during the first reel and shouted, "Hey, Ma, I made it, I made it, Ma."



ALAN PAPPE

STALLONE: MUSCLE & HUSTLE



He would be an actor at a Walter Reade Church

no padded ruffed away a leg



Newsweek  
Nov 29, 76  
MOVIES  
Janet Maslin

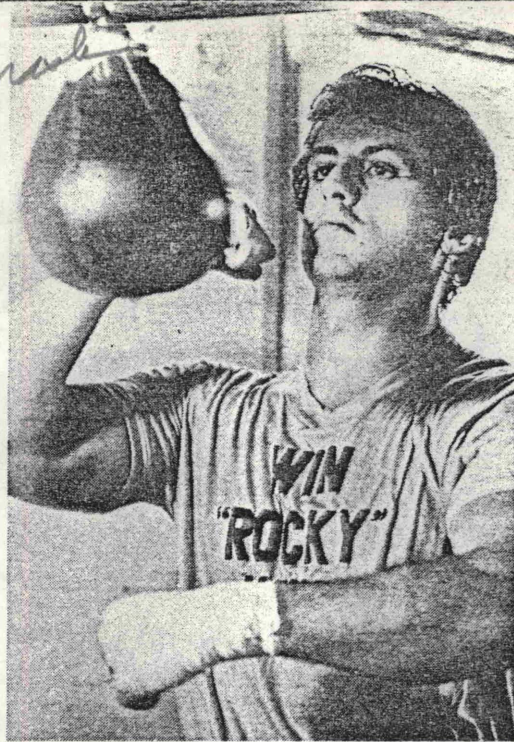
## Knockout

ROCKY could have been a sleeper, but it's been turned into a contender. A barrage of advance publicity has proclaimed this modest, low-budget movie an automatic blockbuster and its leading actor and screenwriter, Sylvester Stallone, a major star—the latest successor to Marlon Brando. Parallels between Stallone's own success story and that of the movie's title character, a persistent, golden-hearted boxer, have been widely noted—how the down-on-his-luck actor held out against proposals that Ryan O'Neal or Burt Reynolds star as Rocky and won the chance to play the role himself. Even the most jaded preview crowds, so the media reports go, have burst into applause at the film's closing credits.

The film is likely to leave a lot of moviegoers cheering—the sort of cheering you hear on a sunny day at a football game when the home team is trouncing its archrival. This is one of the few recent movies ("One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was another) to approach its subject with such black-and-white moral certitude that viewers know exactly which side they're on and don't mind at all the blatant way in which they've been manipulated. Crisply directed by John Gildsen, "Rocky" so skillfully slaps a modern, street-wise veneer onto one of the half-dozen oldest stories in the world that it can freely traffic in sentimentality while seeming to hang tough.

**Champion:** Rocky is a perennial loser, a two-bit boxer and ineffectual thumb-breaker for the mob in Philadelphia, who gets his big chance when the Muhammad Ali-type world champion (Carl Weathers) decides to fight an unknown as a Bicentennial publicity stunt. Simultaneously, Rocky—or "The Italian Stallion," as he calls himself—gets his shot at true love after he realizes that the shy spinster who works at the neighborhood pet shop (Talia Shire) is in fact gorgeous when she takes off her glasses. Any movie with the ad slogan "His whole life was a million-to-one shot" clearly isn't much concerned with the possibility of failure, and there isn't much suspense in either story line. But the film manages to draw considerable drama out of its gritty fairy tale—thanks almost entirely to the huge, handsome Stallone and his colossal narcissism.

Stallone's gift for self-dramatization propels the action above and beyond its underlying banality. At heart his Rocky is that stock character—the gentle giant—but Stallone has endowed him with such vivid idiosyncrasies that the cliché comes on new life. Rocky talks to his turtles (Cuff and Link) and bemoans his line of work with the good-natured gruffness that Brando should have used with his pet pigeons in "On the Waterfront": "If you guys could sing or dance, I wouldn't be doin' it." He paternally lec-



Stallone: A little Brando and a lot of ego

tures a tough-talking young tomboy in his grimy neighborhood about the perils of hanging out with "them coconuts on the corner." He goes into training so vigorously that he begins to worry the champ's staff, especially after they see a television report of him working out in a meat locker, earnestly pummeling a side of beef.

Throughout, Stallone is funny, immensely likable, and so consistently monolithic that his acting ability is difficult to assess: at times he seems to be giving not so much a full performance as a brilliant monologue. By the time the heavyweight bout takes place, "Rocky" has become completely engaging. The climactic fight sequence, carefully choreographed by Stallone (who reportedly modeled his stolid boxing style on Rocky Marciano's), is brutal and breathtaking, a series of cinematic body blows guaranteed to reduce even the most

skeptical observer to a quivering fan. "Rocky" isn't really a movie about sports, but it works on the visceral level of a good sports event, generating blissfully uncomplicated excitement.

—JANET MASLIN

## Happily Ever After

**THE SLIPPER AND THE ROSE: THE STORY OF CINDERELLA**, a new musical version of the old fairy tale, isn't quite the children's film it pretends to be. Tots who haven't studied Latin will be puzzled when the heroine arrives at the ball and is introduced as "Princess Incognita." They may be slightly bewildered when the Prince returns to his castle after an unsuccessful meeting with a prospective bride and grumps: "Why do they always sound so many trumpets? Why can't a prince come home without a fuss?" They may also start to fidget when the lovers have to iron out a few last wrinkles before living happily ever after, caused by the royal parents' disapproval of Cinderella's middle-class origins. But "Cinderella's" essential story still remains, lavishly told. And at least grownups aren't likely to squirm too much. Directed by Bryan Forbes, this is one so-called children's movie that is moderately witty and mercifully short of treacle.

As the heroine, Gemma Craven has the requisite freshness of beauty and tinniness of feet. As the Prince, Richard Chamberlain occasionally lapses into mannerisms better suited to the Prince of Denmark. But, in general, he treats the project as harmless good fun, and old "Dr. Kildare" fans will be glad to be reminded that he sings nicely, too. The movie also features a superb English supporting cast (Dame Edith Evans in her last performance as a dotty old Dowager Queen, Michael Hordern as the fumbling King and Annette Crosbie as

Craven and Chamberlain: Ironing out the wrinkles of a storybook romance

