

Creed (2015)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hours 13 min.

Our content ratings: Violence ; Language ; Sex/Nudity Rated R.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

Proverbs 23:22

Sylvester Stallone deserves the awards nominations he has been receiving for his reprisal of his role of Rocky Balboa in this the 7th film of the franchise. Although I hate boxing as a sport, it being the one in which the goal is to so injure an opponent so that he cannot continue to fight, the sport has engendered some of the most dramatic David vs. Goliath tales to be found on the screen. With its themes of surrogate father-son relationship, handing over the mantle to a new generation, and struggle against near-impossible odds, you will probably find yourself cheering and wiping your eyes, especially at the end when our hero again mounts the steps of Philadelphia's Art Museum, though a bit more slowly this time because of his age.

Fruitvale Station's director Ryan Coogler (also script co-writer with Aaron Covington) does a marvelous job with the action, seemingly placing us in the middle of the ring in the bloody fight scenes. Along with Stallone, kudos are due to Michael B. Jordan who plays Adonis "Donnie" Johnson, a rising young L.A. businessman who moonlights down in Juarez as an up and coming boxer in its not quite legal system. He has a troubled past, never having known his father the famous Apollo Creed who died in the ring fighting Rocky. Conceived out of wedlock and born after his father's death, he was orphaned

when his mother died. He was in and out of foster and families and orphanages due to his constant fighting. As an adolescent he was rescued by Apollo's wealthy widow Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad), but did not take on his family name.

To the consternation of his foster mother he turns his back on business and heads for Philadelphia where he seeks out his father's opponent and friend in the hope of persuading him to train him. Part of his growth toward maturity was when the overly confident boxer lost the keys to his sports car when, back in an L.A. gym, he had arrogantly challenged anyone to a match, and lost. The chastened young man realizes he has much to learn, and that Rocky is the man who can best teach him.

Rocky has been content for years to leave the limelight and operate his restaurant named after his beloved wife. As we see in a tender scene at the cemetery where the grave of his brother-in-law, a key member of his team, is right next to that of his wife's, he has lost everyone dear to him. He has no desire to return to the profession, but Donnie will not give up. What happens when he wears down Rocky's defenses, turning the story into a surrogate father-son tale will leave you with a lump in the throat, especially at the climax of the Big Fight, the film very much following the plot at this point of the original Rocky film. As in some of the other Rocky films, the filmmakers show that even what we see as the villain has redeeming qualities.

There is, of course, an inspiring sequence of intense training, Rocky employing some unusual techniques. During the course of this Donnie attracts a following of locals, who become strong supporters. Also, a second struggle is introduced when Rocky is diagnosed as having Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. Worn out physically and emotionally, the sorrowful ex-boxer is ready to give up and submit to death. At this point Donnie becomes mentor and supporter. There is also a love story between the young man and aspiring singer Bianca (Tessa Thompson), who first draws his attention when she plays

her music far too loudly in the apartment just below his. Her story also involves a struggle in that she is slowly losing her hearing, not a good career development for a singer.

As many critics have observed, this heart-tugging film, rising to the greatness of the first of the series, is a fitting way to close out the series, giving Stallone, with those soulful eyes and craggy face, a fine opportunity to be included in the running for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar.

This film with a set of discussion questions will be in the Feb. issue of VP.