

Rocky Balboa (2006)

Rated PG. Our ratings: V-5; L-3 ; S/N-3 . Running time: 1 hour 42 min.

Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerub'babel:

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 4:6

I always thought that Sylvester Stallone should have ended the Rocky series after the first film at best, and at least following the second. But the series went on and on, spiraling downward in quality. And now, 30 years after the first Rocky, and 16 years after what many fervently hoped would be the last (Rocky V), comes Rocky VI—er, I mean Rocky Balboa. Is Mr. Stallone now punch drunk after taking so many hits filming the series? And has that downward spiral reached a new low? To my surprise, the answer to the last question is "No."

Director/star Stallone again Rocky Balboa shows what a good writer he is, returning to his old neighborhood and featuring such down to earth characters as Paulie (Burt Young) his brother in law. Rocky's son is grown and working in the business world, but obviously embarrassed by his blue collar father, even though people keep coming up to the old man to greet him. Rocky owns a small Italian restaurant, Adrian's, named after his now deceased wife, where many of the customers are strangers who come

to see the former champ and listen to one of his ring stories. There are also regulars, several of whom are down on their luck ex-boxers whom Rocky never turns away.

The reigning ring champion is Mason Dixon (Antonio Tarver), an arrogant boxer bedeviled by the press because all of his victorious bouts have been against obviously mediocre fighters. It seems that there are no tough opponents out there. Then, when a sports channel stages a computerized match between Rocky and Dixon, and Rocky is the predicted winner, Rocky gets a far out idea that draws him out of his funk—and of course, leads to the kind of ridicule he experienced before his first fight—he will challenge Dixon in an exhibition match.

The above premise must seem implausible, but the film and actors pull off the stunt, making the film an enjoyable one to watch. The training sequence is shorter this time, but still exhilarating with the themes from Bill Conti's score. I almost expected the audience to cheer him when he again ran up the steps leading up to the Philadelphia Art Museum, as they did 30 years ago. The ending is satisfying, and the old theme of the underdog going the distance is as inspiring as ever. I still hate boxing, but must admit that some of the most enjoyable dramas to be seen are boxing films with characters sustained by courage and love.