



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Raging Bull

Sitting in a movie theatre as the credits rolled on *The Death Collector* (1975), *Raging Bull*'s casting director Cis Corman felt they could have found their Joey LaMotta. The film hadn't made much of an impression, but the actor playing Joe, a debt enforcer for the mob, had. His name was Joe Pesci. Corman sent Robert De Niro a copy of the film. 'That's how I saw Joe for the first time,' recalls De Niro. He made a call to Scorsese. 'Marty, you've got to see this guy. This guy is interesting.' 'I liked him,' remembers Scorsese. 'What I liked was he seemed like he was so authentic that he, how should I say it, was an actor but he was not an actor. Simple.'

It was left to Corman to track Pesci down. She found her man living above an Italian restaurant he was managing – Amici's, a popular Bronx eatery on Arthur Avenue in New York's Little Italy. De Niro and Corman visited Pesci at work to sound him out. The news wasn't good. Pesci was on a hiatus from performing. 'It wasn't so much that I was finished, it was that I was disappointed, I wasn't getting anywhere,' Pesci says today. 'I had been performing my whole life, from when I was a kid. I was out of Hollywood where you're at everybody's mercy all the time and you wind up being a sissy. You get to the point out there where you bump into a wall and say, "Excuse me," so as not to offend anybody so you can get a job. I wanted to get away from all that and get back into the position where everybody treated you like a man. The fella with the restaurant had been very nice to me and it was a different way to go for a while. I had made the decision that I didn't want to go back into acting unless it was something really terrific.' And that 'something really terrific' was just about to appear with his part in *Raging Bull*.

The Joe Pesci who Robert De Niro contacted was adamant he wanted nothing more to do with acting. He was done. He was finished. Undeterred, De Niro returned, this time with the *Raging Bull* screenplay in hand and with Scorsese and the film's producer Irwin Winkler in tow. Pesci still wasn't convinced. 'I had hoped that working with Bob and Marty, this could finally be the one, but the part of Bob's brother was small, and I figured they should give it to a working actor – you know someone who really wanted it,' recalls Pesci.

Scorsese found Pesci to be 'guarded and reserved. It was almost as though he didn't want the part. He didn't want any part of the industry in fact; for his own reasons.' Pesci wanted to be treated like a man. 'I wanted a part that proved I was good. The brother as written at that point didn't have that much to do, but if it had been a bigger part – almost co-starring with Bob – then I would take that chance. I just didn't want to do another part in a movie that meant nothing for me and everything for everybody else.'

Scorsese and De Niro went away, then some weeks later returned with Paul Schrader's rewrite of Mardik Martin's original screenplay in hand. The role of Joey LaMotta now expanded, De Niro and Scorsese returned to the restaurant hoping that they had addressed Pesci's concerns. 'Thanks to Paul Schrader, who is a terrific writer and came up with the idea of bringing Joey into the story, the part I could see was going to be really great. I said, "Yes, I

would love to be involved”,’ says Pesci. Using the screenplay as a starting point, Pesci and De Niro began to improvise, and sparks began to fly. Pesci had acquired the taste again, and over the coming months continued to meet with De Niro and Scorsese. Scorsese was excited. Pesci was everything he felt an actor should be, authentic and believable in equal measures.

‘Whenever he said anything, he just seemed so perfect for the part,’ Scorsese recalls. De Niro and Pesci were bonding. ‘We got like brothers,’ agreed Pesci. ‘And it wasn’t fake.’

Over the intervening weeks and further read-throughs, Scorsese and De Niro knew they had their Joey LaMotta. But other actors were still being spoken of. News reached Pesci that he was not the only actor in the frame. ‘I got mad. I told them I wasn’t reading any more,’ Pesci recalls. He gave them back their screenplay and walked out, saying: ‘Here’s your script, if I can’t play Joey, get yourself another boy.’ ‘We took it slowly,’ recalls De Niro, ‘but we knew he was the one to play my brother. We did see another kid from Manhattan – and he was terrific – but Joe was strong, and we saw Joey LaMotta not just as a poor little brother, but as tough as Jake. That was important and we knew Pesci was the one.’ With Pesci mollified, he and De Niro moved in together, taking a penthouse suite at the Mayflower Hotel. They were together constantly, creating a strong relationship – a bond between two brothers.

‘Once we knew we were going to do the movie together, we were together all the time’ recalls Pesci. ‘That’s how Bob likes to work and it is a great idea, because it allows you to become the characters. This is what you have to be prepared to do when you do these kinds of movies with Marty, and that is what I love about him. You get to know your character inside and out, and everybody who is in his life inside and out, and everybody around them inside and out.’ With the affiliation between De Niro and Pesci cementing, their ability to ad-lib was creating a depth of dialogue, which Scorsese was inserting in the screenplay. ‘I would throw in my ad-libbing,’ recalls Pesci. ‘Bob liked to ad-lib as well and I was quite good at it, I thought. I knew the lingo well from the Bronx, living and working there.’

As well as the dialogue, there were the physical preparations. De Niro had been in intensive training in the boxing ring, and Pesci, too, had taken to the ring and begun boxing training in order to gain an understanding of the mindset of Joey LaMotta. ‘I learned to box,’ Pesci recalls. ‘I went to the gym, got myself fit and sparred – not with Bob because he was a lot bigger than me. Bob and Marty wanted me to meet Joey so I did. We were both a little short but I don’t think there was any real likeness between us.

I made a lot of those choices myself. I always give my characters a walk, a way of talking. I always do that, because it helps me get into a character better, rather than using too much of myself. ‘I was amused because I remember how he [the real Joey LaMotta] looked at me,’ continues Pesci. ‘He thought a young handsome guy was going to play him, and looked a little disappointed, but he didn’t hurt my feelings; it was funny to me.’

One thing in particular Pesci applauds is Scorsese’s sensitivity towards his actors. ‘Marty would never come up to you in front of other people and tell you what to do, he always spoke to you on the side, just you and him together,’ Pesci says. ‘He made you feel that it was something important between you. It didn’t matter if you were the elevator operator in a scene, he would speak to you alone; he made everyone feel that their part was one of the most important in the movie.’

One of the most difficult scenes to shoot in the film was the reunion scene between Jake and Joey, after Jake's jealousy and anger toward his brother resulted in them not speaking to each other for seven years. Scorsese was adamant that the two actors should not see each other until they met on set. Pesci remembers it really hurt not being able to see his friend. When the day came to shoot the scene, Pesci recalls Scorsese running between their trailers saying, 'Let's see what happens on the set. Let's do it, let's do it. Just say what you feel.' Then after Scorsese left, Pesci heard a knock on his trailer door. It was De Niro. 'Joe, I know Marty doesn't want us to see each other, but there is just one thing I wanna tell, just one thing.' 'What's that, Bob?' 'When we first see each other, every actor in Hollywood would probably want to cry and really go for it. Well, fight it, fight that feeling; be a man and fight it.'

As scripted, the two brothers were to meet and Joey was to spill his coffee as Jake tried to cuddle him. But De Niro's huge bulk and Pesci's weight loss [De Niro famously put on weight to play the coda of the film, which shows Jake LaMotta years after the fame and out of the ring, but Pesci in turn had to lose weight to make his ageing believable] saw the scene play out differently to how it had been planned. 'I couldn't get out of his embrace,' recalls Pesci. 'He was so big, and he just held me, and the coffee never fell, so I had no reason to be mad at him except like, "Come on, I don't want to do this." I remember I was going to cry, but if you see the film and really look at it and listen to my voice, you'll see I was going to cry but I stopped. I just choked and went, "Yeah, yeah, I know." I really fought it, just as Bob advised.'

Scorsese went with the first take. 'Every actor in Hollywood would love to be opposite Robert De Niro in a Martin Scorsese film and at the end cry in each other's arms and beat each other up and go for the big dramatic ending,' says Pesci. 'But I remember when I first saw the scene I was so thankful to Bob, because I would never have thought to have played it that way, and it felt so real. Bob said to fight it and that is what I did.' Their gentle embrace was note perfect. It was all that was needed. To this day Pesci is convinced that 'Marty never knew that Bob came to see me that day.'

Jay Glennie, edited from *Raging Bull: The Making Of* available from Coattail Publications: www.coattail-publications.com, extracts published on *Sight & Sound*, May 2021

RAGING BULL

Director: Martin Scorsese
©/Presented by: United Artists
Producers: Irwin Winkler, Robert Chartoff
Produced in Association with: Peter Savage
Associate Producer: Hal Polaire
Production Accountants: Meryle Selinger, Lydia Resurreccion
Production Office Co-ordinators: Donna Smith, Helene Spinner, Moira Kelly
Production Manager: James D. Brubaker
Location Managers: Dale Benson, Chris Cronyn
1st Assistant Directors: Jerry Grandey, Allan Wertheim
2nd Assistant Directors: Joan Feinstein, Elie Cohn
Script Supervisor: Hannah Scheel
 Casting: Cis Corman
Screenplay: Paul Schrader, Mardik Martin
Based on the book by: Jake La Motta, Joseph Carter, Peter Savage
Excerpts from On the Waterfront by: Budd Schulberg
Director of Photography: Michael Chapman
Camera Operators: Joe Marquette, Eddie Gold
1st Assistant Cameramen: Dustin Blauvelt, Ed Ramirez
2nd Assistant Cameramen: Richard Fee, Bruce McCallum
Key Grips: Ed Quinn, Robert Miller
Gaffers: Richard Quinlan, Ray Mendez
Still Photographers: Christine Loss, Brian Hamill
Special Effects: Raymond Klein, Max E. Wood
Editor: Thelma Schoonmaker
Associate Editors: George Trirogoff, Yoshio Kishi, Erik T. Ramberg, Mark Warner, Susan E. Morse
New York Production Designer: Gene Rudolf
Los Angeles Visual Consultant: Gene Rudolf
Art Directors (Los Angeles): Alan Manser, Kirk Axtell
Art Director (New York): Sheldon Haber
Set Decorators: Fred Weiler, Philip Abramson
Property Masters: Emily Ferry, Tom Saccio
Costume Designers: Richard Bruno, John Boxer
Make-up Artists: Frank Westmore, Mike Maggi
Make-up Created by: Michael Westmore
Hairstylists: Jean Burt Reilly, Verne Caruso, Mary Keats, Mona Orr
Title Design by: Dan Perri
Opticals: Modern Film Effects, Movie Magic, EFX Unlimited
Black and White Timing: Jim Henry
Sound Mixers: Les Lazarowitz, Michael Evje
Re-recording Engineers: Donald O. Mitchell, Bill Nicholson, David J. Kimball
Sound Effects Supervising Editor: Frank Warner
Boxing Technical Adviser: Al Silvani
Technical Adviser: Frank Topham
Special Assistance: Emmet Murphy, Rob Hummel
Consultant: Jake La Motta
Research: Gloria Norris
Stunt Co-ordinator: Jim Nickerson

Cast

Robert De Niro (*Jake La Motta*)
Joe Pesci (*Joey La Motta*)
Cathy Moriarty (*Vickie La Motta*)
Frank Vincent (*Salvy*)
Bernie Allen (*comedian*)
Nicholas Colasanto (*Tommy Como*)
Joseph Bono (*Guido*)
Mario Gallo (*Mario*)
Lori Anne Flax (*Irma*)
Theresa Saldana (*Lenore*)
Bill Hanrahan (*Eddie Eagan*)
Frank Adonis (*Patsy*)
Don Dunphy (*himself*)

Frank Topham (*Topy*)
Charles Scorsese (*Charlie, man with Como*)
Rita Bennett (*Emma, Miss 48's*)
James V. Christy (*Dr Pinto*)
Michael Badalucco (*soda fountain clerk*)
Thomas Beansy Lobasso (*Beansy*)
Paul Forrest (*monsignor*)
Peter Petrella (*Johnny*)
Sal Serafino Thomasseti (*Webster Hall bouncer*)
Mardik Martin (*Copa waiter*)
Geraldine Smith (*Janet*)
Maryjane Lauria (*girl 1*)
Linda Artuso (*girl 2*)
Peter Savage (*Jackie Curtie*)
Daniel P. Conte (*Detroit promoter*)
Joe Malanga (*bodyguard*)
Sabine Turco Jr, Steve Orlando, Silvio Garcia Jr (*bouncers at Copa*)
John Arceri (*maitre d'*)
Joseph A. Morale (*man at table 1*)
James Dimodica (*man at table 2*)
Robert Uricola (*man outside cab*)
Andrea Orlando (*woman in cab*)
Allan Malamud (*reporter at Jake's house*)
D.J. Blair (*state attorney Bronson*)
Laura James (*Mrs Bronson*)
Richard McMurray (*J.R.*)
Mary Albee (*underage ID girl*)
Liza Katz (*woman with ID girl*)
Candy Moore (*Linda*)
Richard A. Berk (*musician 1*)
Theodore Sauners (*musician 2*)
Noah Young (*musician 3*)
Nick Trisko (*bartender Carlo*)
Lou Tiano (*Ricky*)
Bob Evan Collins (*arresting deputy 1*)
Wally Berns (*arresting deputy 2*)
Allan Joseph (*jeweller*)
Bob Aaron (*prison guard 1*)
Glenn Leigh Marshall (*prison guard 2*)
Martin Scorsese (*Barbizon stagehand*)
Bill Mazer (*reporter*)*
Mike Miles (*sparring partner*)*
Angelo Lamonea, Chuck Hicks (*Janiro fight cornermen*)*
Walt LaRue (*Fox fight cornerman 1*)*
Gene Allan Poe (*Audie Murphy*)*
Gil Perkins (*Dauthuille fight cornerman 1*)*
Gene Borkan (*Dauthuille fight cornerman 2*)*
Thomas Murphy (*J.R.'s friend*)*
Leonard D'John (*New Yorker 1*)*
Bobby Giordano (*New Yorker 2*)*
Charles Guardino (*New Yorker 3*)*
Vincent Barbi (*New Yorker 4*)*
John Turturro (*man at table*)*
Michael Chapman (*photographer with cigar and flashbulb*)*

fighters

Floyd Anderson (*Jimmy Reeves*)
Johnny Barnes (*Sugar Ray Robinson*)
Eddie Mustafa Muhammad (*Billy Fox*)
Kevin Mahon (*Tony Janiro*)
Louis Raftis (*Marcel Cerdan*)
Johnny Turner (*Laurent Dauthuille*)

USA 1980©

129 mins

* Uncredited

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