



CLOSE-UP: RYAN COOGLER

Creed

Coogler revitalised the Rocky franchise with his second collaboration with lead actor Michael B Jordan. It's nothing short of exhilarating, with fluid and immersive fight scenes, as well as a surprisingly emotional arc for Sylvester Stallone's Balboa. With a third *Creed* film due in cinemas later this year (directed by Jordan), there's no better time to revisit this origin story.

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There are several things that demonstrate the deftness with which director Ryan Coogler handles even the hoariest tropes of Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* franchise, but the most prominent is his approach to Bill Conti's iconic theme song, a marriage of orchestral pomp and brass-driven disco that topped the Billboard Hot 100 at around the same time that Stallone's underdog boxing saga staged its own upset victory at the 1977 Academy Awards. Though reworked versions of Conti's theme appear in the five sequels (four of them directed by Stallone) over the next three decades, it receives a more playful overhaul in *Creed*, Coogler's surprisingly thoughtful and stylish reboot-slash-generational-torch-passing. Along with its inevitable use as a sample in a hip-hop track, trace elements recur throughout Ludwig Göransson's score, which is unusually restrained for a movie that otherwise strives to hit all the beats required of a Hollywood sports drama.

Indeed, Conti's blustery fanfare doesn't arrive in full force until Adonis Johnson (Michael B. Jordan) approaches the ring for the climactic fight wearing a pair of stars-and-stripes shorts, just like his dad Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers) in *Rocky I* (1976), *II* (1979), *III* (1982) and *IV* (1985). It reappears one last time in a quieter, jazzier incarnation as Adonis and Rocky make their inevitable journey up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. By this time, Coogler has had many more opportunities to impress, having revitalised a seemingly decrepit movie property and elicited a little grace from the old Expendable himself, who gives a much richer performance as the elderly Rocky than he did in *Rocky Balboa* (2006), his own stab at a franchise coda and potential restart.

Even viewers who have less patience with boxing-pic clichés must concede that Coogler – as the maker of a well-regarded American indie who's been enlisted to perform artistic CPR on a dubious studio project – has survived a scenario that has tripped up many other young directors. He again gets strong assistance from Jordan, his lead in *Fruitvale Station* (2013), a Sundance prizewinner that followed the final hours of a young Californian before his death at the hands of a transit cop. While Jordan plausibly channels the braggadocio that was Weathers's forte, his Adonis is far more nuanced than Apollo ever was, which is not so hard, since the latter was essentially a cartoon version of Muhammad Ali minus Islam and politics. For

one thing, Adonis is unabashedly sensitive, getting teary several times and successfully wooing his boho neighbour without resorting to smooth talk.

The fact that Adonis remains a convincingly formidable fighter who values personal fortitude over false fronts of street cred makes the character the very model of manhood for the age of Drake. Parallels between Coogler's hero and the ubiquitous Canadian rapper also extend to tricky matters of class and privilege. As a product of foster homes as well as the Creed family fortune, Adonis doesn't share the straightforward started-from-the-bottom narrative arc that's typical of underdog sports-drama heroes. (Drake has faced the same issue, having grown up in an upper-class neighbourhood in Toronto and entered showbiz as an actor on a teen TV show.) In some respects, he's an alien on the rough streets of north Philly, where Rocky sends him to train. It's a testament to Coogler's faith in the strength of Adonis's central crisis – in which he must grapple with the legacy of the father he never met and prove he deserves the famous surname – that he doesn't contrive a real threat to his economic status. Evidently, failure for this hero means a retreat to mom's mansion.

Another smart update is the decision by Coogler and his DP Maryse Alberti to eschew a high-speed cutting style in favour of Alfonso Cuarón-style long travelling shots, used to exhilarating effect in the first fight scene. Elsewhere, they make a big slo-mo moment seem bigger by having Adonis run alongside members of an urban dirt-bike gang of the kind seen tearing up Baltimore in Lofty Nathan's documentary *12 O'Clock Boys* (2013).

Creed is less fleet-footed in other respects, occasionally becoming bogged down by the preponderance of training montages and the initially tender but ultimately perfunctory romantic storyline. But to anyone who prefers the crowdpleasing bravura of *Rocky II* and *III* over the unpalatable mix of faux grit and uncut schmaltz in all the other instalments (including the overrated original), Coogler's effort punches far above its weight.

Jason Anderson, *Sight & Sound*, February 2016

CREED

Director: Ryan Coogler

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A Chartoff Winkler *production*

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Development's Post Production Credit Program

Presented by: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc, Warner Bros. Pictures

In association with: New Line Cinema

Executive Producer: Nicolas Stern

Produced by: Irwin Winkler, Robert Chartoff, Charles Winkler,

Billy Chartoff, David Winkler, Kevin King-Templeton, Sylvester Stallone

Unit Production Manager: Barbara Kelly

Production Accountant: Kevin Landry

Location Manager: Patricia Taggart

Post-production Supervisor: Nathalie Samanon

1st Assistant Director: Donald L. Sparks

Script Supervisor: Robb Foglia

CASTING BY: Francine Maisler, Kathleen Driscoll-Mohler

Screenplay by: Ryan Coogler, Aaron Covington

Story by: Ryan Coogler

Based on characters created by: Sylvester Stallone

Director of Photography: Maryse Alberti

A Camera Operator: Benjamin Semanoff

Steadicam Operator: Benjamin Semanoff

Stills Photographer: Barry Wetcher

Visual Effects Supervisors: John P. Nugent, Alison O'Brien

Visual Effects by: Sandbox FX Inc., BigHug FX Inc., East Side Effects Inc.

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Patrick Edward White

Editors: Michael P. Shawver, Claudia Castello

Production Designer: Hannah Beachler

Art Director: Jesse Rosenthal

Costume Designers: Emma Potter, Antoinette Messam

Department Head Make-up: Corey Castellano

Department Head Hair: Rita Parillo

Title Designer: Richie Adams

Main and End Titles: River Road Creative

End Crawl: Scarlet Letters

Original Score and Songs: Ludwig Göransson

Orchestra Conducted by: Pete Anthony

Orchestrations by: Jeff Atmajian, Henri Wilkinson, Erik Arvinder,

Per Gunnar Juliusson

Production Sound Mixer: Damian Canelos

Re-recording Mixers: Steve Boeddeker, Brandon Proctor

Supervising Sound Editor: Benjamin A. Burt

Stunt Co-ordinator: Clayton Barber

Boxing Consultants: Jack Reiss, Greg Sirb, Bob Bennett

Unit Publicist: Frances Fiore

Cast

Michael B. Jordan (*Adonis Johnson Creed*)

Sylvester Stallone (*Robert 'Rocky' Balboa*)

Tessa Thompson (*Bianca*)

Phylicia Rashad (*Mary Anne Creed*)

Anthony Bellew (*'Pretty' Ricky Conlan*)

Graham McTavish (*Tommy Holiday*)

Andre Ward (*Danny Wheeler, 'Stuntman'*)

Ritchie Costner (*Pete Sporino*)

Jacob 'Stitch' Duran (*Stitch*)

Malik Bazille (*Amir*)

Ricardo 'Padman' McGill (*Padman*)

Gabriel Rosado (*Leo Sporino, 'The Lion'*)

USA 2015

133 mins

NEW RELEASES

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From Mon 17 Oct

Triangle of Sadness

From Fri 28 Oct

The Greenaway Alphabet

From Fri 11 Nov

Aftersun

From Fri 18 Nov

What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?

(*Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?*)

From Fri 25 Nov

CLOSE-UP: RYAN COOGLER

Fruitvale Station

Sat 22 Oct 12:30; Sat 29 Oct 16:15; Mon 14 Nov 20:50

Creed

Sat 22 Oct 20:25; Sun 13 Nov 18:00

Black Panther

Sun 6 Nov 18:10; Sat 12 Nov 20:20

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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