



The Cinematic Life of Boxing

Body and Soul

Body and Soul

Directed by: Robert Rossen

©: Roberts Productions

Presented by: Enterprise Studios

Produced by: Bob Roberts

Executive Production Manager: Joseph C. Gilpin

Assistant Director: Robert Aldrich

Original Screenplay by: Abraham Polonsky

Director of Photography: James Wong Howe

Supervising Editor: Francis D. Lyon

Film Editor: Robert Parrish

Montages Directed by: Gunther V. Fritsch

Art Direction: Nathan Juran

Set Decorations: Edward J. Boyle

Wardrobe Designed by: Marion Herwood Keyes

Make-up Supervisor: Gustaf M. Norin

Music Composed by: Hugo Friedhofer

The Song 'Body and Soul' Music by: Johnny Green

The Song 'Body and Soul' Lyrics by:

Edward Heyman, Robert Sour, Frank Eyton

Musical Director: Rudolph Polk

Conducted by: Emil Newman

Sound Recording by: Sound Services Inc.

Sound System: Western Electric

Sound Engineer: Frank Webster

Cast:

John Garfield (*Charley Davis*)

Lilli Palmer (*Peg Born*)

Hazel Brooks (*Alice*)

Anne Revere (*Anna Davis*)

William Conrad (*Quinn*)

Joseph Pevney (*Shorty Polaski*)

Lloyd Goff (*Roberts*)

Canada Lee (*Ben Chaplin*)

Art Smith (*David Davis*) *

James Burke (*Arnold*) *

Virginia Gregg (*Irma*) *

Peter Virgo (*drummer*) *

Joe Devlin (*Prince*) *

Shimen Ruskin (*grocer*) *

Mary Currier (*Miss Tedder*) *

Milton Kibbee (*Dan*) *

Tim Ryan (*Shelton*) *

Artie Dorrell (*Jack Marlowe*) *

Cyril Ring (*Victor*) *

Glen Lee (*Marina*) *

John Indrisano (*referee*) *

Dan Tobey (*fight announcer*) *

USA 1947

106 mins

35mm

A BFI National Archive print

* Uncredited

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SIGHT AND SOUND

That *Body and Soul* is a seminal film is indisputable. The trouble with it as a seminal film is that it has disappeared into its accrued significance (its germinology?), a film of more context than content. First, there are the lists that can be spun out of it, the eight future directors, no less, at work here under Rossen: from the significant (Robert Aldrich, Abraham Polonsky) to the so-so (Robert Parrish) to the rest (Francis D. Lyon, Nathan Juran, William Conrad, Joseph Pevney, dialogue director Don Weiss), and even veteran cinematographer James Wong Howe with *Go, Man, Go* in 1953. Then there is its production history, the fact that it was the first venture of the independent Enterprise Studios, formed to give filmmakers greater control over their work (Robert Aldrich: 'They had a very populist concept about how pictures should be made ... It was a marvellous place to work but the pictures were terrible! ... only one was moderately successful, *Body and Soul*, with John Garfield. And that cost too much because Rossen was afraid of Jimmy Wong Howe and the picture took too long').

Principally, of course, it is a seminal film about boxing as one of the 'rackets', and as a statement of the populist ideology of men like Rossen and Polonsky, political writers with affiliations with 30s Communism behind them and the blacklist ahead of them, tilting at windmills like big business, the manipulation of the masses, and the economic exploitation of the dreams of honest men. Honesty and corruption are the bywords here: the economic arguments come laden with such moral dread, the study of the evils of capitalism is so individualistically focused, that it is no wonder the scenarios take off into the realms of sin and perdition, temptation and redemption (among the temptations in *Body and Soul* is not just filthy lucre but the slinky torch singer parodied in the 'archetypal' boxing story in *Movie Movie*). In Rossen's terms, it's not hard to jump from the solemn battle of good and evil for the soul of John Garfield to the question teasingly put to Warren Beatty by the mental patient called 'Dostoevsky' in *Lilith*: 'Do you believe that if there is no god that there can be no such thing as virtue?' (Is Rossen the 'Dostoevsky of the Cinema'? The Australian publication *Film Index* has made so bold.)

Body and Soul is constantly talking about money, but its thinking is persistently existential. In a way, this also exemplifies the plight of the 'political' writer in pre-war Hollywood, who felt the need to present his social criticism as something else. In interview (*Film Quarterly*, Spring 1962), Polonsky has even referred to this as a kind of self-censorship, and claimed that filmmakers like Ford and Capra, conservatives unself-conscious about their political attitudes, could more openly introduce 'progressive' material. Polonsky's dialogue for *Body and Soul* crisply and pungently works the divide between economics and metaphysics, giving most of its best lines to Roberts, the crooked fight promoter who represents the System and whose talk, to borrow F. Scott Fitzgerald's phrase, is full of money: 'Everything is addition and subtraction, the rest is conversation'; 'Take the money – it ain't like people, it got no memory, it don't think.' As would be even more evident in Polonsky's own subsequent directorial debut for Enterprise, *Force of Evil*, language in *Body and Soul* works another divide between heightened vernacular and buried metaphor.

The Cinematic Life of Boxing

Body and Soul

Mon 30 Mar 20:40; Sat 11 Apr 12:10

Season Introduction Talk + World Premiere:

Learning the Ropes + Q&A with director Ryan Pickard, actor Ray Winstone and former World Middleweight Champion Darren Barker
Tue 31 Mar 18:15

Raging Bull

Wed 1 Apr 14:30; Sat 11 Apr 17:50; Sun 19 Apr 15:15; Mon 20 Apr 20:15 (+ intro by season curator Dr Clive Chijioke Nwonka)

Fighters

Wed 1 Apr 20:40; Tue 28 Apr 18:00 (+ Q&A with boxers Jimmy and Mark Tibbs)

TwentyFourSeven

Thu 2 Apr 20:50; Tue 21 Apr 18:15 (+ Q&A with director Shane Meadows)

Rocco and His Brothers

Rocco e i suoi Fratelli
Fri 3 Apr 14:00; Sat 18 Apr 14:10; Sun 26 Apr 14:45

Rocky

Fri 3 Apr 20:30; Thu 30 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by season curator Dr Clive Chijioke Nwonka)

When We Were Kings

Sat 4 Apr 14:50; Sat 25 Apr 18:20

The Boxer

Sat 4 Apr 17:50; Tue 14 Apr 18:00 (+ Q&A with boxer Barry McGuigan)

Fat City

Mon 6 Apr 12:00; Mon 27 Apr 18:10

Ali

Mon 6 Apr 14:15; Fri 17 Apr 20:00

Million Dollar Baby

Wed 8 Apr 20:30; Wed 15 Apr 18:20 (+ discussion with broadcaster and athlete Jeanette Kwakye and boxing writer Ruth Rapper)

The Fighter

Thu 9 Apr 20:45; Sun 19 Apr 18:30

The Hurricane (unconfirmed)

Sun 12 Apr 17:50; Fri 24 Apr 20:15

Jawbone

Thu 16 Apr 18:15 (+ Q&A with actor and writer Johnny Harris); Tue 21 Apr 20:50

The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Mäki

Hymyilevä mies

Fri 17 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by season curator Dr Clive Chijioke Nwonka); Sat 25 Apr 15:15

Creed

Sat 18 Apr 16:30; Mon 27 Apr 20:20

Journeyman

Mon 20 Apr 18:15; Wed 29 Apr 20:45

UK Premiere: The Featherweight

Wed 22 Apr 18:10

Rossen's direction follows suit, a combination of conventional naturalism (shading into documentary 'fights' coverage, as in the famous climactic bout which Wong Howe shot on roller skates) and some *noir* stylisation, the exaggerated angles and camera movements of the framing sequences in which Charley sweats out his moral crisis on the night of the big fight. The combination is in itself a Hollywood convention, and it is largely a matter of predilection whether one emphasises the element of *noir* or reportage in those 30s Warners films, 'torn from the headlines of today', on which Rossen worked as a writer. The history of his development as a director is also the trace of those two tendencies (he later expressed an admiration for neorealism, and shot *All the King's Men* as far as possible on location and in natural light).

On the one hand, this makes him rather hard to describe stylistically (realist, expressionist, documentarist ...), and on the other is his distinguishing feature, because Rossen continues, beyond the 30s and 40s, to work over the moral, ideological and political problems that went with the style – through the desert of the 50s (*Alexander the Great*, *They Came to Cordura*) to the 60s, when the discussion of moral problems becomes a picture of soul states (*The Hustler*, *Lilith*). To the extent that *Body and Soul* is ambivalent about its terms – it's all there in the title; the film wants to talk about capitalism and the soul – there are already intimations of this. The moral contest also has an aspect of dream (in which begin responsibilities), mainly evident in the strangely convoluted structure: Charley wakes from a nightmare on the night of his big fight, rushes home to an unsuccessful reunion with mother and sweetheart, and then proceeds to his dressing-room, where the rest of the film then unfolds in flashback. It's an aspect also of such story elements as Charley's relationship with Peg, who is his salvation in that she is doubly removed from his world (with a foreign background and artistic aspirations), and even of the persona of John Garfield, both pugnacious and soft, or as one commentator has put it, 'a combination of tough cynicism and urban dreaminess.'

Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, January 1986

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