

'Creed' nearly as good as original 'Rocky'



By Howie Nave

The best thing for both “Rocky” fans and those who’ve been under a rock for 40 years having never seen a “Rocky” film, naming this movie “Creed” was the best move ever because it stands alone on its own. But we all know ultimately it’s a “Rocky VII” flick and outside of the first one the best in the franchise since Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone) took on the menacing Clubber Lang (Mr. T) in “Rocky III.”

What director J.J. Abrams did to the rebooting of the ailing “Star Trek” franchise in 2009, 29-year-old writer/director Ryan Coogler has done the same here with “Creed.” What a rush it must have been having someone like Coogler, not only taking on the monumental task of directing a classic franchise, but as a kid being a true fan of the “Rocky” franchise. Coogler wasn’t even born when the first “Rocky” was released back in 1976.

“Creed” is the first in the “Rocky” franchise that Stallone didn’t write and the first where Stallone is cast more as a supporting role. But make no mistake about it he’s the thread

that has carried us through this journey from the beginning. What a journey, too, as we now find Rocky running a restaurant named Adrian's, after his late wife and we're reminded of those around him that we all saw in the previous movies who are now gone. Life seems to be a waiting game now, as Rocky knows all the glory years of love and triumph are long gone and the last thing he wants to do is resurrect the past.



At the same time in a parallel story we're introduced to actor Michael B. Jordan (who Coogler directed in "Fruitvale Station") as Adonis Johnson (who goes by Donny), the illegitimate son of Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers), Rocky's first opponent and the man who would jump start his boxing career giving him a shot at the title and eventually wind up being his best friend. After Apollo dies (in the very lame "Rocky IV"), Adonis ends up in

foster care with a huge chip on his shoulder and who is known for causing fights. The young Creed is taken in by Apollo's widow (Phylicia Rashad) and raised in more comfortable surroundings. But comfort doesn't seem to mellow Adonis whose been spending his evenings driving south of the border to box in seedy venues.

And, yes, you can almost predict what's going to happen now and how long before Rocky meets the son of his late best friend, Apollo Creed. There's much more than that trust me, but you know it is inevitable.

The similarities between "Creed" and the first "Rocky" are very apparent, but make no mistake about it, this is director Ryan Coogler's movie and brings out first class performances from the relatively new Jordan and veteran Stallone. The supporting cast is also top notch from Donny's girlfriend,

Bianca (Tessa Thompson) to “Pretty” Ricky Conlan (played by real-life UK boxing champ Tony “The Bomber” Bellew). Some of the scenes are amazing; particularly one in the first fight scene showing this one long, uninterrupted shot. The film’s score by Ludwig Goransson is excellent, but I got shivers hearing Bill Conti’s iconic Rocky theme and seeing Rocky on those Philadelphia steps one more time (and you will too).

“Rocky” received 10 Academy Award nominations in nine categories winning three for best picture, best director and best film editing. I think “Creed” is going to receive a few, and wouldn’t that be the coolest taking an Oscar home after 40 years?

“Creed” clocks in at 2 hours, 12 minutes and is rated PG-13 for violence, language and some sensuality.

Howie Nave is host/emcee/manager of The Improv at Harveys. You can hear him Monday-Friday 6 to 10am on KRLT FM-93.9.