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Todayâ??s AFI Movie Club film: ALI (2001)

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Today Iâ??m pleased to share the AFI Movie Club selection, *Ali,* starring Will Smith in the title role and featuring AFI Trustee Jada Pinkett Smith as Sonji Roi. Will and Jada have been key supporters of AFI through the Will & Jada Smith Family Foundation â?? with an emphasis on supporting and promoting female and nonbinary filmmakers through grants to AFIâ??s Directing Workshop for Women and Young Women in Film.

Growing up I was exposed to â??The Mouthâ?• Howard Cosell and a number of larger than life sporting personalities including Broadway Joe Namath, Evil Knievel, and the Harlem Globetrotters, to name just a few. But the greatest by name was Muhammad Ali. His banters with Cosell were must-see viewings as were his legendary boxing matches. Being the youngest of seven brothers and two sisters, I was all in when called to the television for an Ali match whether with Joe Frazier, Ken Norton, Jerry Quarry, or Mr. Cosell.

One year, our mom took a job that required a lot of traveling. And. as luck would have it, while she was walking through Chicago-Oâ??Hare International Airport, so was Muhammad Ali. Mom didnâ??t know any strangers and was well familiar with Ali. So, as moms do, she asked The Champ for an autograph for her seven boys at home who were his biggest fans. Muhammad agreed but only if Mom accompanied him across the terminal. Mom did and The Champ rewarded her with an autograph repeated seven times on a piece of paper. What does Mohammad Ali mean to you?

Hereâ??s Screenwriter Randy McKinnon, AFI Class of 2017, introducing the film for AFI and Director Micheal Mann in an exclusive AFI archive on making *Ali*:

HOW TO WATCH *ALI* NOW

The movie doesnâ??t end at the credits. Engage with your family, friends, and others like you who love the movies. Check out the AFI Movie Club Discussion Questions for this movie and post your responses in the comment section!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

-What does Muhammad Ali mean to you?

-What made Muhammad Ali one of the most iconic boxers in history?

-Muhammad Ali lost his title, lost his boxing license and almost went to jail because of his principles. Do you think his beliefs would be received differently today?

-What is the significance of Muhammad Ali and Howard Cosellâ??s relationship?

-How did Will Smithâ??s extensive preparation enhance his performance in the film?

-Why does the film ALI continue to resonate nearly 20 years after it was released?

-How would you rate ALI?

INTERESTING FACTS

Muhammad Aliâ??s boxing trainer Angelo Dundee served as a boxing technical advisor during the filming of the movie.

To become Howard Cosell in the movie, Jon Voight has said that he had to undergo six hours of makeup, often beginning at 3 a.m. Voight said if any of the prosthetics were put on incorrectly, it could take up to an hour to fix.

The film also features a number of professional boxers, including Michael Bentt as Sonny Liston, James Toney as Joe Frazier and Charles Shufford as George Foreman.

To make the fight sequences look as realistic as possible, the production used both high-definition and low-resolution VHS cameras and simultaneously shot both the left and right sides of the action.

Will Smith worked with a dialect coach and went through Islamic studies to fully immerse himself into the character of Muhammad Ali.

According to Will Smith, when learning to fight like Ali for the role, he met with a neurobiologist to explain the workings of the human brain to better recreate the motion of the legendary boxer. The neurobiologist had Smith watch different moves of Aliâ??s on a loop in a dark room for hours at a time so that each move would burn neuro passages in Smithâ??s brain.

With a year of preparation for the role, Will Smith added 35 pounds of muscle through workouts and weight training.

Will Smith also went to boxing school for the role. He spent six months learning to become a fighter and then six months specifically learning to fight like Muhammad Ali.

Originally, Will Smith did not want to take on the role of Muhammad Ali because he was concerned about not doing justice to the boxing legend. Muhammad Ali and his family even asked Smith to take the part, but the star was not convinced until director Michael Mann laid out a plan on how to tell the

story and how to prepare Smith for the part.

About AFI Movie Club

I hope the AFI Movie Club brings some inspiration and entertainment during this uncertain time. AFI has created a global, virtual gathering of those who love the movies where each dayâ??s film â?? announced by a special guest â?? is accompanied by fun facts, family-friendly discussion points and material from the AFI Archive to bring the viewing experience to life. As a non-profit, AFI Movie Club is a member-powered organization, dependent upon the support of its movie fans. To support AFI Movie Club please consider becoming a member or donating.

AFI Movie Club is a newly launched free program to raise the nationâ??s spirits by bringing artists and audiences together â?? even while we are apart. AFI shines a spotlight on an iconic movie each day, with special guests announcing the Movie of the Day. Audiences can â??gatherâ?• at AFI.com/MovieClub to find out how to watch the featured movie of the day with the use of their preexisting streaming service credentials. The daily film selections will be supported by fun facts, family discussion points and exclusive material from the AFI Archive to enrich the viewing experience.

(Source: AFI News Release)

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2. AFI Movie Club
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