

Let's Do The Time Warp Again

The girl in the black lace corset exhales a cloud of cigarette smoke through her cherry red lips into the cold April night. I watch her in the light of the Clinton Street Theater marquee—*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, it proclaims in bold letters, *Saturday, Midnight*. I dig my hands into my pockets, shivering.

"Have you done *Rocky* before?" my boss Fred asks, pulling a bag of rice out of the pocket of his motorcycle jacket. He had suggested the outing as a bizarre take on corporate team-building—the cool gay boss' alternative to a ropes course.

"Not in years," I reply. "Since high school, actually."

"That means you're a virgin again!" a fat, gleeful man in caked makeup shouts from behind us. This guy is a pro, a lipstick in his hand deftly smearing a "V" onto my cheek before I can protest.

"Big turnout for something that happens every Saturday," I observe, noting the long line of attendees snaking around the corner.

"Tonight's the 33rd anniversary performance!" the lipstick man exclaims, his eyes twinkling behind false lashes. "Thirty-three years! The longest-running showing of *Rocky* in the world! Keeping Portland weird, right?"

"Fucking weird is right," Fred deadpans, stubbing out his cigarette on the sole of his



remember to breathe

BY NICK MATTOS

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Paint your own picture.

boot. The line begins to move, my coworkers and I lurch in single file into the theater as the fat man behind us giggles with excitement.

The emcee strolls across the stage with the requisite campy swagger. "Welcome to the Clinton Cabaret!" he roars. "I see lots of virgins in the audience! Get the hell up here!" I'm surprised to see a crowd of 35 people, some marked with the scarlet "V," join my coworkers and I moving toward the stage.

Turning around, I scan the audience of youthful flesh encased in Hot Topic corsets, mentally listing each theatergoer's estimated age: 16, 18, 19, 15. *It's likely that a third of the people here tonight were unable to vote in the last election*, I reckon as before me a group of fellow "virgins" replicates the sounds of the last

orgasm they gave their partners for their initiation. *Shit*, I think, unsettled by the realization—*It's wholly possible that the majority of this audience could have been conceived in the hazy hours following one of the last 33 years' worth of Rocky showings at this theater*. I will omit the details of my de-virginization; however, I will say that it involved balloons and a terribly embarrassed young Asian woman. Paint your own picture.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show is exactly what it is—I doubt any queer worth zir salt requires a synopsis. There is, as always, blood and corsets, rock opera and garish makeup, Susan Sarandon and Meat Loaf and a sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania. However, the Portland Cabaret brings something else to the table: a live reenactment of the film as it shows. The effect is jaw-droppingly on point, the actors perfectly lip-syncing along with the lines clad in costumes nearly identical to their film counterparts. These people are serious about the *Picture Show*. But why? I ponder in the darkness.

Why does the tradition continue? As a film and as a phenomenon, *Rocky* is hardly as sub-

versively racy as it must have been to audiences in the '70s or '80s. Any attendee of a Portland drag show or watcher of *South Park* has seen and heard far raunchier fare than anything in the film. Still, every new generation of theater kids latches on, puts on their fishnets and oversized heels, gets up on the stage and does the Time Warp again and again. Why?

I turn my head, look across the merry crowd shouting spiritedly at the screen. A woman my mother's age sits stiffly in her corset next to the girl with the cherry red lips—her daughter. "Slut!" they scream in unison at the screen, then laugh together.

Every unlucky generation relearns the lessons of the last the hard way, rediscovers the thrill of rebellion and thinks it is unique to them, doesn't see the long chain of subversion that leads up to them. *Rocky* may not be the far end of the shock spectrum now, but it's one of the first, an artifact of sexual and artistic rebellion curated by those who still hunger for the crazily campy side of life, regardless of their age. I pick up my bag of props, glad that *Rocky* was there when I was a teenager to show me how to be insane and glamorous at the same time, glad that it shares its lessons so freely with the teenagers here now. I throw pieces of toast into the air, scream "Asshole!" at the screen, and smile. ☐

NICK MATTOS will probably never do the Time Warp again. For more information on Portland's acclaimed *Rocky* cabaret, check out rockypdx.org.

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