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COVER STORY

Celebrating 12 years of 'Rocky'

By GREG LIVADAS
Times-Union

They've survived a spray of eggs from football players. They've overcome broken water pipes and ripped movie screens.

And they must be frisked before they go to the movies.

Fans of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* have experienced a lot of hardships in the 12 years the movie has been playing. After all, a crowd that includes guys prancing around in ladies' silk underwear, in a theater filled with marijuana smoke, must expect a few problems.

Tonight, they'll celebrate their will to survive. That's when hard-core *Rocky* fans, from as far away as Toronto and New York City, will converge on the Renaissance Theatre for a convention of *Rocky Horror Picture Show* enthusiasts, in honor of the movie's 12th anniversary.

Rocky posters, T-shirts and greeting cards will be hawked. Acting troupes with names like "Erotic Nightmare" and "Rocky Horror Review" will perform skits. Videos of the film's stars will be played. A costume contest offers a \$100 prize. Everything that a *Rocky Horror* fan could possibly want.

But the movie they all worship won't be the focus at tonight's convention. Instead, it's a gathering of the people whose efforts have allowed the movie to survive for 12 years, the *Rocky* fanatics who understand each other's infatuation.

"The people who will come are the hard-core regulars who have been going to *Rocky Horror* for a long time — hundreds of times," says Eric Bradshaw, 18, editor of *Castle Times*, a local *Rocky* newsletter which is sponsoring the convention. He's also a member of Midnight

Madness, the local group that acts out the movie in front of the screen.

No famous names from the original movie will be there. "The people that kept it going will be at the convention, not the stars," Bradshaw says.

No where to go but up

Rocky Horror came out in 1975 as a major picture, shown during normal movie hours. It bombed.

But when the Waverly Theater in New York City began to show it at midnight, it began attracting an audience. Soon, a dedicated following was watching it every weekend.

The following year, a shy school teacher named Louis Faresse Jr. decided to talk back to the screen during the long pauses in the dialogue. His first retort came when the movie's innocent engaged couple, Brad and Janet, approach the castle of the deranged alien transvestite, Dr. Frank N. Furter. Janet holds a newspaper over her head to keep dry in the rain.

"Buy an umbrella, you ----," Faresse shouted from his seat. He was a hit, and soon, everyone was shouting in unison at the screen. The audience memorized the lines and timed their responses perfectly.

Each week, something new was added. The audience brought water bottles and sprayed each other during the rain scene. They shot rice, (during the wedding scene) flung toast (when a glass was raised for a toast) and rolls of toilet paper (when a character exclaimed, "Great Scott!")

In 1980, the movie *Fame* showed a typical *Rocky* crowd. That introduced millions more to the movie.

Today, a dozen years after it opened, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* still plays every weekend in 250 theaters



Janet and Brad, above, are horrified by the weird sounds they hear coming from the next room in *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Right, behind closed doors lurk, from left, Columbia, Magenta, Frank N. Furter and Riff Raff.



around the country and earns 20th Century Fox \$8 million a year. Not bad for a movie which cost a measly \$1 million to make.

And millions of fans (mostly night owls, since it usually plays at midnight) still fill the theaters.

In Rochester, *Rocky Horror* opened at the now defunct Showcase Theater in Greece in 1976 and had stints at the long-gone Coronet and Jerry Lewis theaters. It played for four years at the Cine Greece Theater and has been playing every Friday and Saturday night at the Panorama Theater since 1984.

Acting out, and acting up
The Midnight Madness floor show

cast, the dozen regulars who perform in front of Panorama's screen, dress in costumes and act out characters' movements and lines on the screen.

"The movie is not that great," says Bradshaw, who plays the character Riff Raff at the Panorama each week. "The first 10 or 20 times you go to the show, you watch it and the cast," he says, but after that, people go to watch each other.

That's because the audience is the show. And the audience likes it. They traditionally come armed with pounds of equipment to fling.

"We shoveled the aisles after each show," says Fred Powers, manager of Cine Greece 8 which showed the movie

for 204 weeks. "People were bringing in five pounds of rice." Sometimes props like eggs or hot dogs would trickle in.

At least, that's the way it used to be. Guards at the Panorama Theater, the only theater in the area which still shows the movie, search movie-goers — as many as 150 each Saturday night — to cut back on the litter in the aisles.

Craziness on the stage often rivaled the craziness on the screen. Fights would sometimes break out when members of the audience harassed the players. Numerous screens fell victim to flailing limbs of crazed audience members, and squirt guns filled with Coca-Cola.

Shows at the Panorama still feature the *Rocky Horror* Players and plenty of obscenities from the audience, but very little prop throwing.

"Best people still tape rice to their legs and shove toilet paper down their coats," Bradshaw admits.

You've got to be pretty devoted to smuggle toilet paper and affix rice to your legs.

You've also got to have courage to dress up like the movie's characters.

Everyone in the theater rises when the Players' star, Mark Kahley, enters and saunters down the center aisle. He plays Frank N. Furter, the demented transvestite from the galaxy Transylvania, who dons women's makeup, fishnet stockings, garters and silky black bikini bottoms.

Then the real show begins. If a movie character is thrown to the floor, the corresponding live cast member is thrown to the floor. They also slam themselves against the walls, do the Time Warp dance and speak into flashlights shining in their faces.

Basically *Frankenstein* gone berserk, the movie depicts a mad scientist who creates the man of his dreams, a blonde hunk (*Rocky Horror*), who wears only gold-lame briefs.

The plot weaves its way through a transvestite convention, the kidnapping of the honeymooning couple, Brad and Janet, the murder of a mean motorcyclist (played by rocker Meat Loaf), numerous seductions, and a sensuous grand finale in a swimming pool.

Meanwhile, the players search the audience for first-timers, pronounce them "virgins," and do everything in their power to embarrass them.

During last Friday's show, Kahley found a victim, sat on her lap and raised his legs on her shoulders, straddling her head. She slumped lower in her chair.

Bradshaw says this happens during every show. He should know. He's been attending *Rocky* every weekend for seven years.

And how does this all effect his social life?

"A lot of that is my social life," he says. "I can't think of a better place to be — there are the diehards, preppies and punks — if there was a bar full of these people, I'd go."

Rochester's Midnight Madness players don't get paid to dress up that way, but they are allowed to get in free.

The audience pays \$4 to get into the movie. "But it really doesn't matter," he says. "People that are in the cult will pay whatever they have to."

LAST WEEK

ATTENDANCE

PRIZES

FRI	55	Jodi L. Dressler
SAT	71	Lorraine Godfrey

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? WRITE :

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