

## MIKE TYSON: Man, Myth, Movie

Written by Phil Woolever  
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INSIDE CELLULOID RINGPOSTS - "Tyson", the autobiographical documentary of boxing's mercurial mauling icon "Iron" Mike by director James Tobak that garnished a strong reception at the Cannes and Sundance film festivals, posted respectable numbers after limited release openings in Los Angeles and New York last Friday.

"The first question we ask is who am I?" muses an isolated, on-camera Tyson in setting the piece's introspective philosophical tone.

Apparently there are still tons of ticket buying folks interested in whatever that answer might be.

Opening weekend grosses for the eleven theatres that screened the 90 minute movie were estimated by Variety at \$85,982. That might not sound like much in the world of multi-million dollar blockbusters, but the per screen average showed plenty of promise for more widespread release, and per-capita it easily beat "The Informers" starring Billy Bob Thornton, Mickey Rourke, Winona Ryder and Kim Basinger.

"Obsessed" was the weekend's biggest moneymaker. Beautiful Beyonce may be more of a dramatic draw than the scarred former champion these days, but there are still plenty of customers leaning toward the cult of personality type obsession that came following Tyson's decades of glamorous glory and train wreck falls from grace.

It appears Tyson's star power lasted much longer than his left hook. The fighter's flick is a New York Times' "Critics Pick", amongst other cinematic accolades from major outlets.

So far, the film by Sony Pictures Classics has received far more generally positive reviews than the individual has recently. Whatever your opinion on Tyson, the man remains a highly publicized, popular subject in the public forum for what is usually a vastly polarizing debate in the realm of celebrity status.

Numerous non-boxing websites I've monitored show heavy response to Tyson on a purely personal level. Most readers' posts often have absolutely nothing to say about the film. Tyson seemingly has a two-way, love/hate relationship with the American mainstream.

At the Hollywood premiere, Tyson looked a bit sheepish as he posed for red carpet photos alongside the movie poster and hobnobbed with people like Warren Beatty, Annette Bening, and Carl Weathers. Tyson looked much more comfortable standing by Sugar Ray Leonard and Shane Mosley.

It seemed Tyson was studying viewers' reaction to the blunt, historical picture which features plenty of classic fight scene footage in addition to a high resolution individual image of Tyson as he sits alone in an oceanfront property and reflects upon himself and his life.

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"I watched it privately and said 'good', but I never watched it in a conglomerate of people (like this)," said Tyson at the LA opening. "There's things I wish I didn't say in there."

It would be interesting to find out what those things were. Tyson doesn't shy away from the shadows in his past, like revealing that he had gonorrhea when he became the youngest heavyweight titlist after pummeling Trevor Berbick in 1986.

Tyson's intriguing narrative ranges from early thug days to meeting world leaders to his prison time on a rape conviction to how his hands felt as he put the gloves on.

"To be honest, I'm a jerk sometimes," he intones, or "I come and I have supreme confidence, but I'm scared to death."

Women, for better or worse, were always a "magnetic force".

On Don King: "This is supposed to be my black brother. He's just a wretched, slimy, reptilian mother..."

With his Maori tattoo and the scar tissue in the corner of his eyes, Tyson's self portrait is indeed a riveting contradiction, perhaps like Tyson himself. It is just as easy to sympathize as it is to find deep faults.

In Manhattan at a glitzy gathering to hype the movie's New York release, a diverse group that included Joe Frazier, Ice-T, Christopher Walken, and Republican National Chairman Michael Steele, whose sister Monica Turner is one of Tyson's former wives, showed their support.

Also on hand was rapper Nas, whose especially written song "Legendary" is the film's theme. In an era where items ranging from cheap food products to second rate entertainment can be designated a legend, at least Tyson's triumphs and failures seem legitimately worthy of the term.

Toback and Damon Bingham are credited as the project's primary producers, but Nas is included in a reported group of others, including hoops star Carmello Anthony, who had a hand in production.

As varied shades of lighting play across the highlights, soft spots, and timelines of Tyson's aging face, different countenances come and go.

Like the piles of publicly posted responses that range from damning insults to blind eternal devotion, there is at least a little bit of truth in many examples from opposite sides. The film seems to offer it's own truths from different sides of Tyson.

"If I have any anger, if it's directed at anyone, it's directed at myself," concludes Tyson.

I hope that's true, because it used to be different. I hope Tyson has found a productive, comfortable lifestyle he can continue to embrace.

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My own perspective on Mike Tyson, based on many hours of public observation, dozens of brief chats, and a few extended private interactions, is very favorable. I don't blame you if you disagree, but personally Tyson has always treated me well.

I like the guy.

"Once I'm in the ring, I'm a God," says Tyson.

How true it was. How false it was.

See, with hindsight, for yourself.