



***Requiem for a Heavyweight* is a Spring 2026 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of the Sony Columbia Pictures dvd release of that film.**

17 of a possible 20 points = **1/2 = a minor classic**

**United States 1962 black-and-white 87 minutes live action feature drama
Columbia Pictures Corporation Producers: David Susskind and Jack Grossberg**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- 2 Direction: Ralph Nelson***
- 2 Editing: Carl Lerner**
- 2 Cinematography: Arthur Ornitz***
- 2 Lighting: David Golden**
- 2 Screenplay: Rod Serling***
- Script Supervision: Sasha Laurance**
- 2 Music: Laurence Rosenthal* Orchestration: Laurence Rosenthal***
- 1 Art Direction: Burt Smidt Graphic Art: Guy Fraumeni**
- Set Decoration: Francis Brady**
- Set Dressing: Francis Brady**
- Costume Design: John Boxer**
- Makeup: Richard Smith**

0 Sound: Edward Johnstone
Sound Editing: Jack Fitzstephens
Sound Re-recording: Richard Vorisek
2 Acting
2 Creativity
17 total points

Cast: Anthony Quinn* (Mountain Rivera), Jackie Gleason* (Maish Rennick), Mickey Rooney* (Army), Julie Harris* (Grace Miller), Stan Adams* (Perelli), Madame Spivy* (Ma Greeny), Herbie Faye (Bartender), Jack Dempsey (Jack Dempsey), Cassius Clay a.k.a. Muhammed Ali (Ring Opponent), Steve Belloise (Hotel Desk Clerk), Lou Gilbert (Ring Doctor), Arthur Mercante (Referee), Rory Calhoun (Rory Calhoun), Al Bain (Police Officer), William "Haystacks" Calhoun ("Haystacks," Rivera's Wrestling Opponent), Nancy Cushman (Woman on Elevator), Sig Frolich (Diner Patron), John Indrisano (Bar Patron Watching TV), Angelo Rossitto (Midget Wrestler Outside Wrestling Ring), others

A searing ride on the descending elevator to ignominious social bottomlands, *Requiem for a Heavyweight* examines a few short days in the life of a heavyweight boxer past his prime. One whose eye injury insures the curtain has fallen on his seventeen-year career in the ring.

Anthony Quinn plays Mountain Rivera, a school dropout groomed for profit by manager Maish Rennick. Being a cynically vain gambler of opportunistic inclination, Maish was more than thrilled to sponsor young, vital Mountain when his legs and fists were powerhouses for opponents to reckon with.

But a mid-thirties pugilist was a different story. Good only for immediate discard or low comedy. A pathetic figure without any trace of self-respect remaining.

Acidly portrayed by Jackie Gleason as a double-dealing collector of expendable human merchandise, Maish stumbles his way into ethical quicksand, having bet against his own protégé Rivera prior to the aging hulk's match with far nimbler Cassius Clay. Not only does he absolutely believe Mountain wouldn't last more than four rounds, but he convinces underworld loan shark Ma Greeny, brutally personified by Brooklyn native Bertha Levine

(otherwise known to admirers as Madame Spivy) that she should likewise invest heavily in a surefire short match.

Both come up losers. For Rivera is still tough enough to hold his own until both stamina and vision play out in the seventh round. Since Maish had neglected to inform him he should head early to the showers on that particular evening, the still game slugger put forth his best effort.

Clay was impressed. The outcome produced a much different reaction from Rivera's manager. First disbelief. Then, upon seeing certain unfriendly faces in the arena hallway after the fight, fear. When Ma's hired goons shadow him through darkened corridors, anxiety turns into outright terror for the man who cannot be trusted. They eventually corner their victim, in a boxing ring, ironically. When outmaneuvered prey asserts he can't produce payback funds immediately, they proceed on Greeny's command to leave him somewhat the worse for wear.

Though Mountain's "best friend" has proven anything but, humane trainer Army, in a perhaps career-best performance by Mickey Rooney, stays loyal. Himself often a fellow-sufferer of mockingly arrogant Maish's biting tongue, Army undertakes to guide the forcibly retired combatant to an employment office. There harried counselor Grace Miller proves intensely sympathetic. Grace is admirably underplayed by Julie Harris, an overly involved social worker who takes her concern for well-being of applicants too intimately.

This sets her unsuspectingly on a collision course with Mountain's boss, who's simultaneously attempting to unload unprofitable cargo on wrestling promoter Perelli, an obnoxious scoundrel making a career of deluding and relieving credulous patrons of entertainment dollars. The fix is always in operation at his professional wrestling establishment.

Oily Perelli envisions Mountain as an oversize counterfeit Indian chief, a blatant ethnic stereotype of the most disrespectful kind. For such a well-known figure in New York's sporting world, this sleazeball is willing to provide Maish enough dough to enable payoff to Ma Greeny and possibly a one-way bus ticket out of town.

Grace has been equally busy trying to schedule an interview for her reconstruction project pet with upscale owners of an Adirondack summer camp for children.

Unfortunately, her client's controller learns of that plan. He sabotages it by getting the overly amiable job candidate intoxicated at a nearby bar.

Ignoring advice from disgusted intermediary Army, his hapless heavyweight friend shows up and creates chaos at a swank hotel where potential employers are waiting to receive his visit. Utterly destroying chances of earning wages at a boys' camp upstate.

Two verbal showdowns follow. One pits Grace against Maish. In the other, Army denounces his professional associate as a skunk.

Caught wretchedly between them, a one-time world heavyweight contender must decide whether to take the first dive of his life or abandon a traitorous paymaster in that individual's most fateful crisis.

Who owes what to whom?

Rod Serling's wrenching screenplay allows no easy exits from this moral dilemma for either characters or viewers. It's buttressed by superlative performances from each of the principals, including Stan Adams as viciously vengeful Perelli, who intends to leave no crawlspace open for Maish to use as an escape route.

Laurence Rosenthal's depressing, expressionistic music score supplies requisite gloom throughout much of the drama. Though a nostalgic background waltz tune surfaces in scenes between Grace and Mountain, implying a hopefulness never attaining realization.

Cinematographer Arthur Ornitz keeps the camera prowling through corridors, alongside bar counters, zooming overhead and across canvas covering of boxing ring, peering into dingy cold water flats and sterile office cubicles, while enmeshing characters and environments in mutual interplay.

Carl Lerner never permits a scene to overstay its welcome, trimming *Requiem for a Heavyweight* to a brisk eight-seven minutes, with violence minimized by rapid flash cutting in fight scenes.

Each minor character was carefully chosen for maximum stunning visual and verbal effect. New York accents predominate as they should. Possibly using the prior 1956 *Playhouse 90* television production as a template, this later adaptation offers greater movement, speedier bursts of action, a physically more imposing Mountain, and a tangibly realistic Army in Mickey Rooney, who, unlike Ed Wynn, isn't automatically associated with light comedy.

Ralph Nelson, a severely underappreciated director, proves detractors at sea here, marshalling a set of unforgettable acting triumphs with the same dexterity displayed in *Lilies of the Field* and his previous television version of *Requiem for a Heavyweight* for *Playhouse 90*.

There are no true bonus features on this Columbia Pictures dvd, other than trailers for the 1961 movie *Barabbas*, also starring Anthony Quinn, and the 1977 movie *The Greatest* which highlights Cassius Clay a.k.a. Muhammad Ali. This dvd release does offer both widescreen and full screen presentation options.

Requiem for a Heavyweight is highly recommended exclusively for adult audiences. It's a paradigm of intelligent scripting, finely nuanced characterization, and exceptionally accomplished cinematography. However, it is too violent and mature in content for children and teen viewers.