



By Marko Peric

This Week: All roads lead to Rome

Spartacus

Kirk Douglas, Lawrence Olivier, Jean Simmons, Peter Ustinov and Tony Curtis.

Director: Stanley Kubrick
1960. 196 minutes. Colour
PG.

After suggestions that *Blade Runner* and *The Princess Bride* are too new to be considered classic film, it seemed fitting to review something more suitable. *Spartacus* fits the bill perfectly. Arguably the best epic to come out in the sixties, it has a talented cast, striking visuals, and an engaging plotline that makes one forget that the movie is over three hours long.

The title character, played masterfully by Kirk Douglas, is a Thracian slave who is sold to a gladiatorial school. Here, slaves are trained to fight each other to the death for the entertainment of the masses. Spartacus falls in love with one of the slave girls at the school, and the trainer torments him over this. When she is sold, Spartacus kills the trainer and unintentionally starts a revolt. Thousands of slaves flock to his cause, and soon the former gladiator commands an army of slaves. The Roman garrison sent to put down the revolt is slaughtered, as are

the legions sent to intercept the slaves. Although Spartacus and his followers only want to escape from Italy, the Romans will not accept this. Led by the arrogant Marcus Crassus (Olivier), they mass all their forces to crush Spartacus and his rebellion.

Of course I'm not going to tell you who wins. But what I have told you is only a brief summary of the plot. There are countless details and scenes, each important, that would fill the page if I tried to explain only a third of them. There's so much to the film that it really has to be watched more than once.

Acting: Spectacular. Kirk Douglas becomes larger than life to his followers, but the character remains very much human. Douglas has never had a more memorable role. Jean Simmons plays the slave girl he falls in love with. She may start out a little wooden, but after the rebellion she really gets into the role. Lawrence Olivier steals the show, however. With an ego the size of the Capitol, he makes Crassus ambitious and merciless, but not without charm. Most of the time he appears, he dominates the scene. On the other hand, Peter Ustinov is delightful as the owner of the gladiatorial school. His character becomes quite admirable as the film progresses,

which is remarkable since he starts as repulsive jerk.

Direction: Kubrick does an excellent job of balancing the epic proportions of the story with the human drama. His handling of both is deft and certain. The inclusion of Tony Curtis as Antoninus, a slave story-teller turned rebel is a perfect example of the human side of the story. And the other end of the spectrum, the large scenes are handled masterfully.

Memorable Scenes: Countless. The first few minutes of the slave revolt are filled with action and bloodletting, and so much takes place you might want to press rewind and watch it

again. The final battle scene is also astonishing, with quite literally a cast of thousands. I'm not sure if the film is available in letterbox, but finding a copy in that format would be worthwhile if only for this scene. Also watch for the bathing scene with Olivier and Curtis. Can you figure out what Olivier is talking about? It seems that the censors in 1960 didn't.

Best Lines: Almost everything Ustinov says is priceless. Pay careful attention whenever he is on screen. Aside from him, Douglas has the great and often imitated line "I am not an animal!" There are

other memorable lines that you'll have to watch for -- I can't begin to list them here.

Bottom Line: Big, bold, perhaps a tad bloody, and definitely worth watching. Get together all your friends that don't have limited attention spans, find three hours, and make lots of popcorn. If you only watch one epic in your entire life, make this the one.

Available: The larger video stores will of course have copies, but many of the smaller ones might not, even ones that have decent classic sections. It might be good idea to call ahead.

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Various Artists
Grace of My Heart OST
(MCA)

The difficulty of being a songwriter includes being compared to past masters. But the soundtrack of Allison Anders's *Grace of My Heart*, set in the 1960s, deftly solves this problem. This is 60 minutes of original song collaborations by artists from the past and present, including Bill Sobule, Joni Mitchell, Burt Bacharach, Los Lobos and Leslie Gore. The result is an adventurous and surprisingly smooth album. Although songs such as "Groovin' on You" and "Between Two Worlds" seem to miss the mark, the majority of the album is a marvellous demonstration of songwriters blending their skills to re-create one of the most important eras of popular music. Of particular note are "I Do" (Carole Bayer Sager and Dave A. Stewart) and "Unwanted Number" (Elvis Costello), both accurate representations of the time as well as accomplished songwriting. To add authenticity, most of the soundtrack was recorded at Capitol Records, a studio which as barely changed since the 1950s, and the producers strove to assemble musicians, writers and arrangers who worked in that time. So, if you want to revisit a musical era through the talents of today, *Grace of My Heart* is your ticket there.

Geraldine Quinn