



Ali: The Man, the Moves, the Mouth

Executive Producer: Les Krantz

Hosted by Bert Sugar

Facts That Matter, Inc/ Wildwood Films

60 minutes, 2008 / 2012

MVDvisual.com

I suppose it is because I know so much less about boxing than the Beatles that I found this hour-long summation of Ali's career more interesting (and I enjoyed the previous one).

Narrated by boxing expert Bert Sugar (listed as "show host" though he's never seen; d. 2012), We see a very young Cassius Clay state why he wanted to box (has to do with a stolen bike, apparently), and follows his career through his many, many matches, on becoming a Muslim, his place in the Civil Rights movement, the war against him by the government during the Viet Nam war (yes, war), and those spectacular boxing moments with clever names like "Thrilla in Manila" and the "Rumble in the Jungle."

Ali the man / legend is certainly more entertaining than Will Smith as Ali (and the Fresh Prince did an amazing job, FYI). Early on, Ali could put the fear into both his fists and his rhymes.

Sure, by his 30s, he was not the man he was when he began (rope-a-dope, my ass, he was tired), which was still the best in the world. Was he the quickest ever? Was he the strongest ever? Was he the prettiest ever? Well, it's hard to argue with the last one, but I think it's not the strength or the speed that made him the legend he is, but a combination of both, mixed with intelligence and instinct. The latter two is especially what put him above the likes of George

Foreman and Joe Frazier. They were punching machines, but machines don't think. Hey, that's what brought down Skynet's T-800, ain't it?

Throughout the documentary, there are lots of shots of the key (and even some lesser) fights in Ali's career, including the "phantom punch" against Sonny Liston. Of course, with this being only an hour, the clips are many, so they are naturally short. Besides, Ali was interesting enough out of the ring to support showing more of this footage.

My only two real gripes are that there is no mention (though seen a couple of times) of the man who probably did more for Ali's career after his trainer, a snarky and ruffled man by the name of Howard Cosell (nee Cohen; d. 1995). Cosell kept him in the limelight in so many ways, championing him when few others would. Heck, his picture is even on the back cover! My other sticking point is the glossing over of Ali's surprising defeat by Leon Spinks, an excellent but far lesser boxer; it's pointed out that Ali won it back, but it is more a footnote here than the shock it was at the time. Much more time is spent on the bigger named Frazier and Foreman.

Ali / Clay is a fascinating person who has led an amazing life. His current lack of ability to move and talk fluidly due to a muscular degenerative disease reminds me of how talker Marshall McLuhan was reduced to one word the last year of his life after a stroke. And yet, Ali remains a charismatic figure who draws in all ages, occupations and class status. Even Patti Smith mentioned him in the song "Birdland," on her first album, *Horses*.

This documentary gives a solid foundation of why that has happened. Nod to the man from me, too.