

# De Niro portrays fighter

By TOM MOORE  
Arts Editor

Robert De Niro is a chameleon. When you watch other great actors on the screen, say Marlon Brando, Laurence Olivier, or James Cagney, you hardly lose sight that you're watching a great actor. They rarely become so embellished in a part that you lose sight of their celebrity.

But De Niro gets so deep into his roles that he becomes the characters he plays. Part of this lies in that he starts each part as a blank page. He picks up the mannerisms for his role as he researches his part. He leaves nothing for us to hinge on as an established film persona and this allows him to make his performances more realistic and effective.

In *Raging Bull*, his fourth collaboration with director Martin Scorsese, De Niro plays middleweight champion Jake La Motta. La Motta, whose boxing career spanned the 40s and early 50s, has his life turned into a tale of sin and redemption.

In one of the most unsympathetic bio-pics ever made, De Niro plays Jake La Motta as a loutish, brutal animal. La Motta lives to fight, in and out of the boxing ring. And his anger drives everyone — his brother, the wife he craves — away from him.

De Niro's got the Bronx accent down perfect. And he's got La Motta's famous crouching style of boxing; he even went so far as to

put on some 50 pounds to play the broken-down La Motta. The almost absurd dedication that De Niro put into this part — that dedication he puts into every part — has been hyped to death in the media. But it's this willingness to push things to their limits, to become every part he plays, that makes Robert De Niro the greatest film actor of his generation. No other performer can match his low-key intensity.

With all his greatness, De Niro is not out to blow all the other actors in *Raging Bull* off the screen. Robert De Niro is an ensemble actor; he pushes the others in his films to his level of greatness. In *Raging Bull* he is evenly matched by Joe Pesci, who plays La Motta's profane and quirky brother, and Cathy Moriarty, who plays La Motta's beautiful and ever-suffering wife. Neither Pesci nor Moriarty has ever acted on the screen before, but you can't tell that by watching them. They come across as seasoned professionals able to give remarkably realistic performances.

These performances are helped along by Scorsese's documentary approach and a true-story script by Paul Schrader and Mardick Martin, which supposedly was heavily reworked by Scorsese and De Niro.

The scenes in *Raging Bull* with their violent action and violent dialogue play as if we are taking a look at actuality. Scorsese knows how to play things evenly so that they never come off as theatrical and show-offy. One gets this feeling from his films even though he has a vir-



De Niro in 'Raging Bull' ... forceful acting in movie

tuoso knack for the visual and sound technique of cinema.

Such visual and aural effects are perhaps noticeable only to the most astute filmgoer. Yet combined with the forceful acting and the gutsy direction. They help make *Raging Bull* a disturbingly great film that is not to be missed.

# In 'Ordinary People'

## Middle-class family deals with suicide try, emotions

By TIM POPE  
Staff Writer

The wandering camera focuses on the stately, white-washed front of a private school, where a group of young choral singers rehearse. A cut to the face of one boy. Something gleams in his eyes. His singing serves as a catharsis for some inner anguish.

For the next hour and a half we watch as this young boy deals with ordinary emotions. We watch ordinary characters tear at each other, analyze each other, avoid each other and resolve their problems. And this is the beauty of *Ordinary People*.

The film is a slow, caressing study of the motivations of a family steeped in middle-class American ideals. The subjects realize that problems in life are not as unavoidable as our society pretends.

*Ordinary People* deals with the lives of a suburban family whose son Conrad (Timothy Hutton) tries to readjust after recently attempting suicide. His mother, Mary Tyler Moore playing against her TV persona, is a woman who cannot get beyond abrupt mannerisms. She is too wrapped in herself and appearances to give her son the compassion he needs.

And his father (Donald Sutherland) is too condescending, always quick with warm praise and sympathetic with his son's problems, but he is never really understanding until the end.

Director Robert Redford selects portions of scenes of

family life to hammer home a quiet touch of irony. Sutherland and Moore, for instance, discuss vacations on a Texas golf course while their son comes close to a second suicide attempt.

Alvin Sargeant's screenplay is tight and intense. Characters don't hit upon some revelation in the end, as is typical for Hollywood. The dialogue sometimes runs in circles, as in the scene where the mother and son absent-mindedly discuss his problems with math.

"I've always had a tough time with trig," she says. "Did you take trig?" he asks with a gleam of hope. "Did I take trig? Did I take trig?" she asks in disbelief. "I put your clothes on the bed." End of scene.

The most extra-ordinary touch in this film is the intensity of the actors. Mary Tyler Moore combines the raw saccharine sweet charm that she displayed on her show with an icy, bitchy exterior and concern for the trivial. Donald Sutherland is quiet and reassuring at first but loses his control in the end when he begins to question his patterned motions.

But the most intense performance comes from Timothy Hutton. He stands erect in some scenes with an expression of a child desperately searching for something to focus his attention on. Other times he teeters on the brink of violence like some abominable secret is fastened deep beneath his blue eyes.

*Ordinary People* is a film that is slow and quiet — a character study rather than a monumental piece. Yet the intensity holds it up.

# 'Comic Books Tonight' delight for players, crowd

By MARC ROUTH  
Staff Writer

*Comic Books Tonight*, the current production of the Chez Condoret Cabaret, is a good excuse for a group of four performers to sing and clown around and enjoy themselves. And after a few drinks from the bar, the audience is sure to have just as much fun.

Written by Tom Haas and directed by Linda Wright, the production is ably performed with musical director Chris Klutz at the piano. The evening is a series of four skits on the comic book theme tied together by singing and comedy.

Haas has taken music from Broadway successes and popular tunes, aiming for humor by giving them new words in some instances and by placing them at particularly unfitting moments in others. As in any satirical review which depends on spoofing and quips by the performers, the jokes work in some places and fizzle in others.

The first skit introduces Archie Andrews and the rivalry between Betty and Veronica for his companionship. But soon, Robert Redchevy comes onto the scene as the star of a local

theatre, and the battle switches to the two men.

"The Specimen," the second skit, is the story of a female fish-creature who pursues a human scientist in an attempt to find a mate. In speaking of her past experiences, the female creature states, "It was a heavy gill trip."

And "The Great Superhero Contest," Superman once again proves himself to be the comic book hero that he is. In the final sequence, "The Makeout Queen," a naive, inexperienced boy hopes to take the high school makeout queen to the prom.

All of the performers in *Comic Books Tonight* seem to be old hands at this type of comedy. Stephen Barefoot plays the underdog in the skits, and he is funny in his attempts to escape from the creature in "The Specimen" and to get the girl in "The Makeout Queen."

Brian McNally performs the roles of Superman and Robert Redchevy with a mock macho presence that is drolly humorous. With the only costume change in the production, McNally opens his shirt to reveal a T-shirt with the superhero "S". In fact, when he puts on a pair of glasses and combs his hair a certain way, he looks unbelievably like mild-

mannered reporter Clark Kent.

Maggie Roberts is enjoyable as the makeout queen and as Veronica. Her brassy voice is just right for some of the songs that she performs. Marnie Carmichael momentarily steals the show as the fish creature in "The Specimen," Carmichael sings "That Ol' Black Magic" and a number of other songs as she goes from fish face to normal. However, with the competition of the other performers, she is not the focal point for long.

The Chez Condoret Cabaret began in February 1979, with performances in the dining room of Chez Condoret. The first productions

were more in the style of French cabaret with variety show entertainment, while the current production's a more cohesive show in the style of New York cabaret.

In October 1979 the bar area and cabaret were refashioned and the performances were moved into that area.

*Comic Books Tonight* will be presented through Saturday. Performances are at 9 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and also at 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Reservations are necessary and the cover charge is \$3.50 per person. For more information call 942-8714.

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