

Although filmed in black and white, the film is gorgeously rich in texture with tones of greens, purples, blues and, appropriately enough, bright stabs of crimson. And while essentially a silent drama, beneath the swirling Gustav Mahler soundtrack there's the gentle sound of fangs piercing a virgin's neck and the sickening thwack of a wooden stake being driven through Dracula's heart. Maddin has not so much made a record of a stage production; rather, he has re-imagined Stoker's *Dracula* as it might have looked before the likes of Bela Lugosi and Francis Ford Coppola got a hold of it.

As *The Heart of the World* proved, Maddin is—as one review in *The New York Times* described him—the “finest black-and-white silent director in all of Canada.” *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* is another feather in his cap and this reviewer eagerly anticipates his next foray into feature filmmaking, *The Saddest Music in the World* (based on an original screenplay by Kazuo Ishigura), a Rhombus Media production that will be unleashed on the world in the fall.



MINA AND DRACULA

Pretenders beware, Maddin is prepared once again to claim his rightful place as Canada's most original and daring auteur.

By Paul Townend

Paul Townend is a Toronto-based freelance film critic and editor.

# The LAST ROUND


2003 100m prod NFB, exp Sylvia Sweeney, Louise Lore, p Silva Basmajian, d Joseph Blasioli, sc Stephen Brunt, pb Michael Ellis, ed Craig Bateman, s John Martin, mus Allan Kane, narr Colin Linden; with Muhammad Ali, George Chuvalo, Milt Dunnell, Angelo Dundee, Robert Lipsyte, Rachman Ali, Irv Ungerman, Jimmy Breslin, Bert Sugar, Ernie Terrell.

The fiction is that George Chuvalo, a no-name club fighter from Toronto, by the luck of the boxing gods, went toe-to-toe for 15 rounds in March 1966 with Muhammad “I am the greatest!” Ali and left the ring bloodied, but still standing; a real-life Rocky



The Last Round

Images courtesy of the NFB.



Balboa. The world press was dismissive, calling the fight a mismatch and a sham. Who the heck was this guy Chualo? By what right did he have to fight the “greatest”? And where was Toronto, anyway? As usual, the truth is stranger—and more complicated—than fiction.

Joseph Blasioli tells this twisted tale of fate expertly and entertainingly in *The Last Round*. Interviews with all involved, except Ali—although his brother Rachman appears in the film—are combined with old photographs, trips to the Junction in Toronto’s west end, and wonderful black-and-white archival footage provided by CBC Sports. Ali’s story is well known and his fight with Chualo only a blip in his stellar career, but for Chualo it was his defining moment, the one fight he will always be remembered for.

Chualo wasn’t a no-name club fighter, but the heavyweight champion of Canada, and one of the Top Ten in the world. The son of working-class immigrant parents from the Junction, close to Toronto’s slaughterhouses (his father worked the killing floor at Canada Packers; his mother plucked chickens for half-a-cent a bird), his only ambition from an early age was to be the world boxing champion. By 15 he was a strapping lad of 90 kilograms. He turned pro before he was 20, but he was brought along too fast, with too many fights and not enough training. He was being groomed to be the house fighter at Maple Leaf Gardens; however, Chualo wanted

more. He wanted a shot at the world heavyweight title.

His chance came in New York City in a February 1965 match with Floyd Patterson, a former heavyweight champion, at Madison Square Gardens, the mecca of boxing. In the most important fight of his life—a win would have given him a shot at Ali, who had previously beaten Sonny Liston to claim the heavyweight crown—Chualo went 15 rounds with Patterson and lost in a closely fought contest that should have been declared a draw. It was a prestigious loss and a moral victory. Later that year, Ali and Liston were scheduled for a rematch and if Liston won, Chualo was promised a bout with him. But the fickle fates of boxing threw him a curve. Not only did Ali win, but he did so with the famous “phantom” punch in the first round that sent Liston to the deck and boxing into disrepute. Chualo had to settle for a match with Ernie Terrell, a lumbering giant with mob connections. Again he went 15 rounds, and again he lost in a decision that was clearly rigged. Chualo’s chance at the championship bout he had longed for all his professional career seemed to slip away.

Then fate took another strange and startling turn. Ali’s name came up in the U.S. Army draft. He cried foul, or more to the point, he complained, “Why me? I ain’t got no quarrel with the Viet Cong.” In the politically charged atmosphere of the time, this was tantamount to treason. It didn’t

help matters that he had recently converted to Islam and the controversial Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad was now his spiritual adviser. This, combined with the farce of the second Liston fight, made Ali an undesirable champion, and he was stripped of his title. In order to win it back, his manager, Angelo Dundee, arranged for a fight with Terrell, the newly appointed champ, but no city in the United States would allow it. Dundee then tried Montreal, but Mayor Jean Drapeau suddenly got righteous and also wouldn’t allow it. Toronto was next on the list in this travelling road show, and Harold Ballard, the part owner of Maple Leaf Gardens, had no problem, but by now the American pay-for-view companies had pulled out and refused to televise the fight in the United States. Then Terrell pulled out as well. Dundee had a venue but no opponent for Ali. So in steps Chualo, who finally gets the fight he has always wanted, while also putting Toronto on the world map.

March 29, 1966: The match took on mythical proportions as the underdog Canadian vs. the loudmouth American, and although the Canadian didn’t win, he didn’t go down either. Like the fictional Rocky Balboa—it has been said that the Chualo–Ali fight was the inspiration for *Rocky*—he “won” by going the distance. It was a great fight and a historic moment in Canadian sports. *The Last Round* does justice to both the fight and the man.

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