

# Entertainment

## Stone film commends disabled vet

"Born on the Fourth of July" celebrates veteran Ron Kovic

by Robb Frederick  
Entertainment Editor

Ron Kovic has spent much of his last twenty years in hell, and he wants to talk about it. In his 1976 autobiography Kovic, a veteran disabled in Vietnam, recorded the pain and frustration which accompanied his efforts to return his life to a state of physical, emotional and social normalcy. With the help of director and fellow veteran Oliver Stone, Kovic's plight has finally gained national attention through the film *Born on the Fourth of July*.

The film documents Kovic's transformation from an obsessively patriotic youth to a militant anti-war protester, and the change carries with it few pleasant moments.

Kovic is just a young boy enjoying small-time life in Massapequa, New York, when *Born on the Fourth* begins.

While attending a parade celebrating the birthday he shares with a nation, he stands in awe as the decorated soldiers pass before him. This nationalism continues to build throughout his adolescence, spurred by his mother's expectations of grandeur and the spirit of McCarthyism sweeping the country. By graduation, Kovic's only aspiration is enlistment in the Marine Corps.

Once in the military, Kovic volunteers for duty on the front lines, where he experiences one firefight too many.

As a shell rips through his chest, severing his spinal cord, Kovic loses the final threads of his innocence. This scene is particularly gruesome, as Stone attempts to recreate the feelings Kovic recalled for his autobiography.

"I heard a huge crack next to my ear. It was like getting hit with an express train...I closed my eye for a second, then I started to breathe. My lung was collapsed so I just took little breaths. All I could think of was that I didn't want to die. I waited to die," he wrote.

Kovic doesn't die, but his journey into hell is nowhere near

completion. Upon his return to the States, he begins a residency that confines him to veterans' hospitals where he is confronted by the brutal realization of his unjust fate.

While in the hospitals, Kovic's living conditions deteriorate even further. He is subjected to humiliating, agonizing treatment by unsympathetic orderlies working with inadequate equipment. Rats roam freely throughout the institution, and patients are frequently left unattended for lengthy periods of time.

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Kovic is eventually released from the hospital, and he returns to his home and his family, where he encounters an entirely different series of problems. He quarrels bitterly with his brother, who opposes the war, and he turns to alcohol to combat his disillusionment with life. His bouts with intoxication lead to barroom fights and volatile arguments with his religious mother.

At the peak of his frustration, Kovic attends a violent anti-war protest, where a policeman upends him from his chair. This experience eradicates all remaining faith Kovic has in his country, and incites him to join the movement.

Through protest, Kovic once again finds purpose in his life. He becomes a universal spokesman for handicapped veterans, and his efforts lead to a militant uprising during a Republican National Convention.

Although he is beaten and arrested, Kovic finally exposes the suffering he shares with so many other veterans.

Although the running time of *Born on the Fourth of July* exceeds two hours, director Oliver Stone has difficulty compacting the full struggle of Ron Kovic. Supporting characters merely disappear, and significant events are overshadowed by unimportant details.

The true accomplishment of Stone lies in his unyielding style of directing. Stone, who renewed the market for Vietnam films with his smash success *Platoon*, uses *Born on the Fourth* to personalize the trauma and agony of war. He pulls no punches, and the result is a work which repulses viewers with gruesome details and bitter truths. Stone rarely lets the pressure subside, and the film leaves viewers drained.

The film's financial success, however, rides solely on the remarkable performance by Tom Cruise. To get a feel for Kovic's pain, Cruise spent months working in a wheelchair; the experience resulted in a thoroughly believing performance of the caliber reserved for Academy Award winners.

In *Born on the Fourth*, Cruise shatters any doubts about his acting ability. His honest, emotional performance carries the film through its rough moments with ease, and he does so without any of the boyhood charm which he has based his career on thus far.

The directness of *Born on the Fourth of July* makes the film difficult to view, but the subject matter itself is unpleasant.

As Ron Kovic approaches a podium at the film's end, he explains his motives to a reporter. "I feel like I'm home," he states. "I just feel like we're home."

This film is more than a reminder of an issue that divided a country. It is a homecoming for Kovic and other veterans like him, and it is long overdue.

# Liner notes

by Robb Frederick  
Entertainment Editor

Hundreds of prospective actors swamped the Philadelphia offices of several casting directors earlier this week after local papers ran an ad announcing small roles in the upcoming Sylvester Stallone film *Rocky V*. Available roles included fight referees, pedestrians and cab drivers. Is a role that small worth the hassle? Before you answer, remember this- with a single line just about anyone could overshadow Sly's pitiful range.

•Rumors have it that Bruce Springsteen and his girlfriend/backup singer Patti Scialfa are expecting a child, but no statements have yet been issued by the Boss' management.

•The sequel-of-the-month award goes to *Leatherface: The Texas Massacre III*, which opened last week to (surprise!) not-so-great reviews.

•Chuck Berry is suing High Society magazine for printing photos of him posing nude with an unidentified woman. Do the magazine's publishers really expect this to increase sales? After all, Berry is 63.

•As an abundance of cover songs seeps onto the airwaves, congratulations to the Scorpions, who almost do justice to The Who's "I Can't Explain." Even if the song makes die-hard Who fans feel like a hotel room after a stay by Keith Moon, it's still much less of a sin than Joan Jett's version of AC/DC's "Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap." Just a quick warning: If New Kids on the Block try to cover "Born in the USA," I can't be held responsible.

•Virgin British Airways has begun running an ad featuring everybody's favorite Panamanian, Manuel Noriega. Accompanying the picture is a

boast that "Only one person can fly into the U.S.A. for less."

•Tom Cruise has just filed for a divorce from Mimi Rogers, his wife of 32 months. Cruise must be feeling creative, since he told *Rolling Stone* earlier this month that he "...can't imagine being without her."

•Polygram Jazz has signed Bill Cosby for a series of albums, but the records will contain music, not comedy. Cosby plans to use the series to showcase several of his original compositions.

•Just in case anyone else out there is waiting patiently for another release by Edie Brickell and New Bohemians, take note- for now Edie can be seen in the film *Born on the Fourth of July* (see review on this page). She sings "A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall" in what may be the film's only upbeat moment.

•Novelist Stephen King has begun work on the movie adaptation of his book *Misery*. The film's lead will be played by James Caan.

•Several recent recordings have just reached the platinum sales level. The certified releases include Acrosmith's "Pump," Tears for Fears' "The Seeds of Love," and (Ack!) "New Kids on the Block."

•The Coca-Cola Corporation, which aired a sloppy 3-D commercial during last year's Superbowl, will run another "breakthrough" pitch during this year's big game. Executives shelled out vast amounts of cash to create the new spot, which gives the classic "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" impressive stereo sound. That's money well spent considering that only 19% of America's VCRs have stereo capability.

### Contemporary Hits

taken from *Radio and Records*

1. Michael Bolton - "How Am I..."
2. Rod Stewart - "Downtown Train"
3. Seduction - "2 to Make it Right"
4. Paula Abdul - "Opposites Attract"
5. Jody Watley - "Everything"

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