



The Godfather

If you want a film that exemplifies and honours the impossible, arbitrary and contradictory history and nature of moviemaking, look no further. Hollywood movies are an artform and a mass entertainment, the product of a singular vision and of a ruthless industry, the work of great directors and the alchemical result of a thousand collaborations, coincidences and backs-against-the-wall snap decisions. *The Godfather* is all of the above and more – an unimaginably dark story that begins with the hopeful sentence ‘I believe in America,’ a fat, full saga that, two years after its release, revealed itself to be merely the middle of a fatter, fuller saga, and a work the creation of which has generated its own mythic origin stories, from the director who wouldn’t compromise to the leading man nobody was sure could pull it off. It is enduring and defining art, alchemically transmuted from the pages of an OK bestseller and the imaginations of everyone involved, first among them its great co-writer and director Francis Ford Coppola. As James Caan’s Sonny Corleone says in one of the film’s most enduring scenes, ‘This is business, and this man is takin’ it very, very personal.’ So much of the most brilliant work from Hollywood emerged from the conviction that a movie could be both. Every scene of *The Godfather* makes the case for that belief.

The movie exists on countless timelines – it was an early peak for its director, given his big studio shot at the unimaginable age of 32; a mind-blowing return to form for Marlon Brando; a stunning launch for Al Pacino; a benchmark achievement of New Hollywood; and a gauntlet thrown down by its cinematographer Gordon Willis, whose brown-black-and-blacker lighting and compositions changed the look of movies. Its most experienced actor made his debut in the 1930s; its newcomers are still working today. While no movie can be said to gather both the past and the future of filmmaking into itself, *The Godfather* comes thrillingly close. It’s a crime story, a family story that plunders the word ‘family’ for comedy, emotion and profound horror, an immigrant story and a cautionary tale about the American hunger for power; it contains multitudes. Were the screen suddenly to triple in size, as it does in Abel Gance’s 1927 epic *Napoléon* (a film Coppola reveres), you sense that a teeming world would reveal itself as always having been there. But the world within Coppola’s frame is big enough; half a century later, we can still walk around in it and discover something new about moviemaking and life with every visit.

Mark Harris, bfi.org.uk

Roger Corman on ‘The Godfather’

Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* is one of the enduring works of American cinema. It’s a monumental combination of my cinematic favourites as a producer and a director: the American genre film and the European art film. Presenting a deeply flawed protagonist as an emblem of the contradictions within the American dream, the film touches on the immigrant experience that is part of the heritage of all Americans.

Coppola gives us the inherently American story of the aspirations of the outsider. We see that the Mafia is, at its core, a business for an ethnic group

that has been excluded from mainstream commercial enterprise. Its organisation, though based in bloodlines and honour, mirrors the structure and history of corporate America. The film embraces the quintessentially American crime genre, but subvert it by presenting violence as rooted in social necessity. We are transported to a world where murder is justice and our identification is with the outlaw, an extreme version of the outsider present in the personal histories of many Americans.

Coppola brings artistry to this American world of violence through several channels. He elicits performances that allow his characters realistically to span decades while effectively embodying the deterioration of respect for social convention inherent in the rise to power. And he introduces a cinematic style that intensifies his actors' performances. Framing, the composition of individual shots, *mise en scène* and, most notably, powerful juxtaposition confirm the place of artistry in American gangster cinema. Violence and murder are documented in a realistic style, but are at the same time made beautiful. Sonny's death, for instance, is presented in a gritty fashion but is timed as an elegant series of shots. This type of artistry, rooted in the crime genre, confirms not only Coppola's proficiency as an *auteur* but his capacity for innovation.

Some may suspect that I'm biased because Coppola began his career with me in 1962. But while I like and admire Francis a great deal, I'm confident I would consider the film a colossal work even if he were a stranger. I can admire *The Godfather* from afar for its social and artistic impact, but know the reason it makes my list of favourites is because it touches me personally. As an American by birth and an independent film-maker by profession, I have a strong identification with the outsider. Beautiful, realist, revolutionary, *The Godfather* stepped outside the boundaries of the traditional in both form and story. In doing so, it eclipsed and conquered the mainstream.

Roger Corman, *Sight and Sound*, September 2002

Francis Ford Coppola on 'The Godfather'

Is it true that Paramount wanted to fire you during the making of The Godfather?

I was getting 'fired' every other week. The things they were going to fire me over were, one: wanting to cast Brando. Two: wanting to cast Pacino. Wanting to shoot in Sicily; wanting to make it in period. The very things that made the film different from any other film.

How did you manage to stay on?

By a very slim margin. The first time I almost got fired was over the casting. I think I only stayed on and finally got Pacino because literally they made a corporate decision: 'If we don't do it now, we'll delay for six months, and the book's a bestseller now.' I think they decided it would be more trouble to fire me. The second time I almost got fired was after the shooting started and I was falling a day behind every week: I had told them it would take me 80 days to make the movie, and they gave me a schedule of 53 days. Everyone hated Brando's first day. Bob Evans started to make inquiries to see if Kazan were available. They figured that Kazan was the only director who could really work with Brando. Finally, after the first three weeks, Charlie Bluhdorn, the head of Gulf and Western, had a nice meeting with me and gave me his support. Then I took control of it.

How did they feel about the film before it was released?

I have to give Bob Evans credit there. As soon as he saw the film, he decided it would be a major hit. He staked his career on it, because he was the guy who fought for the length. I was chicken. I was going to cut 15 minutes out. Evans really means well, and has some good intuitions, and he worked very hard on it. I feel the finished version could have been better had they left me alone.

Do you accept Brando's interpretation of the film as a parable of corporate life in America?

Brando got that from me. I always wanted to use the Mafia as a metaphor for America. If you look at the film, you see that it's focused that way. The first line is 'I believe in America.' I feel that the Mafia is an incredible metaphor for this country. Both the Mafia and America have roots in Europe. America is a European phenomenon. Basically, both the Mafia and America feel they are benevolent organisations. Both the Mafia and America have their hands stained with blood from what it is necessary to do to protect their power and interests. Both are totally capitalistic phenomena and basically have a profit motive. But I feel that America does not take care of its people. America misuses and short-changes its people; we look to our country as our protector, and it's fooling us, it's lying to us. And I thought the reason the book was so popular was that people love to read about an organisation that's really going to take care of us. When the courts fail you and the whole American system fails you, you can go to the Old Man – Don Corleone – and say, 'Look what they did to me,' and you get justice. I think there is a tremendous hunger in this country, if not in the world, for that kind of clear, benevolent authority. Of course that is a romantic conception of the Mafia. There is a difference between the Mafia as it really is and the Mafia as we depict it.

Did you feel constrained at all by the plot?

One of my problems was time. I first felt that I had only two hours. And there were so many obligations that I had. I had to do the Hollywood producer. I hated that whole Hollywood section, but I had to do it because I had to cut off that stupid horse's head. I had to do this, I had to do that. And by the time I did what I had to do, I had already used up the movie. So I never had time to make some of the points I wanted to make. Brando's death scene was very self-indulgent, in that it didn't just say what it had to say and get out. It was like four minutes with this little kid. That's the best scene in the film, I think. I wanted to do more of that kind of stuff, but I couldn't. The only part of the film that I had a nice time doing was Sicily because it was all over by then, and I had a chance to think it out.

Francis Ford Coppola interviewed by Stephen Farber, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1972

THE GODFATHER

Directed by: Francis Ford Coppola
©/Presented by: Paramount Pictures Corporation
Produced by: Alfran Productions, Albert S. Ruddy
Associate Producer: Gray Frederickson
Unit Co-ordinator: Robert Barth
Sicilian Unit Production Manager: Valerio De Paolis
Unit Production Manager: Fred Caruso
Location Co-ordinators: Michael Briggs, Tony Bowers
Post-production Consultant: Walter Murch
Foreign Post-production: Peter Zinner
Executive Assistant: Robert S. Mendelsohn
Assistant Director: Fred Gallo
Sicilian Unit Assistant Director: Tony Brandt
Script Continuity: Nancy Tonery
CASTING: Fred Roos, Andrea Eastman, Louis DiGiaino
Screenplay by: Mario Puzo, Francis Ford Coppola
Based on the novel by: Mario Puzo
Director of Photography: Gordon Willis
Camera Operator: Michael Chapman
Grips: Robert Royal, Michael Oates, Ed Kammerer
Electricians: David McClean, Russell W. Engels
Special Effects: A.D. Flowers, Joe Lombardi, Sass Bedig
Edited by: William Reynolds, Peter Zinner
Editors (New York): Marc Laub
Assistant Editors: Jack Wheeler
Production Designer: Dean Tavoularis
Art Director: Warren Clymer
Sicilian Unit Assistant Art Director: Samuel Verts
Set Decorator: Philip Smith
Standby Props: David Goodnuff
Carpenters: Edward Swanson, Ken Paquette
Costume Designer: Anna Hill Johnstone
Women's Wardrobe: Marilyn Putnam
Wardrobe Supervisor: George Newman
Make-up: Dick Smith, Philip Rhodes
Hairstylist: Phil Leto
Music Composed by: Nino Rota
Mall Wedding Sequence Additional Music: Carmine Coppola
Baptism Sequence Additional Music: J.S. Bach
[Music] Conducted by: Carlo Savina
Production Recording: Christopher Newman
Re-recording: Bud Grenzbach, Richard Portman
Cinemobile Technician: Johnny Jensen
Location Service: Cinemobile Systems

uncredited:

2nd Assistant Director: Steven Skloot
Screenplay – Brando/Pacino Garden Sequence: Robert Towne
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Bill Butler
Insert Photography: George Lucas
1st Camera Assistant: Tibor Sands
2nd Camera Assistant: Peter Salim
Key Grip: Robert Ward
Dolly Grip: Robert Volpe
Grip: Ray Williams
Set Grip: Ed Knott
Gaffer: Dusty Wallace
Best Boys: Ed Tonkin, Ed Quinn

Electrician: Joe Rutledge
Generator Operator: Jim Meyerhoff
Stills: Jack Stager
Editor (New York): Murray Solomon
Property Master: Tom Wright
Standby Props: Leslie Bloom
Outside Props: Jack Wright Jr
Construction Grip: Joe Williams
Sound Recordist: Les Lazarowitz
Boom Operator: Pat Suraci

Cast

Marlon Brando (*Don Vito Corleone*)
Al Pacino (*Michael Corleone*)
James Caan (*Santino 'Sonny' Corleone*)
Richard Castellano (*Peter Clemenza*)
Robert Duvall (*Tom Hagen*)
Sterling Hayden (*Captain McCluskey*)
John Marley (*Jack Woltz*)
Richard Conte (*Barzini*)
Al Lettieri (*Virgil Sollozzo*)
Diane Keaton (*Kay Adams*)
Abe Vigoda (*Tessio*)
Talia Shire (*Connie Rizzi*)
Gianni Russo (*Carlo Rizzi*)
John Cazale (*Fredo Corleone*)
Rudy Bond (*Carmine Cuneo*)
Al Martino (*Johnny Fontane*)
Morgana King (*Mama Corleone*)
Lenny Montana (*Luca Brasi*)
John Martino (*Paulie Gatto*)
Salvatore Corsitto (*Bonasera*)
Richard Bright (*Neri*)
Alex Rocco (*Moe Greene*)
Tony Giorgio (*Bruno Tattaglia*)
Vito Scotti (*Nazorine*)
Tere Livrano (*Theresa Hagen*)
Victor Rendina (*Philip Tattaglia*)
Jeannie Linero (*Lucy Mancini*)
Julie Gregg (*Sandra Corleone*)
Ardell Sheridan (*Mrs Clemenza*)
Simonetta Stefanelli (*Apollonia Vitelli*)
Angelo Infanti (*Fabrizio*)
Corrado Gaipa (*Don Tommasino*)
Franco Citti (*Calo*)
Saro Urzi (*Vitelli*)

uncredited:

Sonny Grosso (*McCluskey's aide*)
Carmine Coppola (*pianist*)
Sofia Coppola (*Rizzi baby boy at christening*)
Joe Spinell (*Willi Cicci*)
Max Brandt (*extra in furniture-moving scene*)
Tony Geiger
Pete Lemongello

USA 1972©

175 mins

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