



Dir: Francis Ford COPPOLA / USA
Released in Britain: 1972
Running Time: 172 minutes
Colour: Technicolor
Estimated Attendance: 11 million

Family life was never going to be the same after Francis Ford Coppola's breakthrough movie, a vast but impeccably detailed portrait of a close-knit Mafia clan. Practically every moment here offers a master class in filmmaking, from the opening party sequence to the chilling closing massacre. See it and weep.

THE GODFATHER

Director **Francis Ford Coppola**
 Producer **Albert S. Ruddy**
 Screenplay **Mario Puzo, Francis Ford Coppola, adapted from the novel by Mario Puzo**
 Director of Photography **Gordon Willis**
 Editors **William H. Reynolds, Peter Zinner**
 Production Designer **Dean Tavoularis**
 Music **Nino Rota**

Don Vito Corleone • Marlon Brando
 Michael Corleone • Al Pacino
 Sonny Corleone • James Caan
 Kay Adams • Diane Keaton
 Tom Hagen • Robert Duvall
 Connie Rizzi • Talia Shire
 Fredo Corleone • John Cazale
 Clemenza • Richard Castellano
 Captain McCluskey • Sterling Hayden
 Jack Woltz • John Marley
 Barzini • Richard Conte
 Sollozzo • Al Lettieri
 Tessio • Abe Vigoda
 Carlo Rizzi • Gianni Russo
 Cuneo • Rudy Bond
 Johnny Fontane • Al Martino
 Mama Corleone • Morgana King
 Luca Brasi • Lenny Montana
 Paulie Gatto • John Martino
 Bonasera • Salvatore Corsitto

THE STORY

In August 1945 Don Vito Corleone, known as 'Godfather' to the many Italian immigrants in New York dependent upon his help and protection, presides over his daughter Connie's wedding to the young bookmaker Carlo Rizzi. The lavish ceremony at his Long Beach home is attended by crowds of relatives and friends, among them Tom Hagen, the Don's right-hand man and legal adviser. Hagen attends a meeting that has been requested with the Don by Virgil Sollozzo, a leading member of the Tattaglia Family, closest rivals to the Corleones. Sollozzo proposes that the Don participate in a drug-running operation, and although the Don turns the offer down, Sollozzo notices that Sonny, the eldest Corleone son, is interested.

A few weeks later, the Godfather is shot down in the street, clearly so that the way will be open for the Tattaglias to do a deal with Sonny. The old man survives, however, and while he slowly recovers, the Corleones take their revenge. Michael, the youngest son, shoots both Sollozzo and McClusky, the corrupt police chief who has been helping him, and is then rushed to Sicily to be out of harm's way during the ensuing warfare. He marries a Sicilian girl, Apollonia, and for two years lives happily in an obscure mountain village until the news reaches him that Sonny has been killed and that the Don has resumed command of the Corleones. Shortly afterwards, Apollonia is killed in an explosion intended for Michael and set off by Fabrizio, one of his own bodyguards.

Michael returns to New York to find that the Don has made peace with all the rival families and that an uneasy truce exists. He marries an American girl, Kay, and sets about taking over the reins from the Godfather, who is now keen to retire. When Don Vito dies suddenly, the Godfather's long-range planning finds an efficient champion in Michael. With a series of ruthless murders he settles old scores, disposes of the weak members of his own ranks and restores the Corleones to full supremacy.



Left The meticulously spectacular *Gone With the Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics, *Above* The meticulously spectacular *Gone With the Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics
Below The meticulously spectacular *Gone With the Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics

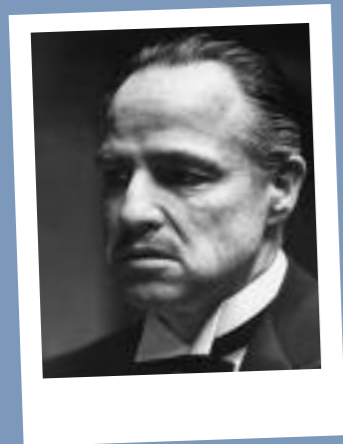
WHAT THEY SAID THEN ...

With a sequel already on the way, *The Godfather* is perhaps more of a social phenomenon than a movie, a curious compendium of legend, fantasy, rumour and thinly disguised fact. That the size of its audience has broken all records indicates the same kind of response as was given to the gangster films of the 1930s (the truth looks so much better in make-up).

Yet breaking the rules, *The Godfather* deals not with the wages of sin but with such upright human virtues as honour, loyalty, justice and the exercise of power. Its personalities, far from being social outcasts, are hard-working members of the community, pursuing the decent living conditions that are the right of every United States immigrant. The Godfather himself, while he may have been capable of a slight indiscretion in his youth, is now undoubtedly a man of the highest integrity. And in this sense, despite the hangovers from the old gangster movie tradition – the careful period reconstructions, the vintage cars, the lush furnishings – *The Godfather* is a modern tale about contemporary private enterprise.

The really remarkable aspect of the film is that in terms of style it is so self-effacing – one might unkindly call it the *Love Story* of gangster cinema. Coppola has played completely safe and, apart from tinkering a little with the death





OSCARS

10 Nominations, 3 Winners

Best Picture

Directing: Francis Ford Coppola

Actor: Marlon Brando (note: award refused)

Actor in a Supporting Role: James Caan

Actor in a Supporting Role: Robert Duvall

Actor in a Supporting Role: Al Pacino

Costume Design: Anna Hill Johnstone

Film Editing: William Reynolds, Peter Zinner

Sound: Bud Grenzbach, Richard Portman, Christopher Newman

Writing (Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium):

Mario Puzo, Francis Ford Coppola

WHAT WON THAT YEAR?

Directing: Bob Fosse *Cabaret*

Actress: Liza Minnelli *Cabaret*

BAFTAS

4 Nominations

Actor: Marlon Brando (also for *The Nightcomers*)

Costume Design: Anna Hill Johnstone

Supporting Actor: Robert Duvall

Most Promising Newcomer to Leading Film Roles: Al Pacino

WHAT WON THAT YEAR?

Film: *Cabaret*

Direction: Bob Fosse *Cabaret*

Actor: Gene Hackman *The French Connection/The Poseidon Adventure*

Actress: Liza Minelli *Cabaret*

scenes (the *Godfather's*, for example, takes rather longer) has mostly filmed Puzo's narrative just as it comes. One result is that the film is far too long. Another, inevitably, is confusion; lesser characters arrive and abruptly depart without it being certain whether we should regret their passing. The holocaust at the end, rather too glibly intercut with a new Corleone baptism, needs particularly careful attention if one is keeping score.

With due allowance given to the obvious charm of the wedding reception and the seductive landscapes of the Sicilian sequences, *The Godfather* is primarily borne along by its battery of excellent performances, two of them by Coppola's 'regulars' Robert Duvall and James Caan, who already proved their worth so impressively in *The Rain People* (19xx). The film's big discovery is Al Pacino, whose transition from gauche outsider to hardened and inevitable successor to the Godfather is portrayed with finely calculated intensity. Almost, but not quite, he steals the film from Brando who, sinking with a sinister calm into the network of folds on his face, nevertheless gives an effortless authoritative impersonation of the Don. Despite some curiously unmemorable qualities, *The Godfather* would be unimaginable without Brando's hypnotic presence – the elegant gestures, the murmuring comments, the unbending poise.

WHAT THEY SAY NOW ...

It was the event film of the 1970s, with dialogue, characters and imagery instantly entering the popular consciousness. It made stars of Pacino and Caan, and gave Brando a triumphant comeback. Not since Warner Brothers' crime cycle of the 1930s had the underworld so captured the public imagination. But in adapting Mario Puzo's bestseller Coppola turned pulp into opera. Plainly put, *The Godfather* is fully deserving of its reputation as one of the greatest American films ever made.

The reasons are numerous: Coppola's authoritative grip on an ordered, fastidiously constructed narrative, Dean Tavoularis's richly detailed design, the weight given to a fabulous supporting ensemble, Gordon Willis's striking cinematography, Nino Rota's melodic score. Take your pick.



Far left above The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics, **Far left below** he meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics, **Below** The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics **Right** The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical

The Godfather has long been criticised for glorifying the Mafia. But time and two more pictures have drawn out the despair and nihilism in the material. *The Godfather Part II* of 1974 is even more compelling in its study of power shading into moral decay. The flawed *Part III* of 1990 sees Michael Corleone get his just desserts with Shakespearean finality. *The Godfather* continues to entrance, however, for its mythic exploration of family, albeit one cursed in blood and ambition.

CLASSIC QUOTE

Don Corleone: 'I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse.'

SCENE STEALER

The producer who refuses to cast Don Vito's godson Johnny Fontane in his film awakens, panicked to find his bed and silk pyjamas sticky with blood. Fearfully he pulls the sheet away and, shrieking, discovers the severed head of his magnificent thoroughbred stallion at his feet.

BEHIND THE SCENES

So numerous are the anecdotes (Brando did *not* stuff his cheeks with cotton, but had resin blobs clipped to his back teeth; Sinatra, universally believed to be the model for crooner Johnny Fontane, *did* attack Puzo in a restaurant, calling him a 'stool-pigeon'; the baby being baptised during the climax is Coppola's infant daughter Sofia) that there are volumes of *Godfather* lore and trivia.

IN THE CHAIR

Shortly after its premiere *Variety* reported, '*The Godfather* is an historic smash of unprecedented proportions. At the time, Francis Ford Coppola was holed up in a hotel writing the screenplay for *The Great Gatsby* to relieve his financial problems because he believed *The Godfather* was going to be a disaster. Suddenly he was the most important filmmaker around, with masterpieces *The Conversation* and *The Godfather Part II* made back-to-back. His subsequent