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Author(s)	Todd McCarthy
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REVIEWS

FILM

THE GODFATHER PART III

A Paramount release from Zoetrope Studios. Produced and directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Executive producers, Fred Fuchs, Nicholas Gage. Screenplay, Mario Puzo, Coppola. Camera (Technicolor), Gordon Willis; editor, Barry Malkin, Lisa Fruchtman, Walter Murch; music, Carmine Coppola; additional music and themes, Nino Rota; sound (Dolby), Clive Winter; sound design, Richard Beggs; production design, Dean Tavoularis; supervising art director, Alex Tavoularis; set design (Italy), Maria Teresa Barbasso, Nazzareno Piana; supervising set decorator, Gary Fetti; set decorator (Italy), Franco Fumagalli; costume design, Milena Canonero; associate producer, Marina Gelter; coproducers, Fred Roos, Gray Frederickson, Charles Mulvehill; assistant directors, H. Gordon Boos, Gianni Arduini-Plaisant (Italy); casting, Janet Hirshenson, Jane Jenkins, Roger Mussenden. Reviewed at the Loews Astor Plaza, N.Y., Dec. 12, 1990. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 161 MIN.

Michael Corleone Al Pacino
 Kay Adams Diane Keaton
 Connie Corleone Rizzi Talia Shire
 Vincent Mancini Andy Garcia
 Don Altobello Eli Wallach
 Joey Zasa Joe Mantegna
 B.J. Harrison George Hamilton
 Grace Hamilton Bridget Fonda
 Mary Corleone Sofia Coppola
 Cardinal Lambert Raf Vallone
 Anthony Corleone Franc D'Ambrosio
 Archbishop Gilday Donal Donnelly
 Al Neri Richard Bright
 Frederick Keinszig Helmut Berger
 Dominic Abbando Don Novello
 Also with: John Savage, Franco Citti, Mario Donatone, Vittorio Duse, Enzo Robutti, Michele Russo, Al Martino, Robert Cicchini, Rogerio Miranda.

Faced with the extraordinary task of recapturing magic he created 16 and 18 years ago, Francis Ford Coppola has come very close to completely succeeding with "The Godfather Part III."

While certain flaws may prevent it from being regarded as the full equal of its predecessors, which are generally ranked among the greatest modern American films, it nonetheless matches them in narrative intensity, epic scope, sociopolitical analysis, physical beauty and deep feeling for its characters and milieu. In addition, it is certainly the most personal of the three for the director.

It is impossible to know if Paramount's \$55 million-plus production investment will yield huge profits, but it should stand as a major b.o. attraction.

Dragged back into bloody gangland activities after laboriously enshrouding himself in the trappings of respectability, Al Pacino's Michael Corleone laments, "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in." This could be read as Coppola's comment upon his own involvement in this celebrated trilogy.

Once again, Coppola has man-



MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE MEN: Sonny's boy Andy Garcia, left, consults with don Eli Wallach.

aged to fuse matters of close concern to him with the stuff of richly satisfying commercial entertainment. Preoccupations with aging, diminished power, family, passing the mantle, sin and redemption are easily combined with dramatic familial and political intrigue, violent power plays, international high finance and corruption in the Vatican. Most of it plays beautifully.

Reminders of the earlier pictures are present both explicitly, via brief clips, and implicitly, through the repetition of storytelling motifs. Like the original, Part III opens with a lengthy festival celebration punctuated by backroom dealings. It is 1979, and Michael Corleone, having divested himself of his illegal operations, is being honored by the Catholic Church for his abundant charitable activities.

The party at the family's lavish New York apartment introduces characters both familiar and new. Michael's ex-wife Kay (Diane Keaton), now remarried, comes to see him for the first time in eight years, principally to support the desire of the couple's son Anthony (Franc D'Ambrosio) to quit law school and become an opera singer. Unmarried and without a romantic attachment, Michael receives his emotional support from his sister Connie (Talia Shire).

Hopeful of bringing his family closer together, Michael dotes on his daughter Mary (Sofia Coppola), and understandably becomes perturbed by her affair with cousin Vincent (Andy Garcia), hot-headed, violence-prone illegitimate son of Michael's late brother Sonny. Vincent has been unhappily working for slumlord and old-style thug Joey Zasa (Joe Mantegna), who has taken on Michael's less savory holdings.

Also on the scene are friendly rival Don Altobello (Eli Wallach), new counsel B.J. Harrison (George Hamilton), replacing the absent Robert Duvall's Tom

Hagen, Hagen's priest son Andrew (John Savage), singer Johnny Fontane (Al Martino), the highly placed Archbishop Gilday (Donal Donnelly) and a journalist (Bridget Fonda) who seeks an interview with Don Corleone but happily settles for a roll in the hay with Vincent.

Bad blood between the ruthless Zasa and the Corleone family mounts just as Michael tries, with \$600 million, to buy a controlling interest in the European conglomerate Immobiliare, a move that would cement his business legitimacy and financial future. The company is owned by venerable European families presented as being even more corrupt than the Mafia, and both sides lobby for the favor of the Vatican, which must ratify the Corleone takeover.

But old ways die hard, as Zasa, feeling slighted, spectacularly massacres most of the old dons at an Atlantic City conclave. Michael and Altobello escape with their lives, whereupon the irrepressible Vincent undertakes a personal vendetta against his impudent former boss.

After exactly midpoint, 80 minutes, the action switches to Italy, where it remains for the dura-

tion. Ostensibly, the family is gathering in Sicily to attend the operatic debut of Anthony, but there is much business to look after. Pacino and Wallach's old dons can't help begin scheming against one another, much as they profess to want to live out their remaining days quietly.

In one extremely potent scene, Michael begins confessing his countless sins to a cardinal (Raf Vallone), which forces him to confront his most heinous crime, the murder of his brother Fredo. Even more powerful is the sequence in which Michael officially anoints his bastard nephew as a Corleone, giving him the power of a don.

But the best is still yet to come. In one of the most masterful examples of sustained intercutting in cinema, Anthony's performance on opening night in "Cavalleria Rusticana" serves as the backdrop for several murderous missions.

Both Michael and Altobello are targets at the opera house, two financial kingpins are victimized, a bishop is pursued and the Pope himself (the actual John Paul I, who died mysteriously after a very short reign) falls under an assassin's hand. Suspense generated here is genuine and considerable, and is topped off by a rather shocking denouement that, given the death of one of Coppola's sons a few years ago, could not be more deeply felt.

With one glaring exception, which may unfortunately become the subject of an inordinate amount of criticism, casting and acting is exemplary down the line. For the third time out in his career role, Pacino is magnificent. With his character trying to take the initiative in reconciling his family and pushing through new business deals, Pacino is more animated and varied than he was going into his deep freeze in Part II. He manages to generate considerable sympathy despite his venal history, and injects a measure of rueful humor as well.

Andy Garcia brings much-needed youth and juice to the ballsy Vincent, heir apparent to the Corleone tradition, much as James Caan sparked the first film and Robert De Niro invigorated the second.

Looking and acting better than she has before as Kay (hardly her most memorable role), Diane Keaton proves a welcome, if brief, presence in warming the film, and Talia Shire seems pleased with the opportunity to do some dirty work at long last. Wallach, Mantegna, Vallone, Donnelly and Fonda are all impressive, while Hamilton has very little to do but stand behind Pacino.

Film's main flaw, unavoidably, is Sofia Coppola in the important, but not critical, role of

Michael's daughter. Ungainly, afflicted with a valley girl accent and not an actress who can hold her own in this august company, the director's daughter simply doesn't cut it. This renders pic's main romantic element un compelling and essentially unbelievable, and undercuts the force of the ending.

Unfortunate casting decision was made after original actress Winona Ryder had to bow out at the start of production, and created a furor within the company. Sad to say, the naysayers were correct.

A few awkward lines of dialog pop up here and there, and finale feels too abrupt, as Coppola seems to put too quick a capper on his great saga. But these are the only notable drawbacks in a mostly outstanding work.

As before, production values are spectacular. Myriad settings created by Dean Tavoularis and countless costumes fashioned by Milena Canonero provide a constant visual delight. Gordon Willis' cinematography, dark as before, gloriously matches his supreme accomplishments on the preceding films.

Carmine Coppola's score artfully incorporates the late Nino Rota's themes into outstanding new musical backgrounding, and editing by Barry Malkin, Lisa

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MPAA RATINGS

NEW YORK R ratings, including one for Francis Coppola's "The Godfather Part III," dominated the 1,145th weekly bulletin of the Motion Picture Assn. of America's Classification & Rating Administration.

Five other pics attracted the restricted label. One was rated PG, two PG-13 and one NC-17.

- PG**
"Shipwrecked" (Buena Vista).
- PG-13**
"Fast Getaway" (Cinetel Films through New Line).
- "Heaven And Earth" (Triton Pictures).

R
"Bloodsucking Pharaohs In Pittsburgh" (Skouras Pictures). So rated for strong violence, and for sensuality and language.

"Dead Space" (Concorde). Sensuality and violence.

"Delta Force Commando II (Priority Red One)" (Transcon Entertainment). Strong violence, and for some language.

"Descending Angel" (Home Box Office). Sensuality and language.

"The Godfather Part III" (Paramount). Violence and language.

"Street Solders" (Academy Entertainment). Language.

NC-17
"The Secret Sex Lives Of Romeo & Juliet" (Spectradyne).

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Fruchtman and Walter Murch keeps the disparate elements in balance while shining in individual setpieces.

Like Michael Corleone, Coppola seems to have been looking for a certain absolution with this film and, in exploring his major themes here so richly, with the maturity and resignation gained with age, he has arguably achieved it.

He has also created a dramatic and commercial powerhouse that can stand easily on its own and as the conclusion of a remarkable trilogy. — *Cart.*