

## Document Citation

Title	<b>A frosty family reunion</b>
Author(s)	Todd McCarthy
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2009 May 18
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	29, 35
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Tetro, Coppola, Francis Ford, 2009

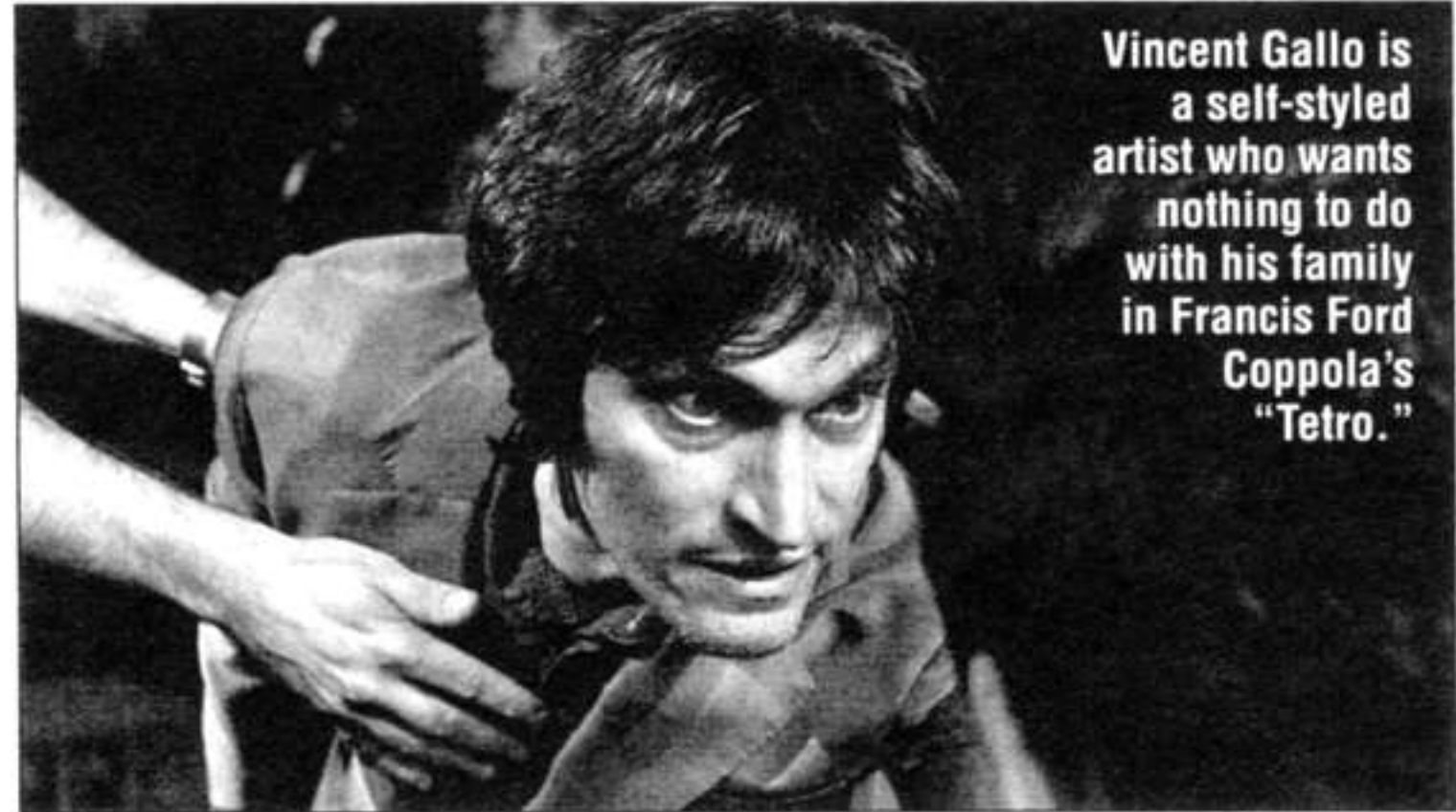
# A frosty family reunion

By **TODD McCARTHY**

**A**lthough markedly better than his previous small-scaled, self-financed pic, "Youth Without Youth," Francis Ford Coppola's "Tetro" is still a work of modest ambition and appeal. Gloriously shot in mostly black-and-white widescreen in Buenos Aires, Coppola's first original screenplay since 1974's "The Conversation" hinges on the tension between two long-separated brothers dominated by an artistic genius father. The angst-ridden treatment of Oedipal issues makes the picture play out like a passably talented imitation of O'Neill, Williams, Miller and Inge, and

thus it feels like the pale product of an over-tilled field. Coppola will release the film himself Stateside, doubtless to marginal returns, and in the long run, "Tetro" likely will be most remembered for introducing a highly promising young actor, Alden Ehrenreich.

Allegedly first noticed by Steven Spielberg in a homevideo played at a bat mitzvah and subsequently discovered by longtime casting ace and producer Fred Roos, the 18-



Vincent Gallo is a self-styled artist who wants nothing to do with his family in Francis Ford Coppola's "Tetro."

year-old Ehrenreich manages the remarkable feat of resembling by turns three of the leading actors from "The Departed": When he first appears, he looks like the

younger brother of Leonardo DiCaprio; then, at certain moments, his smile and the look in his eye recall Jack Nicholson, *Turn to page 35*

**TETRO**  
American Zoetrope  
Directed by Francis Ford Coppola  
Starring: Vincent Gallo, Alden Ehrenreich, Maribel Verdu

## Film review index

City of Life and Death .....	31	Police, Adjective .....	30
Fish Tank .....	32	Spring Fever .....	31
Huacho .....	30	Tetro .....	29
Invisible Girlfriend .....	33	Up .....	29
No One Knows About Persian Cats .....	32	What Goes Up .....	30
		William Shatner's Gonzo Ballet .....	33

## TV

Glee .....	29
<b>Legit</b>	
Giant .....	34
Waiting for Godot .....	34

VARIETY MAY 18-24, 2009 Pg 29 cont. on Pg 35

# TETRO

Continued from page 29

while his head and facial shape are reminiscent of Matt Damon. Not only that, he has a winning screen presence and proves entirely up to the role's dramatic requirements.

Ehrenreich plays Bennie, who, clad in the spiffy whites of a cruise ship attendant, uses a Buenos Aires layover to track down his brother Tetro (Vincent Gallo). Arriving unannounced at the apartment his brother shares with g.f. Miranda (Maribel Verdu) in the artsy La Boca district, Bennie wants to know why Tetro never followed up on his promise to come back for him when the older boy left home a decade earlier.

Bennie has always idealized Tetro as a successful bohemian artist, but the scruffy malcontent destroys that image quickly, rebuffing Bennie's familial overtures and refusing to answer his many questions. Tetro seems so overwhelmed by resentment, regret and anger, mostly concerning his illustrious orchestra-conductor father Carlo (Klaus Maria Brandauer), that the most he can do is scribble notes on scraps of paper he shows to no one.

Miranda mediates a kind of truce that at least keeps Tetro from kicking Bennie out and, at length, revelations leak out in conversation and color flashbacks about deep, disturbing family secrets centering on Carlo, his unbridled egomania and sense of *droit du seigneur*.

Fraught with Greek and Freudian weight, these crucial disclosures constitute the thematic meat of the piece and explicitly explain the reasons for Tetro's dreadful psychological condition and his desire to escape the family. But while what went on years ago might more than justify the unsteady course of Tetro's subsequent life, Coppola's gradual lifting of the dramatic lid over the course of more than two hours frankly feels old-fashioned and labored; the sort of transgressions summoned up have, of late, become the stuff of comedy and instantly disposable daytime TV talk — no longer the exclusive property of deep-dish dramatists bent on exploring how the warped behavior of above-the-law patriarchs leads to tragedy.

What would, then, have been weighty material for the stage, bigscreen or television back in the '50s now has the feel of a small, particular story that's been inflated to immodest proportions. At the same time, Coppola lacks the writerly flair to make the big scenes soar or resonate with multiple meanings and dimensions; rather, they more often than not seem abruptly curtailed and somewhat unsatisfying.

In his search for the story's full impact, the writer-director is not overly assisted by Gallo, who has no trouble catching the bohemian physical aspects and sullen anti-social attitude of a self-styled artist, but doesn't reach down deep to where he might uncover nuggets of true character revela-

## TETRO

(U.S.-ARGENTINA-SPAIN-ITALY)

An American Zoetrope release and production. Produced by Francis Ford Coppola. Executive producers, Anahid Nazarian, Fred Roos.

Directed, written by Francis Ford Coppola. Camera (B&W/color, wide-screen), Mihai Malaimare Jr.; editor, Walter Murch; music, Osvaldo Golijov; production designer, Sebastian Orgambide; set decorator, Paulina Lopez Meyer; costume designer, Cecilia Monti; sound (Dolby), Vicente D'Elia; re-recording mixer, Murch; associate producer, Masa Tsuyuki; assistant director, Juan Pablo Laplace; second unit director, Roman Coppola; casting, Walter Rippel. Reviewed at Wilshire screening room, Beverly Hills, April 29, 2009. (In Cannes Film Festival — Directors Fortnight, opener; Seattle Film Festival.) Running time: 127 MIN.

Tetro ..... Vincent Gallo  
Bennie ..... Alden Ehrenreich  
Miranda ..... Maribel Verdu  
Carlo/Alfie ..... Klaus Maria Brandauer  
Alone ..... Carmen Maura  
Jose ..... Rodrigo De La Serna  
Josefina ..... Leticia Bredice  
Abelardo ..... Mike Amigorena  
Maria Luisa ..... Sofia Castiglione  
Ana ..... Erica Rivas  
(English, Spanish dialogue)

tion; he never finds Tetro's bottom. By contrast, Ehrenreich's Bennie, hitherto unexposed to the family skeletons, is a veritable beacon of optimism and endeavor, and the teenage thesp makes the picture his own.

Other thesp, including the lively Verdu ("Y tu mama tambien") and the imposing Brandauer, register as required, albeit with no surprises. Spanish diva Carmen Maura swans through as an influential art-world maven amusingly named "Alone," who bestows and withdraws her favor at a whim.

The film's physical specifications are impeccable. Retaining much of the same crew from "Youth Without Youth," including lenser Mihai Malaimare Jr., composer Osvaldo Golijov and indispensable longtime editor and sound wizard Walter Murch, Cop-

**Crucial family disclosures constitute the thematic meat of 'Tetro' and explain the title character's dreadful psychological condition.**

pola gets good value from his Argentine locations and provides abundant sensory pleasure. Use of black-and-white here creates a link with the director's 1983 "Rumble Fish," his only previous monochrome outing, which also dealt with two brothers with a significant age difference.

Coppola has spent much of his career, as well as a great deal of his own money, seeking the ideal state of truly independent filmmaking. The trouble, as always, is in being careful what you wish for, since when he finds creative nirvana, he frequently has trouble delivering the full goods. "Tetro" represents something of a middle ground in that respect.

Film