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# Brando at Best in Bloody 'Godfather'

By DON BRAUNAGEL

Press Entertainment Editor

"The Godfather" is a "family" picture.

Not the kind Walt Disney used to make, though. This one's a bloody, gripping depiction of Mario Puzo's popular novel about a Mafia family—family in the literal sense and in the Mafia meaning, one branch of the crime syndicate.

Basically, the plot is like that of hundreds of gangster movies—rival mobs struggling and killing for power—but "Godfather" has more depth, new dimensions and extraordinary excellence.

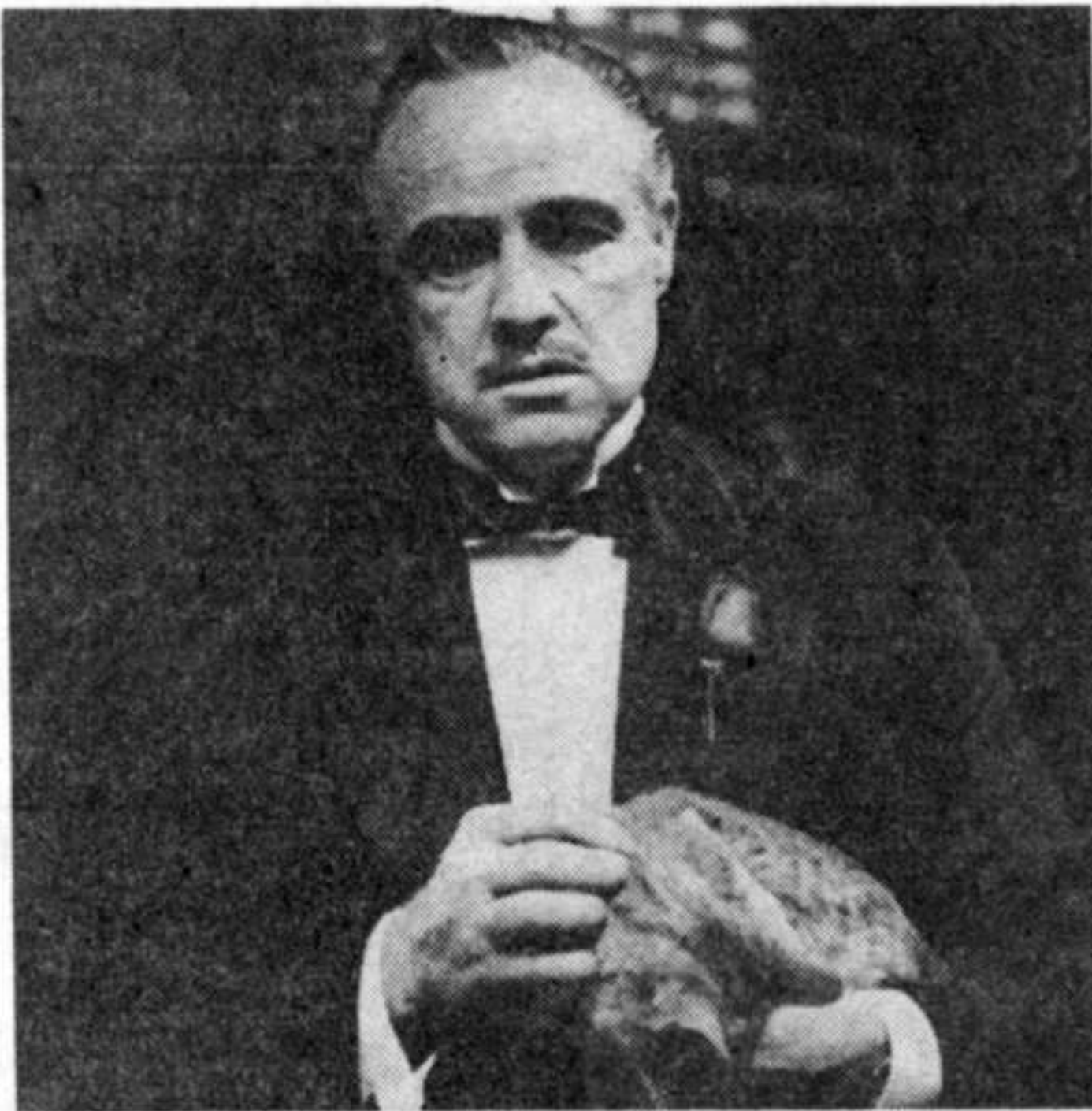
Chief among the elements giving the film its impact are Francis Ford Coppola's direction and the acting of Marlon Brando as the Godfather and Al Pacino as his son Michael.

Coppola, who collaborated with Puzo on the screenplay, has contrasted the public and private lives of the film's criminals with stunning effect.

As the Godfather's daughter is getting married in a sunny, colorful garden, he sits nearby in a dimly lit room, receiving favor-seekers and conducting his grim business, summing up with dark humor in the code sentence: "We'll make him an offer he can't refuse." Refusal means death.

And later in the film, as Michael is becoming his nephew's godfather, his agents are killing rival mobsters. The film cuts from the baptism to the shootings, from the baby's innocent face to the bloody victims, while the priest intones "The Lord be with you" to Michael. The irony overwhelms.

Such contrasts force us to wonder about other public figures, then about our acquaintances, and even about



Brando as 'The Godfather'

ourselves. How does what people think of us compare with what we really are? And why are we elated when the "good" crooks kill the "bad" ones?

One scene, in particular, drives home this point. Michael is asking his girlfriend to marry him, but she's hesitant because of what she knows about his family's criminal activities.

He tells her they're just like other men of power. She accuses him of being naive, and asks "What about senators and presidents? They don't order people killed."

Michael looks at her with a hint of contempt and asks: "Now who's being naive?"

The nearly three-hour film covers about 25 years of mob activity, concentrating on the dispute in the post-World War II years over whether to get involved in the drug trade.

We see the gang leaders distinguishing between "clean" and "dirty" crime, speaking out against communism and regretting that Hitler wasn't stopped at Munich. And racial bias adds

to the private-club atmosphere of the gang meetings.

But those are asides. Mostly Coppola keeps the tension level high, so that at one point a nurse's whisper startles like a gunshot.

And "The Godfather" follows the current movie trend of less sex and more gore. One man is strangled while a knife pins his hand to a desk top. Another puts on his glasses just in time to get a bullet through the lens, after which blood spurts from the wound.

Still, the moments of violence are juxtaposed with those of affection. And Brando is a master of both. Cheeks padded, lip curled and body sagging, with a raspy voice both sinister and sentimental, he's totally convincing while playing with his grandchild or planning nonrefusable offers.

His acting style is unmistakably Brando, but his brilliance comes in infusing that style into his character. He's an honest-to-Godfather marvel.

## THE GODFATHER

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But the film is not all his. Pacino, looking like a deadly Dustin Hoffman, superbly makes the conversion from the young war hero to the cold-eyed killer who becomes mob leader.

And James Caan, recently hailed as Brian Piccolo in the TV movie "Brian's Song," here does a fine job in a vastly different role, that of Michael's flamboyant, sensual and impulsive older brother.

Typical of the top-notch acting in lesser roles is Sterling Hayden as a crooked cop. Only Al Martino, as a Sinatra-type singer, isn't up to his role, even though it's pared down considerably from the novel.

"The Godfather" is a must-see for gangster-movie fans, and a should-see for others. But stay away if you can't stand the sight of blood.

## 'Godfather' Sets Box-Office Mark

NEW YORK (UPI) — Paramount Pictures has announced that during its first week, the movie "The Godfather" brought in \$465,148 — the most ever for a single week for one picture.

The studio also said the movie set a Canadian record by grossing \$90,236 during its first five days in Toronto.