

Pacino, De Niro, Keaton excel

Godfather Part II is meaningful, engaging

By JULIAN BELTRAME

Seldom has a big-hit's sequel been as good as is Francis Ford Coppola's film, *Godfather, Part II*.

And this is not from lack of trying. The annals of Hollywood are filled with attempts to cash in on previous successes, but few have managed to equal their predecessor's quality or

box-office receipts. Coppola has done the former and he is almost certain to come close to the latter.

What this sequel has going for it is the serious attention of some of the business's most talented people, including Coppola, Mario Puzo, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro and the lovely Woody Allen girl, Diane Keaton. All play dominant roles in

the film, and all excel.

Possibly the most telling feature of *Godfather II* is the script's (Puzo, Coppola) wholeness. It does not assume everyone likely to see the second *Godfather* has seen the first; therefore, it doesn't depend on the original *Godfather* to sell itself, or to fill in holes in the story. If you hadn't seen the first *Godfather*, *Godfather II* would be just as meaningful and engaging.

Splitting Marlon Brando's central role in this one are Al Pacino, as the *Godfather's* son and inheritor of a functioning and strong empire, and (in flashback) Robert De Niro, as the *Godfather*, as a youth, busily building it. Although *Godfather II* is basically Michael's (Pacino) story, one cannot underestimate De Niro's contribution to the film.

Not only does he complete Vito Corleone's life and the rise of the Corleone family, but his sometimes humorous, sometimes touching, sometimes violent portrayal of the younger *Godfather*, liberally intercut within the major story, helps us through the over three hour length of the film.

For De Niro the characterization is a major triumph, coming off his

brilliant performance in *Mean Streets* in which he received critical acclaim, if not popular recognition. Now in a major motion picture, he is liable to get both.

The dual story device within the film works well for Coppola because he is able to show how certain themes prominent in the rise of Vito Corleone, decay under Michael's leadership and contribute to his troubles.

Vito is seen making friends among his community, remembering those he owes favours to, and helping those who come to him. Also inherent in his nature is a deep-seeded love of family, transcending everything, including business.

Michael partly inherits and partly creates a different world. He hides himself in a heavily guarded estate in Nevada, far away from the family's New York world. At his parties they play American music, and he does business with people outside the family circle.

He is faced with a major problem in the film which he cannot answer, or answers unsuccessfully. Whether to operate outside the circle, thereby strengthening the corporation, or remain loyal to his

kind, even if it weakens his power.

He chooses the former with the dream that he will soon be bigger than U.S. Steel. When he finds the man he has dealt with is plotting against him, Michael loses both worlds.

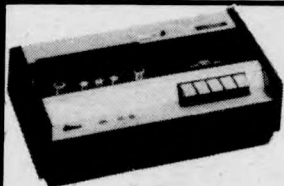
Deserted by his wife (Keaton) after she refuses to carry his child, and betrayed by his brother, Michael is left at the top of a powerful crime syndicate, alone, and suspicious of even his closest advisor.

Coppola was unjustly criticized for failing to make a distinction between right and wrong in the first *Godfather*, but he leaves little doubt about his stand this time. The catch-all rationalization for their criminal indulgence, that it kept the family close and strong, is done away with in *Godfather II*.

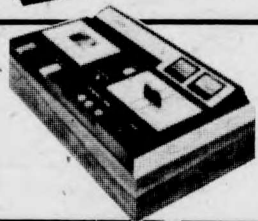
For all practical purposes, the family no longer exists by the end of this film. All that is left is a corporation which justifies its place in the world in pretty much the same way other corporations do; with the need to feed its boundless appetite and the appetite of its shareholders.

Left also is a lonely man with little or no reason to live.

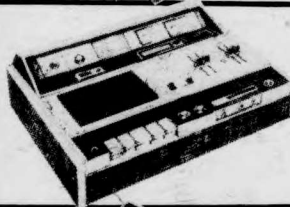
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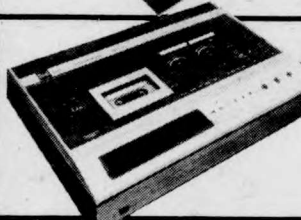
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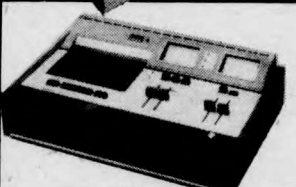
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