Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Francis Coppola

Elisa Leonelli · Friday, June 20th, 2025

Francis Coppola © HFPA 2007

On Saturday night, April 26, 2025, the legendary movie director Francis Ford Coppola received the 50th AFI Life Achievement Award at Hollywood's Dolby Theater, presented by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg.

I was able to watch this event when it aired on TNT on June 18. It will be shown again on TCM July 31.

Harrison Ford recounted how he was hired by George Lucas as Hans Solo for *Star Wars* while working as a carpenter in Coppola's office. Al Pacino and Robert De Niro spoke about their experiences in *The Godfather* trilogy.

Adam Driver, who played a visionary architect in Coppola's latest movie *Megalopolis*, said: "When the importance of the arts is being minimized, and our industry is only judging a film's success by how much money it makes, I hang on to people like Francis for inspiration."

I remembered the numerous times I interviewed Coppola, an Italian-American like myself, and two special occasions in particular.

Tucker at Lucasfilm © Elisa Leonelli 1988

In July 1988, I was invited to visit Skywalker Ranch, headquarters of Lucasfilm in San Rafael, and conduct press interviews about *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* with Francis Coppola, George Lucas, and Jeff Bridges, who played Preston Tucker.

George Lucas, Francis Coppola © Elisa Leonelli 1988

My article was published in the December 1988 issue of CIAK, the Italian film monthly, when I was their Los Angeles correspondent.

Teri Garr, Raul Julia-*One from the Heart*

In 1982 I had interviewed Teri Garr at Zoetrope Studios in Los Angeles about *One from the*

Heart that Coppola directed. This lovely actress would then agree to a studio session and an at home photo layout. Read my article and see some photos at this link.

I interviewed Coppola again in 1991 about *The Godfather Part III*, with Andy Garcia, Talia Shire and Sofia Coppola, in 1992 I wrote an article for CIAK *about Bram Stoker's Dracula,* in 1996 I wrote an interview for *Marie Claire* about *Jack*, when Coppola told me that he chose to direct the movie because he wanted to work with Robin Williams, and Robin revealed that they co-owned a restaurant called Rubicon in San Francisco.

Robin Williams-Jack

But the most endearing meeting was when we traveled to Napa in 1997 to conduct interviews for *The Rainmaker*, starring Matt Damon and Claire Danes, that Coppola directed from the John Grisham novel, and we visited his winery where we were served lunch and I was fortunate enough to have a seat at the table right next to Francis himself. We talked about our love of opera.

The Rainmaker

In November 2018 (reposted in December 2021), I wrote a Golden Globe Moment of Francis Coppola being awarded Best Director by the journalists of the Hollywood Foreign Press in 1973 for *The Godfather*. Gene Hackman, who was shooting *The Conversation*, presented him the trophy.

Megalopolis

As for *Megalopolis*, I had read about the screening in Cannes, so I went to see it when it came out in theaters as a shortened version. It is long, confusing and unwieldy, but it illustrates a dream that the 85-year-old director believes in for a better world.

It's the kind of optimism we need to hang on to and fight for during these disastrous times of wars of aggression against Ukraine, Gaza and Iran, the systematic dismantling of American democracy attempted by Donald Trump's Big Beautiful Bill, when immigrants are arrested indiscriminately by ICE agents, the National Guard and the Marines are commandeered to Los Angeles against the

wishes of Governor Gavin Newsom and Mayor Karen Bass.

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