

# Entertainment



Ethel Simmons

Thursday, January 17, 1991 (AGE)

## Coincidence led to his success

By Dan Greenberg  
special writer

**R**OBERT CICCINI is now appearing on 1,320 screens nationwide as Lou Pennino — "a small but significant role," he said — in Francis Ford Coppola's "The Godfather Part III." The former Bedford Township resident assessed his career by declaring, "I recognized the insecurity of it, having to audition continually, but I had always been interested in acting, ever since I was a little kid."

His success in being cast in "The Godfather" (as lieutenant to mobster Vincent Mancini, played by Andy Garcia) represents more than a decade of determination, hard work and careful preparation, to say nothing of luck and coincidence.

There's also talent, intelligence and education. "The right agent is important, too," Ciccini said, describing the arduous years that transformed this all-sport high school athlete into a stage and film actor.

"FOOTBALL, BASEBALL, basketball, track and field — I competed in all these sports at Bishop Borgess High School, where I graduated in 1976," he said. Ciccini went on to Central Michigan University. "I suppose if I had been able to compete in one of those sports on a college level I would have, but I wasn't big enough or good enough," he said.

"Acting was a natural progression. If the university environment is supposed to be a place where the world is opened up to young people, well it certainly was for me."

After considerable acting experience at Central, he left school to travel in Europe, where he had the opportunity to meet his parents' relatives. His mother is French and his father, Italian. The senior Ciccini now lives in Bloomfield Township and is a custom tailor. Besides Robert, the Ciccinis have two sons and a daughter.

Bob Ciccini spent two years at Wayne State University, receiving his bachelor's degree in the theater program, where he appeared in 18 shows in Hilberry Studio Theatre productions and at the Bonstelle Theatre. He also worked in a dance troupe at the same time.



Bob Ciccini was a struggling stage actor who got his big break when he was cast in the film "The Godfather Part III."

Then came auditions and acceptance at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts where, he said, "I did three years of hard training in their private master's program. We were out working 12-14 hours a day, rehearsing, going to class, doing shows."

IN THE ROMANTIC tradition of starring artists, he lived in a real rat-hole in the East Village on 15th Street in Manhattan with my buddy Paul. We were so poor and NYC was expensive, so we ate a lot of pizza and drank Algerian wine. We had these mice that used to crawl around and were so brazen they would sit there and hang around with us watching television.

CICCINI'S BREAK capped more than a decade of study and hard work. And it happened because of a coincidence. He said, "It was a very fortunate set of circumstances which all fell in place."

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Michael Corleone, played by Al Pacino (center), participates in a grand celebration after a ceremony where he is honored by the Catholic

Church, in Francis Ford Coppola's long-awaited movie continuing the "Godfather" saga.

In 1984 Ciccini married Jeanine, whom he describes as incredibly supportive of his acting career despite the fact that "it was tough living in New York without money."

"When I got out of school I immediately got a lot tougher because," he said with a wry grin, "I didn't become a star right away. I didn't even get a job."

During the next two-year period, he waited tables, jugged my schedule and appeared in a string of low-budget, no-pay, off-off Broadway shows. "Then he started getting paying work in regional theater, appearing for the 1988 season at the prestigious Cleveland Playhouse and later at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis."

"But I couldn't get film auditions because the kind of agent I had dealt mostly in theatrical work," he said.

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someone else. Rosalie Josephs, who shares offices with Brian Chavon, who had cast me in two plays in New York, and Brian liked my work."

Rosalie asked him about young actors and he recommended me. He didn't know my agent so he gave her my home phone."

Ciccini received the call and was auditioned by Roos. Of course, it was exciting to learn the scope of the production. Even a small role in a film like "The Godfather" can open doors to meet agents, the kind of agents that can get me auditions, agents who would be powerful enough to get me seen by the people I need to see and who would be impressed by the fact that I had gotten some role that it wasn't a fluke or some kid just out of school."

Many nervous months passed af-

ter that audition. For a while, he told he had the role, he was going to travel. Then the phone rang and he then Coppola was traveling to the part. The delays started in November 1989 through January 1990.

"I GOT SICK and slipped and I was devastated. Ciccini said, "Finally I started auditioning again and got a role in New York at Tisch School of the Arts. I started acting in November 1989 through January 1990."

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He spent two years in New York in Sicily and a month in New York. Working with V. Fazio, May, then via Diane Keaton, George Hamilton and the rest of the players that appears in "The Godfather" is a tremendous boost to my confidence."

Since then, Ciccini has worked in small appearances in Spike Lee's "Jungle Fever" and worked with Paul Sorvino and Rita Moreno in "Life in the Fast Lane" films, which will appear soon. He has a new agent, a manager in Los Angeles and all the trappings of success.

This month he is in New York, and the press is full of stories about him and his success.

## upcoming things to do

### • 'NONSENSE' COMING

Next attraction at the Birmingham Theatre is the musical "Nonsense," opening a five-week run Tuesday, Feb. 5, and continuing through Sunday, March 10. Marilyn Farina, who originated the role of the Reverend Mother in New York, will repeat her role in this production. Jennifer Myers, who attended Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills, also is in the cast. For ticket information call 644-3533.

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### • SCHEDULE CHANGE

The Birmingham Theatre announces that the comedy "Shirley Valentine," originally scheduled for Tuesday, April 2, through Sunday, May 5, will be replaced by the nostalgic musical "Dames at Sea." For more information call the theater at 644-3533.

### • KEEGO CINEMA

Free admission is offered to children and adults at every Saturday and Sunday matinee showing. Matinee at the Keego Cinema in Troy, 11:30 a.m. Opening films are: "Freaky Friday," starring Julia Roberts (Feb. 29 and 29); "The cartoon 'Go to Heaven' (Feb. 29); "The cartoon 'The Jetsons' (Feb. 29); "Wall To Wall" (Feb. 29); "The cartoon 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' (Feb. 29).

Feb. 23-24 "Pound Puppies," March 2-3, and "The Adventures of Milo and Otis," March 9-10. For more information call the 24-hour movie hotline 642-1900.

### • FARMINGTON PLAYERS

The Midwestern premiere of "Days to Come" by Eddin Hellman at Farmington Players, March 1-4, at the Farmington Players Barn, Hellman

is also the author of "The Children's Hour," a Broadway hit in the 1930s, and several other plays including "The Little Foxes." Days to Come runs Feb. 15-17, 22-24, 28 and March 1-3. Curtain time for the Thursday-Saturday performances is 8 p.m. and the Sunday shows begin at 2 p.m., except for the matinee which will be performed at 2 p.m. Tickets can be purchased by calling the box office at 544-2965.

### • GUEST ARTIST

Concert on the Birmingham City by the University of Michigan, Farmington Players, and the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. The concert will be held on Sunday, Feb. 25, at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$10.00. For more information call the box office at 544-2965.

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