

Scorsese scores with mayhem and the mafia in 'The Irishman'



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CHENNAI: Incredibly, it's been nearly 25 years since director Martin Scorsese worked with his on-screen 'alter-ego' Robert DeNiro (in 1995's "Casino").

They finally reunite in "The Irishman," in which DeNiro gives arguably the greatest performance of his long and stellar career as Frank Sheeran, a World War II veteran who, in the 1950s, gets sucked into the mob, which pushes him into any number of nefarious activities, and sees him estranged from his much-loved daughter Peggy.

There are other long-awaited reunions in the film's cast — Scorsese and Harvey Keitel get together for the first time since "Mean Streets," and Joe Pesci, one of the great mob character actors, is back with DeNiro and the director. There's also a much-hyped first-time meeting between Scorsese and another legend of American cinema, Al Pacino, who plays Jimmy Hoffa, the leader of the mighty Teamsters union — heavily

linked with organized crime — who disappeared in 1975. It seems remarkable that these two heavyweights of the genre had to wait until Pacino was 79 to work together for the first time.



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"The Irishman" is Sheeran's story (it is based on Charles Brandt's 2004 book "I Heard You Paint Houses," which was based on Sheeran's recollection of events that took place in the Fifties and Sixties when he was working as a truck driver and became involved with gangster Russell Bufalino (Pesci). Sheeran goes on to become Hoffa's bodyguard.

"The Irishman" is a vast canvas (it clocks in at 209 minutes) of political corruption, avarice, murderous ambition and violence — all made to seem perfectly normal. The film doesn't attempt to portray the mobsters' softer sides, as so many mafia movies and TV series have. Sheeran does display an emotional connection to his daughter, but there is nothing remotely familial about Bufalino or Hoffa.



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The one bum note in "The Irishman" is Scorsese's decision to use actual footage from the time to illustrate the links between politics and the mafia. It doesn't quite convince. The rest of the movie, however, is superb.

Pacino is at his amped-up, mercurial best — it's a delight to see him and DeNiro at the peak of their acting powers, working with an equally gifted director. DeNiro cleverly lets us glimpse hints of the ruthless villain beneath Sheeran's dignified veneer with a performance of restrained brilliance.

Crafted with excellence and elegance by Scorsese and backed by a powerhouse cast of ageing actors ('de-aged' with digital technology for the period scenes), "The Irishman" is a remarkable piece of cinema from some of the medium's most-gifted protagonists.