

Marlon Brando influenced a generation of actors and played memorable roles such as Don Corleone in "The Godfather," above, Stanley Kowalski in "A Streetcar Named Desire," below left, and Col. Kurtz in "Apocalypse Now," middle. Off the screen, right, his life was equally fascinating and unpredictable.

Acting icon influenced a generation

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES >> Marlon Brando, who revolutionized American acting with his Method performances in "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "On the Waterfront" and went on to create the iconic character of Don Vito Corleone in "The Godfather," has died. He was 80.

Brando died at an undisclosed Los Angeles hospital yesterday, attorney David J. Seeley said today. The cause of death was being withheld, as were funeral arrangements, said Seeley, noting the actor "was a very private man."

Brando, whose unpredictable behavior made him equally fascinating off the screen, was acclaimed the greatest actor of his generation, a two-time winner of the Academy Award who influenced some of the best actors of the generation that followed, among them Al Pacino, Robert De Niro and Jack Nicholson.

He was the unforgettable embodiment of the brutish Stanley Kowalski of "A Streetcar Named Desire," the mixed up Terry Malloy of "On the Waterfront" (which won him his first Oscar) and the wily Corleone of "The Godfather" (which won him his second).

But his private life may best be defined by a line from "The Wild One," in which Brando, playing a motorcycle gang



leader, is asked what he's rebelling against.

"Whattaya got?" was his famous reply.

Millions of words were written about his weight, his many romances and three failed marriages, his tireless — and, for some, tiresome — support of the American Indian and other causes, his battles with film producers and directors, his refuge on a Tahitian isle.

His most famous act of rebellion was his refusal in 1973 to accept the best actor Oscar for "The Godfather." Instead, he sent a woman who called herself Sashen Littlefeather to read a diatribe about Hollywood's treatment of Native Americans.

Brando's private life turned tragic years later with his son's conviction for killing his daughter's boyfriend in 1990. Five



years later, the daughter, Cheyenne Brando, committed suicide, still depressed over the killing. She was 25.

Still, the undying spotlight never made Brando conform.

Starting with Kowalski in the stage version of "A Streetcar Named Desire" and a startling series of screen portrayals, Brando changed the nature of American acting.

Schooled at the Actors Studio in New York, he created a naturalism that electrified audiences and fellow actors.

"He influenced more young actors of my generation than any actor," longtime friend and "Godfather" co-star James Caan said today.

Born in Omaha, Neb., in 1924, he grew up a pudgy, mischievous boy called Bud.

He first became exposed to the theater through his mother,



an occasional actress in the Omaha Community Playhouse. It was Mrs. Brando who encouraged a neighbor to appear at the playhouse — a young man named Henry Fonda.

At 19, Brando moved to New York and studied acting with Stella Adler. After a week, Adler said: "Within a year, Marlon Brando will be the best young actor in the American theater."

It took a bit longer. He appeared in such plays as "I Remember Mama," "A Flag Is Born" and "Truckline Cafe" before the Tennessee Williams play that made him famous, "A Streetcar Named Desire" in 1947.

Brando never appeared in another play, but he reprised the role in the 1951 film, earning the first of four successive Academy Award nominations for best actor. It was followed

by "Viva Zapata" (1952); "Julius Caesar" (1953); and "On the Waterfront" (1954), his first win.

A remake of "Mutiny on the Bounty" in 1962 bolstered his reputation as a difficult star. He was blamed for a change in directors and a runaway budget.

The film changed his life in another way: He met his third wife, Tahitian beauty Tarita, and bought an island, Tetiaroa, which he intended to make part environmental laboratory and part resort.

His box office power seemed finished until Francis Coppola chose him to play Mafia leader Don Corleone in "The Godfather" in 1972. Brando's jowly, raspy-voiced Don became one of the screen's most unforgettable characters.

In his later years, 100 pounds heavier, he hired himself out at huge salaries for such commercial enterprises as "Superman." He was more effective as the insane army officer in Coppola's "Apocalypse Now."

His crusades and many romances kept him in the public eye throughout his career. His first marriage was to actress Anna Kashfi in 1957; they separated a year later.

In 1960 he married a Mexican actress, Movita. They were divorced after he met Tarita. All three wives were pregnant when he married them. He had nine children.

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