

Review: 'Jobs' is about Apple more than the man

August 15 2013, by Sandy Cohen



This film image released by Open Road Films shows Ashton Kutcher as Steve Jobs in a scene from "Jobs." (AP Photo/Open Road Films, Glen Wilson)

A better title for this film might have been "The History of Apple Computers."

"Jobs" aims to be the first biopic about tech giant Steve Jobs (Sony's Aaron Sorkin project is next), but instead of offering insight into the

man, it's a chronology of Apple and the advent of personal computers.

Ashton Kutcher plays Jobs convincingly enough. The "Two and a Half Men" star looks uncannily like the Apple co-founder, right down to the lumbering gait, and there's no trace of Kutcher's kooky-character past here. But with a script by first-time screenwriter Matt Whitely that focuses more on corporate events than characters, there's no chance to look deeper into the man behind the Mac.

Directed by Joshua Michael Stern ("Swing Vote"), "Jobs" opens with the Apple chief introducing the first iPod in 2001. Then it jumps back almost 30 years, when Jobs was a scruffy, barefoot, Reed College dropout on campus just for kicks. (James Woods appears briefly as a concerned school administrator, but is never seen again.) Jobs hallucinates in a field, travels to India, and suddenly it's 1976, and he's struggling in his job at Atari. Prone to outbursts and, apparently, body odor, he turns to his friend, Steve "Woz" Wozniak (Josh Gad), for help. Jobs discovers a computer prototype Woz built, and a few months later, Apple Computers is born.



This film image released by Open Road Films shows, from left, Josh Gad as Steve Wozniak, Ashton Kutcher as Steve Jobs, and Ron Eldard as Rod Holt in a scene from "Jobs." (AP Photo/Open Road Films, Glen Wilson)

Gad is the heart of the film. Though his character, like the others, is weakly developed, Gad's vulnerability as Wozniak makes him the most relatable. There's also heart in the soundtrack, a romp through the 1960s and 70s that includes songs by Cat Stevens, Joe Walsh and Bob Dylan.

Jobs, on the other hand, could be a real jerk. He dismisses his pregnant girlfriend (Ahna O'Reilly) and denies paternity of their daughter. He withholds stock benefits from founding members of his team. If a colleague doesn't share his vision, he fires them on the spot. Loudly. The one scene where Jobs cries isn't enough to make you like the guy.



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After he and Woz make a deal with investor Mike Markkula (Dermot Mulroney), the film spends a lot of time at Apple headquarters, where Jobs is a hot-tempered perfectionist. His insistence on quality and innovation above all doesn't sit well with board director Arthur Rock (a sadly bland J.K. Simmons), who unites with newly appointed CEO John Sculley (Matthew Modine) to remove the company co-founder from his post.

The decade the film skips—when an ousted Jobs created his software company NeXT, which he eventually sold to Apple—seems like a lost chapter that could have illuminated its subject. How does such a driven man survive after being driven out? Instead, the film picks up in 1996, when Jobs inexplicably has a new wife and young son; his now college-age daughter snoozing on the living-room couch. He's lured back to

Apple and transforms it into the most profitable company in the world. (That's not a spoiler, it's history—you can check it on your iPhone.)



This film image released by Open Road Films shows Ashton Kutcher as Steve Jobs, left, and Josh Gad as Steve Wozniak in a scene from "Jobs." (AP Photo/Open Road Films, Glen Wilson)

And that's the problem with "Jobs." While it's interesting to see the history of Apple and how Jobs' singular determination was crucial to its success, the history of a company isn't as compelling as the history of a person, especially one as complex, innovative and influential as Steve Jobs.

"Jobs," An Open Road Films release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "some drug content and brief strong language." Running time: 127 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

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