



Chaotic Abbie Hoffman biopic aptly captures the energy of its subject.(Time Out!) (movie review)

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"Steal This Movie"

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Opens today

Written by Bruce Graham. Produced and directed by Robert Greenwald. A Lions Gate Films release. Rated R (brief nudity, violence, drug use). Running time: 111 minutes.

Cast:

Abbie Hoffman Vincent D'Onofrio

Anita Hoffman Janeane Garofalo

Gerry Lefcourt Kevin Pollack

Johanna Lawrenson Jeanne Tripplehorn

People too young to remember the 1960s counterculture era and anti-Vietnam War upheavals might wonder what all the fuss was about.

Those who lived through the times but were too immersed in, uh, the agricultural products of the day probably fried so many brain cells they can't recall what all the fighting was about. They'd be hard pressed, then, to recollect the guy who tried to stop the war by, among other things, exorcising the Pentagon.

Almost everyone else will realize that Abbie Hoffman makes a great subject for a biopic. The maniacally energetic Yippie leader and Chicago Seven ringmaster had so much passion, creativity and blind belief in his ability to change the world that it's amazing his life story wasn't captured on

film before.

Throw in a constant barrage of '60s and early '70s rock anthems, a quirky love story and a bit of mystery (will the journalist who frames the story find evidence of the evil government plot to discredit Abbie?) and you should have a winner. Unfortunately, "Steal This Movie" is at times too chaotic and disjointed to deserve the highest praise.

"Steal This Movie" - the title refers to Hoffman's 1969 book "Steal This Book" - is partially based on a book by Hoffman's wife, Anita. One of its producers, Gerald Lefcourt, was Hoffman's longtime lawyer. So it's no surprise the movie wholeheartedly takes Hoffman's side, even visually.

Cinematographer Denis Lenoir keeps Abbie (Vincent D'Onofrio) and his gang awash in bright colors while gray government drones are practically portrayed in shadows.

D'Onofrio provides a nuanced portrayal, capturing Hoffman's charm and persuasiveness as well as his moody and suspicious sides (Hoffman was bi-polar, though the manic-depressive disorder was not diagnosed until his later years).

D'Onofrio's bad perm and irritating accent, which attempts to be an authentic mix of Hoffman's New England upbringing and New York residency, are detracting. The fact that he is 8 inches taller than the real Hoffman is not.

Janeane Garofalo, who plays Anita, also turns in a solid performance. Director Robert Greenwald allows her to shed her mostly sarcastic and caustic persona. Here she's sometimes giddy, sometimes strident, both a leader and a follower. She's believable as a woman who is entranced by Hoffman but who also can hold her own against such a charismatic force.

Anita and Abbie's tale is as central to this movie as is the political story. In the movie, the couple meet on a bus and she later becomes one of his key collaborators. They marry and have a son; as their relationship progresses, so does their increasing involvement in anti-war exploits.

Among Hoffman's most memorable moments were when he and his pals dropped dollar bills onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, throwing traders into a frenzied rush for the cash. The move was an effort to protest American companies' profiting from the Vietnam War.

Hoffman also staged a 1966 march on the Pentagon that included an attempted levitation and exorcism of the building; founded the Youth International Party (Yippies); and led the protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Grainy archival footage of the events is blended with new film to create a they-were-really-there

effect. Though not as seamless as when *Forrest Gump* was placed into historical shots, the technique still adds a good amount of realism.

Hoffman's role in the convention demonstrations led to the famed Chicago Seven trial. His celebrity earned him the ire of the Nixon administration and the FBI, which campaigned to discredit him. Hoffman slid into depression and desperation, and eventually was arrested for trying to sell cocaine to undercover officers, which he said was a set-up.

Rather than face a long prison sentence, Hoffman went underground for six years without his family. He assumed a new name and a new life, though he remained an activist. As "Barry Freed," he worked on environmental issues while living with another woman, Johanna Lawrenson (Jeanne Tripplehorn). Free love, indeed.

Later, Hoffman revealed his true identity, spent two months in jail, and returned to activism full time until his 1989 suicide.

All in all, "Steal This Movie" is a pretty interesting story that should appeal to former hippies - and their love children as well.

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