

Rating: «« ***out of 4 stars***

Running Time: 115 min.

Here’s one that has been a long time coming. *The Founder* was supposed to arrive in theaters in 2015 as an Oscar contender, but its release was pushed back a couple of times. Heck, it barely made it out this year. Although these types of delays often denote trouble, this biography of one of the men behind the fast-food franchise McDonald’s isn’t half-bad. The problem is that while it’s a decent movie, it also isn’t an exceptional one.

The story follows milkshake mixer salesman Ray Kroc (Michael Keaton), struggling to make ends meet and driving from diner to diner, state to state, attempting to sell his wares. When he gets a substantial order over the phone from a small restaurant in San Bernardino, he’s compelled to visit. He’s overwhelmed by what he sees; a smooth and efficiently operated fast-food establishment run by brothers Maurice (John Carroll Lynch) and Richard McDonald (Nick Offerman).

Kroc boasts and states the location has,”...the best burger I’ve ever tasted.” Even back in the 50s before fast-food service reached its zenith, I’m not entirely convinced that anyone has ever or would ever say that a mass-produced McDonald’s sandwich is the greatest in the world.

Regardless, the protagonist begins attempting to convince the brothers to franchise their restaurant. While the siblings are initially hesitant, Kroc’s enthusiasm gets the better of them. As time passes, the lead begins to exert his influence over McDonald’s and push his partners out

of the way.

Director John Lee Hancock (*Saving Mr. Banks*) shoots and presents the material in a straightforward, somewhat generic manner. In fact, for the first hour it feels like a puff-piece documentary you’d see on TV about the success and growth of a major corporation.

Kroc learns more about the model of McDonald’s and attempts to raise equity and sell franchises; these moments are scored almost like an infomerical, with a golly-gee attitude toward the proceedings.

I’m sure it is used as an intentional technique, in order to contrast the beginnings of Kroc’s involvement with what will eventually occur. However, it’s an odd pairing that doesn’t make for a lot of tension or conflict early on.

The details of the first sections are interesting to a degree, but they don’t possess a great deal of bite. Kroc experiences problems with the first franchise owners, but these issues are forgotten as more appropriate candidates are screened and start their own businesses under his scrutiny and supervision.

It is towards the final third that the movie eventually springs to life. Things get considerably more interesting when Kroc begins to push harder against his partners and make some nasty, morally objectionable decisions to slice the McDonald brothers out of the business. Keaton is always interesting to watch as he turns his go-getter into a cutthroat figure with a certain bluntness and little regard for others.

And there is tension in these scenes as the lead turns nasty, using real estate tactics to take over the burgeoning corporation and revise the history of the company as his own creation. It’s a bold move to paint Kroc in a negative light. Still, one feels the drive for power as well as the underhanded motions and motives for that behavior should have been explored in more detail and could have arrived much sooner in the story.

Perhaps that is why I liked *The Founder* but wasn’t overwhelmed by it. Despite its best efforts

and another strong central performance, it takes a long while to hit its stride and make its point. Until then, the movie almost tastes like a fast-food burger. The meal is reasonable enough while it is being consumed, but it doesn’t really satisfy and ends up leaving you with a somewhat queasy aftertaste.

By Glenn Kay
For the Sun