

Review: 'The Apprentice' stirs the hornet's nest with Trump portrayal



CANNES: Iranian Danish director Ali Abassi's Cannes Film Festival competition entry "The Apprentice" was one of the most talked about films at the recent event.

The movie caused a stir largely because it zeroes in on a hardly known aspect of the man, played by US Romanian actor Sebastian Stan. We first meet Trump as a young man in the early 1970s while he was working for his cold and condescending father Fred (Martin Donovan).

Enter Roy Cohn (Jeremy Strong), a notoriously vicious lawyer who mentors the young Trump and imparts his three rules for success: Always attack, never admit to any wrongdoing, and never admit defeat.

With a screenplay by political journalist Gabriel Sherman, the film depicts an eager apprentice being tutored by Cohn to override humane notions of morality and ethics. While a disclaimer says that some artistic licence has been taken, it hasn't stopped the film from stirring the hornet's nest — in fact, two weeks on from the premiere and an eight-minute standing ovation the film still does not have a US distributor.

The movie goes further than a mere biographical sketch of Trump and Cohn by chronicling the dirty days of the Nixon era and the corporate greed that fuelled the Reagan years. The second half of "The Apprentice" focuses less on the mentor-mentee relationship and more on Trump himself, with his first wife Ivana essayed in the film by the savvy and self-aware Maria Bakalova.

The film has a grainy texture which portrays the 1970s and 1980s in all its tacky authenticity and Aleks Marinkovich's production design highlights some of the vulgarity that the era is famous for.

Some will say the film is too harsh, while many will say its not harsh enough and Stan's performance as an almost gentle young man is so at odds with the character we know today that it is a little jarring.
