

Movie review: A Royal Affair (+trailer)

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By [Francesca Rudkin](#)

7:00 AM Saturday Jun 30, 2012



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A scene from A Royal Affair. Photo / Supplied

Sex, power and politics drive Danish film-maker Nikolaj Arcel's intelligent and soundly crafted historical drama about an illicit romance that helped bring the Enlightenment to Denmark in the second half of the 18th century.

A salacious tale, *A Royal Affair* is co-produced by Lars von Trier and written by Arcel (who also co-wrote *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*). Lavish costumes and careful attention to detail contribute to the authenticity of this classy drama which is ambitious in its attempt to be both a love story, and history and political lesson. It's not an epic, but it is a dignified saga which has been well written and beautifully shot.

At the centre of all this is the figure of young Englishwoman Caroline Mathilde (Vikander), who is sent to Denmark to marry its childish, unhinged and ineffectual king, Christian VII (Folsgaard). Unprepared for life at court with her mad and adulterous husband, Caroline bears the king a son and then leaves him to his scandalous antics as she retreats into a life of solitude within the palace.

Enter German doctor Johann Struensee (Mikkelsen), a closet free-thinker and advocate of the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment such as vaccinations for children, freedom of speech, and the abolition of serfdom. Struensee becomes the king's closest ally and friend, and in Queen Caroline discovers a fellow progressive thinker.

His relationship with the queen sets in motion events that see him rule Denmark, and ultimately produce dramatic social change.

Mads Mikkelsen is seriously good and authoritative in what is mostly a rather solemn drama. He's at the epicentre of the story, and his relationship with the king and the king's royal court is just as fascinating to watch as his relationship with the young queen. Mikkel Boe Folsgaard, in a Berlin Film Festival award-winning performance, shines as the king. A character short on likeability, in the hands of Folsgaard King Christian is somehow the most endearing character here.

Arcel has achieved a nice balance between a realistic and romanticised version of an extraordinary historical story, although the politics is more interesting than the affair and he may have considered nipping a little off the running time.

Stars: 4/5

Cast: Alicia Vikander, Mikkel Boe Folsgaard, Mads Mikkelsen

Director: Nikolaj Arcel

Running time: 158 mins

Rating: M (Violence & sex scenes)

Verdict: More than just your everyday royal sex scandal

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