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Movie Reviews by Greg "Roy" King

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A ROYAL AFFAIR

by Roy

Reviewed by GREG KING

Director: Nikolaj Arcel

Stars: Mads Mikkelsen, Alicia Vikander, Mikkel Boe Folsgaard, Trine Dyrholm, David Dencik, Cyron Melville, Thomas Gabrielsson, Bent Mejding, Harriet Walter.



A Royal Affair is a sumptuous period drama that depicts a little known event in Denmark's history, and deals with intrigue, corruption, political power plays and illicit sexual relations in the Danish court in the 18th century.

Fifteen year old Caroline Matilda (rising Swedish star Alicia Vikander), a

member of the British Royal family, is forced into an arranged marriage with Christian VII (Mikkel Boe Folsgaard), the King of Denmark. But when she arrives in Copenhagen in 1766 she discovers, to her horror, that the king is unbalanced and politically ineffectual, obsessed with his dogs and not interested in running the country. Following his marriage, the king leads a dissolute life style, with whores and excess drinking. He was also schizophrenic.

When the King returns from a tour of Europe accompanied by Johann Struensee (*Casino Royale* villain Mads Mikkelsen), his new personal physician, Queen Caroline finds an unexpected ally at Court. Caroline secures the services of Struensee to work with the King. He also holds influence over the King, and slowly begins to make sweeping social changes and progressive reforms to Denmark, particularly in the areas of censorship, sanitation and health. His reforms are influenced by the enlightened age that is sweeping Europe.

But Struensee begins an ill-advised affair with the lonely and frustrated Caroline, which eventually leads to his downfall. Struensee has underestimated the power of the Danish nobles who comprise the court. They plot with the King's ambitious and scheming mother (Trine Dyrholm) to undermine him and remove many of his reforms.

This epic costume drama has been beautifully directed by Nikolaj Arcel, who adapted the script from Bodil Steensen-Leth's book about the real-life affair between Struensee and the Queen of Denmark. Along with regular collaborator Rasmus Heisterberg, Arcel co-wrote the original film version of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, and they have done another fine job here.

This is a handsomely mounted production, and technical contributions are superb. The period detail reeks of authenticity, from Manon Rasmussen's costumes to Niels Sejer's lavish production design. The film has been beautifully shot by Arcel's regular cinematographer Rasmus Videbaek (*Truth About Men*, etc).

Mikkelsen recently won the Best Actor Award at Cannes for his turn as a kindergarten teacher accused of molesting a child in the drama *The Hunt*. He is excellent here as the enlightened Struensee. Vikander is also very good and delivers a wonderfully nuanced performance. Mikkelsen and Vikander develop a strong sexual chemistry that ignites the screen.

In his first feature film, Folsgaard is also very good and sympathetic in a difficult role as the ineffectual and slightly mad king, a performance that won him the Best Actor Prize at the Berlin Film Festival. He portrays him as a tragic and pathetic figure, reminiscent of Tom Hulce's childlike Mozart in *Amadeus*.

A Royal Affair is a gripping, superb historical drama that brings to life this little known period of Danish

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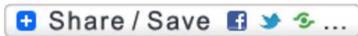
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