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## Politics and romance prove a dangerous mix in A Royal Affair

*A Royal Affair* tells the story of King Christian VII's bizarre relationship between him, his queen and his personal physician and the impact it made on 18<sup>th</sup> century Denmark. Though Nikolaj Arcel's film is a dramatized account presented from Queen Caroline Mathilde's perspective, the events depicted onscreen are heavily based on true accounts. Fresh off a successful run at the Berlin International Film Festival, *A Royal Affair* arrives in the UK promising to be one of 2012's finest foreign language features.



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A Royal Affair is in UK cinemas 15 June

The film takes the form as a letter penned by the exiled Queen to her two young children whom she is convinced she will never see again. From there *A Royal Affair* introduces the young British royal Caroline (Alicia Vikander) as she crosses over to the continent to meet her new husband, the King of Denmark. Mikkel Boe Følsgaard brilliantly fills the mad monarch's shoes. His uncontrollable paranoia and philandering eventually require the presence of a dedicated doctor, which is where Mads Mikkelsen steps in as German doctor and anonymous Enlightenment promoter Johann Struensee. The three leads are terrific in their portrayals, but none more so than Følsgaard, the well-deserved best actor winner at Berlin, whose child-like king is manipulated by all closest to him. As he lifts Christian to manic highs and wallows in dejected lows, Følsgaard's performance is powerfully authentic, making it difficult to hate the deluded King, yet effortlessly managing to evoke unreserved pity towards him. The supporting players are also worthy of note, especially David Dencik (most memorable as Esterhase in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*) as the scheming Ove Høegh-Guldberg. Illustrating the struggles of the time, *A Royal Affair* is not only a fascinating historical account, but also serves as an allegory for our own cash-strapped and troubled contemporary times. Issues of taxation, propoganda and resentment from the masses are no less relevant today than they were 250 years ago.

Arcel has constructed and thoroughly convincing period piece that packs a lot of historical drama

into its 128 minute runtime. Part romance, part political thriller, the script does well to hit all the important notes over the six year period it covers. The series of events spread over the years does mean that momentum is difficult to keep and the film, though engaging, feels quite lengthy. *A Royal Affair* is one of the rare instances where a good film could have made a great miniseries, as more time could have been dedicated to flesh out the significant events along the way. It would also be nice to spend more time with the three central figures, especially to explore the complexity of Struensee and King Christian. The film paints Mikklesen's man of the Enlightenment as a hero, despite his duplicitous relationship with the King and his eventual power grab, not to mention the affair the title refers to. While *A Royal Affair* paints an adequate portrait of the doctor, it also seems like the tip of an iceberg.

Striking a terrific balance between dramatisation and history, Arcel's *A Royal Affair* is an intriguing treat. In re-creating this stranger-than-fiction account, Følsgaard steals the show despite a strong effort from Mikkelsen, in a film that feels firmly grounded in authenticity. The flow of the film may struggle due to the timespan it covers, but *A Royal Affair* is a fascinating depiction of power and politics in 18th century Europe, leaving the viewer to wonder how much has really changed since. **8.5/10**

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