

A Royal Affair explores one of the most famous illicit romances in European history

By [Chris Tookey](#)

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A ROYAL AFFAIR (15)

Verdict: Danes reign

Rating: ★★★★★

Denmark is enjoying a creative renaissance, with top-class TV dramas such as *The Killing* and *Borgen*, and the rise of directors such as Nicolas Winding Refn (*Drive*).

Despite isolated hits such as *Babette's Feast* (1987) and *Festen* (1998), the current revival started eight years ago, with a brave political drama called *King's Game*, the most gripping depiction yet of the way spinning, leaking and lying to the public have come to dominate democratic politics.

That film was superbly written by Nikolaj Arcel and Rasmus Heisterberg, and ably directed by Arcel.

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A Royal Affair starring Alicia Vikander as Caroline Mathilde and Mads Mikkelsen who plays Christian VII of Denmark's physician

With *A Royal Affair*, the same duo has turned to the 18th century to examine one of the most famous illicit liaisons in European history.

There are echoes of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere in the moving tale of Caroline Mathilde (luminously played by star-of-the-future Alicia Vikander), a young Englishwoman sent to marry the feeble-minded Christian VII of Denmark (a Berlin Festival award-winning performance by Mikkel Boe Folsgaard).

Her subsequent affair with the king's German physician (Mads Mikkelsen, an actor of immense authority) was not just a sex scandal. It dramatised the clash between the values of the Enlightenment and the religious-political establishment.

The film isn't hard going, as the chemistry between Vikander and Mikkelsen is excellent, while the dotty Christian's hopeless attempts at lovemaking and his petulant demands for a 'fun queen' offer light relief.

'The world is full of princesses and I get stuck with the grumpy one,' he grumbles.

We British may draw parallels with our Royal Family, which gives the film a cheeky topicality. But this is an intelligent, realistic costume drama of the kind we rarely see.

The last one on offer was *The King's Speech*, and *A Royal Affair* deserves to reach the same mature audience. Though it is not on an epic scale, it is a thoughtful period piece that can stand comparison with Fred Zinnemann's *A Man For All Seasons* and David Lean's *Doctor Zhivago*.

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The reviewer might have mentioned that HRH Princess Caroline Matilda was the sister of King George III, and granddaughter of King George II. "young Englishwoman" indeed. I know the story; there are no parallels with "our Royal Family".

- Thomas Rex Campbell, New York USA, 16/6/2012 15:16

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