

A Royal Affair (En Kongelig Affaere) (15)



Director
Nikolaj Arcel

Starring
Mads Mikkelsen, David Dencik, Alicia Vikander, Trine Dyrholm, William Johnk Nielsen, Mikkel Boe Folsgaard

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13/06/2012

Review by [Matthew Turner](#)

Opens Friday 15 June 2012

Four out of **Five** stars
Running time: **128** mins

Impressively directed and superbly written, this is a gripping, powerfully moving and thought provoking Danish drama with a magnificent central performance from Mads Mikkelsen.

What's it all about?

Directed by Nikolaj Arcel, A Royal Affair (En Kongelig Affaere, original title fans) is based on a true story and begins in 1766 Denmark, with aristocratic, English-born Caroline Mathilde (Alicia Vikander) being married off to foppish, ineffectual King Christian VII (Mikkel Boe Folsgaard). After bearing the King a child, Caroline turns to the King's personal physician, German doctor Johann Friedrich Struensee (Mads Mikkelsen) and the pair begin an illicit affair.

At the same time, Johann's burgeoning friendship with the King deepens and he plots with Caroline to manipulate the King into turning Denmark into a progressive, socially reforming nation with a series of liberal reforms. However, the repressive aristocracy, who had hitherto ruled by persuading the King to rubber-stamp everything, eventually work out what Johann is up to and he soon finds himself in a very dangerous position.

The Good

Mads Mikkelsen is magnificent as Johann, delivering an emotionally complex performance as an outsider (the source of his initial bonding with Caroline) trying to balance his genuine friendship with the King, his illicit love for the Queen and a greater, all-consuming desire for social reform. Mikkel Boe Folsgaard (who won the Best Actor prize at Berlin) is equally good as King Christian, managing to elicit sympathy and finding emotional depth in a role that could easily have been played as broad caricature, while Alicia Vikander (who occasionally resembles a young Natalie Portman) is terrific as Caroline and generates strong chemistry with Mikkelsen.

The script (with rumoured input from Lars Von Trier) is excellent, presenting a compelling portrait of a country at a pivotal time in its history and conveying genuine excitement for the social possibilities inherent in even the smallest reform. On top of that, the production design is superb, particularly when highlighting the stark contrast between the opulence of the court and the sickening poverty and darkness of the world outside the palace walls.

The Great

Nikolaj Arcel's direction is assured throughout, giving equal weight to the powerfully emotional romance and the historical drama, while establishing exactly how high the stakes are for Denmark as a country and allowing the tension-fraught political wranglings to play out like a conspiracy thriller.

Worth seeing?

A Royal Affair is a thoroughly enjoyable Danish drama that's by turns gripping, thought-provoking

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and powerfully emotional, thanks to a superb script, impressive direction and terrific performances from all three leads. Highly recommended.

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