

A Royal Affair / En kongelig affaere (2012) Nikolaj Arcel
P Michell, 2021

A Royal Affair is the true story of an ordinary man who wins the queen's heart and starts a revolution. Centring on the intriguing love triangle between the ever more insane Danish King Christian VII, the royal physician, who is a man of enlightenment and idealism, Struensee and the young but strong Queen Caroline Mathilda. It is a gripping tale of brave idealists who risk everything in the pursuit of freedom for their people ... and above all, it is the story of a passionate and forbidden romance that changed an entire nation.

The film's director, [Nikolaj Arcel](#), made a Director's Statement for the picture. It reads: "A ROYAL AFFAIR is based on one of the most dramatic events in Denmark and indeed European history; whenever I used to pitch the film to foreign investors, people had a hard time believing that the story was true, that these momentous events had actually happened in the late 1700's. In Denmark however, it is taught in school, more than 15 books have been written about it (both factual and fictional) and there has even been an opera and a ballet. I feel honored and extremely lucky to finally bring the full story to the screen. Tonally, I was inspired by the great epics from the 40's and 50's where films would often feel like literary works, structured around characters and the passage of time, and not clearly following the obvious screenplay roadmaps. But my creative team and I were also fired up by the idea of bringing the Scandinavian historical drama into the new century. We wanted to achieve this by adhering to a self-imposed rule; we didn't want to "show" history, didn't want to dwell pointlessly on the big official events, the fancy dresses and hairdos, or the way the food was served. Rather, we wanted people to simply experience the story through the eyes of the characters, taking the 1760's for granted. Even though the period is obviously there in the set designs, the costumes it was filmed and edited as we would have filmed and edited a film taking place in modern Copenhagen. Finally, [Gabriel Yared](#) and [Cyrille Auforts](#)' beautiful score has brought the film full circle, and home to its epic roots."

Films like this presents another side of cinematic story-telling. 'Reconstructed Past' allows a set of real events to be presented in an interesting and entertaining way. Filmmaking here is blurring the traditional documentary historical presentation. This is not new. Hollywood has been doing this for a long long time such as; *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* (1939), *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), etc.

Creative Personnel:

[Nikolaj Arcel](#) – Director (7 credits) / Screenplay (23 credits)

Nikolaj Arcel was born on August 25, 1972 in Copenhagen, Denmark. He is a writer and director, known for [A Royal Affair](#) (2012), [King's Game](#) (2004) and [The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo](#) (2009).

[Alicia Vikander](#) – Queen Caroline Mathilde (47 credits)

Is a Swedish actress, dancer and producer. Studied ballet at the Royal Swedish Ballet School, but decided to pursue acting instead of ballet, following a few injuries and subsequent foot and back surgeries.

Portrayed a humanoid robot in [Ex Machina](#) (2014) and a half-human/half-witch in [Seventh Son](#) (2014).

The directors she dreams to work with are [Lars von Trier](#), [Terrence Malick](#) and [Quentin Tarantino](#).

Signed as the new face of Louis Vuitton in February 2015.

As part of her audition process, director [Nikolaj Arcel](#) took actress [Alicia Vikander](#) out drinking to see how well she could understand Danish. Vikander faked that she could understand and speak it well but at the end of the process when Arcel told her she got the part she didn't understand what he was saying until he switched to English.

Vikander spent two months in Copenhagen in Denmark learning Danish prior to principal photography.

[Mikkel Boe Følsgaard](#) – King Christian VII (24 credits)

His first film. In 2012, he won the award of Best Male Actor at the Berlinale for his appearance in the movie *A Royal Affair*, while still attending theatre school, Statens Teaterskole in Copenhagen. He graduated in the summer of 2012. Grew up in the northern part of Sealand, the biggest of the Danish isles.

Plays Mark Hess in very good 'The Chestnut Man' TV series.

[Mads Mikkelsen](#) – Dr Johannes Friderich Struensee (59 credits)

A highly regarded and busy actor Mads Mikkelsen's great international successes parallel those achieved by the Danish film industry since the mid-1990s. As a child he trained as a gymnast and then became a professional dancer before studying drama at the Aarhus Theatre School in Denmark and became famous overnight as star of the police series 'Unit 1' (2000) which won an International Emmy as Best Drama Series. Often voted 'sexiest man in Denmark' ("Better than being the 'ugliest man in Denmark!"). Favourite movie is *Tax Driver* (1976).

Has appeared in three Danish films that were submitted for the Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category: [After the Wedding](#) (2006), [A Royal Affair](#) (2012) and [The Hunt](#) (2012). Currently working on an 'Indiana Jones Project' (2021)/

Trivia:

Film is in Danish but the actual court spoke French and German.

The meeting of Christian VII and Caroline Matilda took place in 1766, when Christian was 17 and Caroline was 15. Actors [Mikkel Boe Følsgaard](#) and [Alicia Vikander](#) were in their 20s when they filmed the scene.

Danish actor [Mads Mikkelsen](#), portrays a German character. Swedish actress [Alicia Vikander](#) plays an English character who speaks Danish for most of the film. [Mads Mikkelsen](#) was around 46 when he played Dr. Johann Friedrich Struensee, who was executed before he was 35.

The film does not reveal ex-Queen Caroline's final fate. After her exile to Celle, Germany in 1772, Caroline had supporters back in England and in Copenhagen itself. With the support of her brother King George III, they planned to get her someday restored to influence at court. But she contracted scarlet fever and died in 1775. She was not yet 24.

The film's closing epilogue English translation states: "With his father [King Christian VII of Denmark]'s help, Frederik [King Frederick VI of Denmark] staged a coup d'état and seized power at the age of 16. Guldberg, Julianne Marie and their Cabinet were banished from the Court. In the course of Frederik's 55 year long reign, almost all of Struensee's laws were reinstated. Frederik went even further than Johann when he abolished serfdom and liberated the peasants".

Reviews:

The Doctor Knows Best

Roger Ebert, 2012

The principles of the Enlightenment, which would inspire the French Revolution, first took practical shape in Denmark in the 18th century. The books and ideas of Voltaire and Rousseau arrived there under the arm of Dr. Johann Struensee, a German physician who was hired to care for the young King Christian VII, and eventually took very good care indeed of his comely new queen from Britain, Queen Caroline Mathilde.

Their risky love affair and clandestine guidance of Danish politics provide rich material for "A Royal Affair," a big budget historical drama that carries Denmark's hopes into the Oscar season. It provides still more exposure for the rising Danish star [Mads Mikkelsen](#), the latest male sex symbol of the art house crowd. He plays Struensee, a social reformer ahead of his time.

Queen Caroline ([Alicia Vikander](#)) arrives in Denmark for a royal marriage, and discovers that the rumors she's heard about her intended husband, the king ([Mikkel Boe Folsgaard](#)), are true. First seen by us hiding behind a tree and by her displaying an odd giggle, he's mentally deranged and infantile. After finding he doesn't much like marriage, he suddenly determines to make a grand tour of Europe, and the elders of the court hire Struensee to travel along and see what can be done with him.

Struensee finds him to be putty in his hands, easily influenced, and when they return to Copenhagen, with Caroline and a new royal infant, he stays on within the royal household. Denmark at the time was a place where rich aristocrats ruled and such reforms as orphanages seemed dangerously radical. Caroline, in love with Struensee, also falls in love with what the doctor tells her about Voltaire's politics, and she uses her influence with the king to change the nation's history.

Christian was essentially a figurehead, useful for public display and dismissed by the powers in his court. His innocence and cluelessness are sort of endearing. The doctor has a masterstroke: He uses Caroline to persuade her husband to take command of his kingdom, as after all he is permitted to do under the constitution. One reform follows another, to the consternation of the suddenly powerless court.

Strangely, the illicit couple seem more in love with what they're doing than with each other. Yes, they're "in love," but it isn't the earth that shakes, it's the kingdom. As the power behind the throne once removed, Mikkelsen is well-cast as a strong leading man who is also convincing as an intellectual and reformer.

[Nikolaj Arcel](#), the director, makes good use of locations in Prague, everybody's favorite backdrop for a historical European city, and the players and costumes make this look like a historical romance. It's ever so much more, as we discover in scenes that bracket the main action, revealing the tensions and dangers experienced by the brave young queen. Is it too much to suspect that she carried on her affair for reasons of idealism, not lust?

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How Films Get made

TrustNordisk were in Cannes selling Zentropa's epic real life historical love story.

BY THEODORE SCHWINKE 19 MAY 2011
SCREENDAILY.COM

Zentropa [production company] chose to shoot in the Czech Republic not because they wanted to take advantage of the territory's 20% production rebate ("You can get a rebate practically in every country in Europe," Jensen said) but because they wanted to learn from the Czechs.

"We have no tradition of working with big, spectacular historical films in Denmark," said Peter Albaek Jensen, executive producer on *A Royal Affair*. "We came to get knowledge we couldn't find locally in Scandinavia." Jensen said he was immediately impressed by the quality of Czechs' work. "I've produced 150 features and if you can impress me, that's something.

A Royal Affair is Zentropa's first historical picture. "We've made probably around 100 films around Copenhagen," Jensen said. "Films about ordinary people in ordinary Denmark in ordinary surroundings. Of course, after 100 films like that, it was time for a little exoticism."

Jensen said he was very pleased with his experience in the Czech Republic and highly recommended the territory to other filmmakers. "I can see no reason to shoot in Scandinavia," he said. "We're talking about Lars Von Trier doing his next film down here. He wanted to do a historical piece so that would be obvious."

Zentropa entered *A Royal Affair* three years ago. The historical story is well known in Denmark but has never been filmed. "As long as I've been working in the Danish film business, people have been talking about making this movie, but nobody was able to make the proper script," Jensen said. "But when I read Nikolaj [Arcel] and Rasmus [Heisterberg]'s script, I knew we had it." Arcel and Heisterberg previously collaborated on the international hit *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*.

“This story is the biggest and most spectacular love story in the history of the state of Denmark,” Jensen said. “What can have more appeal than a secret, royal love story with fatal consequences?”

18th century Danish King Kristián VII (Mikkel Boe Folsgaard) suffered from mild schizophrenia. He made his court physician, Johann Struensee (Mads Mikkelsen), a state counsellor. Eventually the doctor became lover to Queen Karolina Matylda (Danish Shooting Star 2011 Alicia Vikander) and de facto ruler of the kingdom. Struensee made many political enemies in court, however. His adversaries ultimately convicted him of offending the crown and sentenced him to death.

The project has strong prospects, not least of all in Scandinavia, where the story, director, screenwriter and actors are all well know. “We also hope that will go in Germany because the hero, Struensee, is German,” Jensen said.

The project shot 40 days in the Czech Republic — 10 at Barrandov Studios and at the remaining on live locations in Prague and 20 other sites around the country. Jensen employed a 100-member Czech crew [to] do the lion’s share of the work. “We have less than 10 Danish people down here,” Jensen said.

Jensen praised his Czech partners at Sirena Film, with whom Zentropa previously shot the 2008 thriller *Fear Me Not*, starring Ulrich Thomsen and Paprika Steen, and the work of Czech film commissioner Ludmila Claussova. “Meeting Ludmila was really what removed the last concerns about being here,” Jensen said, “so we were not so worried about what is, for us, a very big and very expensive film.”

Production moved to Dresden for four days after concluding principal photography in the Czech Republic on May 12. Post-production is taking place in Denmark. “I wouldn’t be worried about doing post [in the Czech Republic] but we have to spend a little money in Denmark,” Jensen said. In the end, the producers spent nearly half their €5.5m budget in the Czech Republic, where they were to receive a 20% cash rebate within 44 days of the conclusion of filming. Other financing came from *Mitteldeutsche* Medienförderung, Eurimages, the Danish and Swedish film institutes, the Nordic Film and Television Fund, and Danish and Swedish television.

“Without bragging too much I would say the fantastic script made this project actually quite easy to finance,” Jensen said. “It’s easy if you have a script that everybody loves.”