

## **Review – The Young Victoria – Littleham Village Hall**

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October**

Written by Julian Fellowes, himself almost an aristocrat both by descent and marriage, produced by Sarah Ferguson herself a Royal by association who was partnered by Martin Scorsese in this production, the film was destined for success. With such an impeccable pedigree and populated by such capable actors as Emily Blunt (Victoria) and Rupert Friend (Albert) it is not surprising that this turned out to be so.

The production utilised real locations almost throughout, Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire being the principle location, substituting for Buckingham Palace and other regal dwellings. I also recognised Osborne House on the Isle of Wight at one point where in the film, during the later days of the lover's courtship, they sheltered from the rain in a stylised Apollo's temple. Osborne House was a favourite home of Queen Victoria. The success of this location policy was self evident as it gave the production a validity and integrity that would have been hard to achieve any other way.

The story follows Victoria's life from her late teens to Albert's death. Through Emily Blunt's fine performance we get an intimate insight into the mind of the young Princess as she perceives the way in which courtiers close to her are attempting to manipulate the course of the Monarchy to their own advantage. We see her emerge from childhood into a headstrong young woman determined to fulfil her destiny as Queen and to take a very political role in the development of the nation. We are able to share with her in a very immediate way, the frustrations, anxieties and violence that were precipitated by her well meaning but ill advised foray in to the world of the politicians. I was very impressed by the way in which Emily Blunt was able to convey the rather petulant reaction the young Queen expressed to the results of her well intentioned "meddling. I found myself almost forgetting that this was a film such was the convincing quality of her performance, I was engrossed.

As Victoria's life unfolded we experience, in a parallel story line, the machinations of the European Monarchies, desperate to establish regal bonds with England across the channel by thrusting Prince Albert into the arms of Victoria. Clearly, from Emily Blunt's characterisation of Victoria and from the record which shows her to be a strong minded, independent, free thinking woman, such a plan was bound for failure had there not been an immediate and natural attraction from their first meeting.

The film's technique of taking us into the minds of the principal players enabled us to experience how Albert must have felt in those early days of their courtship where the motivation and inertia for the liaison came from others. Although, this didn't quite ring true for me as the history books show Albert to have been a very forceful and determined person, yet at this point in the film he appeared very subordinate and subject to manipulation.

Notwithstanding the various and acute needs of the Royal manipulators on both sides of the channel, the relationship succeeds and Victoria and Albert are married. We are then, once again through the filmmaker's technique of putting the viewer into the minds of the characters, given an intimate insight into their very private love affair. I suppose it helps to be reminded that Kings and Queens function much the same as the rest of us when it comes to bed time? My uncomfortable reaction to the bedroom scenes is probably the result of them being played and filmed so convincingly that I felt like an intruder, a voyeur. Such a response should be a credit to the actors and director.

Throughout the film, there is a continual grumbling undercurrent from the political machinations of the parliamentarians in England, the Monarchies across the channel and even the close family of Victoria herself through her mother's (Miranda Richardson) liaison with the ambitious and self seeking comptroller of the royal household, Sir John Conroy (Mark Strong). Incidentally, with no disrespect to Miranda Richardson's performance, I couldn't help but be distracted by her association with the "Blackadder" TV series as Mrs Miggins and Elizabeth I. What a shame, such is the penalty of type casting!

It was a pity that what appeared to be a most convincing true story, as it should have been, given the connections of the writer and producer, that it was tarnished by serious historical inaccuracy. In the film, great drama is made over the attempt on Victoria's life (fact) with Albert being wounded as a result of throwing himself across Victoria and "taking the bullet" (fiction). This is how history is diluted and legend takes its place. Hollywood is normally associated with these offences to the past as witness the claim made in the Hollywood film U-571, that the capture of the German Enigma code machine was done by American navy officers!

I suppose that it was necessary to restrict the film's focus to the private life of the young Royal couple, however I was disappointed that more wasn't made of Albert's very significant contributions to the arts and culture of the time. Contributions that are still very evident today. Reference was made fleetingly to his willingness to involve himself in the progress and well being of the nation and it's people but this was quite inadequate as a record of his actual impact. I think an opportunity was missed here.

Nevertheless, the cinematography was quite beautiful. I was transfixed by the deftness of the transitions from scene to scene, in particular, the way in which the most appropriate musical score was adapted to suit the fluidity of the action. The job of the film editors must have been an immense task and contributed enormously to the artistic merit of the film.

Not normally taken to watching romantic dramas, surprisingly, I enjoyed this film.

**Sir Lorn Stakes – Littleham - 4<sup>th</sup> October 2009**