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**"A Royal Affair"**By *Sophie Braccini*

Photo provided

Something is glamorous in the kingdom of Denmark. From that country comes to Orinda April 5 a story of intrigue and love on a backdrop of factual 18th century history in the film "A Royal Affair."

Few Americans know the importance German doctor Johann Friedrich Struensee had in the battle between enlightenment and obscurity in 18th century Europe. Struensee (played by Mads Mikkelsen, "The Hunt," "Casino Royale") was recruited by progressive members of the Danish Court to take care of King Christian VII (Mikkel Boe Folsgaard) in 1770. The immature, libertine and manic-depressive king was neither the embodiment of a great monarch nor a decent husband to the young British princess Caroline Mathilda (Alicia Vikander), who was married to him at age 16.

Thanks to the trust he placed in Struensee, a reader of Rousseau and Voltaire who had himself written a few pamphlets on freedom, the monarch transformed into a progressive king, infuriating the more conservative amongst his court. Then, an attraction between the queen and the doctor materialized into a romance that precipitated their demise.

The friendship between the king and his doctor, with trust and manipulation intertwined, adds spice to the story. Danish star Mikkelsen is almost overshadowed by much less

known Folsgaard as the weak but touching king.

Folsgaard's portrayal is at times frightening, at times charming, and often unsettling. The movie is probably on its way to become an international success; it was very well received at the Berlin International Film Festival, where Folsgaard won for Best Actor (Nikolaj Arcel and Rasmus Heisterberg won for Best Script). The young Swedish actress Alicia Vikander gives a contemporary interpretation of the life of the very young queen - most of the story happens before she even turns 20 - who was ready to embrace progressive ideas and passionate love.

The historical element of the movie should not be overlooked. The list of reforms engaged by Struensee during his short years at the top of the Danish state is incredible, including the abolition of torture, un-free labor (corvée), the censorship of the press, noble privileges, the slave trade in the Danish colonies, the etiquette rules at the Royal Court, and state funding of unproductive manufacturers.

There was also an introduction of a tax on gambling and luxury horses to fund nursing, criminalization and punishment of bribery, reorganization of the judicial institutions to minimize corruption, introduction of state-owned grain storages to balance out the grain price, assignment of farmland to peasants, reorganization and reduction of the army, university reforms, reform of the state-owned medical institutions. And all this was done peacefully, without war or revolution.

After Struensee's demise, queen dowager Juliana Maria and her conservative supporters who seized power repelled most of these reforms, but Frederick's son re-enacted most of them years later.

Director Nikolaj Arcel offers a rendition of this true story, giving it the shape and appeal of a romantic drama.

"A Royal Affair" will be shown for one week starting April 5 at the Orinda Theatre as part of the International Film Showcase. For more information, visit lamorindatheatres.com.

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