

The King's Speech

- Cate Marquis

Colin Firth, Geoffrey Rush and Helena Bonham Carter sparkle in the amusing yet uplifting history-based film "The King's Speech," one of 2010's best and a heavy Oscar contender.

In the 1920s, radio is a new medium. The younger son of Britain's King George, the Duke of York (Colin Firth), is called on to give a speech at the closing of a grand exposition in London. But the speech reveals, in humiliatingly public fashion, what the royal family had known although the public had not - the prince stammers.

"The King's Speech" is based on a lesser-known side of famous historical events. King George VI, father of the present Queen, ascended the throne on the verge of World War II, when his brother Edward VIII gave up the throne to marry the American divorcee Wallis Simpson. This film explores the personal journey of the man who never expected to be king.

As the younger prince, Bertie, as his family called him, had eluded the public spotlight, amply filled by his aging father King George V (Michael Gambon) and playboy brother Crown Prince Edward (Guy Pearce). Bertie quietly had carved out a career as a naval officer and was raising his two daughters, Elizabeth (Freya Wilson) and Margaret (Ramona Marquez), with his wife Elizabeth (Helena Bonham Carter).

But times had changed and, as his father the King notes, it was no longer enough for younger princes to simply look good in uniform and not fall off their horse. Now they are expected to make speeches and engage with the public.

Encouraged by his wife Elizabeth, Bertie quietly visits a long line of speech therapists in an attempt to address his problem, with little luck. Desperate, they stumble upon Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), an Australian speech therapist with a small out-of-the-way office. A sometimes-actor with eccentric methods and decidedly democratic manner, Logue is an odd, yet oddly effective, therapist.

Director Tom Hooper's film is lively and funny, while also being an excellent, inspiring film about friendship, perseverance and the challenge of stammering.

The scenes between Colin Firth and Geoffrey Rush are comic gold, as they explore the relationship between the rigid prince Bertie and the outspoken but effective Lionel. It is wonderful to see Helen Bonham Carter take a break from eccentric roles to play a more normal person, which she does with great charm and spunk.

The dialog is witty, fast and clever, making the film highly amusing while also presenting an inspiring dramatic story, about friendship and persistence, against the backdrop of a significant point in history.

There are many worthy supporting performances, such as Derek Jacobi as Archbishop Lang, whose falsely encouraging comments often undermine Bertie's self-confidence. Michael Gambon plays Bertie's demanding father with growling style and Guy Pearce is very effective as his more confident

yet less responsible brother, clearly more interested in throwing parties with his mistress Wallis than his royal duties.

Lush, lovely photography, carefully-crafted period sets and costumes create a convincing historical feel. Shots are often framed so that we experience things from Bertie's point of view. We deeply feel his discomfort facing an audience giving a speech.

The music, often classical, is particularly affecting, lifting scenes to dramatic heights. The combination of music and image in the final scene, when the new King addresses a nation newly at war, is sublime.

“The King's Speech” is enjoyable for its strong characters and witty dialog and moving for its inspiring story of overcoming stammering. This is one of those films that make it such a delight to go to the movies this time of year.

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