

THE KING'S SPEECH

*The Weinstein Company and UK Film Council presentation
A See Saw Films / Bedlam Production
Directed by Tom Hooper. Written By David Seidler*

A film review by Franco P. Visser

February 2012 will mark the 60th anniversary of the death of King George VI, the royal Prince who was not supposed to be King. On the morning of 2 February 1952 the King's valet found him dead in his room at Sandringham, the royal family's country retreat in Norfolk. The Queen Mother, then Queen Elizabeth the Queen Consort was notified and she immediately rushed to his room, but to no avail. The King had died peacefully in his sleep after a long illness, suffering from lung cancer and arteriosclerosis amongst other ailments. Prince Edward, King George VI's elder brother succeeded his father King George V as King Edward VIII, relinquished the throne in order to marry the twice divorced American socialite Wallis Simpson, thereby causing the well-known pre-World War II 'abdication crisis' of 1936-1937, and forcing Bertie, as he was known to his family, to step up and take his brother's place as Sovereign of the United Kingdom and the last Emperor of India. The much loved King had a severe speech impediment which especially stifled his ability to deliver public speeches, causing him great suffering and public humiliation, from individuals no less than the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang (played by Derek Jacobi).

The film *The King's Speech* is set in this time beginning with King George V's illness and last days as King of England. King George V (played by Michael Gambon) suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and pleurisy and his declining health in the 1930's caused great tension and fear for the royal family and the British nation as a whole, as Prince Edward's behaviour as Prince of Wales and Heir Presumptive already raised eyebrows and concern as to his suitability as monarch of millions.

The film shows King George V's harsh and strict treatment of his children. His firm grip and control of the royal household was legendary. Under these circumstances Prince Albert (played by Colin Firth), his wife Princess Elizabeth (played by Helena Bonham Carter) as Duke and Duchess of York, together with their two small daughters carved a comfortable role for themselves within the royal fold, providing much needed support to King George V and Queen Mary in their duties and commitments in the British realm. Prince Edward (played by Guy Pearce) shirked away from his responsibilities, preferring women, fast cars and the party-set above his constitutional duties



and responsibilities.

As a pillar of strength to her husband and future Sovereign, Princess Elizabeth sought the help of many professionals and quacks in order to better Prince Albert's speech difficulties. Many of them had very little if any successes in their treatment regimes. It was Princess Elizabeth who found Lionel Logue (played by Geoffrey Rush), an unorthodox speech therapist from South Australia, and enlisted his help in finding a workable solution to Prince Albert's pronounced stammer. As the Duke and Duchess of York acceded to the throne, the nation looked to their new King George VI in times of national crisis to lead and provide comfort and reassurance. Slowly but surely Logue was able to help King George VI improve his speech impediment, although ultimately the King suffered a life long battle with his stammer. Logue significantly improved the

King's speech abilities, which was especially important for King George VI in leading his people into World War II. Many subjects of the realm only had contact with and access to their sovereign via the wireless, and this medium of communication proved most challenging to the King. Logue's methods were to say the least rather strange, but they proved most valuable to King George VI in grappling with his impediment. Logue became an enduring friend of the King and Queen, although their relationship had a problematic patch. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother wrote to Logue following the King's death in 1952 and expressed her life-long gratitude for all that he had done for King George VI.

The King's speech is a wonderful and dare I say emotional film about the relationship between a King and his speech therapist upon whom he depended so much. The film takes you inside the stoic, conservative, rule and etiquette-bound royal family and provides the viewer with a glimpse into the fragile and rather delicate self-image and ego of a man whose destiny was altered by an American divorcee. Queen Mary's character is brilliantly portrayed by Claire Bloom, and the viewer is also privy to her inability to be a warm and loving mother figure to her wayward and fragile children, in great part due to her husband King George V's influence and prescriptions. I am satisfied that this film will be worth your viewing it, and I fully applaud Colin Firth's award as Best Actor at this year's 83rd Annual Academy Awards, in addition to the film taking the 2011 Best Picture Oscar.