

Film Review: History by Rote in Formulaic ‘Victoria and Abdul’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 30, 2017 - 11:02am

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CHICAGO – There have been 155 TV/Movie depictions of Queen Victoria, who ruled England from 1837 to 1901. The “Victorian Era” continues to fascinate filmmakers, and who is perfect to portray Queen V. towards the end of her life? Get me Dame Judi Dench on the Skype!



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

This is a story of a little known chapter of her later life... her unlikely relationship with a footman from India, Abdul Karim. In the film, it is hinted that the history of this friendship was destroyed for image purposes, but enough of the events were recorded to adapt into a film (from a book by Shrabani Basu). Veteran director Stephen Frears (“Florence Foster Jenkins”) applies his usual workmanlike approach to narrative, but nothing comes to life in the situation. No offense to the great Judi D., but the formula presented in the film almost seemed like a satire, with the elder actress of course portraying the title character of an ancient queen. The supporting cast does lend a better hand, especially comedian Eddie Izzard as heir to the throne, Albert “Bertie” Edward. Except for the apparent destruction of this chapter in Victoria’s life, the story doesn’t grab.

Queen Victoria (Judi Dench) has hit a rut. Her kingdom is close to a billion people, but at the end of the 1890s her long reign – combined with old age – has become lonely and boring. It’s time for a surprising happenstance, and it comes in the form of Abdul Karim (Ali Fazal), a subject of the colony of India. His participation in a ceremony piques Victoria’s interest.

The Queen is so fascinated that she invites Abdul to be a footman in her entourage. Their friendship as a result of this unlikely pairing infuriates Victoria’s son Prince Bertie (Eddie Izzard), the heir to her throne. The situation gets so tense that the Prince draws up papers to declare his mother insane, which inflames the situation all the way to Victoria’s death in 1901.

“Victoria and Abdul” expanded to Chicago on September 29th. Featuring Judi Dench, Ali Fazal, Michael Gambon, Tim Pigott-Smith and Eddie Izzard. Screenplay adapted by Lee Hall, from the book by Shrabani Basu. Directed by Stephen Frears. Rated “PG-13”



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Title Characters Victoria (Judi Dench) and Abdul (Ali Fazal)

Photo credit: Universal Pictures International



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