

‘Their Finest’ is British Filmmaking at Its Finest

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 14, 2017 - 4:09pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – In a combined BBC Films, Welsh Government and Pinewood (London) Pictures production, the British-based “Their Finest” pairs England’s history with authentic and passionate romance, to create a sly and funny riff on propaganda films and the British movie industry during the early days of World War II.

With a top drawer cast – headed by the great scene stealer Bill Nighy – and perfect construction by Danish director Lone Scherfig (“An Education,” “One Day”), “Their Finest” is righteous and tear-jerking entertainment, especially in the actualization of a wonderfully recreated example of the early 1940s British film industry. This is one of those rare films where women are all at the top of the credit list... besides Scherfig, the screenplay was adapted by Gaby Chiappe (from a novel written by Lissa Evans) and the lead role is portrayed by Gemma Arterton, who has never been better. Additionally, the black shadow of the London bombings during the early 1940s was given a proper connection to the story, and young character actor Jake Lacy (HBO’s “Girls”) did some scene stealing of his own as the lone American cast member. For history, romance and comedy in the face of tragedy, “Their Finest” lives up to its title.

The Second World War is heating up, as Germany continues its bombing raids on London in 1940. With men off to war, clerical jobs need filling, so young writer Catrin Cole (Gemma Arterton) joins the Ministry of Film, propaganda division. She first is used as a script supervisor, but after interviewing twin sisters who rescued soldiers at Dunkirk, she is promoted to full screenwriter to structure the script, under the supervision of Tom Buckley (Sam Claflin).



Sam Claflin, Gemma Arterton and Bill Nighy in ‘Their Finest’

Photo credit: STX Entertainment

When the British War Department gets wind of the project, they put their full approval behind it, hoping to lure the Americans into the war with its gung-ho message – they even cast an American RAF flyer named Lundbeck (Jake Lacy) to portray a Yank in the film. Add vain and pompous Ambrose Hilliard (Bill Nighy), and the production is put into full gear.

And in the background, as was the tradition of 1940s films, is a romance brewing between Catrin and Tom. The lady screenwriter is married to a problematic artist (Jack Huston), but that doesn’t stop the sparks from flying around the writing partners. The film created an enjoyable balance between the pomposity of a typical propaganda of the era, which includes heroes, dogs, the absurd twins and Bill Nighy, with the reality of life and death in London. Add a dash of eclectic film folks, with their creative quirks, and story is perfectly spiced.

Gemma Arterton has a memorable face and presence for film, and she carried her quasi-tragic screenwriter character with perfect aplomb. She represented the step up that many women took during the WWII years, and learned to fend for herself and her emotions throughout the story. The aforementioned Nighy is comic relief as the aging-actor-in-denial role, but in his typical fashion he also came around when asked to contribute more than the usual share during wartime. His acting lessons with Jake Lacy’s American flyboy are both hilarious and touching.



Film Within the Film: Twins Soldier Towards Dunkirk in ‘Their Finest’

Photo credit: STX Entertainment

There is a bonus in this film to old time film buffs who remember the Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger films of the 1940s, like “Stairway to Heaven.” Director Scherfig recreated the color palette of those films (the War Department wanted the heroic story in color) and the film-within-the-film felt exactly like that time. She also deftly does some newsreel recreations, so the truth of the film is absolutely right on, to the point where there was a bit of camera winking. It’s all fiction, so it’s also a sly, saucy take and a complete celebration of a filmmaking era gone with the wind.

There is a wonderful moment towards the end when the film is finished, and the audiences are eating it up. It is a reminder of the communal experience of the movies so succinctly, where strangers laughed and wept together. Ah nostalgia, it always seems like it’s warmer and fuzzier in the movies.

“Their Finest” opens in Chicago on April 14th, part of a nationwide release. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Gemma Arterton, Sam Claflin, Jack Huston, Jake Lacy, Jeremy Irons and Bill Nighy. Screenplay adapted by Gaby Chiappe, from a novel by Lissa Evans. Directed by Lone Scherfig. Rated “R”



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