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Film Capsule: Darkest Hour (Wright, 2017): USA

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Director Joe Wright (*Anna Karenina*, *Atonement*) delivers the goods with *Darkest Hour*, a moving dramatization of Great Britainâ??s decision to go to war against Germany in 1940. Newly-named Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, portrayed by the award-winning English thespian Gary Oldman, leads the way in *Darkest Hour* as he sets out to unite the country after the ouster of his predecessor, the pacifying Neville Chamberlain. With strong costuming, production design, make-up and hair styling, the film easily qualifies as a period piece. *Darkest Hour* is also the recipient of six Oscar nominations including Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Achievement in Costume Design, Best Achievement in Makeup and Hairstyling, Best Achievement in Cinematography, Best Achievement in Production Design, and Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role.

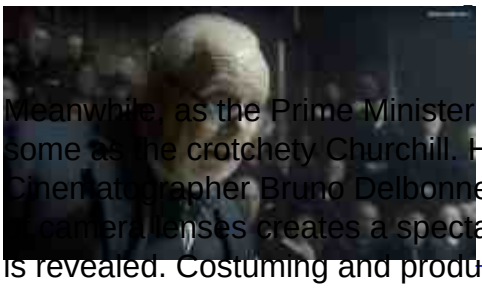


Like Churchill himself, Oldman was up for the task in a leading performance that entertains in one moment and inspires in the next. Utilizing extensive make-up and hair styling provided by Kazuhiro Tsuji, David Malinowski and Lucy Sibbick, Oldman not only acts the part he looks the part! Aiding in

most of the emotionally riveting scenes is Actress Lily James (*Baby Driver*, *Cinderella*) as Churchillâ??s young, sensitive, doe-eyed secretary, Elizabeth Layton, who mouths her bossâ??s speeches as they are delivered. In addition, acclaimed Cornish actress, Kristin Scott Thomas (*The Party*, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*), portrays Churchillâ??s doting wife, Clemmie, and brings a much-needed sense of balance, propriety and grounding to the Prime Minister.

As the German armyâ??s drive pushed through France toward the North Sea, Churchill decides to sacrifice a brigade of four thousand soldiers near Calais to distract and slow the German army to buy time to evacuate Dunkirk where some 300,000 British soldiers are pinned down under German Air Assault. The beaches of Dunkirk sit a mere 21 miles across the English Channel from the Cliffs of Dover. Hope of evacuating the 300,000 trapped soldiers off the beaches of Dunkirk is slim to none. Unable to get naval or air support from the United States, and facing a harbor cluttered with sunken ships prohibiting safe navigation for the British Navy, a â??volunteer civilian navyâ?• is called upon to rescue the stranded soldiers. The outcome of the war, the British way of life and a free Europe are at stake. British filmmaker Christopher Nolanâ??s film *Dunkirk,* also Oscar-nominated for Best Motion Picture of the Year*,* portrays the rescue/evacuation in an ultra-realistic, highly cinematic treatment.





Meanwhile, as the Prime Minister of British Parliament, Oldman continues to holds his own and then some as the crotchety Churchill. However, once the moment comes for the war declaration, Cinematographer Bruno Delbonnelâ??s (*Inside Llewyn Davis*, *Amelie*) lighting, camera angles and use of camera lenses creates a spectacle drawing the viewer as the resolve deep inside Winston Churchill is revealed. Costuming and production design are at their best here, in my opinion. And, Oldman delivers a consummate speech performance complete with Churchillâ??s trademark guttural delivery and an earthy, rumbling, emotionally tempered pitch. In my opinion, these Parliament-set scenes are the heart of the film. The soul of the film belongs to the â??tubeâ?• scenes where Churchill empathically engages commoners on their feelings surrounding the threat the Germans pose.

Full of political intrigue and military maneuverings, *Darkest Hour* is set against Great Britainâ??s ill preparedness for war and early appeasement/isolationist stance which was discussed by American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in his senior college thesis and published book, â??Why England Slept,â?• (an illusion to Churchillâ??s book on Germanyâ??s rise to power from 1932-38, â??While England Sleptâ?•). Lord Halifax and Chamberlain, portrayed by Ronald Pickup and Stephen Dillane, as members of Churchillâ??s inner-sanctum War Council, plot against Churchill in an attempt to force into Parliament a â??vote of no confidence.â?• Churchill manages to stay one step ahead of them while avoiding utter annihilation at the hands of the German army.

Darkest Hour is an emotionally-riveting, historical bio-drama with arguably the yearâ??s Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role. Moreover, a strong mise-en-scene makes *Darkest Hour* a

must-see film with the highest recommendation. A masterpiece.

Category

1. Feature Film

Date Created
January 30, 2018
Author
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