

**Chiasso, Cinema EXCELSIOR****18.15****Friday, 7th December 2018****VICTORIA AND ABDUL****2017**

107 minutes

Directed by **Stephen Frears**

Starring: Judy Dench, Ali Fazal, Eddie Izzard, Adeel Akhtar

Abdul Karim, a young prison clerk from Agra, India, is instructed to travel to England for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 to present her with a mohur, a gold coin which has been minted as a token of appreciation from British-ruled India.

The Queen, who is lonely and tired of her fawning courtiers, develops an interest in and later a friendship with Abdul. She spends time with him alone, and promotes him to become her Munshi. She asks him to teach her Urdu and the Qur'an. When Victoria discovers that he is married, she invites his wife and mother-in-law to join him to England. They arrive wearing black Burqas, to the consternation of the household.

While Victoria treats Abdul as a son, his preferment is resented by her household and inner circle, including her son Bertie and the Prime Minister. The household plots to undermine their relationship, hoping that Abdul will be sent home. When Victoria embarrasses herself by recounting to the court the one-sided account of the Indian Mutiny that Abdul had told her, Victoria's faith and trust in him are shaken and she decides he must go home. But the following day she changes her mind and asks him to stay. She gives Abdul a bejewelled locket with her photograph.

Victoria's interest in India grows, and at her Isle of Wight home of Osborne House, she surround her with plenty of Indian signs and she tells the household that she intends to give Abdul a knighthood.

The Prime Minister is adamant that the royal household must find a way to get rid of Abdul. They research his family background in India, and present Victoria with a dossier to show that his family is more ordinary and poor than Abdul has told her. When Victoria insists her doctor examine Abdul to find out why his wife has not fallen pregnant, he discovers that Abdul has gonorrhoea, and rushes to tell the Queen, expecting her to dismiss him in disgust. However, Victoria remains loyal to Abdul and admonishes her courtiers for plotting against him.

Eventually the household decides that, if Victoria does not break with Abdul, they will all resign. They also threaten to certify Victoria as insane. When Victoria is told, she angrily summons the entire household to the Durbar Room and demands that anyone who wants to resign step forward. When none do so, she tells them she has decided not to make Abdul a knight, but to include him in her next honours list as a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.

When Victoria falls ill, ...

Critics' comments:

- Victoria & Abdul is worth seeing for Dench's magisterial performance and for Frears's light but sure directorial touch. Just don't mistake it for actual history.
(September 29, 2017 | Christopher Orr – *The Atlantic*)
- This is a very warm story about an unusual relationship surrounded by palace intrigue, power struggles and jealousy. It is about the loneliness of a world-weary Queen who finds the emotional support she needs in a man from a very different culture.
(January, 12, 2018 - Robert Roten – *Laramie Movie Scope*)
- Judi Dench's turn as Victoria in old age, smitten with her man-servant, is one of her best
(September 15, 2017 – *The Times*)