

A Royal Affair -- Setting, Details, & Design

This time in Danish history is often referred to as one of the most interesting; thus, those responsible for producing and directing this film were faced with the task of perfecting the setting and design to maintain historical accuracy. This page will address the historical accuracy of the film's features by examining film elements such as architecture, music, character attire and lighting.

Architecture

According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), the oldest and most extensive movie database on internet, *A Royal Affair* was filmed in the Czech republic. To be more specific, it was filmed in



Rocco style furniture

Prague, a city with very old architecture. It makes sense they filmed it in Prague since Copenhagen has become very modern in its architecture. So, what is presented as Copenhagen in the film, is mostly Prague. For example the summer palace Frederiksborg in Denmark was filmed at the chateau of Ploskovice in Czech Republic. Both palaces was built in the baroque era.(1)

The movie is set in the end of the baroque artistic period. The baroque came to the

Northern European countries in the 1650s and lasted for around one hundred years. The movie is set in 1767 so most of the architecture has a baroque look.



Author: Julian Herzog, Christiansborg Slot in Copenhagen Slotsholmen, 2014.

Michelangelo was one of the first to introduce this new era of architecture. In his work he created white pilasters which were usually outside of the buildings. Michelangelo also tied buildings together through a new kind of space architecture. He often created three different buildings under one architecture principle, this created more space. (2)

This baroque architecture is represented in the movie, especially inside the Christiansborg palace, which is very spacious. The rooms in the Royal Affair were very big, for example the place they ate dinner, and the locations where the different offices and the council meetings took place. In addition, double-lined columns were very common which you could see in the movie as well. Overall the architecture was very simple and quaint, the color scheme was mostly white and gold.

The buildings themselves were from the baroque era, however inside the buildings the halls were replaced by so-called Rococo style furniture, and small intimate lounges. In Europe around the 1730s the heavy baroque furniture was replaced with smaller Rococo couches, tables and chaise lounges. This made the rooms even more spacious. Rococo chairs were low and wide and the lines were curved, often with bronze fittings. This was accurate in the movie, the architecture was from the baroque era, and the furniture was of rococo style

(<http://scalar.usc.edu/works/reel-norden/media/Screen Shot 2017-05-02 at 4.13.14 PM.png>). (3) Christiansborg Palace (http://scalar.usc.edu/works/reel-norden/media/1024px-Christiansborg_Slot_Copenhagen_2014_01.jpg) was built during the reign of Christian VI who died in 1746. The palace was inspired by Austrian and French architecture. It was completed in 1745. It was built out of 10,000 beech trees, but didn't last for long when the theater and riding school burned down in 1794. (4)

Fredensborg was a very beautiful palace, the interior was decorated by many

paintings by artists from the eighteenth century. According to the author Lacelles Wraxall the most gorgeous section of the castle is in east wing part which was completed in 1725. However because of the economy at that time, the columns around the castle were of cheaper material, of wooden construction. The west wing had a hipped roof with a tower, and a beautiful southern entrance. Fredensborg was never isolated, it had a big hunting ground linked with gardens and the forest. (5)

However, when referring to the summer palace in *Royal Affair* it is Frederiksborg they mean. According to the author William Ilkins when the winter days were over the royals spent many days in the Frederiksborg Palace. Frederiksborg is situated in in the western part of Copenhagen. It was built during the reign of Frederik IV (1720-30).(6)

Music

The soundtrack to *A Royal Affair* greatly enhances the emotions of the film. For instance, during the dance scene, Struensee and Caroline are dancing to music that seems to intensify in parallel to the flirty tension. Then suddenly, when they are almost nose to nose, the scene goes into slow motion, the music becomes slow and intimate, and the camera zooms in on the couple, fully engulfing the viewer in the emotion and wanting between the two of them. In that brief moment, you can almost feel the characters' heartbeats, but just as quickly as you became entranced, the fast paced dance music returns, abruptly removing you from your daze.

The music plays to the viewers emotions throughout *A Royal Affair*. Another example of this is during the execution of Dr. Struensee. The build up to his death is sad and epic, but as soon as the execution is complete there is utter silence. The melancholy music begins again as we see Caroline receive the news of her beloved's death. The score to the film adds depth to an already deep and dramatic story. Overall, it is clear that the score of the film was carefully picked to portray the mood of each scene and the darkness of this time in Scandinavian history. The music in the movie is indeed from musicians living in the eighteenth century, so the music playing in the movie would have all been accessible at that time.(7)

Attire

The costumes worn by the characters in *A Royal Affair* accurately portrayed popular attire for the upper class and royal subjects of the eighteenth century. In the film, King Christian VII and noble gentlemen often wore elegant waistcoats

([http://scalar.usc.edu/works/reel-norden/media/SDD_Royal_Affair](http://scalar.usc.edu/works/reel-norden/media/SDD_Royal_Affair_Waistcoat.png)

Waistcoat.png), powdered wigs, and ruffled ascots. Gentlemen's fashion in the eighteenth century largely consisted of suits made of silk, velvet, or brocade. In the upper classes, these suits were many times adorned with silver or gold decoration and elegant buttons. Embroidery often trimmed the front edges of coats with patterns such as tiny flowers or leaves. It was common for the coat to distinctively curve around mid-chest so as to show off the ornate design of the waistcoat.⁽⁹⁾ In the film, Christian VII is shown wearing an ensemble similar to this style. His waistcoat appears to be made of a blue silk with accents of gold embroidered leaves, and his overcoat slightly curves outwards with an embroidered pattern along the edges.



This image shows King Christian in a blue waistcoat that features gold embroidery. The embroidery is featured along the edges and shows a design with flowers and leaves.



This image shows Queen Caroline in her blue sack dress, a very popular style of dress for women in the late eighteenth century. This style features back pleats draping down from the shoulders like the pleats on Queen Caroline's dress.

As for women's fashion in the eighteenth century, one of the most popular dress designs was the robe à la française or sack. It is described as a loose fitting dress worn over a tight bodice with a full underskirt or petticoat. By 1755, the design had been modified to the point of it becoming a dress for formal occasions. The sack dress

([http://scalar.usc.edu/works/reel-norden/media/SDD_Royal_Affair](http://scalar.usc.edu/works/reel-norden/media/SDD_Royal_Affair_Blue_dress.png) Blue dress.png) now featured back pleats that were sewn down from the shoulder, forming a train and giving the bodice of the dress a tighter fit. This type of dress is similar to one that the actor portraying Queen Caroline wears in *A Royal*

Affair. The dress design often featured mid-length sleeves with ruffled-falling cuffs accented by lace underneath the patterned material.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the upper classes of

Danish society fashion trends often originated in France and England, and the styles depicted in *A Royal Affair* are authentic to this tendency.

Lighting

Throughout the film there was a dark and dreary atmosphere, particularly in scenes that took place within the palace. The absence of sunlight and the use of candlelight emphasized not only the tensions present in the scene, but also the darkness of Denmark's history, and the darkness of living in a palace during this time. This "darkness" in eighteenth century Denmark was a result of the nation's backwardness from not being as quick to embrace the Enlightenment movement. Although Struensee implemented many new ideas for Danish society that could have "enlightened" the nation, his affair with the Queen proved to bring Denmark back to its original structure.⁽⁸⁾ The decision to exclude light from many scenes and create a dreary mood for the audience was accurate considering the dark ending to an otherwise progressive story in Denmark's history. However, the film's lighting may have just been an artistic choice by the director to accentuate the emotions of the specific scene.

In contrast to the dreary scenes that take place in the palace, the brighter scenes often emphasize the love between Queen Caroline and Johann Friedrich Struensee. When the royal family moved to the summer palace, the scenes became brighter as the new romance blossomed. One scene in particular depicted Struensee and Queen Caroline riding horses through a green field with the sun shining in the background. In this sense, the variation in lighting between different scenes was more of an artistic choice rather than a historical reference.

(1) "Filming Locations." IMDb. Accessed February 09, 2017.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276419/locations>

(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276419/locations>).

(2) "Barokken." Design og håndverk Vg1 - NDLA. Accessed February 09, 2017.

<http://ndla.no/nb/node/60592?fag=44> (<http://ndla.no/nb/node/60592?fag=44>).s

(3) Kent, Neil. *The soul of the north: a social, architectural and cultural history of the Nordic countries, 1700-1940*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 107.

(4) Donnelly, Marian C. *Architecture in the Scandinavian countries*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 142.

(5) Wraxall, Lascelles. *Life and times of Majesty Caroline Matilda queen of Denmark and Norway*, Volum 1. 116.

(6) Ilkins, William Henry. *A queen of tears: Caroline Matilda, queen of Denmark and Norway* Volum 1. 62-65.

(7) "Soundtracks." IMDb. Accessed February 09, 2017.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276419/soundtrack>.

(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276419/soundtrack>.)

(8) Jane Ashelford, *The Art of Dress: Clothes and Society, 1500-1914* (London: National Trust Books, 2009), 136-137.

(9) Jane Ashelford, *The Art of Dress*, 144.

(10) Byron J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 105.

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