

FROM JOE WRIGHT DIRECTOR OF ATONEMENT



GARY OLDMAN IS WINSTON CHURCHILL

DARKEST HOUR

FOCUS
FEATURES

SOUNDTRACK ON
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

1

DOLBY
DIGITAL

WORKING TITLE

UNIVERSAL

IN CINEMAS JANUARY 12



ABOUT DARKEST HOUR

Academy Award nominee and BAFTA Award winner Gary Oldman stars for BAFTA Award-winning director Joe Wright in **Darkest Hour**, a thrilling account inspired by the true story of Winston Churchill's first weeks in office during the early days of the Second World War. Academy Award nominee Anthony McCarten's original screenplay takes a revelatory look at the man behind the icon.

A witty and brilliant statesman, Churchill is a stalwart member of Parliament but at age 65 is an unlikely candidate for Prime Minister; however the situation in Europe is desperate. With Allied nations continuing to fall against Nazi troops, and with the entire British army stranded in France, Churchill is named to the position with urgency

on May 10th, 1940. He is confronted with the ultimate choice: negotiate a peace treaty with Nazi Germany and save the British people at a terrible cost or fight on against incredible odds.

With the support of his wife of 31 years, Clemmie (Academy Award nominee Kristin Scott Thomas), Churchill looks to the British people to inspire him to stand firm and fight for his nation's ideals, liberty, and freedom. Putting his power with words to the ultimate test, with the help of his tireless secretary (Lily James), Winston must write and deliver speeches that will rally a nation. As Winston withstands his own darkest hour, he attempts to change the course of world history forever.

WORLD CHANGING WORDS



‘Words can, and do, change the world. This is precisely what happened through Winston Churchill in 1940,’ marvels **Darkest Hour**’s screenwriter, BAFTA Award-winner Anthony McCarten. ‘He was under intense political and personal pressure, yet he was spurred to such heights in so few days – over and over again.’

McCarten found himself gravitating towards the intense period between May and June 1940, ‘during which Winston turned coal into diamonds.’ The linchpins of his original screenplay for **Darkest Hour** became three speeches that Churchill wrote and delivered during this time.

The stakes could scarcely have been higher. By the time Churchill became Prime Minister, Allied Forces were already at war with Adolf Hitler, and one democracy after another had fallen to his Nazi forces. Britain now stood on the edge of a precipice. The dilemma was, either steel the nerves and be drawn deep into the conflict; or retreat from the war altogether, with inconceivable consequences.

McCarten says, ‘This story is anchored in the past yet it resonates all the way into the here and now. Too often

today, our “leaders” are followers. These decisions made in less than one month’s time had global ramifications.’

McCarten’s research led him to the minutes of Churchill’s War Cabinet meetings. These notes ‘revealed a period of uncertainty, something we don’t take into account considering his robust leadership. Winston knew he had made wrong calls in the past, certainly during World War I with the Battle of Gallipoli.’

He continues, ‘Pedestals are for statues, not for people, and a close reading of the minutes reveals not only a leader in trouble, under attack from all sides and uncertain what direction to take, but also just how dangerously close a country came to entering into a “peace” deal with an enemy who, if unchecked, would have reshaped the world forever.’

Ultimately, says McCarten, the **Darkest Hour** screenplay took shape ‘examining the working methods and leadership qualities and trains of thought. Winston strongly believed that words mattered, and he took pen in hand to help him – and his country – face down a terrifying threat.

‘In the process came the self-willed making of an iconic man.’



IN THE WAR ROOMS

For director Joe Wright, the War Rooms scenes ‘are centerpieces of the movie, and central to the story we are telling.’

He elaborates, ‘We didn’t want to make a film that simply said Churchill was great. We felt that the audience should actually hear the arguments and ponder them. What was essential about Churchill is that he himself would do just that; as a leader, he listened and considered other people’s points of view and then made a decision. We show this more than once in **Darkest Hour**.’

Wright notes with relief, ‘History has proved Churchill right and that is worth celebrating. But in May 1940 there was validity to exploring the avenue of a negotiated peace, not least because Britain didn’t have an army any more; the ground force was trapped at Dunkirk, on the other

side of the Channel. If they were going to be wiped out the UK would then not be able to defend itself at all.’

For Halifax, Churchill’s political rival who advocated for peace talks with the enemy, Wright felt he needed an actor who could convey authority and conviction rather than caricatured antagonism. ‘Stephen Dillane conveys moral gravitas, and I do think that he will persuade filmgoers that Halifax might have a point. His was a valid argument.’

He continues, ‘In the War Rooms scenes, I hope the audience will hear Halifax out and consider his position carefully; if Britain hadn’t won the war, might Halifax have been right? Also, Churchill would then not be the hero. Winning a war is made up of so many choices and so much luck, tragic and otherwise.’



CREATING A LIKENESS

‘When I heard, “Gary Oldman portraying Winston Churchill,” I thought, “What a performance that will be to witness,” says director Joe Wright.

But would an actor who had already incarnated real-life figures ranging from Sid Vicious to Beethoven to Lee Harvey Oswald be willing to take on Winston Churchill? Oldman reflects, ‘I had always been fascinated by Churchill as he was truly our greatest statesman. Yet he wasn’t someone that I was looking to play. It wasn’t the psychological or the intellectual challenge that was the hurdle, it was the physical component. I mean, you need only look at me and look at Churchill...’

Even so, he admits, ‘With who was joining up on **Darkest Hour**, my inclination became to say yes. What I liked about Anthony’s wonderful script is that it’s not a “biopic.” It dramatizes a few crucial weeks in our history straight through, so there’s no jumping forward or back and no aging.’

Darkest Hour held an even more elemental appeal for Oldman, who admits, ‘I wanted to say those words; Churchill’s speeches - which he wrote himself - are some of the greatest in the English language. He was remarkable because he didn’t go in for purple prose, or overload with metaphor or imagery. He could make use of those when needed. But he understood the people he was

speaking directly to, and made sure that what he said just went right to the heart of the nation.’

Oldman felt he could not do the role until he could ‘not only hear the man but feel him physically, the way he moves through space...and, I had to be able to look in the mirror and see him, or at least the spirit of him, looking back at me.’ He personally approached Academy Award-nominated special effects make-up artist Kazuhiro Tsuji, who is acknowledged within the film industry as being in a class of his own when it comes to prosthetics.

Tsuji admits, ‘It was daunting, the idea of creating a likeness that everyone has their own image of already. But with the art of make-up, when you have an actor putting the soul into it, he can become the person that we intended to create.’ It took six months of development and testing to achieve the right look for the prosthetics, makeup and hair. By the time production began in 2016, the full daily application was down to an exact science – one that took up to three-and-one-half hours daily.

‘Ultimately,’ concludes Oldman, “This was the hardest job I’ve ever been on as an actor. Yet it was the most freeing. I couldn’t wait to get to work and be Winston. I’d come in every day and think, “I am so fortunate to be doing this.””



THE WOMAN BEHIND THE MAN

As the saying goes, behind every great man is an even greater woman. The most important woman in Winston Churchill's life during those four intense weeks in the spring of 1940 was his wife of 31 years – and counting – Clementine, known as Clemmie. Marrying her was, he said, his most brilliant achievement.

His confidante, his conscience, and his critic, Clemmie was the one person Winston trusted above all others. Joe Wright reveals, 'Clemmie was very much Churchill's partner in policy as well as in domestic life. She was more liberal than

Churchill and as such often argued for the liberal cause. Sometimes he listened to her, not always. But she was integral to his decision-making process.'

Academy Award nominee Kristin Scott Thomas, who plays Clemmie, reflects, 'Churchill says in one of his letters that he wouldn't have been able to live through the war without Clemmie by his side. It was clear that she was very supportive yet had very strong ideas about politics and about what should be done in the world and how things should be run – and she would tell Winston so.'

REFLECT

After watching the film, take some time to reflect on the experience and your reactions. You might want to watch the trailer to refresh your memory - see www.darkesthour.co.uk

1 How much did you know about Winston Churchill before seeing **Darkest Hour**, and did the film hold any surprises? Did the film change or challenge your perception of this iconic figure?

2 How did you react to Gary Oldman's performance as Winston Churchill? Which other performances stood out to you?

3 What did you think of the screenwriter's choice to focus on a short period in Churchill's life? How might this kind of biopic actually offer more insight than telling someone's whole life story?

4 What do we see influencing Churchill as he makes leadership decisions? In what ways do you think he is a model for good leadership, and in what ways is he flawed?





ssafa | the
Armed Forces
charity

SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity provides lifelong support to our Armed Forces, veterans and their families. We began our work in 1885 and are the oldest national tri-service military charity in the UK. SSAFA's support for serving personnel, veterans and their families was invaluable during the Second World War.

During the war, SSAFA dealt with an average of 200 cases each day; with support ranging from caring for the sick to giving assistance with debts, housing, medical treatment, rehabilitation, clothing, evacuation and childcare. By the end of 1944, SSAFA was running 13 children's homes and a Married Families Club, where a service man and his family could stay during his leave. During 1945 alone, SSAFA helped over 138,000 people from the Armed Forces community.

To find out more, visit ssafa.org.uk , [f](#) SSAFA, [t](#) @SSAFA

“In the knowledge that his family at home are being well cared for by SSAFA, the soldier fighting overseas may wholeheartedly devote himself to his duty, without being worried by family troubles and hampered in the efficient execution of his duty.”

Letter written by General Montgomery, Commander of 21st Army Group, later the British Liberation Army (BLA) and British Army of the Rhine (BAOR).

More than 70 years on, with over 500 employees and 6,000 volunteers, SSAFA is still ready to help the Armed Forces community. Last year, we helped over 67,000 people – from Second World War veterans to those involved in more recent conflicts – as well as their families, providing practical, emotional and financial support when needed.

For community activities and promotional use only.

Sale, duplication, republication or other transfer of this material or excerpts thereof is strictly prohibited.

DARKEST HOUR IN CINEMAS JANUARY 12