

Chiasso - Cinema EXCELSIOR

18.15

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RED JOAN

2018

101 minutes

Directed by **Trevor Nunn**

Starring: Judi Dench, Sophie Cookson and Stephen Campbell Moore

The English born widow Joan Stanley (**Judi Dench**) whose story is based on the real-life case of Southeast London's Melita Norwood, is living out her retirement in a quiet suburb when she is suddenly arrested for treason by MI5 agents (the British Secret Service) in May 2000. During Joan's interrogation, in flashback-mode the film tells the story of young Joan's (**Sophie Cookson**) earlier life beginning in 1938 at Cambridge University. The young and sexually naïve Joan is a hard-working nose-to-the grindstone brilliant physics student who is drawn into the fascinating world of Sonya (**Tereza Srbova**) and her brother Leo (**Tom Hughes**), who are supporters of the Soviet Communist party. Allured by their world of ideas around societal justice, and equally swept away by the noisemaker Leo, Joan joins in their meetings and rallies against Hitler.

Joan is then recruited to work in a government laboratory with the gentlemanly professor Max Davis (**Stephen Campbell Moore**) where they secretly work to create the atom bomb. Max and Joan develop a romantic relationship and the two share a joint view of the world but differ in their respective implementations. It is Sonya and Leo who coerce Joan into passing along secret documents that allow Stalin's Russia to keep pace on bomb development. She easily flies under the radar since, as Sonja tells her, "Nobody would suspect us. We are women."

During this time, the alliances between Russia, Britain and the United States were quite fluid, and as an intelligent and ideologically budding young woman, she believed her actions saved lives. After seeing the catastrophic effect of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki she thought that only with equal access to information could the superpowers balance each other out. In a moral debate we can ask ourselves, did she really commit those crimes and give away Britain's secrets to the Russians as a KGB spy in the 1930s?

### Critics' comments:

...Capably lensed by cinematographer Zac Nicholson with a focus on the period's earthy colours and textures and costumed to perfection by Charlotte Walter (who also dressed "Their Finest" with the same level of attention to the era's knitwear and suiting), "Red Joan" leaves a lasting impression mostly with its flashback scenes. While Judi Dench is flawless in bringing time-spanning depth to her melancholic character (with accidental nods to her infamous "M" persona), her contemporary segments are comparably bland by narrative design. Uneven it may be, "Red Joan" still emanates a memorable essence, one that's refreshingly and believably feminine. (from *robertebert.com*)

...Lindsey Shapiro has captured an intriguing piece of hidden history, showcasing women's strengths and the overlooked roles they played during the world's most turbulent times of war. Joan boldly fights for her sense of justice and equality in an attempt to protect the world and save humanity. Empathy for everyone surpasses one's duty to a country. It is fascinating to watch her unique story unfold and we marvel as she justifies her bold actions decades later – when she almost got away with it all. (from *Film Threat*)