



Locarno Cinema KURSAAL

18.15

Friday, 16th November 2018

THE DARKEST HOUR

2017

125 minutes

Directed by Joe Wright

Starring: Gary Oldman, Kristin Scott, Lily James, Stephan Dillane

In May 1940, the opposition Labour Party in Parliament demands the resignation of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (Ronald Pickup) for being too weak in the face of the Nazi onslaught. Chamberlain tells Conservative Party advisers that he wants Lord Halifax (Stephen Dillane) as his successor, but Halifax does not feel the time is right. Chamberlain is forced to choose the only man whom the opposition parties will accept: Winston Churchill (Gary Oldman), the First Lord of the Admiralty.

Churchill tries to dismiss his new secretary Elizabeth Layton (Lily James) for mishearing him, which earns him a rebuke from his wife Clementine (Kristin Scott Thomas). King George VI (Ben Mendelsohn), who strongly distrusts Churchill, reluctantly invites him to form a government. Churchill includes Chamberlain and Halifax.

Although he was right about the danger from Adolf Hitler, Churchill has a poor reputation because of his record in the Admiralty, the Gallipoli Campaign in the First World War, his views on India and his support for Edward VIII during the Abdication Crisis. Parliament reacts coolly to Churchill's first speech promising "Blood, toil, tears and sweat," for which he is chastised by the King. Churchill refuses to negotiate for peace, believing that the Germans are untrustworthy, but the French Prime Minister thinks him delusional for not admitting that the Allies are losing the Battle of France. Halifax and Chamberlain are keen to use Italian Ambassador Giuseppe Bastianini as intermediary to negotiate with Germany. They plan to resign from the government if Churchill refuses and use a vote of no confidence to replace him with Halifax.

The British Expeditionary Force is trapped at Dunkirk and Calais. Against the advice of the War Cabinet, Churchill orders Brigadier Claude Nicholson in Calais to lead the 30th Infantry Brigade in a rear guard action to distract the enemy and buy time for the soldiers at Dunkirk to evacuate.

The debacle in France causes the War Cabinet to support negotiating with Germany. George VI unexpectedly visits Churchill; the King encourages the Prime Minister to continue the war. Still uncertain of what to do, Churchill impulsively rides the London Underground (for the first time in his life) and asks the startled passengers their opinion; the civilians unanimously want to continue to fight. Churchill meets with the Outer Cabinet and other Members of Parliament, who also support him. The evacuation of troops from Dunkirk, Operation Dynamo, is successful.

As Churchill prepares to address Parliament, Halifax asks Chamberlain to continue with their plan to resign, but Chamberlain decides to listen to the address first. Towards the end of his speech, Churchill proclaims that "we shall fight on the beaches" should the Germans invade. Chamberlain decides to support Churchill, and Parliament applauds the Prime Minister's defiance.

Critics' comments:

- 'Darkest Hour' invites viewers inside the heart and mind of a great leader but never really captures his deep rapport with the British people, which turned out to be one of his greatest political assets. Dunkirk takes a more populist approach. (*December 7, 2017 - J.R.Jones - Chicago reader*)

- 'Darkest Hour' is a straightforward, day-by-day depiction of world-changing events, told with meticulous simplicity. (*December 18, 2017 - Moira MacDonald - Seattle Times*)

- And yet for all that telling about how it was, the film feels much more like happy fantasy than detailed history, a fond look back on the lead-up to a moment of moral righteousness. (*December 15, 2017 - Matthew Lockona - San Diego Reader*)

