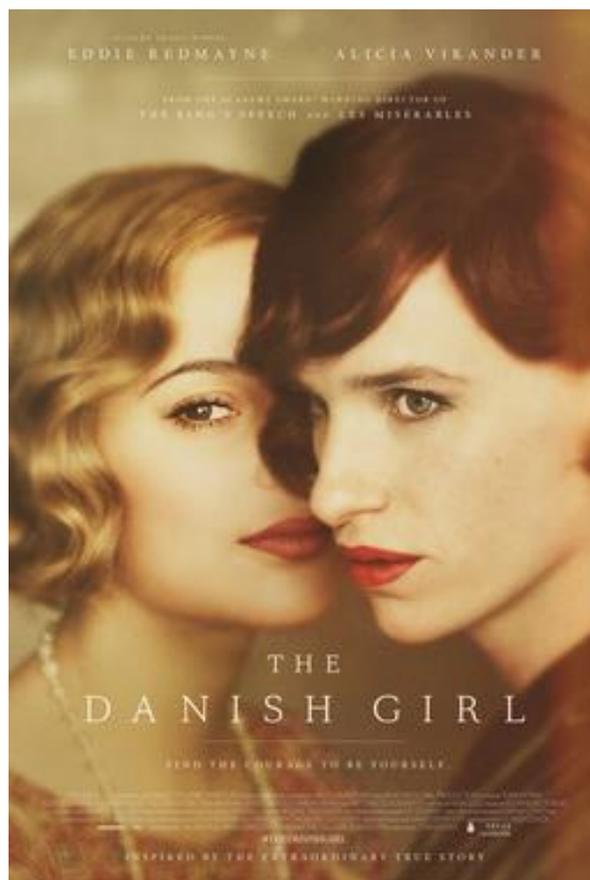


The Danish Girl



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by Tom Hooper. Produced by Tom Hooper, Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Anne Harrison and Gail Mutrux. Screenplay by Lucinda Coxon. Based on *The Danish Girl* by David Ebershoff. Casting by Nina Gold. Cinematography by Danny Cohen. Supervisor of the Art Direction: Grant Armstrong. Original Music by Alexander Desplat. Edited by Melanie Ann Oliver. Key Costumer: Paco Delgado. *Note due to the film's six different working locations and the large number of companies involved not all producers and filmmakers can be listed.*

Cinematic length: 118 minutes. Commercial distribution by Universal Pictures (international distribution) Focus Pictures (USA). Production Companies: Pretty Pictures, Senator Global Productions, Artemis Productions and Working Title. First cinematic release: Venice Film Festival September 2015: DVD release 2016. Check for ratings. Rating 85%.

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Cast

Eddie Redmayne as Einar Wegener

Alicia Vikander as Gerda Wegener

Matthias Schoenaerts as Hans Axlil

Ben Whishaw as Henrik Sandahl

Amber Heard as Ulla Paulson

Sebastian Koch as Dr. Kurt Warnekros

Pip Torrens as Dr. Jens Hexler

Nicholas Woodeson as Dr. Buson

Adrian Schiller as Rasmussen

Henry Pettigrew as Niels

Emerald Fennell as Elsa

Review

The Danish Girl is loosely based on a novel of that name about the life of one of the world's first sex change individuals. The film has changed so many known basic facts that it should not be considered as history or biography and does not pretend to be.

(Eddie Redmayne) and Gerda Wegener (Alicia Vikander) are a happily married couple living in Copenhagen in 1926. Life for them is not perfect; Gerda cannot get her dealer interested in her work and as professional artists they do not seem to have much money. Even so, they seem to be getting by – until the most trivial of incidents turns their life into a slow burning tragedy. Gerda's female model will be late for a nearly finished portrait of a reclining woman, so she talks Einar into posing for what she needs, one leg in a silk stocking and then lace above

the knee. When the model arrives there are laughs all round, but Einar holds the silk stocking to his face, sensually. When they make love next, he requests that Gerda keep on her silk underwear.



Eddie Redmayne as Einar Wegener in his Lily persona

In the next scene Gerder and Einar are going to a party, but Einar appears dressed as a woman, replete with wig, make up and hat. Einar has even invented an identity, Lily, his cousin. As ‘Lili’ is introduced to other guests Einar seems to be inventing a persona for his imaginary friend. Supposedly meant as a joke which Gerda is in on, she wakes up rapidly when she sees Einar kissing a man. Neither of them can stop or even control the takeover of Einar’s personality by Lily and at times Gerda seems uncertain if she wants to stop the process. The reasons are made clear. Her portraits of Lily are what her unknowing dealer and the public want. Lily is making her famous and prosperous. They go to Paris, supposedly to further their careers, but in Copenhagen, Lily was increasingly ubiquitous, while Einar increasingly faded out of sight. Given that Lily enjoys flirting with unknowing men, exposure in Copenhagen seems close before they leave. It also comes close in Paris when in one of the film’s most moving scenes, Einar’s childhood friend Hans Axlil (Matthias Schoenaerts) now a Parisian art dealer, accepts their invitation and turns up at their apartment. Einar thinks it a fine joke on Axlil to be dressed up as

Lily and pretending to be her. Actually Axlil can see the reality in seconds and obviously finds this pathetic. To stop any further embarrassment of Gerder he pretends not to know, not to be embarrassed and before leaving, briefly plays along while Lily/Einar thinks that they have fooled him and enjoys their supposed deception.



Alicia Vikander

As a cinematic scene this is extraordinarily well done; but it wrenches at the emotions. Much of *The Danish Girl* affects people like this. Eddie Redmayne's performance becomes so complex and exact that it becomes riveting. Unfortunately we are riveted to watching the disintegration of a personality – and one that wants this to happen. Einar has become so entranced with Lily that he thinks everyone else feels the same and does not seem to care what the effects of the transformation are, particularly on Gerder. The film starts to resemble a bizarre and nightmarish tragedy where the centre stage character obviously thinks he acts in a carefree comedy. Ultimately all his wife gets for her stoic, steadfast loyalty and tolerance are seductive smiles from Lily that are meant to entrance and to be told that the person she loved has gone, Lily has taken over.

In a rare compromise to his wife he agrees to see psychologists and psychiatrists. The film rapidly and clearly shows why after this decision he does not make more compromises with Gerder. The world of 1920s mental health appears as more than authoritarian; sinister, repressive, all powerful, dangerous and deleterious are the most accurate adjectives. Electric shock treatment, lobotomies and incarceration in asylums are the supposed cures. Einar just escapes being incarcerated by fleeing, being chased by guards who want to follow doctor's orders

and lock him up for impersonating a woman. Ironically Dr. Warnekros (Sebastian Koch) the only doctor who shows him compassion and agrees with his solution, becomes the most dangerous to him – after warning Einar of the dangers he faces.

The film is well made, with an extraordinary use of landscapes, streetscapes, interiors and costumes which subtly combine to give an ambience of Europe in the 1920s. The usual cinematic tricks, so overused, such as model t Fords and Rolls-Royce vehicles, fedoras and feather boas and the same few jazz tunes and Cole Porter melodies, are all mercifully eschewed. Instead we have a world where opulence starts becoming more common, where women are loyal to their husbands, no matter what, and where repressive cultural and gender values are just beginning to break down, but are still best not challenged too openly.

These are strong points, but the high quality of the acting and the screenplay and the wise use of the unusual topic matter do stand out. What mercifully does not stand out is the film making techniques: seamless scenes flow well. Several producers in different locales, changing directors and subsequent script changes, frequent recasting as to who would play Gerder and six different filming locales (Germany, Brussels, Denmark, France, Norway and England for some interiors) should have made for a mess, but it does not show: that's movie magic.



