

A significant and profound celebration of individuality

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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The extreme truth of his hidden identity and acceptance of his true self sets an impassioned artist free in the exceptionally soulful *The Danish Girl*. It's the much anticipated new film from Tom Hooper (*The King's Speech*, *Les Misérables*), and one that will make its mark in history.

The visual sensibility and commanding artistry of director Tom Hooper astounds. From the first frames he sets a poignant and spiritual tone with imagery of the natural beauty of Copenhagen where revered landscape painter Einar Wegener lived during his formative years; these crisp images are perfectly balanced and significantly underscored by the emotional and lush score by Alexandre Desplat (who also lensed Hooper's *The King's Speech*).

Hooper then reveals Wegener's stark painting of this landscape, showing us the similarities found between the real world and imitation, powerfully revealing the dilemma Wegener faces when he uncovers the reality of his hyper-feminisation, and alter ego that lies buried and dormant inside him. It's interesting that the character's transgender journey is not portrayed as that of an obvious stereotypical young gay man who explores 'the woman inside' - as Quentin Crisp did in *The Naked Civil Servant* - but that the story is set within the conventional and traditional six-year marriage between Wegener and his wife Gerda in a conservative Copenhagen of 1926.

The Danish Girl does not give us a melodramatic or dismal human drama, but delivers this life-affirming, yet heart-breaking story, as an ultimate and unforgettable romance. It's a striking love story between a husband and wife, exploring their sexual and platonic union; it's also a superb love story between a man and a woman, looking at how each gender infuses its inborn and inbred nature with that of the opposite sex.



Passionate performance

Hooper intensifies the romance with immense sensuality, allowing us to feel Wegener's heroic journey into the soul of Lili, who challenges him and ultimately transforms him into how he sees himself, and not the image he has to stare at in the mirror every day. This reflective and sensual journey into the gentleness of women is truly magnificent and takes us into the heart and soul of a man who is willing to sacrifice everything to find true happiness and understanding.

Eddie Redmayne delivers a tour de force in his dual roles as man and woman; it is astonishing how he never imitates or impersonates, but becomes, immersing himself wholeheartedly into the character of Lili, and allowing his transformation to be truthful. Redmayne's passionate performance is layered with immense sadness, but equally presents us with the blissful joy of true fulfilment and absolute enlightenment. What's truly admirable about Redmayne's courageous performance is how he perfectly captures the innocence and essence of a man who falls in love for the first time when he unleashes the goddess inside.

Alicia Vikander impresses as a wife whose loyalty and devotion to her husband knows no bounds, and has to succumb to her husband's journey of re-discovering himself as a woman. It is remarkable how Vikander's sensual beauty and femininity gradually dissolves as the story progresses, and how it then mutates into a more masculine nurturer, physically and emotionally. Ben Whishaw (Perfume, Spectre) once again manages to transform himself into another remarkable character as a gay man who falls in love Lili and becomes her trusted confidant.

Equally impressive is Sebastian Koch as Wegener's childhood friend who becomes Gerda's confidant and their guardian angel. Besides its rich content, skilfully scripted by playwright and screenwriter Lucinda Coxan (based on David Ebershoff's debut novel), *The Danish Girl* is contextually flawless, offering abundant spectacle and awe that supports its emotional narrative.



Colourful tapestry

Cinematographer Danny Conen (who lensed Hooper's *The King's Speech* and *Les Misérables*), strikingly captures the colourful tapestry of the film's landscape, allowing us to experience the contrast of the diverse emotions that surface.

The visual imagery is aptly complimented by Eve Stewart's outstanding production design and Paco Delgado's sumptuous costumes. The impact of design and implementation is mesmerising and incredibly detailed. Wegener's apartment becomes a cathedral, with a window in the background revealing an illumined cross, accentuating the spiritual and sacred world of the characters. In contrast to this, the Wegener's apartment in Paris shouts of decadence and opulence, revealing the threats and corruption of an unconventional society.

The filmmakers allow us to see the story through the eyes of an artist; the composition, colours and textures of the natural world are not only visible in the paintings, but vice versa; in one scene, when Wegener crosses underneath a bridge, the bottom of the bridge is painted like the dome of a cathedral. Once again, fantasy and realism merge to give us the opulence of both realms, showing how the contrast compliments and enriches the ordinary world.

Hooper firmly keeps his fingers on the pulse of *The Danish Girl*, masterfully erasing ignorant and pre-conceived notions of the perverse nature of its subject matter, bringing to the surface a significant and profound film about identity and love.

Confidential conversation

Hooper never infringes or invades the mindscape of our tragic hero; he does not rely on visual dynamics to reveal Wegener's childhood through conventional flashbacks, but allows the character to gradually reveal this information through dialogue, drawing the audience into a trusting and confidential conversation. When we see the world Wegener talks about, the payback and emotional impact of the intimate dialogue overwhelms the senses.

Although *The Danish Girl* is set in 1926, nothing has really changed in our world where transgender people are still frowned upon, and where those who want to celebrate their unique individualism are regarded as outcasts whose outcry for compassion is severely ignored.

The Danish Girl boldly celebrates the valour of those who embrace their true identity and are not shamed of who they are, and salutes those whose kind-heartedness makes the world a place everyone wants to share equally. If you are looking for a film that offers a sincere and profound journey into the heart and soul of those who walk a different path, *The Danish Girl* should definitely not be missed. It is a film that will transform the way you see the world of those who live outside your comfort zone.

*Read more about *The Danish Girl* and other new films opening this week: www.writingstudio.co.za*

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