

Keira Knightley delivers in daring adaptation of Tolstoy tale of forbidden love

Written by Anna Karenina Film Review by Kam Williams



First published in a literary magazine between 1873 and 1877 in a series of installments, "Anna Karenina" is a 1000+ page opus which chronicles the ill-fated affair between a St. Petersburg socialite and a strapping, young soldier. Despite the salacious soap opera at the heart of the story, the dense novel is actually much deeper, as it explores myriad motifs, ranging from feminism to family to forgiveness to fate.

Leo Tolstoy's tawdry tale of forbidden love has been brought to the screen over 20 times, most notably starring Greta Garbo (1935) and Vivien Leigh (1948) in the title role. Here, Academy Award-nominee Keira Knightley (for *Pride & Prejudice*) delivers a fresh interpretation of the flawed heroine in a bold adaptation directed by Joe Wright.

The movie marks the pair's third collaboration, along with the critically-acclaimed "*Pride & Prejudice*" (2005) and "*Atonement*" (2007), costume dramas which together netted a total of 11 Oscar nominations. End of year accolades are likely in store for this offering as well, primarily as a consequence of Knightley's powerful performance and Wright's daring and dazzling reimagining of the Russian classic.

The highly-stylized production has a stagy feel to it rather reminiscent of "*Moulin Rouge!*" (2001). In fact, most of the film unfolds in a dingy, dilapidated theater, which might sound at first blush like a disappointing downsizing of the sweeping source material. But this surreal treatment, replete with stampeding horses and a host of other surprises lying in wait in the wings and up in the rafters, proves nothing short of magical without diminishing the Tolstoy epic one iota.

At the point of departure, we find miserably-married Anna selfishly falling in love at first sight with dashing Count Vronsky (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), a bachelor serving in the cavalry. The two proceed to carry on shamelessly, much to the chagrin of her cuckolded, considerably older hubby, Alexei Karenin (Jude Law), a boring government bureaucrat.

Besides that awkward triangle, the picture devotes its attention to a couple of lesser-developed subplots. One involves Anna's brother (Matthew Macfadyen), a womanizer who has been

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cheating on his wife, Dolly (Kelly Macdonald). The other revolves around wealthy Konstantin Levin's (Domhnall Gleeson) pursuit of Dolly's teenage sister Kitty (Alicia Vikander), a debutante who harbors hopes of being courted by Vronsky.

Ultimately, Anna's mind gradually unravels, being tragically undone by a mix of jealousy, bitterness and assorted social pressures. All of the above transpires against an audacious, visually-arresting backdrop as envisioned and brilliantly executed by the gifted Wright. A sumptuous cinematic feast!

Excellent (4 stars)

Rated R for sexuality and violence

Running time: 130 minutes

Distributor: Focus Features

To see a trailer for "Anna Karenina", visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3gXCTJEjYc>