

# The Queen (2006)



## TOMATOMETER

97

Average Rating: 8.4/10 Reviews Counted: 184 Fresh: 178 | Rotten: 6

Full of wit, humor, and pathos, Stephen Frears' moving portrait of the British royals during the period after Princess Diana's death features not one but two remarkable performances, that of Helen Mirren as Queen Elizabeth II and Michael Sheen as the newly-ordained Prime Minister Tony Blair. They embody their characters and lay bare the motivations behind these prominent people, giving viewers a glimpse into the inner workings of the British monarchy.

## AUDIENCE

74

liked it Average Rating: 3.5/5 User Ratings: 164,683

## MOVIE INFO

The British prime minister and the Royal Family find themselves quietly at odds in the wake of a national tragedy in this drama from director Stephen Frears. On August 31, 1997, Diana, Princess of Wales died in an auto accident in Paris; despite the controversial breakup of her marriage to Prince Charles, she was still one of the most famous and best-loved women in the world, and the public outpouring of emotion over her passing was immediate and intense. However, given the messy circumstances of Diana's breakup with Charles, official spokespeople for the Royal Family were uncertain about how to publicly address her passing. It didn't take long for the media to pick up on the hesitation of Buckingham Palace to pay homage to Diana, and many saw this as a sign of the cool emotional distance so often attributed to the royals, which in this case was widely seen as an insult against Diana and the many people who loved her. Prime Minister Tony Blair (played by Michael Sheen) saw a potential public-relations disaster in the making, and took it upon himself to persuade Queen Elizabeth II (played by Helen Mirren) to make a statement in tribute to the fallen Diana -- an action that went against the taciturn queen's usual nature. *The Queen* was released the same year that Helen Mirren played Queen Elizabeth I in an acclaimed miniseries for British television; *The Queen* also gave Michael Sheen his second opportunity to play Tony Blair after portraying the prime minister in the television film *The Deal*. ~ Mark Deming, Rov

PG-13, 1 hr. 43 min.

## Drama

Directed By: [Stephen Frears](#)

Written By: [Peter Morgan](#)

US Box Office: \$56.2M

Miramax Films - [Official Site](#)

<http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/queen/>

# The Queen

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

***The Queen*** is a 2006 British historical drama film directed by Stephen Frears, written by Peter Morgan, and starring Helen Mirren in the title role, Elizabeth II. Released almost a decade after the event, the film depicts the death of Princess Diana on 31 August 1997. The Royal Family, at their summer residence of Balmoral Castle, regards that Diana's death as a private affair, not to be treated as an official royal death, in contrast with the views of newly appointed Prime Minister Tony Blair and Diana's ex-husband Prince Charles, who favour the general public's desire for an official expression of grief. Matters are further complicated by the media, royal protocol regarding Diana's official status, and wider issues about republicanism. The views of Diana's two sons, William and Harry throughout the film are portrayed through other characters.

The film's release was coincided with a revival of favourable public sentiment with respect to the monarchy and a downturn in fortunes for Blair, whose resignation came within less than a year later. Michael Sheen reprised his role as Blair from *The Deal*, and did so again in *The Special Relationship*. The film also earned numerous critical and popular acclaim for Mirren and some controversy as she had originally refused appointment into the Order of the British Empire in 1996, but only to accept her offer in 2003. Mirren praised the Queen in her Academy Awards acceptance speech and was invited to dinner at Buckingham Palace on 10 May 2007, but did not attend due to filming commitments in Hollywood.

## Plot

In the 1997 general election, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen) becomes Britain's Labour prime minister. However, the Queen (Helen Mirren) is slightly wary of Blair and his pledge to modernise Britain, but he promises to respect the Royal Family. Three months later, Diana, Princess of Wales died in a car crash at the Alma Bridge tunnel in Paris. Blair's director of communications, Alastair Campbell (Mark Bazeley), prepares a speech in which Diana is described as "the people's princess". Blair gives his speech the next day and the phrase catches on. Within the next few days after Diana's death, millions of people across London display an outpouring of grief at Buckingham and Kensington Palaces. Meanwhile, the Royal Family are still at their summer estate in Balmoral Castle. Diana's

death sparks division among members of the family, in which they observe that, since Diana was divorced from her husband, Prince Charles (Alex Jennings) a year earlier, she is no longer a part of the family. Diana's funeral arrangements were thus best left as a private affair of her noble family, the Spencers. Charles argues that the mother of a future king cannot be dismissed so lightly, while the Queen authorises the use of an aircraft of the British Royal Flight to bring Diana's body back to Britain.

In London, flowers pile up before the palace railings, forcing the changing of the Queen's guard to use another gate. British tabloids become inflammatory about the lack of a statement from the Royal Family. Charles leaves no doubt that he shares Blair's views about the need for a statement. As the Royal Family's popularity plummets, Blair's acceptance rises, to the delight of his anti-monarchist advisers and wife Cherie (Helen McCrory). However, Blair does not share these sentiments. While disagreeing with the Queen's course of action, Blair begins to develop an admiration for her. Blair also disagrees with his wife's views and tells her that a republican Britain is ludicrous and begins to denounce the anti-monarchical disdain of his Labour Party advisers. Blair immediately calls the Queen at Balmoral and recommends three strong measures to regain public confidence for the monarchy: attend a public funeral for Diana at Westminster Abbey, fly a Union flag at half-mast over Buckingham Palace, and speak to the nation about Diana's life and legacy in a televised address.

Blair's recommendations outrage several other members of the Royal Family including Prince Philip (James Cromwell) and the Queen Mother (Sylvia Syms). Philip is surprised that Elton John is asked to attend and sing a song, "Candle in the Wind" in Diana's memory. They view such steps as an undignified surrender to public hysteria. The Queen seems concerned about this and although she shares their feelings, she has doubts as she closely follows the news. The Queen believes that there has been a shift in public values and that perhaps she should abdicate. The Queen Mother dismisses the idea by saying that she is one of the greatest assets her monarchy has ever had, stating: "The real problem will come when you *leave*". She also reminds the Queen of the promise she made in Cape Town, South Africa on her 21st birthday, in which she promised that her "whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong..." Meanwhile, Philip attempt to distract William and Harry (Jake Taylor Shantos and Dash Barber) from Diana's death by taking them deer stalking. While venturing out alone in her classic Land Rover, the Queen damages the vehicle while crossing a

river and is forced to telephone for assistance. The Queen weeps in frustration, but catches sight of a majestic red deer which Philip, William, and Harry have been stalking. She is struck by his beauty and the two stare at each other. Hearing a distant gunshot, she shoos the animal away and decides to carry out Blair's recommendations. While preparing to return to London to attend Diana's public funeral, the Queen is horrified to learn that the deer has been killed on a neighbouring estate, and asks to see the stag and is upset at its loss.

The Royal Family finally return to London to inspect the floral tributes and while watching live television coverage with his staff, Blair becomes angry and disappointed at his Labour Party advisors, in which he states that the Queen is admirable and Diana had thrown everything she offered back in her face and seemed to destroy everything held most dear by the Queen. The Queen later follows Blair's advice to make a public statement on live television, where she speaks about the life and legacy of Diana and describing her as "an exceptional and gifted human being". Two months after Diana's death, Blair visits Buckingham Palace to attend a weekly meeting with the Queen. The Queen finally regains her popularity, but she believes that Blair has benefited himself from her acquiescence to his advice and that she will never fully recover from "that week". The Queen cautions Blair that he will find that public opinion can rapidly turn against him and declares that times have changed and that the monarchy must modernise. When Blair suggests that he can help with this, the Queen replies: "Don't get ahead of yourself, Prime Minister. Remember, *I'm* supposed to be the one advising *you*".

## Production

### Filming

The screenplay was written by Peter Morgan and produced by Pathé Pictures and Granada Productions (ITV Productions). Stephen Frears had a clause in his contract from *The Deal* that allowed him to direct any follow-ups or sequels, and he was officially announced as director in September 2003. The film was shot on location in the United Kingdom, in England in London, Halton House and Waddesdon Manor, in Buckinghamshire, Brockton Hall in Hertfordshire and in Scotland at Balmoral Castle and Castle Fraser in Aberdeenshire and Blairquhan Castle and Culzean Castle in South Ayrshire. Mirren says transforming herself into the Queen came almost naturally after the wig and glasses, since she shares a default facial expression — a slightly downturned mouth — with the

monarch. She regularly reviewed film and video footage of Elizabeth and kept photographs in her trailer during production. She also undertook extensive voice coaching, faithfully reproducing the Queen's delivery of her televised speech to the world. Morgan has said that her performance was so convincing that, by the end of production, crew members who had been accustomed to slouching or relaxing when they addressed her were standing straight up and respectfully folding their hands behind their backs. Mirren arranged to spend time off-camera with the supporting cast playing other members of the Royal Family, including James Cromwell, Alex Jennings and Sylvia Syms so they would be as comfortable with each other as a real family. Shots involving the Queen were shot in 35mm film and shots of Tony Blair were shot in 16mm film to enhance the contrast of different worlds.

### Historical accuracy

Some aspects of the characters are known to be true to their real-life counterparts. Cherie Blair's hostility to the monarchy has been widely reported, including her refusal to curtsy. According to Morgan, "cabbage" is an actual term of endearment Philip uses for his wife («*mon chou*» – "my cabbage" – is a standard affectionate nickname in French).

Other elements represent characteristics associated with people depicted. The electric guitar seen behind Blair in his personal office is a reference to his past membership in the band Ugly Rumours while a student. The Newcastle United football jersey he wears to a family breakfast is a reference to his support of that team. The film also shows Alastair Campbell coining the term 'the people's princess', but in 2007 he revealed that it was Tony Blair who came up with it.

A notable inaccuracy is that Robin Janvrin is represented as the Queen's private secretary during the aftermath of Diana's death. In fact, that position was then occupied by Janvrin's predecessor, Sir Robert Fellowes, a brother-in-law of Diana, Princess of Wales; Janvrin was the *deputy* private secretary until 1999. However, the film is accurate in depicting Janvrin as the person who delivered the news of Diana's accident to the Queen at Balmoral during the night.

### Box office

The film exceeded box-office expectations; with a budget of \$15 million the film earned \$56.4 million in the United States and Canada as of September 2006.

## Critical reception

Before the film was released, critics praised both Stephen Frears and Peter Morgan, who later garnered Golden Globe and Academy Award-nominations for Best Director and Best Screenplay. Michael Sheen's performance as Tony Blair earned him particular acclaim. Helen Mirren's portrayal garnered her acclaim from critics around the world. Her portrayal made her a favourite for the Academy Award for Best Actress well before the film was released in theatres. After its showing at the Venice Film Festival, Mirren received a five-minute-long standing ovation. Roger Ebert came out of recovery from surgery to give the film a review. He called it "spellbinding" and gave it four out of four stars. *The Queen* was the most critically acclaimed film of 2006 with Mirren being the most critically acclaimed actress of the year. *The Queen* has 97% positive reviews on the film-critics aggregate site Rotten Tomatoes.

Amongst the few negative reviews, *Slant Magazine's* Nick Schager criticised the insider portraiture of the film as "somewhat less than revelatory, in part because Morgan's script succumbs to cutie-pie jokiness [...] and broad caricature", mentioning particularly "James Cromwell's Prince Philip, who envisions the crowned heads as exiled victims and the gathering crowds as encroaching "Zulus".

## Soundtrack

The soundtrack album was released on the Milan label on 26 September 2006. The original score and songs were composed by Alexandre Desplat and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra. The album was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Score. It was also nominated for the BAFTA Award for Best Film Music (lost to the score of *Babel*).

The Queen – 2:09  
Hills Of Scotland – 2:25  
People's Princess I – 4:08  
A New Prime Minister – 1:55  
H.R.H. – 2:22  
The Stag – 1:50  
Mourning – 3:50  
Elizabeth & Tony – 2:04  
River Of Sorrow – 1:59  
The Flowers Of Buckingham – 2:28  
The Queen Drives – 1:48  
Night In Balmoral – 1:09  
Tony & Elizabeth – 2:04  
People's Princess II – 4:08  
Queen Of Hearts – 3:33  
Libera Me (Verdi) – 6:27