

# THE IRON LADY

**A Weinstein Company / Yuk Films / Film4 / UK Film Council / Pathé Presentation  
A DJ Films Production  
Directed by Phyllida Lloyd**

**Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser**

When the actor Colin Firth (*The King's Speech*, *Mama Mia*) called out Meryl Streep's name as the winner of the Best Actress in a Leading Role Oscar at this year's 84th Annual Academy Awards for her portrayal of Margaret Thatcher, one thought came to my mind...Finally! Nominated a record 17 times and having won three Oscars to date no actress has made a bigger impact on Hollywood and the film industry than Meryl has. Her career, first as a stage actress before moving on to motion pictures, spans some 40 years and she is widely regarded as the most talented actress in Hollywood history. It thus came as no surprise that she of all people acted the role of one of the strongest political leaders of the 20th century.

Margaret Hilda Thatcher (born née Roberts) was the longest-serving, and first ever female to hold the post of Prime Minister in British history. Since her initial studies and qualifications in chemistry and law she steadily made her progress within the British political arena, eventually leading to her election as Conservative Party Leader in 1975, ousting Edward Heath as party leader, and Prime Minister in 1979, defeating James Callaghan in a general election. In her career Margaret Thatcher was not afraid to show a steely resolve, dedication and commitment with regards to her political views and beliefs. Her steadfast attitude and unwavering nature led a Russian Newspaper, the *Red Star* to call her the 'The Iron Lady', a nickname that stuck throughout her political career. Her tenure as Prime Minister, winning the elections a record three times, saw many changes to both domestic and foreign policies and relationships. Her government brought in sweeping changes in Britain and it was especially her move towards the privatisation of state utilities and her stance towards economic reform and the organised labour (unions) that caused major upheavals in the early eighties. In addition, her 'never compromise' attitude made her the target of many individuals and terrorist organisations alike.

Early in the morning of 12 October 1984 Margaret and her husband Sir Dennis narrowly escaped death and serious injury when the Irish Republican Army launched an assassination attempt at the Brighton Hotel where the Thatchers were staying- Margaret was due to open the Conservative Party Conference on 13 October 1984. Despite her narrow escape and the death of five people in the horrific bomb blast Margaret insisted that she open the Conference as planned, which she duly did. In so doing her public popularity increased significantly and she attracted widespread support across the political spectrum for her iron will and



determination no matter what the circumstances surrounding her. It was also the IRA that was behind the assassination of her dear friend and colleague Airey Neave in a car bomb explosion close to the Houses of Parliament. One of the hallmarks of her political career however was the Falklands war in 1982. Tensions rose between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the Falklands Islands off the coast of Argentina over which England held sovereignty. The war lasted for 74 days with Argentina surrendering on 14 June 1982. Despite the deaths of 255 British personnel and 3 Falkland Islanders, Margaret Thatcher and her government were bolstered by the crisis and the victorious outcome.

Margaret Thatcher has suffered numerous health difficulties since her departure from 10 Downing Street and the film *The Iron Lady* uses her frail health and progressive dementia as a backdrop in portraying Margaret's personal life and key events in her political career. Streep's acting is impeccable to say the least and after viewing the film you will be left with no doubt as to her acting brilliance or why she received the Oscar gong this year.

In conversation with a colleague one day the film *The Iron Lady* and Meryl Streep, as one of the most formidable actresses in the history of Hollywood, came up as topics of discussion. At that time I had not viewed the film, and my colleague was of the opinion that five minutes into the movie he was overpowered by the Meryl Streep acting phenomenon and viewed the film as 'vintage Meryl Streep' i.e. typical and not really something special. Naturally I was a bit taken aback and disappointed because I had high hopes for the film, though I resolutely ordered a copy of the film despite my colleague's less-than-positive comments.

I formed quite a different opinion of the film compared to the one conveyed to me by my colleague, and I almost felt as if I was seeing the real Margaret Thatcher on screen. In addition I was left with an overwhelming sense of sadness for a lady who at one time in history was one of the most powerful political leaders of the 20th century as opposed to the frail, demented and lonely individual who is portrayed in the film. Her husband, Sir Dennis, died in June 2003 and his death came as a huge blow to Margaret. She has to be frequently reminded that he has passed away as she still believes at times that he is alive. *The Iron Lady* is a must see movie if ever there was one, especially for those interested in political / historical genres, and hats off to Meryl Streep for the justice that she brought to the character that is and forever will remain, Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady.