



SUNDAY EXPRESS

# Review

Picture: ANTHONY SOUZA

Madonna tells **Sandro Monetti** how two years of research into the lives of Wallis Simpson and King Edward VIII left her sympathetic to the American divorcée. The pop icon makes her directoral debut with *W.E.*, illustrated here with movie stills pictures by Anthony Souza

**HATE FIGURES:** Controversial Wallis Simpson, played by Andrea Riseborough, with James D'Arcy as Edward, in *W.E.*, which will be released in January

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# Films

## When M

**J**UST WHEN it seemed Madonna had done all there was to do in life, from writing children's books to posing for a sex manual, she's re-invented herself yet again, this time as a serious moviemaker.

Her feature-length directorial debut *W.E.*, which she also co-wrote, is a drama about Wallis Simpson, the controversial American divorcée for whom King Edward VIII gave up the British throne.

No stranger to controversy herself, "Her Madgesty" has long been fascinated by one of history's hate figures and seemed keen to show Wallis in a more sympathetic light: "I wanted to present a more rounded portrayal of Wallis than was commonly known," she says.

"Truth is subjective. Everything I have to say about the Duke and Duchess is my conclusion after a lot of research. Both of them made huge sacrifices. All loves involve some sort of compromise."

Madonna, 53, discovered during research that, much like herself, Wallis wasn't born with a silver spoon in her mouth.

"It's important to understand the world that Wallis came from. When she was young, the only option for a woman was to marry, and you were only as good as the man that you married. If you married well, you would have a good life, and if you didn't, you'd have to make do.

"She grew up without a father. Her mother cooked for people. They moved around a lot and she lived in the homes of many privileged families. As a servant's daughter she could see the difference between the haves and the have-nots. She did have an uncle who had money and made sure she got an education, but she grew up feeling like she was on the wrong side of the tracks and she wanted a better life."

Wallis found that better life and was married to her second husband, shipping executive Ernest Simpson, by the time she met Edward at a hunting weekend in January 1931. She became his mistress three years later.

Madonna says: "Wallis was in awe of Edward to a certain extent. She was swept up in the glamour that surrounded him. I don't think she ever thought it would be more than a momentary fling.

"The Prince of Wales found it refreshing that she was so straightforward and informal with him. I tried to capture her sense of humour and her sense of irreverence towards him that took him by surprise. She was smart, funny and she could make a mean martini."

Edward was so enamoured by her that when he became King in 1936 and their relationship prompted a constitutional crisis, he gave up the throne to be with her.

That fascinated Madonna. "I couldn't get my mind off the fact that a man gave up the throne for a woman. From my perspective, men since the beginning of time have fought to get on the throne. Men are power-seeking animals, so why would this man run away from power? Why would he give it up? What drove him to do that?"

"If it was for a woman and it was for love, what did this woman have that would inspire him to make such a great sacrifice. I wanted to know more about her."

Madonna spent two years researching the movie, devouring every book written on the couple, interviewing people who had known them, watching every documentary and reading the letters Wallis and Edward had sent each other, letters that provided her film's title as they would sign off each one with their initials, W and E.



CLOSE UP: W.E. stars James D'Arcy

The screenplay was co-written with Alek Keshishian, who had previously worked on the Madonna: Truth Or Dare documentary and music videos.

He cuts back and forth in time to see how selected items from the 1998 Sothebys auction of items from the Duke and Duchess's estate played a part in their scandalous love story.

James D'Arcy plays Edward, and Madonna chose fast-rising British star Andrea Riseborough, 30, as Wallis Simpson. The actress played another controversial 20th-century figure, Margaret Thatcher, in the acclaimed BBC drama *The Long Walk To Finchley*.

**A**NDREA said: "From the moment we first had a conversation and talked about it, I really wanted to play the role with Madonna directing, because she has such an affinity with Wallis."

"I think she understands her in a very specific way in relation to her own life. I just knew she needed to tell the story and I can't say enough good things about her as a director."

Not all the critics have been so kind though, with reviews decidedly mixed so far. But they all seem agreed that Madonna makes a better job of things than she did directing her earlier short film, the woe-filled *Filth And Wisdom*.

No less a Hollywood powerhouse than multi Oscar-winning producer Harvey Weinstein is very impressed and believes

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# Madge meets Maj



The stunning images seen here are taken by 24-year-old Anthony Souza, who was appointed the stills photographer on the film *W.E.*

"Madonna asked me to re-create some of the classic images of Wallis and Edward," says the young photographer, who was clearly inspired by the romance of the Thirties.

"I wanted to approach the photos as artistic works, not just publicity stills."

So how was it for a young man starting out on a photography career to work with a media icon? "I really never had any problems in accessing any areas of the set; I just tried not to get in the way of the cameras."

"Madonna wasn't the sort of person that the media normally portray her as. I found her really warm and nurturing. All that she expects of the people she works with is that they do their best, as she does herself."

● Anthony Souza's photographs are at *The Little Black Gallery, 13A Park Walk, London SW10 0AJ* from December 13-20. For details visit [thelittleblackgallery.com](http://thelittleblackgallery.com)

and Andrea Riseborough; and Madonna (right)

has awards potential. He is distributing the film in a few American cinemas this week for an Oscar-qualifying run ahead of its worldwide release in the New Year.

Madonna will be everywhere in 2012 promoting her new album, including a performance to a global audience at American Football's Super Bowl.

But will *W.E.* prove good enough to land her a trip to the Superbowl of showbusiness, the Oscars?

● *W.E.* will be in cinemas on January 20



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