

A colorful and charming *Coco* marks a bright spot for Pixar

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of ««««

Running Time: 109 min.

Pixar, once the leader in the animated film industry, has been in something of a creative slump lately. While still boasting excellent technical merits, recent titles like *Cars 3*, *Finding Dory* and *The Good Dinosaur*

haven't exactly been earning raves from the press. Their latest, *Coco*

, attempts to tackle unique and visually arresting subject matter by using the Mexican Day of the Dead holiday as inspiration. But does it do the material justice?

The story involves 12-year-old Miguel Riviera (Anthony Gonzalez). He wants to be a musician like his hero, Ernesto de la Cruz (Benjamin Bratt), but his shoemaking family doesn't permit any music in the house. When the boy enters a talent contest on the holiday, his relatives destroy his guitar. Undeterred, Miguel visits the grave of de la Cruz and tries to "borrow" one displayed in the star's crypt. This passes him through to the Land of the Dead. The boy learns that the only way to return to the living world is to find a special marigold petal and receive a family member's blessing before sunrise. Believing that de la Cruz may be his great-great-grandfather, Miguel befriends Hector (Gael García Bernal), a trickster who promises to help him complete his task.

This is a warm-hearted effort that stresses the importance of family bonds, forgiveness and remembering the dead. These themes are further stressed by the clan's shunning of a late relation and a plot complication; when the deceased are forgotten by their family, they completely vanish from all realms. These little touches add a bit more drama to the

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proceedings, as certain skeletal characters begin to fade away (and while I'm not sure if the studio intended this, it will probably make young children whose families celebrate the holiday feel incredibly guilty should they not take part).

There are few minor issues. Miguel's guitar playing skills are exceptional, despite the fact that he really hasn't had much of an opportunity to play. The jokes and one-liners presented are hit-and-miss, although there are a few particularly funny ones that elicit laughs; a bell-related gag is played off in a very amusing manner. And being a Disney film, there is a great deal of emotional manipulation as the filmmakers push to elicit a tear or two towards the close. However, it is a movie about the dead, and as such the tear jerking doesn't feel as forced or unwarranted as in other titles of its ilk. Ultimately, *Coco* is effective at pulling the heartstrings.

And as expected, the images are eye-popping. There are some vibrant colors on display in the Land of the Dead. Of course, the bony skeletons add another level of interesting imagery and make for a nifty contrast to the neon pink, purple and orange hues lighting the stacked buildings and homesteads of this afterworld metropolis. The movie also earns points for its arresting alebrijes, bright spirit guides who fly through the night sky. There's also a goofy dog named Dante that provides some comic relief with his drooping tongue and dopey expressions. Thankfully, the screenwriters also developed the character to give it a purpose in the story besides providing obvious sight gags.

In the end, *Coco* may not be remembered as the greatest title in the Pixar catalog, but it is a charming and enjoyable exercise that easily bests the last few features from the studio. Most family audiences will find that the film carries a sweet and enjoyable tune.

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