

## Visual Excellence Aside, ‘Coco’ is Just So-So

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 22, 2017 - 2:56pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Coco” bears all the visual hallmarks of the Pixar Studio at its best, however its story bears the more recent symptoms of creative exhaustion. In this story, a young boy named Miguel (voice of Anthony Gonzalez) aims to follow his heart and pursue music, but toe tapping tunes have been strictly forbidden in his home... since his great-great grandfather left the family to go out on the road and pursue his own dreams.

The only one who doesn’t immediately shut down Miguel’s dreams is his great grandmother Coco, but that’s largely because she’s old and hard of hearing. After Miguel hears about a contest in the plaza, he aims to break away from the family business and take his chances. But he is found out and his grandmother smashes his guitar. In desperation he attempts to borrow the guitar of the most famous musician in all of Mexico – Ernesto de la Cruz (Benjamin Bratt), – on Dia De Los Muertos (The Day of the Dead) and accidentally winds up in the land of the dead himself.



Hector (voice of Gael Garcia Bernal) and Miguel (Anthony Gonzalez) in ‘Coco’

*Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios*

In this film, the land of the dead has been rendered as a sort of undead Disney World, complete with majestic opening gates, a bridge of magic petals that the undead must cross over, flying transportation and theme park sized buildings which suggest the animators had a blast. Although this land is largely populated by skeletons, they look like candy skulls come to life, and they are probably the cuddliest bags of bones you're likely to see. They're also good for some of the movie's best gags as they are forever falling to pieces and picking themselves up again.

There are also various spirit animals which were a favorite of my daughter Helen, and another in a long line of Disney's lovable pups. The attention to detail is also present in how the music is presented. Each character strumming the guitar – including Hector (Gael Garcia Bernal), Miguel's guide in dead land – actually looks like they're playing, with actual chords. Too bad the music they're playing isn't quite as great as the animation. The songs are pleasant, but not especially memorable. After seeing the film several days ago, and I can't actually recall a single tune.

The story is familiar, Miguel has to find his great-great grandfather and get his blessing to return to the land of the living or else he'll be stuck a skeleton forever. There's a lot of messages about dreams, and family, and some plot twists stolen wholesale from Pixar's earlier film "Up"... this all adds up to a feeling that I've been here before. The colors were different, but I felt a little blasé about another trip down Pixar's well trodden path, and towards its inevitable conclusion. The story hit its beats for me, but its heart isn't in it, and it didn't enchant the way the best of the Pixar Studio or Disney's pictures do.



Miguel Surrounded by the Dead in 'Coco'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios

My twins had mixed reactions. They enjoyed the night out, and my daughter definitely liked it better than my son did. It ran a little long for them, and at one point my son asked if it was over yet. In short, "Coco" belongs on Pixar's "B Team," lacking that extra something to put it among the best of their best.

*"Coco" opens everywhere on November 22nd, in 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D theaters and show times. Featuring the voices of Gael Garcia Bernal, Benjamin Bratt, Anthony Gonzalez, Renee Victor, Gabriel Iglesias, Cheech Marin and John Ratzenberger. Screenplay adapted by Michael Green. Directed by Kenneth Branagh. Rated "PG-13"*



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