

## Disney Magic is Hopping to New Orleans in ‘The Princess and the Frog’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 11, 2009 - 9:19am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The feature animation film tradition, invented by and fostered by the Walt Disney Company for close to 70 years, gets another glorious rendition in their latest release, “The Princess and the Frog.”

In an unexpected twist, given the title, the story is set in the early part of the 20th Century in New Orleans. Tiana (voice of Anika Noni Rose) is a hard-working African-American woman who dreams of opening her own restaurant. She holds down several jobs in a dedication to her father, who never got to live out his similar dreams.

One of her best friends is Charlotte, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist in the Crescent City. She is anticipating the visit of Prince Naveen, playboy royalty from across the ocean. The Prince is only interested in the music and party aspect of old New Orleans, and subsequently falls under the spell of the evil Dr. Facilier. Faster than he can say voodoo, Dr. F turns the Prince into a frog.



The Princess Gets the 411 from The Froggy Prince in ‘The Princess and the Frog’  
Photo credit: © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Let loose on a costume ball thrown by Charlotte in association with Mardi Gras, the Prince frog convinces a reluctant Tiana – costumed as a princess – to kiss him and break the spell. Fortunately it’s not as simple as that, and the adventure begins.

The tried-and-true Disney formula: adventurous story, romance, wacky sidekicks and Broadway style songs are all in place, but they are filtered through this valentine to the glory and promise of old New Orleans back in the pre-WW2 era. The jazz and the mystery are highlighted, through a talking alligator named Louis who just wants to blow his horn and the voodoo of the bad Dr. Facilier and the good Mama Odie. Throw in a Cajun firefly named Ray and the scenario is as spicy as jambalaya.

There is an uncompromising beauty to the animation, with several sequences going off into a flight of fancy as indicated by the song or the setting. The voodoo, for example, is framed in bright and fiery colors as the magic is unveiled. The restaurant dream is drawn in art deco cool, with a waiter sequence that gives a run at "Hello Dolly" for fun and sophistication.

And of course, even as this animated film is aimed at kids, it becomes engaging for all ages, as references to "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (John Goodman as "Big Daddy"), nods to the shallowness of Royalty (Charlotte and the Prince are somewhat reckless next to Tiana) and the comic relief of the various bayou inhabitants create a atmosphere of sheer merriment for all. It is entertainment that cracks a smile.



The Jazzy Alligator Louis Struts his Stuff in 'The Princess and the Frog'  
Photo credit: © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Even though much hoopla was associated with Disney creating its first African American "princess," Tiana is portrayed as a strong, resilient character with a overriding dream, who procures a Prince not by wishing and hoping for one (as her flighty friend Charlotte does), but standing firm to a persona that deserves respect and love. It is a theme that is a thread throughout the film, as in the quest for happily-ever-after means creating your own luck.

The villains are properly villainous, but with a twist. It is power and connection to royalty that Dr. Facilier seeks, and uses the darkness of voodoo as an offering to connect this power to the "other side," in the fashionable connection between death and life in New Orleans. The Prince's aide-de-camp, Lawrence, is a bumbling comic character who get seduced by the villainy and of course gets a proper comeuppance.

The ensemble voice cast is peppered with a few big names – Goodman, Oprah Winfrey as Tiana's mother and Terrence Howard – but is mostly handled by a lesser-known ensemble who give the resonance to the scope of the story. From the streets of New Orleans to the nearby bayou country, the cast of plucky survivors teach the elite Prince a thing or two about living well.

And finally, the city of New Orleans gets it due as a cradle of intuitive culture, music magic and that strange essence that makes it one of America's greatest cities. In the wake of the modern ills of Katrina and the exposure of the associative sins, Disney chose to celebrate the vibrancy of the necessary life force in this Southern community legend and came to the conclusion that its heart beats in all of us. We all want to be in that number, when the saints go marching in.

*"The Princess and the Frog" opens everywhere December 11th. Featuring the voices of Anika Noni Rose, Bruno Campos, Oprah Winfrey, Terrence Howard and John Goodman. Rated "G"*



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