



Kino Ken screened COCO on November 29, 2017 at the AMC Theaters, Westmoreland Mall, Hempfield Township, Pennsylvania. Below is his review of that outstanding film.

17 of a possible 20 points

******1/2 of a possible *******

United States 2017 color 109 minutes feature seriocomedy musical animation Pixar Animation Studios / Walt Disney Pictures Producers: Darla Anderson and Mary Alice Drumm

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance (j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- Direction: Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina**
- 2 Editing: Steve Bloom, Lee Unkrich, and Jessica Katz**
- 2 Cinematography: Matt Aspbury**
- 1 Lighting: Danielle Feinberg, Tim Best, Jennifer Leigh King, Ryan Michero, Josè Luis Ramos**
- Special Visual Effects: Michael O'Brien (Supervisor) Dustin Anderson, Itamar Belson,**

**Susan Fisher Fong, Christian Hoffman,
David Lally, Erin Lemkühl,
Hsiao-Hsien Lo, Richard Marrujo,
Thomas Moser, Owen Neuberger,
Leon Jeong Wook Park,
Stewart Pomeroy, Cari Reiche,
Lana Chen Sun, Gaston Ugarte,
Jamie Williams, others**

**2 Screenplay: Adrian Molina* and Matthew Aldrich* based on
an original story by Lee Unkrich, Jason Katz,
Matthew Aldrich, and Adrian Molina**

Story Supervision: Jason Katz*

Music Editing: Stephen Davis*

2 Music: Michael Giacchino*

Songs: Kristen Anderson-Lopez* and Robert Lopez*

Orchestrations: Jeff Kryka* and Miguel Bezanilla*

2 Production Design: Harley Jessup*

Art Direction: Tim Evatt*

Character Design: Daniel Arriaga and Carter Goodrich

Set Design and Props: Drew Hartel*

**2 Animation: Gini Cruz Santos* (Supervising Animator),
Michael Venturini* (Supervising Animator),
Nickolas Rosario* (Director of Animation),
Jesus Martinez, Michael Ravella, Maura Turner,
others**

2 Sound Design: Christopher Boyes*

Sound Editing Supervision: Christopher Boyes*

Sound Effects: Blake Collins*, Justin Doyle*, J. R. Grubbs*,

Dee Selby*, and Jack Whittaker*

Dialogue Recording: Nick Jimenez

Dialogue Mixing: Greg Crawford, Doc Kane, and Michael Miller

**Casting: Beth Blanks, Carla Hool, Natalie Lyon, and
Kevin Reher**

1 Voice Acting

2 Creativity

17 total points

**Voices Cast: Anthony Gonzalez (j)* (Miguel Rivera),
Gael García Bernal* (Hector), Benjamin Bratt* (Ernesto de la Cruz),
Alanna Ubach (Mamá Imelda), Renee Victor (Abuelita), Jaime Camil
(Papá), Alfonso Arau (Papá Julio), Herbert Siguenza (Tío Oscar/
Tío Felipe), Gabriel Iglesias (Clerk), Lombardo Boyar*
(Plaza Mariachi/Gustavo), Ana Ofelia Murguía (Mamá Coco),
Natalia Cordova-Buckley (Frida Kahlo), Selene Luna (Tía Rosita),
Edward James Olmos*(Chicharrón), Sofia Espinosa (Mamá),
Carla Medina (Departures Agent), Dyana Ortelli (Tía Victoria),
Luis Valdez (Tío Berto/Don Hidalgo), Blanca Araceli (Emcee),
Salvador Reyes (Security Guard), Cheech Marin (Corrections Officer),
Octavio Solis (Arrivals Agent), John Ratzenberger (Juan Ortodoncia),
others**

Miguel Rivera is a twelve-year-old Mexican boy with a long-standing, colossal dilemma. He's forbidden by a formidable tyrant of an abuela named Elena to enjoy music in any form.

This rubs him the wrong way for several reasons. First, he happens to love rhythm, drumming away on whatever he finds handy. Second,

Miguel visits with members of mariachi bands in his home town's plaza whenever he can. Third, his family's dream for him is to uphold their tradition of making quality footwear. He's not particularly keen on keeping his feet inside shoes, let alone creating them. Fourth, Elena's prohibition against music extends to listening sessions. Miguel must not play records, watch film musicals from the glory days of Mexican rancheras, or even mention his great-great-grandfather, an irresponsible dreamer who abandoned wife and baby daughter Coco in order to pursue musical fame. Or so his family believes.

Despite these interdictions, Miguel hopes to achieve renown and wealth by playing guitar while singing in the style of his idol, a movie matinee idol named Ernesto de la Cruz. With no confirmation from anyone, Miguel has determined the superstar Ernesto to be his family's black sheep great-great-grandfather, who deserted Coco and her mother Imelda long ago. He believes entering and winning a neighborhood Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) talent contest will insure him recognition and success. But how can he do so with no guitar to play?

Spoilsports might point out practice with an air version hardly constitutes adequate training for public performance as a musical virtuoso. The boy's singing is also derivative, relying on audience familiarity with de la Cruz's for eager acceptance.

With crucial competition looming and a family intent on traditional honoring of ancestors, Miguel escapes from home confinement and makes his way to a mausoleum honoring de la Cruz. Inside is the star's guitar, temptingly resting on supports with no visible alarm system to ward off thieves.

Perfect. A short climb up, followed by stretching of arms, should guarantee the prize becomes his own. Then nothing can prevent him from attaining stardom.

But when he dares to begin playing someone else's instrument, Miguel's magically transported to The Land of the Dead. There he meets painter Frida Kahlo, various departed forebears, and two musicians named Chicharrón and Hector. In a sober, grimly slow-moving sequence Chicharrón fades from view, forgotten by his last surviving relative. That can happen to anyone over time, Hector warns Miguel. Even to a public hero like Ernesto de la Cruz.

Miguel begins to worry whether he might become trapped in his own fantasy world, ultimately suffering a fate similar to Hector's buddy. He notices a worrisome fading of flesh. Eventually mortality is bound to occur, Hector counsels, but it would be best not to rush such an outcome. He's willing to help a costumed interloper who shouldn't be there, still very much alive if merely until sunrise. But Miguel must get him in return transport back to the Land of the Living this very night, so Hector can remind his daughter of her neglected father before he's locked up in Death's Dominion again for a year. She must still be alive somewhere. He hasn't spotted her in the Land of the Dead.

Well, okay. If Hector will pledge to take his disguised companion to the exclusive party for invitees only being thrown by Ernesto de la Cruz's deceased self.

That poses a dilemma for Miguel's prospective guide. Ernesto is the last figure he wants to encounter. He has reasons of his own for avoiding the popular singer. Yet a deal is a deal.

To tell more of the plot would ruin surprises in store planned by Pixar's crafty screenwriters. Rush out to the theater if curious about COCO's conclusion and how Miguel's quest ends.

Aside from a screenplay finely calculated to amaze and touch, the film's main assets are its music and Anthony Gonzalez's winningly naïve performance as Coco's great-grandson and Imelda's prospective inheritor of vocal talent. The youth never sounds a false note in journeying from frustrated nobody to champion of an alternative set of bloodline endowments. His family relationships sound fully authentic, normal, motivated by desire for acceptance and aversion to rejection by kin.

In orchestrations of Jeff Kryka and Miguel Bezanilla, energetic effusions couple beautifully with melodies provided by Pixar's house composer, Michael Giacchino. Their music stylings blend convincingly with poignant melodrama, a combination found blatantly throughout Mexican film scores of the nationalization and economic wonder years. This Golden Age of the Mexican cinema yields a trove of classic musicals and memorable performances still enticing viewers today, making them considerably more than just nostalgic souvenirs. Robert Lopez of "Hamilton" fame teamed with wife Kristen to write "Remember Me," a Golden Globe Best Song Nominee.

However, songs such as "Un Poco Loco" and "The World Es Mia Familia" merit just as much attention, even if they didn't get reprised in the soundtrack. "Un Poco Loco" incorporates unfettered trilling and yips of encouragement so characteristic of Mexican music. "The World Es Mia Familia" unites timely lyric with jaunty festive dance melody.

A notable first for Pixar is use of papel picado, a kind of inverted silhouette animation style employing perforations in paper, to

advance plot briskly without any loss of characterization as Miguel keeps breathlessly moving through hometown streets. It sets the tone for rapid changes of scenery and character groupings as Dante dog, named after the horse ridden by de la Cruz in the movies, and his adoptive owner journey about a labyrinthine afterworld in search of Miguel's misguided model.

Lighting occasionally lapses into minimal contrasts of shading variants, particularly in night scenes showcasing the City of the Dead's glittery layout.

Sound is uniformly clear throughout an extremely wide range of decibels, a tribute to masterful recording and mixing.

Unafraid to slow pacing in sections of dramatic confession, COCO's creators triumphantly braved possible defection of kids accustomed to nonstop action on screen. Child viewers are also treated to intelligent dialogue about family traditions, memory, and consequences of surrendering to lures of money and reputation which could dissolve critically important fostering relationships.

Remarkably belligerent and unrepentantly self-serving, Benjamin Bratt's villain deservedly receives a black comedy double dose of death. His character's garish, guitar-shaped swimming pool, in which Miguel nearly loses his life both metaphorically and actually, pays tribute to the overblown eccentricity of Ernesto's American counterpart, Elvis, and a Las Vegas performance environment which spawns such emotionally empty showmanship.

Far more subdued, Gael Garcia Bernal's Hector displays ideal proportions of quixotism, bumbling, and usurped giftedness, winning gradual sympathy for unachieved aspirations and severed ties to loved ones.

Further enhanced by finely articulated animation, COCO has possible creative sources in the work of Hayao Miyazaki, as Hoai-Tran Bui points out at www.slashfilm.com/world-of-coco/2/, particularly SPIRITED AWAY and HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE. The latter film flips hero and villain during the course of its topsy-turvy story, just as COCO does. Its castle resembles Watts Towers. So do inharmonious, jumbled clusters of apartments featured in COCO's City of the Dead. Dark browns, royal purples, and pumpkin oranges predominate in that place, a gloomy zone where dead spirits pass right through living souls. That imagery may have been inspired by similar denizens of the night in SPIRITED AWAY.

COCO is a notable achievement as musical and as animation dramedy. It's too frightening and complex a tale for under-ten viewers. For those older, Lee Unkrich's newest release offers pleasure, wit, impassioned music, artistry, and a poignant reminder of how important familial love is for those of us resident on Planet Earth.