

“Coco”

By Helen Lutz

As a little girl I attended Catholic school. That’s probably one of the reasons I love Halloween. Catholics celebrate the triduum of Allhallowtide beginning with Halloween trick or treating on October 31st followed by November 1st which is All Saints Day (and a Catholic school holiday), and then back to school on All Souls Day, November 2nd when we are supposed to pray for those who went before us. As a child the last day was a downer since morning came early and the nuns got right back into teaching catechism as well as reading, writing and arithmetic.



In almost every culture it is believed that the dead should be honored out of respect or fear of retribution (ghosts). Chuseok is a three day festival celebrated in South Korea giving thanks to ancestors for an abundant harvest. We looked forward to August 15th when we lived in Japan. The Japanese celebrate the three day Bon Festival honoring and commemorating dead ancestors. It is party time with fireworks (like I’d never seen before), games and dances like the Bon Odori welcoming the spirits. The gates of the base were opened for the festival and all the organizations had food booths along the lines of NIOSA – only bigger. I cooked and sold my fair share of hamburgers at the Wives’ Club booth.

Disney and Pixar bring Mexico’s Día de Muertos (The Day of the Dead) to life in their new animated movie “Coco.” Generations are revered on altars throughout the country with candles, photos and food while celebrations and parades entertain the crowds. In the Rivera household, music is banned; they are a family of shoemakers. Many generations ago Imelda and her tiny daughter Coco were abandoned by Imelda’s husband. He needed to go out into the world, guitar in hand, to play music to the crowds. Life wasn’t easy for Imelda and she turned to making shoes; just a few at first, and later as her family grew they became the SAS Shoemakers of Mexico.

As little Miguel Rivera (Anthony Gonzalez) hides in the attic, he plays an old guitar and watches films of his idol and musical hero Ernesto de la Cruz (Benjamin Bratt). Miguel is young and doesn’t understand many things. He loves music, but his family forbids it. While visiting the Día de Muertos family shrine he sees photos of all his ancestors starting with great, great grandmother Mama Imelda and great grandma Coco as a little girl; however, the face of the man in the picture has been torn off.

Going against his family’s wishes and seeking music, Miguel visits the cemetery and the mausoleum of Ernesto de la Cruz. He plans to ‘borrow’ the famous guitar hanging inside. Hearing noises, Miguel panics and is magically whisked into the Land of the Dead. The land is filled with beauty and music and a conglomeration of the most stunning skeletons ever seen going about their business. During the festival they have the opportunity to cross over the bridge into the land of the living and check out their relatives.

The colors and characters are fascinating as Miguel explores the world meeting Hector (Gael Garcia Bernal) who happens to be a fun guy and con-artist, but is prohibited from crossing over the bridge. It appears that he is not remembered by anyone in the living world. “Coco” tells the story of Miguel’s adventure with Hector through the Land of the Dead while Miguel seeks out de la Cruz – he just has to be his long lost great, great, grandfather. Needing to return to the land of the living before dawn, Miguel learns a great deal about his ancestors, his idol and himself.

The story behind “Coco” is intriguing as it explores a concept of the afterlife (much more uplifting than Dr. Oz). My eight year old grandson attended the screening with me. While in the Land of the Dead Justin asked Grandpa to take him out of the theater claiming he didn’t like the sad parts, but the film tends to be a little intense for kids in spots. “Coco” won’t rate up there with “Toy Story,” but should you be looking for a refreshing story and insight into another culture instead of a tired sequel, then this might be just the right destination for a family outing. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats ... I give “Coco” TWO 1/2 HARTS. It’s well done, but can get just a little creepy.