

COCO (2017)

- Released on November 22nd, 2017
- 1 hour 49 minutes
- \$180,000,000 (estimated)
- Directed by Lee Unkrich
- Budget: \$20 million
- Pixar Animation Studios, Walt Disney Pictures
- Rated PG for thematic elements

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Demetri Panos
 - Opinion: Coco is a vibrant visual narrative with heartfelt poignancy you expect from Pixar. They again prove that story, theme & character building is as important as environment building. Not that the depiction of Dia de los Muertos isn't eye poppingly beautiful; it is! Latin pride & heritage burst out in color and emotion. Directors Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina seamlessly blend concept and culture. Exposition is expertly and efficiently relayed so as audiences easily understand the set up, the risks, stakes and goals. As a visual medium Pixar has again raised the bar. Not since Inside Out has use of lighting, color, opacity and translucency been used to tell story with such effect. The depictions of Land of the Living and Land of the Dead all come to life with color, illumination and music! The Mexican lore of Dia de los Muertos is brought to such life it makes one want to believe in the tradition, comfort and togetherness. I would be remiss if I didn't mention voice casting. You can't cry cast white washing in Coco. A predominantly Latin cast brings verve and authenticity to the text. There isn't a dialogue or musical note that doesn't ring with genuineness. It's something you can't reach with a dialogue coach. When Miguel exclaims "Abuelita!" Is not just cadence its inflection, emotion. Anthony Gonzalez is a natural. He brings a charm, virtue and rebellion to Miguel that only a child actor can bring. Gael Garcia Bernal as Hector brings a likeable con-man's charm to the character enough so that you not only root but care for the coporeal man. Benjamin Bratt is having fun with the big-headed Mexican pop icon Ernesto de la Cruz. He hits every note and proves even animated characters can chew up scenery. The women who round out this cast are brilliant. Renee Victor, Alana Ubach, are perfect. It helps that there is not one bit of stereotype in character drawing/depiction. Coco was created to entertain multicultural audiences. It does it with an authenticity Hollywood has been more than once accused for not showcasing. Faithfulness to the culture is all up on the silver screen in Coco. And the creators of Coco are masterful mariachis at the plucking of the heart strings. One can't help get emotional. When a minor character fades away because he is no longer remembered, it's just plain sad as the dangers of the ethereal world are demonstrated. You will be warmly reminded of your loved ones living or beyond. Coco does this with culture and class. You will remember with heart and you will not forget Coco. --- for Brenda. ###
- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek

DEVELOPMENT

- First time Pixar has told a story around a cultural celebration.
- Latino community protested Disney for attempting to copyright the phrase "Dia del los Muertos" for the movie.
- For Unkrich, it was the Day of the Dead holiday that really fascinated him as an entry into telling a story. "It wasn't until I started to learn about the tradition, and what it was truly all about, and its history, that I started to really see the potential of telling a story that could be very adventurous and visually dazzling, full of music and color, but could also have a real emotional resonance," Unkrich told Business Insider. "And that's what we're all really looking for ultimately in the stories that we tell. We don't want to just tell a story that's gimmicky and clever." "I started to see the true

potential to tell a unique story that could be big and adventurous and visually dazzling, but also have a solid, emotional core to it." Based on that pitch alone - no story, no characters, nothing else - Disney Chief Creative Officer John Lasseter gave Unkrich the go-ahead to move forward with his untitled *Dia de los Muertos* movie.

- "When I did *Toy Story 3*, we settled on a few basic ideas that were going to be part of the film. And of course we had most of our characters already set, and the look of the world," Unkrich said. "In this case, we had nothing. I mean, we just had a blank piece of paper and that was it."
- Unkrich said he used many Pixar artists and employees who are Mexican or Mexican-American as a sounding board.
- 2013 when Disney filed an application to patent *Dia de los Muertos* for the release of the movie. The Latino community went into an uproar on social media and a petition to stop Disney went up on Change.org and received over 21,000 signatures. The company quickly withdrew the application.
- "We didn't know what we were going to call the film for a very long time," director Lee Unkrich told us. "We made lists of hundreds of different titles to try and figure out what it could be. *Coco* was always just kind of a code name."
- **RESEARCH TRIPS:** <https://youtu.be/946WZKoMSIU>
 - Jason Katz, director Lee Unkrich, producer Darla K. Anderson and production designer Harley Jessup took the first of several research trips to Mexico.
 - "Over the course of three years, we visited museums, markets, plazas, workshops, churches, haciendas and cemeteries throughout Mexico," says Unkrich. "Families welcomed us into their homes and taught us about the foods they enjoy, the music they listen to, their livelihoods and their traditions. Most importantly, we witnessed the importance they place on family."
 - Team "Coco" embedded with families throughout their day, witnessing rituals and meeting neighbors. They were invited to the cemetery to help clean family graves, and they were invited to funerals.
 - Trips inspired the filmmakers to base their fictional town of Santa Cecilia on real sites in Oaxaca. "That helped us decide the lighting," Katz says, as well as "the size of the cemetery and the [regional] music that would be present."
 - And what they learned from their research was the idea of three deaths: when your heart stops, when you're buried, and when you're forgotten.
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WRITING (Lee Unkrich, Jason Katz, Matthew Aldrich, Adrian Molina)

- Writer Matthew Aldrich visited multi-terraced sites such as Guanajuato that were literally layered with history. That helped inspire the vertical look of "Coco's" towering afterlife.
- The movie's original story was vastly different than what happens in the final film. "We told a story about an American boy who had a Mexican mother and an American father. And his Mexican mother had passed away" Unkrich explained. "It was a story about his father taking him down to Mexico to meet the Mexican side of his family, and he ended up being exposed to *Dia de los Muertos* and going on a fantastical adventure.
- This remained the story until the director suddenly realized something was very wrong. "It was ultimately a story about a kid dealing with his grief and learning to say goodbye to the memory of his mother," Unkrich said. "And I realized we were telling a story that was thematically completely antithetical to what *Dia de los Muertos* is about. *Dia de los Muertos* is about never letting go."
- After years of development, the story evolved to focus on Miguel, a young Mexican boy who runs off to the Land of the Dead to solve the mystery of why his family hates music. And while the story was working and things were progressing, there were still challenges.
- "We struggled with Miguel's relationship with his own family," he said. "we wanted the family to be antagonistic but at the same time, we didn't want them to be so bad we didn't like them."
- The film's emotional ending, on the other hand, never wavered. "it was in the very first screening," unkrich said. "the challenge became how to best paint to that scene. A lot of notes we got were, 'this is a fantastic ending, now let's tell a story that can get us to that place.'"

STORY/TOPICS

- Family
- Dia de los Muertos
- Never letting go of family
- Mexican culture

CAST:

VOICE RECORDING SESSIONS: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MswwpVvrsRY>

ANTHONY GONZALEZ (Miguel)

- My parents have always been there for me," said Gonzalez, one of five siblings born in Los Angeles to Mexican parents. "Without them I would not be in a Disney-Pixar movie."
- "I never thought I'd be working in a Disney-Pixar movie at my age. I grew up watching these films!," Gonzalez
- His path to "Coco" started way earlier, singing Mariachi with his modest family at El Mercado de Los Angeles and competing in singing contests in his hometown, Mexico or Miami
- "Since I was 4, my goal was to be a famous singer and a famous actor," he said cheerfully. "I have achieved it and I want to keep doing this. I want to represent all the Latin people. I want to do this for the rest of my life."
- He was later discovered by casting director Blanca Valdez while reading passages in Spanish for the *Univision* channel.
- Auditioned for *Coco* when he was 9 and finally won the part two years later.
- "I think *Coco* came at the perfect time to show everyone to stay together and live the importance of family, that families should be united," says Gonzalez. "At the end of the day, we're all the same and were all human beings, and there shouldn't be any separation between [people]."
- Performed on Spanish-language variety show *Sabado Gigante*, auditioned for Telemundo's *La Voz Kids* (*The Voice* for kids) and is a regular on an annual Univision telethon for sick Latin American children, plus has had acting parts on *Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders* and FX's *The Bridge*.
- "I'm very similar to Miguel because we both just love the music." He also felt a connection to the fact that they both care about their families and know how important the celebration of Dia de Los Muertos is. He also shared with us that the first time he saw Miguel drawn, he was surprised that the character actually looked like him. Anthony also shared who he thought about when playing the role of Miguel. His late grandfather, "We had a very good bond together and that's why I just love celebrating the Day of the Dead. And he was very special to me, because he was always there for me, and he would just be so funny, and he was always there to support me in what I loved to do, which was sing." We asked him if there was another character, besides Miguel, that he would have liked to play and he said he would have loved to have been Dante.

GAEL GARCIA BERNAL (Héctor)

- Such a wonderful opportunity when they said Pixar wants you in the movie, I was like yes! Cool, yes! And then I spoke with them and met and had a really good meeting where they talked about what they wanted to do and they showed me some of the things that they had, and yeah, I mean, I was like, sweet! [laughs]
- "It's one of those stories that's there to be told. When doing the movie, one of the references I had for the character was Baloo from *The Jungle Book*. I wanted to portray that because Héctor is a similar character, with the singing and everything. Hopefully, my kids will hold Héctor on the same level as Baloo."
- "It was a collaborative process to create Hector because you try out things and you get the directions through the script, through the scenes that you're doing and you play around with them and they start to build the character," Bernal explains, "and you start to animate the character and you start to build this collaborative process that ends up with this amazing character."

- “I hope that [kids] find themselves inspired. I want them to enjoy the movie, of course, but I hope especially kids that are born in the United States, who are sons, daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren of people who come from Mexico, feel empowered. They come from a very complex and profound culture. At the moment, there is such an established narrative of hate, so I hope they can feel empowered and are able to counteract those lies about who their parents or their grandparents or their great grandparents are. If I could dedicate this film to someone, it would be to those kids, here in the United States.

BENJAMIN BRATT (Ernesto de la Cruz)

- “They led me into this room that was from top to bottom on all four walls covered in Mexican iconography and images from Day of the Dead and drawings and sketches of the characters,” Bratt said. “I was generally moved because it was in that moment I recognized that Pixar, a company that has such a global reach, is going to tell a story about us, about Latin culture — that’s no small thing.

RENEE VICTOR (Abuelita)

- “In her earlier conception we gave her a wooden spoon that was tucked into her apron string and she would whip that out and kind of hit you to express displeasure,” Unkrich said. “It was at one of our earlier screenings that a couple of our cultural consultants said, ‘A spoon has nothing to do with Latino culture, she should really pull off her *chancla*, her slipper, and hit them with it.’ And that was the first time we learned about *la chancla*, and we embraced the idea fully. That one adjustment has proven to win us a lot of points in the Latino community because it’s something a lot of people grew up fearing.” - Unkrich

ALANNA UBACH (Mama Imelda)

- “Imelda is the source of the family’s ban on music,” says director Lee Unkrich.
- “To me, it’s a modern cultural masterpiece. When I was first asked to do this, I really didn’t have an idea of what it was about entirely, until finally I was ... by the fourth session I was able to sort of piece together what the storyline was about. And to me, it was so important for Pixar to do a movie like this, because what it does is, it’s an homage. It is respect to one quality that all Latin families across the universe do have in common, and that is giving respect and prioritizing the importance of family”
- La matriarca! Absolutely. They are the ones with all the answers, they have birthed our children. They have birthed our aunts and our uncles and our cousins, and our moms and dads. And there seems to be this stoicism and this wisdom that can never be taken away. These are the women with the stories to tell. These are the women that sing the songs that we will sing to our children when they are born. And these are the women that really bring the magical fairy dust to the entire family. And remind us that family is something that can never be broken. No borders, no politics, no presidents can ever break the bonds of family.”

JAIME CAMIL (Papa)

- “I can’t give you any spoilers, but the father-son relationship, the father-daughter relationship is really strong. I cried a lot.”

EDWARD JAMES OLMOS (Chicharrón)

- “I dedicate this movie to Donald Trump and the Trump family,” said Edward James Olmos, who plays Chicharrón. “They should see it. They need to see it.”

SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS

- Pizza Planet truck is briefly visible near the very beginning of the film. Miguel opens a window to look outside and the truck drives right by in front of him.

- As Miguel heads to the plaza, he walks through a busy market scene. One of the stalls has a variety of small figurines for sale, and sitting on the table are Nemo, Marlin, Dory, and Destiny from *Finding Nemo/Finding Dory*.
- In the same scene, another market trader is selling pinatas. Among them are Woody and Buzz Lightyear.
- When Miguel and his new-found friend, Hector, are walking through the Land of the Dead, they pass a poster for *The Incredibles*.
- Luxo Ball- When Dante gets into a fight with a monkey, as the pair move all over the place, the ball can be seen on a table.
- A113- In *Coco*, it's the room number for the Bureau of Family Grievances in the Land of the Dead.
- Dante short- When Dante runs past a small kid eating corn in the street, you can see the little boy is wearing Lightning McQueen sneakers.
- John Ratzenberger - In *Coco*, he plays a ghost called Juan Ortodencia. It's a small role but nevertheless a delight when you hear it.
- Pixar have created their own version of an ofrenda; paying tribute to former employees and influences who have helped Pixar to become the animation powerhouse that it is today. Walt Disney is there, of course, as is Steve Jobs, former Pixar CEO and a massive technological influence on the company. There's also a mention for Don Rickles, the beloved voice of Mr. Potato head in the *Toy Story* movies, who passed away in April 2017.
- Steve Jobs- When Miguel's dead relatives take him to the Department of Family Reunions, we see all the computers used in that place are Macintosh.

DIRECTING (Lee Unkrich)

- *Coco* ended up being the longest project that Unkrich - who's been at Pixar since the very beginning - had ever worked on.
- Co-directed by rising young talent Adrian Molina, who is of Mexican descent. "Pixar was already on its way to making this a culturally authentic film, and we met somewhere in the middle," Alcaraz says. "And even though I'm not very corporate, they listened to what I had to say."

PRODUCTION/ANIMATION (Harley Jessup - Production Designer)

- **SKELETONS:**
 - J.D. Northrup came on board early in the production to address potential issues for "Coco"—and creating skeletons certainly qualified. "The skeletons can detach their bones and do little gags. Even their vertebrae comes apart," says Northrup. "Each piece had to be independent so the complexity of the rig and the stress that it puts on the pipeline were something like we've never seen before."
 - "We had to figure out how to give them personality without skin, muscles, noses or even lips," says character art director Daniel Arriaga. "We played with shapes and did a lot of paintings. We sculpted and studied skulls from every angle to figure out where we could add appeal and charm."
 - "We wanted to create skeletons that A, were not creepy, and B, were entertaining. The most important thing was, I knew we were going to have some very emotional and potentially heavy scenes in this film, and I told my team we needed to design characters that were appealing — and appealing enough to the point where I could go in and shoot a big close-up of one of them and the audience would be right there with them, believing them completely, and not be put off." - Unkrich
 - "You don't typically see skeletons with eyes, but it was important because without them they're just blank slates," says Unkrich. "It's cliché, but the eyes are the window to the soul, and I knew if I was going to have tender, soulful moments with these characters, I needed the audience to be able to look right into them."

- Unkrich also said they also made the eye sockets move and stretch to simulate eyebrows
- Supervising animator Gini Santos said they did this in two ways: by subtly altering the coloring and cracking of bones between characters to create variety, and giving them unique movement styles that would set each of them apart.
- The movement styles were partially thanks to what the animators did with bone density, creating a model with almost half the weight of a normal human skeleton. This lighter weight enabled them to experiment with fun reactions like having popping joints, jiggling ribs, and even having characters fall apart and have their bones pulled back together.

LAND OF THE DEAD:

- The vertical, Victorian architecture of the Land of the Dead, built on the foundation of the past, contained 7 million lights automatically placed with special coding.
- "At the bottom of each tower," explains Jessup, "are the Aztec and Mayan pyramids; above that, Spanish colonial period buildings; above that are Mexican Revolution era and Victorian era buildings; and then into the 20th century and modern day. That created a logic to the Land of the Dead — they are always building on the earlier era as more people die and enter that world." Director Lee Unkrich wanted the towers to "feel infinite," says Jessup, so they are full of detail, and are all connected by interlinking trolley cars.
- We realized that it would need to be ever-expanding because new residents would arrive regularly, if you think about it. So we asked ourselves, "What would a world look like that was being added onto constantly?"
- The city was originally built on the site of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán, which was surrounded by water. And while
 - **DEPARTMENT OF REUNIONS:**
 - According to Production Designer Harley Jessup, the space is designed in the spirit of a "Victorian DMV," with skull and skeleton motifs incorporated into the architecture.
 - Families come to the Department of Family Reunions if they're having problems with crossing over to the Land of the Living. Employed here is a clerk, who assists Miguel and his family in his cluttered, yet cozy office
- **MARIGOLD BRIDGE:**
 - The marigold petals are actually light sources, says Danielle Feinberg, director of photography for lighting. "We have a new kind of light called a particle light that can have many, many points on it," she says. "Our special effects team gave us a way that we can automatically know which petals a person is stepping on as they cross the bridge and control the glow the petals emit creating little spots of light as someone walks through."
 - New software allowed the filmmakers to group the lights, which would previously have had to be placed and adjusted individually by a technician. "We figured out a way to introduce a single light—but give it a million points," says supervising technical director David Ryu. "The renderer sees it as one light, but we see a million lights."
 - The team wanted the bridge to feel as though it were alive: The characters kick up marigold petals as they walk through them, while the outer portion of the bridge features petals that rain down. The effect is made possible with a set of lights and shading signals that pulse on and off throughout the bridge. Effects supervisor Michael K. O'Brien and his team also included a trough of petals in the characters' paths as they walk across the bridge to make it realistically appear that the petals have been displaced. "And then we track a light that sits underneath the petals that adds the glow as a character steps down," O'Brien explains.
- **SAINT CECILIA TOWN:**
 - "Santa Cecilia is inspired by real villages in Mexico," says production designer Harley Jessup. "We stayed grounded in reality in the Land of the Living. It's sun-bleached and

dusty, but the color palette is accented by the brightly colored decorations for Día de Muertos.

- **ARTISTS:**

- One of the many artists who contributed her voice to *Coco* is Mexican sketch artist Ana Ramirez. “The murals in the streets that you see in the Land of the Dead are pulled from what I love about the holiday. Growing up, there were sugar skull candies and skeleton props and toys I’d collect from the celebration. So many of my paintings were based on that kitschy side of folk art that I really loved.”
- *Coco* begins with an exposition by decorative paper cutouts called “papel picado.” It’s through these decorations that we are quickly introduced to several generations in our central protagonist’s family. “I designed the entire opening of the film. I worked with lead animator Tom Gately, production designer Harley Jessup and co-director Adrian Molina. They storyboarded it, I designed the look and Gately animated it in 2-D,” Ramirez said. “It was a great and challenging experience, because I don’t usually get the opportunity to design something so flat in 2-D. But it was what we felt best serviced the story we were trying to tell.”
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EDITING/VFX (Zene Baker, Joel Negron, Jake Morrison- VFX Supervisor)

SOUND/MUSIC (Michael Giacchino)

- “Remember Me” from the Oscar-winning Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez
- “I was able to work with Camilo Lara and with Germaine Franco, who both have a wonderfully extensive knowledge about Mexican music. I had a certain amount of knowledge about Mexican music, but working on this film opened my mind up to show me how vast a creative landscape Mexican music covers. It’s pretty incredible. I left that project feeling like I learned so much, and was able to ask questions and learn and incorporate that into the score.” - Giacchino
- According to director Lee Unkrich, it’s all rooted in music. “‘Coco’ has music in its DNA,” says Unkrich. “Music shapes the film. Some characters are musicians, while others want nothing to do with it.”
- “If we can give them an authentic musical experience, it will help them make a lasting connection to the film.”- Tom MacDougall
- Recorded music in Mexico City
- Over 50 musicians using indigenous Mexican instruments
- SONGS: “We [recorded] separate. “Recuérdame,” “Un Poco Loco” and “Juanita,” we did it, each of us separate. Again, they made me feel very secure, very supported. They brought in really good people to help... we’re not singers, some of us. Anthony sings incredible, but Benjamin Bratt or me, we were, I don’t know. They told me that he was also very nervous, because I just met him yesterday! I don’t know, it’s just wonderful to fall into a character and use the character’s voice to sing.” - Garcia Bernal

PROMOTION

- The first large-scale affirmation of their dedication came last month, when “Coco” debuted in Mexico shortly before Día de Muertos festivities.
- “Seeing this reaction from Mexico, weeks before anybody in the United States saw it, [was] beyond what we could hope for,” Katz says. “That to me is so moving.”
- “I got to see it at the Mexican premiere in Spanish,” he notes, and “to hear them laugh and cry at the right places and gasp when we want them to gasp — it was amazing.”
- Pixar’s first attempt at building for virtual reality. *Coco VR* is a short companion piece to *Coco*, created by Pixar, Oculus, and VR design company Magnopus.

- Ancestry.com, which had directors Adrien Molina and Lee Unkrich along with producer Darla Anderson explore their own family tree using the site's DNA test and archive of records. It also created a portal where you could trace Miguel's family and begin the process of finding your own ancestors.

BOX OFFICE

- Total Lifetime Grosses (As of November 26): \$72,908,930
- Domestic: \$72,908,930
 - + Foreign: \$82,323,183
 - = Worldwide: \$155,232,113
- Domestic Summary
 - Opening Weekend: \$50,802,605
 - (#1)
 - % of Total Gross: 69.7%
- > View All Weekends
 - Widest Release: 3,987 theaters
 - In Release: 5 days / 0.7 weeks
- Grossed \$49 million for the three-day domestic weekend, according to Box Office Mojo, and has now pulled in a total of \$153.4 million worldwide.
- "Coco," with more than \$48 million in ticket sales there, is now the biggest film in Mexican history.

RECEPTION

- IMDB: 9 / 10
- Cinemascore: A+
- RT: 96% / Audience 97%

SEQUEL/LEGACY