

The Princess and the Frog



By [Michael Allard](#)

Wednesday 10 February 2010



Film: The Princess and the Frog

Director: Ron Clements, John Musker

Starring: Anika Noni Rose, John Goodman, Bruno Campos

Runtime: 97 mins

Review: Michael Allard

Rating: ***

It was with heavy hearts that film audiences of 2004 received the news that Home on the Range would be the last Disney film to be made using traditional, 2-D animation. Pixar had become the new king of child cinema, and although no one could complain about the quality of its output, the talking toys, bugs, monsters and fish it had introduced to the world couldn't escape modern times, whether in their overtly computer-generated origins, or in the voices acted out by sharp comedians like Billy Crystal and Tim Allen. These films contained good stories, but none of them were tales in the same vein as the tradition begun by Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.

John Lasseter, director of the Toy Story films and A Bug's Life, seemed to know this better than anyone else when, after Pixar had been bought by the Disney Empire two years later, he decided, as chief creative officer, to re-open the traditional Disney canon. The Princess and the Frog is a welcome addition to that institution, and reminds us that those nostalgia-inducing films really defined themselves by their ability to simultaneously conform to expectations and bring something quite new to the game.

We discover this in the opening minutes, as the camera sneaks into a lush, upper-class, 1912 mansion where the seemingly hand-drawn curtains and armchairs contain an intangible sensuousness, placing you firmly in the minds of the two children who are having the story of The Frog Prince read to them. But one of them is Tiana, who, ten years or ten minutes later, is a hard-working African-American waitress saving up to start a restaurant of her own in New Orleans.

The timeless prologue is somehow unburdened by post-Shrek requirements of anti-fairytale irony, and is more than enough to set the mood for a new generation of dumbstruck children. Prince Naveen of Maldonia, who's come to Louisiana in search of a bride, makes the mistake of dealing with local voodoo

doctor Facilier, and soon both he and Tiana find themselves transformed into frogs and stuck in the depths of the bayou. A race against time follows, accompanied by the comic relief of a trumpet-playing alligator who wants to be human, and a Cajun firefly who is in love with an evening star.

For an audience reared on the family drama central to *The Lion King*, the pacing of *The Princess and the Frog* might feel a bit uneven. Directors Ron Clements and John Musker, who together helmed *The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin*, are thankfully keen on magical, musical set-pieces, using the upmost amount of colour to create scenery out of thin air that matches Randy Newman's Dixieland score. But, whilst post-jungle *Book* narratives positively revolved around music, all too often in *The Princess and the Frog* musical numbers are used as background interludes between encounter after encounter with funny characters both of all species. This excess of supporting figures is detrimental to both the central romance, which doesn't really get going until the film's second half, and to the characterisation of anyone other than Tiana. The Prince lacks the detailed back-story of his romantic counterpart, and Facilier is a slight, playful figure, neither hilarious, like Jafar and Scar, or truly villainous, like Ursula and Maleficent.

Much has been made of the significance of the first black Disney Princess, but what is even more radical is the prominence of the heroine over the hero, and the strong work ethic she maintains in the film's moral. When one of the heroes suddenly dies in the film's climax, however, this sense of realism dominates more than one would expect. Though its greatest pleasure comes from seeing a recognizable New Orleans made as beguiling as *Aladdin's* Agrabah and *Belle's* provincial life, *The Princess and the Frog* is unquestionably a fantasy, and shouldn't be ashamed of it.



One comment

Anon

10 Feb '10 at 12:20 pm

I'm pretty sure the cast information and runtime is wrong... and why does it say review in the title? Sorry.

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