

The Book of Life : A Revi ew

My family and I were recently invited to a pre-screening of *The Book of Life*. I have to admit, I was torn between to go or not to go at first. Granted, just knowing that Guillermo del Toro has his magic hand in on this and that MY Diego was cast as the main character made it hard to resist. I was also tempted to check out what Jorge Gutierrez, director and writer, had come up with since his work on Nickelodeon's *El Tigre: The Adventures of Manny Rivera*. On the other hand, I am so tired of Latino culture being marketed through "mainstream" tactics! Let's face it, with an estimated 54 million [Latinos in the U.S.](#), is there any reason why this film should ever be marketed as a Halloween movie?

The beautiful animation and big names finally moved us to take a chance and take a peek. I was thrown back to see that this movie has more big names than I've ever seen in an animated film put together. Not only is there a beautiful diversity in the cast, there is enough talent to make your head spin!

Diego Luna, Kate del Castillo, Ricardo Sanchez "El Mandril," Eugenio Derbez (the Mexican); Zoe Zaldaña (the Dominican-American); Cheech Marin, Danny Trejo, Gabriel Iglesias, Angela Johnson (the old and the new school Chicano kings and queens); Hector Elizondo (the Boricua); Placido Domingo (the Spanish tenor); Channing Tatum and Christina Applegate (the Anglo); Ron Perlman (who is of Ashkenazi

Jewish decent); and Ice Cube (the Black brother)! Although everyone is just amazing, I do have to add, that only a true G like Ice Cube could bring his character, the Candle Maker, to life and flow with the family vibe of the film as well as he did.

Autistic son and all, my husband, sister and I headed to the theater. And then MAGIC happened! Where do I even start? I kept waiting for the moment when the little sir would have a freak out, or be too scared, or let us know the volume was too high. Let me just say that this NEVER happened. Every now and then we struggled with keeping his 3D glasses on, but considering this child CANNOT sit still for more than 15 minutes, I'll take it as a win.

What did happen? Despite the fact that our Little Love has limited verbal skills, his reaction to La Muerte, voiced by Kate del Castillo, was an incredibly excited "Pretty!" His non-stop laughing made my heart melt. When the music started I could literally see my entire family's jaw drop. Husband could not keep his eyes away from the screen the entire time and little love to this day will not stop singing "I will wait, I will wait for youuuu" (at all hours of the day AND night). Heads up for all, if you already LOVE my Diego, wait until you hear him sing!

It is refreshing to know that [Gustavo Santaolalla](#) has given this film his magic musical touch. Husband immediately pointed out that he was also

responsible for the Amores Perros (starring Gael Garcia Bernal) soundtrack. If you've never seen Amores Perros, the Mexican love drama, perhaps you'd be familiar with his work in Babel, The Motorcycle Diaries, or Broke Back Mountain. As a side note on Garcia Bernal, keep an eye out for as he plays an Iranian Canadian journalist in John Stuart's production, [Rosewater](#).

I'd be lying if I said that I didn't have ANY issues with the stereotypes, particularly with the exotic representation of Latinas. Luckily, and without giving too much away, our heroine Maria, voiced by Zoe Saldaña, kicks butt! This is always a fantastic message to send to our girls and young women. You don't have to be the güerita ice queen to be smart, strong, independent, and fierce. The film is simply loaded with beautiful and empowering messages of friendship, forgiveness, bravery and selflessness.

This is a movie, an animated film, in which our brown children can see characters like themselves. One in which they can see the beauty of our cultures and our traditions. This is a gift to parents like myself who didn't have cartoon characters that we could identify with, who didn't hear our accents, our beautiful accents, in movies or television as heroes and sheroes. This is a gift to los abuelos, like my own and like my son's, who hold tradition and authenticity dear to their hearts! Make sure to keep an eye out for cultural icon Frida Kahlo; religious icon la Virgen

de Guadalupe; and the pre-Columbian Aztec mother of the gods, goddess Coatlicue.

Thank you. Thank you for making a movie about Día de los Muertos that is not scary, a common misconception about our holiday. Somehow, zombies, witches, and monsters are all acceptable and profitable in mainstream America without them being problematic. Thank you for giving such a well thought out and thorough explanation of what it is and why it is celebrated. Thank you for making a movie that spotlights tradition, authenticity, beauty and talent. But above all, thank you for making a film that anyone from any cultural background can watch, understand and appreciate.

Thank you for giving our kids, thank you for giving ME, an animated film that I can finally identify with in mainstream America.

[The Book of Life](#) hits theaters tomorrow, Friday, October 17. Check your local theaters for availability and show times.