SOFTWARE & TECH

Songs In Princess And The Frog

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The Musical Magic of the Bayou: Exploring the Songs in Princess and the Frog

Disney's 2009 animated film *The Princess and the Frog* marked a triumphant return to traditional hand-drawn animation and a fresh addition to the Disney Princess canon. Set against the vibrant backdrop of 1920s New Orleans, the film is propelled by a rich, soul-stirring soundtrack composed by the legendary Randy Newman. Unlike many Disney musicals that lean into Broadway-style pop, the songs in Princess and the Frog are deeply rooted in the musical traditions of the American South: New Orleans jazz, Dixieland, zydeco, blues, and gospel. This unique fusion not only advances the plot but also breathes life into the characters and their world. For fans and music lovers alike, the soundtrack stands as a masterclass in storytelling through song. Below, we take a deep dive into each major number, exploring their context, lyrical depth, and lasting impact.

Overview of the Soundtrack

The soundtrack of *The Princess and the Frog* features nine original songs, all written by Randy Newman, with an instrumental score composed by Newman as well. The music is heavily influenced by the sounds of early 20th-century New Orleans, giving the film a distinct identity among Disney's animated musicals. Newman, known for his witty, character-driven lyrics and eclectic musical style, stepped away from his usual sardonic tone to deliver songs that are warm, hopeful, and deeply emotional. The soundtrack also features a mix of vocal talent, including Anika Noni Rose (Tiana), Bruno Campos (Prince Naveen), Keith David (Dr. Facilier), Michael-Leon Wooley (Louis), and Jenifer Lewis (Mama Odie). The songs in Princess and the Frog serve as the emotional backbone of the narrative, encapsulating themes of ambition, love, sacrifice, and self-discovery.

Main Songs and Their Significance

Down in New Orleans

The film opens with an instrumental version of "Down in New Orleans," a sweeping, nostalgic tune played over the initial shots of the city. It immediately establishes the setting and mood. However, the full lyrical version appears later, sung by Dr. John (a true New Orleans musician) over the end credits. The song paints a vivid picture of the Crescent City, with references to its jazz clubs, streetcars, and voodoo culture. The lyrics are celebratory yet tinged with a hint of magic and mystery, setting the stage for the supernatural elements of the story. For audiences, this song is the first taste of the cultural authenticity embedded in the film's music.

Almost There

"Almost There" is Tiana's "I Want" song—a classic Disney trope where the protagonist expresses her deepest dreams. Sung by Anika Noni Rose, the song is a soaring, jazzy number with a big band feel. Tiana sings about her determination to open her own restaurant, a dream she shared with her late father. The lyrics emphasize hard work, patience, and the idea that success is just "almost there." Musically, the song is uptempo and optimistic, reflecting Tiana's relentless work ethic. The sequence also includes a beautiful montage of her working double shifts, saving coins, and sketching her restaurant plans. This song in Princess and the Frog is often cited as one of the most empowering Disney princess anthems, as it focuses on ambition rather than romance.

Friends on the Other Side

Dr. Facilier's villain song, "Friends on the Other Side," is a menacing, swing-inflected number that showcases Randy Newman's ability to write for a theatrical antagonist. Keith David delivers a chilling performance as the Shadow Man, luring Prince Naveen and Lawrence into his scheme. The song is built around a repetitive, hypnotic bassline and features Facilier's shadow puppets and voodoo dolls. Lyrically, it's a masterclass in manipulation, as Facilier promises wealth and power in exchange for a "little favor." The song's dark humor and theatricality make it a standout villain song in the Disney canon. It also introduces the film's central magical conflict and sets the plot in motion.

When We're Human

After Tiana and Naveen are transformed into frogs, they team up with Louis the trumpet-playing alligator and Ray the Cajun firefly. "When We're Human" is an optimistic, ensemble number where the four characters imagine their lives once they break the spell. Naveen dreams of endless parties, Tiana of her restaurant, and Louis of playing jazz with humans. The song is a joyful, ragtime-inspired tune with call-and-response vocals and a catchy melody. It serves as the group's "getting to know you" moment and reinforces the idea that each character has a personal stake in becoming human again. The lighthearted energy of this song contrasts nicely with the darker tones of Facilier's music.

Gonna Take You There

"Gonna Take You There" is a brief but charming ditty sung by Louis the alligator as he leads Tiana and Naveen through the bayou. Michael-Leon Wooley brings a deep, bluesy growl to the song. The lyrics are simple: Louis promises to take his new friends to Mama Odie, the voodoo priestess who can help them. Musically, the song incorporates a swampy, backwoods blues sound with slide guitar and harmonica. It is one of the shorter songs in Princess and the Frog, but it effectively conveys Louis's bravado and his desire to prove himself as a musician.

Ma Belle Evangeline

Perhaps the most tender moment in the film comes with "Ma Belle Evangeline," sung by Ray the firefly (Jim Cummings) to the star he believes is his lost love. The song is a gentle, romantic ballad with French Cajun influences, complete with an accordion and a lilting, waltz-like rhythm. The lyrics are heartfelt and poetic, comparing Evangeline to a diamond in the sky. The song serves multiple purposes: it deepens Ray's character, provides a moment of emotional respite in the middle of the adventure, and foreshadows the film's themes of love that endures beyond appearances. Many fans consider "Ma Belle Evangeline" one of the most beautiful and underrated Disney love songs.

Dig a Little Deeper

Mama Odie's gospel number "Dig a Little Deeper" is the film's climactic musical set piece. Sung by the powerhouse Jenifer Lewis, the song is a full-blown gospel revival with a choir, handclaps, and an organ. Lyrically, Mama Odie tells Tiana and Naveen that they don't need magic to achieve their dreams—they need to dig deeper within themselves. The song is a turning point, as it forces Tiana to realize that she has been so focused on her restaurant that she forgot to live her life. The gospel style is a perfect fit for the film's New Orleans setting, and the song's message of self-discovery resonates strongly. The sequence is vibrant, with Mama Odie's snake and the fireflies creating a dazzling light show. "Dig a Little Deeper" is often praised as the film's emotional and musical highlight.

The Role of Instrumental Score and Recurring Motifs

Beyond the vocal tracks, Randy Newman's instrumental score for *The Princess and the Frog*is rich with recurring musical motifs. The most prominent is the "Almost There" theme, which appears in various forms throughout the film—sometimes as a wistful solo piano piece when Tiana feels discouraged, and other times as a full orchestral swell when she achieves a breakthrough. Similarly, the "Down in New Orleans" melody is woven into the score to remind viewers of the city's ever-present magic. Newman also uses distinct leitmotifs for Dr. Facilier (a low, creeping bassline) and for the bayou (a gentle, woodwind-driven theme). These instrumental cues ensure that the songs in Princess and the Frog feel integrated into the entire sonic landscape, rather than isolated musical numbers.

Cultural and Musical Influences

The songs in Princess and the Frog are deeply indebted to the musical traditions of New Orleans and the surrounding Louisiana bayou. Randy Newman drew heavily from early jazz pioneers like Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong, as well as from Cajun and zydeco music for Ray's songs. The gospel influence in "Dig a Little Deeper" pays homage to the African American church traditions that gave rise to soul and R&B. Additionally, the use of brass bands, washboards, and accordions adds an authentic layer of texture. The soundtrack stands as a celebration of Southern music in its most joyful and soulful forms. It also represents Disney's first major effort to incorporate a specific regional American musical style into a princess film, setting it apart from the Broadway-influenced sounds of *The Little Mermaid* or *Beauty and the Beast*.

Jazz and Blues Roots

"Almost There" borrows heavily from the big band swing era, with its brassy crescendos and scat-like vocal runs. "Friends on the Other Side" uses blues scales and a walking bass line. Louis's songs often feature twelve-bar blues progressions. These choices ground the film in the 1920s setting while also giving the music a timeless quality.

Gospel and Spirituals

"Dig a Little Deeper" is the most overtly gospel number, but elements of spirituals also appear in the background choir during moments of triumph. The inclusion of a gospel choir adds a communal, uplifting energy that contrasts with the individualistic aspirations of the earlier songs. This musical diversity is one of the reasons the songs in Princess and the Frog continue to be studied and celebrated by musicologists and Disney fans alike.

Impact and Legacy of the Songs

The soundtrack for *The Princess and the Frog*was nominated for several awards, including the Academy Award for Best Original Song for "Almost There" and later for "Down in New Orleans." While neither won, the songs have become beloved staples of Disney musical repertoire. "Almost There" is frequently performed in Disney theme park shows and on concert tours. "Dig a Little Deeper" is a favorite among gospel choirs. The legacy of the music lies in its authenticity—Randy Newman resisted the temptation to make the songs sound like pop radio hits and instead committed to the period and place of the story. This commitment gave the songs in Princess and a Frog a distinct identity that still feels fresh and soulful more than a decade later.

Moreover, Tiana's songs have become anthems for a generation of fans who see her hardworking, ambitious spirit reflected in the lyrics. The music has also been praised for its positive portrayal of African American culture and traditions, something that was notably missing from earlier Disney princess films. In recent years, the soundtrack has been rediscovered by a new audience through streaming platforms, and it continues to rank high among Disney's best sing-along soundtracks.

Conclusion

The songs in *Princess and the Frog* are far more than catchy tunes—they are the heartbeat of the film. Randy Newman's score blends jazz, gospel, blues, and Cajun music into a cohesive, emotionally resonant whole that transports listeners directly to the streets of New Orleans and the magic of the bayou. Each song serves a distinct narrative purpose: establishing setting ("Down in New Orleans"), revealing character ("Almost There"), advancing conflict ("Friends on the Other Side"), building camaraderie ("When We're Human"), offering moments of tenderness ("Ma Belle Evangeline"), and delivering a transformative message ("Dig a Little Deeper"). The result is a soundtrack that not only enhances the film but also stands on its own as a brilliant work of American music. Whether you are a longtime Disney fan or a newcomer to the world of Tiana and Naveen, the songs in *The Princess and the Frog* invite you to dig a

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