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'Kung Fu Panda' is Back!

By Derek Zemrak



Po (voiced by Jack Black) and his long-lost panda father Li (voiced by Bryan Cranston) pose for a portrait in DreamWorks Animation's "Kung Fu Panda 3." Photo DreamWorks Animation

One of the most successful animated franchises in the world returns to theaters nationwide this week. "Kung Fu Panda 3" is the third movie of everyone's favorite, loveable, kung fu-fighting panda Po, where he finds his long-lost panda father. The reunion takes Po to a secret panda paradise where hundreds of cute, cuddly, humorous pandas live a simple happy life. If it were not for the supernatural villain, Kai, who is searching for Po, all would be perfect. Po must train the pandas of the village how to defend themselves and become the ultimate band of kung fu pandas!

I love this movie franchise. It has great messages for the kids of all ages as well as adults. One of the first quotes in the movie is "He who takes - loses out." I think we can all learn from that. I had the opportunity to interview producer Melissa Cobb, and directors Jennifer Yuh Nelson and Alessandro Carloni at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in San Francisco. Everyone loves Po, voiced by the ultra-talented Jack Black. Po is simple, naive, humble and something so very special.

I asked Cobb, who produced all three Kung Fu Panda movies, when she knew she had something special and she responded: "It really was when we finally recorded Jack Black and started seeing him in the character. There is a moment in the beginning of 'Kung Fu Panda' when he's in a Dojo and he is kind of embarrassed, not ready to spar and playing with the training dummy; the animation of that when it finally happened, we all went 'aw' that is Po. We love him."

Nelson returns to direct along with Carloni. When Nelson directed "Kung Fu Panda 2," she was the first woman to solely direct an animated feature film from a major Hollywood studio. She went on to receive an Academy Award nomination.

"Kung-Fu Panda 2" is the second-highest grossing film ever directed by a woman, with "Frozen" taking the No. 1 spot. When I asked Nelson what she feels is Po's greatest trait, she responded: "He would not be embarrassed if he really screwed up and is a geek joy that compared to his sensitivity is what makes Po so special."

All the original voice actors return, including Jack Black as Po, Angelina Jolie (Tigress), Dustin Hoffman (Shifu), Jackie Chan (Monkey), Seth Rogen (Mantis) and Lucy Liu (Viper). When I asked how difficult was it to get the entire cast to return, Cobb said, "They were all happy to return for they love the franchise and the positive messages in the movies." The addition of Bryan Cranston as Po's father is an added bonus to the already amazing cast.

"Kung Fu Panda 3" is rated PG with a TRT (Total Running Time) of 1 hour and 35 minutes. Go see a quality movie for all ages to enjoy.

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