



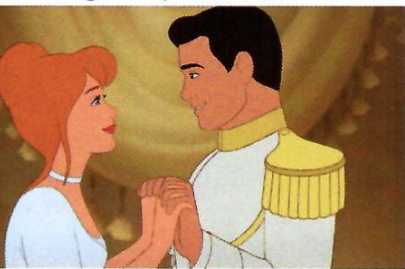
The Slipper Still Fits

Disney veteran Frank Nissen discusses the joys and difficulties of directing Cinderella's third feature outing.

by Jake Friedman

There's a reason why the Disney company still calls Cinderella its most beloved princess of all time (which means she wins the popularity contests over the likes of Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and, even, Ariel the Little Mermaid). "It's because of who she is, what kind of character she is and how she acts and reacts to things," says *Cinderella III* direc-

tor Frank Nissen, who was also a story man for *Dinosaur*, *Tarzan* and *Treasure Planet* before directing *Pooh's Heffalump Movie* in 2005. "I was very concerned about the urge to contemporize the story and characters because Cinderella is loved today as much as she was 50 years ago."



In the straight-to-DVD *Cinderella III: A Twist in Time*, evil stepmother Lady Tremaine gets a hold of the Fairy

Godmother's magic wand, turns back time and makes the glass slipper fit the foot of Cinderella's stepsister, Anastasia. While Anastasia is smitten by the Prince, sibling Drizella and Tremaine pursue their sinister plans to orchestrate the royal wedding before Cinderella and her animal friends can stop them.

Regardless of the new twist of events, Nissen tried to stay true to the original characters. "We watched the first movie over and over again, observing what she did with her body, what she did with her face, how she reacted to things, so I could really get that instilled in me to guide the story people and the animators." Despite a rushed three-year schedule from start to finish, and a relatively tight budget, the film touts a higher quality in art and story than most other straight-to-DVD sequels. "It was important to make sure Gus and Jaq were clearly differentiated in their character relationships," says Nissen. "Equally important was focusing on having them really help Cinderella in tangible ways that make a difference to our story."

Also making a difference was the approach to the Prince's character. "In the first movie he's really little more than a dancing partner for Cinderella," notes Nissen. "But he figures much more in the mechanism of our story, so we had to create a personality for him. We couldn't just build on what was in the first movie because there's hardly anything there, and we couldn't just make him a simple-minded saccharine hero. We tried to think about Hugh Grant and other young modern romantic figures and look at their mannerisms, styles of speech and sense of humor."

Of all characters to get a makeover, the most drastic was Anastasia, who becomes a protagonist in this outing. "In the original movie, the stepsisters really are one-note characters, so we were thinking of things we could give her to do and react to that tell us she's got a softer heart inside ... We had to carefully modulate how sympathetic she was throughout the whole middle of the story so when it comes time for her to say 'I do' at the final wedding scene, we'd have a little bit of ambiguity about whether she'd go through with it."

Although the film is, well, princess-themed, it tested nicely with boys and parents as well, which Nissen chalks up to the movie's emotional core. "I think in a lot of projects, people are afraid to deal with strong emotions, particularly love. It's either treated lightly or made fun of, and I didn't want to do that. This is a wonderfully romantic property. It has a special place in a lot of people's hearts, and I really wanted to respect that. There's plenty of fun in it, but what Cinderella feels and what the Prince feels, it was really important to treat that sincerely. I think that's what people responded to." ■

Disney Home Ent. releases the *Cinderella III: A Twist in Time* DVD on February 6 (\$29.99). The package also includes Spanish and French audio tracks, a "Bibbidi Bobbidi Choose" game and the Cinderella's Ballroom DVD-Rom activity feature.