

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR (2018)

- Released June 8, 2018
- 94 Minutes
- Directed by Morgan Neville
- Production Company is Tremolo Productions
- Rated PG-13

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Christian Bladt
- Juliet Vibert
- Phil Svitek
- Demetri Panos

DEVELOPMENT

- Mister Rogers' Neighborhood began airing in 1968 and ran for 895 episodes. The last set of new episodes was taped in December 2000 and began airing in August 2001
- Neville was motivated to make the film by a deep-seated belief that what Rogers had to offer to the world over decades of his show is missing from our culture today — and desperately needed
- “When I went down to Pittsburgh to meet with Joanne Rogers (Rogers’ wife), my pitch was: I don’t want to make film about the biography of Fred Rogers, I want to make a film about the ideas of Fred Rogers. And she said “Fred would appreciate that because he always said if anybody made a film about his life it would be the most boring film of all time.”- Neville
- According to Neville, the idea from the beginning was not to make a film about nostalgia, but to make a film about these ideas that are timeless, and in fact timely
- “There were a number of hints that I got early on, before I actually started making the film. When I was still deciding on that first trip to Pittsburgh, I went to the Fred Rogers Center and spent a day going through materials there to kind of get a better sense of where this story might go” -Neville
- The first thing he looked at was the Bobby Kennedy assassination special, because it only aired one time and it was never repeated. Neville had only heard about it and had not been able to see it.
 - “When I watched that episode, I knew I could make a film. Any doubts I had about depth or dramatic tension were gone.” -Neville

STORY/TOPICS

- Won't You Be My Neighbor? is a 2018 American documentary film directed by Morgan Neville about the life and guiding philosophy of Fred Rogers, the host and creator of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood.

CAST:

Joanne Rogers as herself

- Married Fred on June 9, 1952. They had two sons, James (b. 1959) and John (b. 1961)
- Fred and Joanne met while he was studying at Rollins College in Florida
- "My last year at Florida State, he wrote me a letter proposing marriage." -Joanne

François Scarborough Clemmons as himself

- Best known for his appearances on the PBS television series *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* throughout the 1970s
- Also a singer, actor, playwright and university lecturer
- For 25 years, Clemmons performed the role of Officer Clemmons, a friendly neighborhood policeman, in the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe*
- In the neighborhood itself, Clemmons ran a singing and dance studio located in the building diagonally across from Mr. Rogers' house
- As "Officer Clemmons", he became one of the first African Americans to have a recurring role on a kids' TV series
- Clemmons and Rogers still remained good friends up until his death

Yo-Yo Ma as himself

- Ma is an award winning, world famous cellist
- He appeared twice on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and developed a friendship with creator and host Fred Rogers
- Ma received the inaugural Fred Rogers Legacy Award in 2014
- Fred Rogers Legacy Award, inaugural recipient, given by the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College
 - Upon reception of the award, Ma stated, "This is perhaps the greatest honor I've ever received"

Joe Negri as himself

- He appeared as himself and as "Handyman Negri" and owner/operator of Negri's Music Shop. in the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe* for nearly 40 years
- "He found me a music shop, decided it should be Negri's Music Shop. And that was a wonderful part of the show, I enjoyed that. Because we brought in a lot of good guests, a lot of good musicians."
- Negri says his character on the show is pure make-believe. In real life, he is not handy.

David Newell as himself

- Known primarily for his portrayal of Mr. McFeely, the delivery man on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*
- Newell was originally hired onto the show as a public relations manager, but Rogers also cast him in the role of Mr. McFeely
- Newell and Rogers were lifelong friends until Rogers' death in 2003
- His character's most famous catchphrase was "Speedy Delivery!"
- He toured the country until he retired in 2015, promoting *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* as Mr. McFeely

Fred Rogers as himself in archival recordings

- Born on March 20, 1928 and died February 27, 2003
- Rogers was a television personality, musician, puppeteer, writer, producer, and Presbyterian minister
- Rogers wrote, produced, and starred in every episode. He also wrote more than 200 songs for the show
- Rogers was known for creating, hosting and composing the theme music for the educational preschool television series *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (1968–2001)

- Trained and ordained as a minister, Rogers was displeased with the way television addressed children at the time, and made an effort to change this when he began to write for and perform on local Pittsburgh-area shows dedicated to youth
- Rogers developed his show on WQED in 1968, and it was distributed nationwide by Eastern Educational Television Network. *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* went on to air for over 30 years
- Rogers was a lifelong Republican—despite fighting the Nixon administration over its push to cancel funding for public television
- He gave now-famous testimony to a U.S. Senate committee, advocating government funding for children's television
- Rogers received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, 40 honorary degrees, and a Peabody Award. He was also inducted into the Television Hall of Fame
- He was ranked number 35 of the TV Guide's Fifty Greatest TV Stars of All Time
- One thing that Neville thought was remarkable about Mr. Rogers was that he used to go back into old episodes that he thought he hadn't aged well, because he had maybe made a comment that has presumed that a woman may be working as a secretary or that he'd used a personal pronoun of he when it should have been they. Rogers would go back and dress up in the same clothes and shoot inserts and fix all old episodes where he felt that he hadn't been sensitive enough.

DIRECTING (Morgan Neville)

- Neville won an Oscar for his 2013 documentary *20 Feet from Stardom*
- "The Fred Rogers I discovered making this film is at once comfortably familiar and completely surprising. I believe Mister Rogers is the kind of voice we need to hear right now" -Neville

TRIVIA

- The Smithsonian Institution displays one of his trademark sweaters as a "Treasure of American History"
- Rogers was red-green colorblind, swam every morning, and neither smoked nor drank. He became a vegetarian in his mid-40s on ethical grounds, stating "I don't want to eat anything that has a mother."

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Graham Willoughby)

- Produced by Morgan Neville, Caryn Capotosto, Nicholas Ma
- The documentary is a combination of archival footage of the original show and interviews with Fred Rogers' friends and family

EDITING/VFX (Jeff Malmberg, Aaron Wickenden)

- Jeff: *Marwencol* (2010), *Spettacolo* (2017)
- Aaron: *Almost There* (2014), *The Trials of Muhammad Ali* (2013) and *Finding Vivian Maier* (2013)

SOUND/MUSIC (Jonathan Kirkscey)

- *Best of Enemies* (2015), *Bookin'* (2013)

Track List:

- It's Such a Good Feeling (Fred Rogers)
- Won't You Be My Neighbor? (Fred Rogers)

- Love (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Clowns and Slime (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Puppets (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Child Psychology (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Characters (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Mr. Rogers Day (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Values and Communication (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Hearings (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Spacey (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- 143 (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Flying (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Feeling Good (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Superheroes and Old Friends (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Rumors (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- King Friday (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Koko (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Tree (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Mend the Split (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- Trolley Music (Jonathan Kirkscey)
- It's Such a Good Feeling/Weekend Version (Fred Rogers)

PROMOTION

- Tagline: "A little kindness makes a world of difference"
- The trailer for the film debuted on what would have been Rogers' 90th birthday, March 20, 2018
- Premiered January 19, 2018 at Sundance, February 24, 2018 at the Boulder International Film Festival, March 16, 2018 at the Miami Film Festival, and May 5, 2018 at the Montclair Film Festival

BOX OFFICE

- Distributed by Focus Features
- June 8, 2018 (United States)
 - Opening weekend earned \$475,419 in 29 theaters
- The film has earned \$657,273 as of 6/13/18
- Opened at number 19, according to Box Office Mojo
- *Won't You Be My Neighbor* was up against *Ocean's 8*, *Hereditary* and *Hotel Artemis*

RECEPTION

- Rotten Tomatoes: 99%
- Cinemascore: 84
- Overall great reviews from critics and fans alike
- *Collider* had only one criticism: the documentary tries to cover too many topics and could go more in-depth and run a half hour longer without dragging
 - "Although the documentary derives a large part of its strength simply from watching Rogers in action, it's still a moving tribute not only to the individual, but to the kindness and compassion he and his program embodied...Neville balances the look at Rogers by showing him as a remarkable individual who was still racked by the same doubts and flaws as the rest of us." -*Collider*

- New York Times- “Rather than trying to unlock offscreen secrets, he sets out to assess the meaning and impact of an onscreen persona. It is that emphasis — the earnest, critical attention to the public Mister Rogers and his legacy — that makes “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?” feel like such a gift.” -*New York Times*
- “Morgan once again avoids making a traditional biodoc and instead takes us behind the curtain to see how Fred Rogers navigated the cultural and social issues of the second half of the twentieth century with his own brand of forward-thinking, compassionate wisdom far beyond his time,” commented Focus chairman Peter Kujawski. “Mister Rogers makes us all want to be better people, and we couldn’t be more proud to be a part of telling his story today.”
- “Won’t You Be My Neighbor? takes a fittingly patient and honest look at the life and legacy of a television pioneer whose work has enriched generations.” -Rotten Tomatoes
- “Watching this film took me, and I suspect many of its viewers, immediately back to early childhood and to the Neighborhood, where Mister Rogers reminded us, in gentle song, that we were special and that he liked us as we were. Fred Rogers is gone and the world is a much scarier place; this film, like a gift, briefly transports us back to the calm we felt long ago. Maybe we’re crying because of that lost innocence; or maybe because there’s a part of us that still misses the man in the cardigan, who always promised that he’d be back tomorrow.” -*Seattle Times*
- “He was a man of ideas whose smartest, most provocative conceit was that the inner lives of children are as rich and complex as those of adults. And he was a man who tried to convince us that taking the emotional lives of children seriously could inspire a radical new vision of children’s entertainment: one that prized feelings over violence, kindness over cartoonishness.” -*Vanity Fair*

SEQUELS

- Though not related to *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?*, Marielle Heller plans to direct a biopic about Fred Rogers called *You Are My Friend* with Tom Hanks portraying Mr. Rogers