



Kino Ken recently viewed **A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD** at the Diamond Theatre in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here's his review of it.

15 of a possible 20 points

**** of a possible *****

United States 2019 color 109 minutes live action feature drama

Big Beach Films / Tencent Pictures / Tristar Pictures Producers: Youree Henley, Leah Holzer, Peter Saraf, Marc Turtletaub

Key: * indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

2 Direction: Marielle Heller

1 Editing: Anne McCabe

1 Cinematography: Jody Lee Lipes Aerial DP: Travis McMunn

Additional Photography: Donald Klinefelter

Still Photography: Lacey Terrell

1 Lighting: Ross Dunkerley, Dante Cardone (2nd Unit), Donald Klinefelter, Jon Morrison

Special Visual Effects: Grant Anderson, Josh Child, Nick Crist, David Entin,

Ranran Meng, Shannon Walsh

- 2 Screenplay: Micah Fitzerman-Blue*, Noah Harper**
Script Supervision: Rebecca Breckel, Megan Graham
Music Supervision: Howard Paar
Music Editing: John Davis Music Mixing: Chris Fogel
Music Recording: Chris Fogel
- 1 Music: Nate Heller**
- 2 Production Design: Jade Healey**
Art Direction: Gregory Weimerskirch
Graphic Design: Brad Towell
Miniatures: Shannon Dailey*
Set Design: Adele Plauche*
Set Decoration: Merissa Lombardo*
Set Dressing: Edgar Um Bucholtz*, Brad Fombelle*, Matthew McCloskey*,
Mamie Stein*
Props: Philip Schneider
Costume Design: Arjun Bhasin
Makeup: Ma Kalaadevi Ananda (Head of Dept.), Krista Montgomery,
Eve Negley, Hannah Donovan
- 1 Sound Sound Editing Supervision: Damian Volpe**
Sound Effects: Sean Garnhart, Matthew Kay, Jay Peck, Bill Sweeney
Dialogue Editing Supervision: Tony Martinez
Sound Recording: Aaron Austin
Sound Mixing: Jim Emswiller and George Simpson, Jr.
Casting: Avy Kaufman, Donna Belajac (local), Missy Finnell (local),
Harrison Nesbit, Chelsea Lynn Peterson (extras)
- 2 Acting**
- 2 Creativity**
- 15 total points**

Cast: Tom Hanks* (Fred Rogers), Matthew Rhys (Lloyd Vogel), Chris Cooper* (Jerry Vogel), Susan Kelechi Watson (Andrea Vogel, Lloyd's wife), Maryann Plunkett* (Joanne Rogers, wife of Fred), Enrico Colantoni* (Bill Isler),

Wendy Makkena (Dorothy), Tammy Blanchard (Lorraine, Lloyd's sister), Noah Harpster (Todd, Lorraine's husband), Carmen Cusack (Margy Whitmer, producer of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood show), Kelley Davis (First Assistant Director of show), Christine Lahti* (Ellen, Lloyd's *Esquire* editor), Maddie Corman* (Lady Aberlin a.k.a. Betty Aberlin), Daniel Krell* (Mr. McFeely, a.k.a. Speedy Delivery, a.k.a. David Newell), Jon Peacock (Sound Technician), Gretchen Koerner (Doctor), Gavin Borders (j)* (Young Boy), Jessica Hecht (Lila Vogel, mother of Lloyd and Lorraine), Di Zhu (Waitress), Nate Heller (Wedding Band Lead Singer), Bill Isler (Restaurant Patron), Fred Rogers (Fred Rogers in television archive footage), Joanne Rogers (Restaurant Patron), Jordan (j) and Naomi (j) and Zoe (j) Harsh (Gavin Vogel, son of Lloyd and Andrea), Margy Whitmer (Restaurant Patron), others

First, I want to credit *Newsweek* magazine and Wikipedia for information relating to what film elements were actual events or transcriptions and which were fictional.

A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD introduces viewers to the world of television personality and Latrobe, Pennsylvania native Fred Rogers through investigative reporter Lloyd Vogel's encounters with his wife's hero. Lloyd is portrayed as a damaged soul, guilt-ridden about a grudge he holds against his father due to the latter's desertion of Lloyd's mother during her final days battling cancer. Not only was dad Jerry absent from spousal commitment during that period. He sought comfort and forgetfulness in an adulterous relationship to boot. That only made matters worse, precipitating a lengthy estrangement from his son.

Years later, at sister Lorraine's marriage to Todd, Lloyd explodes in violence, unable to resist socking Jerry at a most infelicitous moment. Obviously, this is a journalist badly in need of a visit to America's most renowned neighborhood. His *Esquire* magazine editor, Ellen, realizes substantial character improvement might result from such an eccentric assignment.

Lloyd initially demurs, favoring a more aggressive interview subject with plenty of unsympathetic flaws. However, efforts to dislodge Ellen from her

decision fail utterly. Soon the cynic from New York City finds himself confronting a master of understated psychological probing.

Fred Rogers is accustomed to hiding incisively painful confessions inside puppet dialogue. His interview *with* Lloyd quickly devolves into one *of* the damaged pessimist. He realizes confession and self-acceptance are necessary to put the younger man back on track, a process which will require non-judgmental receptiveness in the best play therapy style. By immersing the sophisticate in observation of skits skillfully designed to address the very same kind of anger control issues Vogel himself faces, his host gradually brings him to greater self-awareness.

Lloyd comes to see how selfish both his perspective and his actions truly are. He has to first learn how to forgive himself for inadequacies relating to truthful expression and physical restraint before he can hope to achieve any therapeutic treatment for a troubled soul. Fortunately, the subject of his research project is the perfect person to teach him that lesson.

Spontaneity and candor are not vices. Admission of mistakes isn't the same thing as a declaration of weakness. Schedules can be as flexible as their makers or followers. What counts is people, not things or even ideas. These are the tenets Fred models for his dubious guest.

Lloyd finds himself gradually understanding how the Fred Rogers world of make-believe copies the real one, presenting its problems in a playfully dramatic form easier for children, and even struggling adults, to understand. It takes much less energy to show kindness than to mount a campaign of viciousness or slander. Society's greater gains occur when it operates through programmed, purposeful hospitality, a principle Fred discovered years earlier as a result of childhood bullying. He elected to channel anger and sadness into music and puppetry, converting destructive impulses into artistic creativity.

Lloyd can do the same, using his writing skills. And Fred knows it.

After witnessing an extemporaneous subway performance of a Neighborhood song by child straphangers from various ethnic backgrounds, Lloyd begins to fathom how effectively Fred's gentle teachings are inspiring youngsters to copy behaviors of their television pal. Anyone can be tolerant and friendly. No cash or special power is required.

The care with which Fred Rogers always treated words was another revelation. According to the Pennsylvanian, it's often better to say nothing and let silence do the talking than to rush into insult, complaint, profanity, or incoherent verbal fumbling, typical adult behaviors which strain, rather than ease, relationships. If each person has special value, then so do words he or she speaks. They ought to be used sparingly, with maximum thoughtfulness. Focused, active listening will insure they not go to waste.

Lloyd has to reappraise how he uses communication tools, paying closer attention to their impact on others. A movement away from prejudgment and self-absorption constitutes the evolutionary journey Mister Rogers graciously compels his guest to take. Lloyd is neither protagonist nor antagonist for him, but a vessel through which a master communicator and soul-healer can work.

The outcome of his ministrations is highly predictable. Yet abundant satisfaction comes from observing the stages through which it matures and develops. In that process, the importance of sensitivity to tone of voice, body language, and spatial distancing are highlighted. Mister Rogers repeatedly trespasses on personal barriers his interviewer erects to defend self-destructive rationalizations and scathing sarcasm. The goal justifies such intrusions.

While the movie doesn't totally neglect Fred Rogers' musical gifts, it fails to convey their range and diversity. Audiences hear nothing from his operas. Nor do they see him interacting with instrument builders or virtuoso musicians. A like subordination appears in its reluctance to tie together Fred's religious beliefs and his educational pursuits. Weren't those tightly interwoven? The screenplay treats them as separate, unequal influences, although prayer and contemplation are seen occasionally as at least practical, worthwhile actions.

Too much time is squandered with side excursions into Lloyd's own family. Wife Andrea is significantly underdeveloped. She remains unchanged in character throughout the course of events. His infant son has no personality other than cuteness. Unlike Fred Rogers, neither is an intentional change agent in the reporter's life.

Commendable acting and an unusually intelligent screenplay are the chief assets of this production. Tom Hanks gets the movements, vocal rhythms, direct gazes, and essential calmness of Fred Rogers one hundred percent correct. Just

as persuasive are the candid insights from wife Joanne into her husband's motivations and persona. These are supplied by Maryann Plunkett, who had the enormous advantage of personally meeting the original in preparing and shaping her screen character. The payoff is a performance evidencing the same quiet steeliness of resolve and delicately measured speech cadences typical of both Rogers spouses.

As Lloyd's verbally combative father, Chris Cooper plays the part magnificently, alternating between contrition and lacerating commentary about his son's coldness. Christine Lahti is a fine, no-nonsense, brusquely imperative magazine editor displaying motherly concern about Lloyd's hair-trigger temperament and its consequences. Maddie Corman captures winningly the soft-spoken concern with which Lady Aberlin restores tranquility to various inhabitants of King Friday XIII's invariably somewhat disturbed imaginary realm. Mr. McFeeley's a marvel of overflowing energy as portrayed by Daniel Krell, a postman thoroughly committed to rapid delivery of letters, packages, and literacy in varied visual forms. Despite limited screen time, Enrico Colantoni makes a very strong favorable impression in the role of Family Communications' chief executive officer Bill Isler, prime self-appointed buffer between Fred Rogers and an imposing, frequently miscomprehending adult world.

Lighting, sound, and music are all adequate, though lacking distinction.

Shannon Dailey's miniatures hold the eye well between episodes, depicting Pittsburgh scenery essential to the neighborhood's friendly, compressed ambience.

Thanks to generally above-average acting, a welcome ambience of peaceful encouragement, and penetratingly honest dialogue in stark contrast with snarky backbiting predominant in contemporary drama, A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD entirely justifies the cost of admission for anyone beyond the age of twelve.

A handful of violent incidents and willingness to tackle adult themes in a responsibly mature manner put it off limits for preteen fans of the television show it honors.

On the other hand, for their elders this strongly recommended treat constitutes a delightful reminder of what cinema at its noblest can evoke.

