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PBS to air new series from Fred Rogers Co.

Animated show will be first from shingle since 'Mister Rogers'

By JON WEISMAN

The first television series produced by the Fred Rogers Co. since "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" has gone into production for a fall 2012 premiere on PBS.

"Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood" will be an animated series set in the "Neighborhood of Make Believe" that was a feature of "Mister Rogers." The 4-year-old Daniel Tiger will talk directly to his preschool audience while on adventures in this world.

PBS children's media senior veep Lesli Rotenberg told Variety that PBS and the Fred Rogers Co. have long been considering how to turn the legacy of Fred Rogers into a show for a new generation of kids.

Rotenberg said that "part of the magic" emerged when Out of the Blue Prods. and founder Angela Santomero ("Blue's Clues," "Super Why") came aboard to help develop, with Rotenberg noting that Santomero often says Rogers was her inspiration.

Kevin Morrison is exec producing for FRC with Santomero. The show, which will be accompanied by multiplatform content including online resources for parents and teachers, will be grounded in Rogers' approach to learning.

"We're very excited to be creating a program that builds on Fred's legacy in such fresh and innovative ways," FRC prexy Bill Isler said. "Fred knew that school-readiness skills are the foundation for academic achievement and a full life, and now a growing body of research confirms this."

The series will also make nods to the man himself, with the tiger putting on a sweater and tying his shoes at the start of every episode.

Musically, the show will use some of Rogers' songs while introducing new ones, but all generally in a contemporary fashion.

"You could say we took a little bit of 'High School Musical' and turned it into 'Preschool Musical,'" Rotenberg said.

Joining in the production will be animation specialist 9 Story Entertainment, while Schell Games will design the digital education applications.

"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" premiered on PBS in 1968 and remained in production almost continuously until 2001. It aired nationally in reruns through 2008, five years after Rogers died.

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