

Interview: Fred Savage on His Real Wonder Years

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CHICAGO – There are few TV shows associated with a song more than “The Wonder Years”. Joe Cocker’s raspy version of “With a Little Help From My Friends” immediately conjures up that family sitcom and especially the centerpiece lead child actor Fred Savage. The grown-up Fred Savage is now one of TV’s hottest sitcom directors.

Last week, Savage was the featured guest for the kickoff of the CineYouth Film Festival, which is sponsored by Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival. The annual film showcase celebrates short-format features from filmmakers 21-years-old and younger. And who more appropriate to give a career retrospective than Fred Savage, who began as a child actor and has evolved into show business as a producer, director and occasional performer as an adult.



Fred Savage at the CineYouth Film Festival in Chicago on May 8, 2014.

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Savage was born in Chicago and began his career at age 9. After bouncing around television for a couple years, he landed a film role in 1987 as the grandson in “The Princess Bride,” which is now considered a classic of its era. One year later, Savage got the role that would define him for six seasons: Kevin Arnold in “The Wonder Years”.

The nostalgic and warm show relived the late 1960s through the prism of Kevin and the Arnold family. Six years after the show ended, Savage began his behind-the-camera career with more than 50 director credits to date. He’s also served as executive producer including for the offbeat “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia”.

HollywoodChicago.com met Fred Savage on the red carpet before the CineYouth event. He offered some perspective on his past and present career.

HollywoodChicago.com: Recently one of the most famous child actors in show-business history passed away: Shirley Temple. From what you know of her, how do you think her journey helped pave the way for child actors up into your generation?

Fred Savage: Every generation of child actors learns from the ones that have come before them. As a result, I feel it’s my duty to be there for the child actors who have come after me and to serve as a positive role model and sounding board. Young actors and their parents have reached out to me on how we did things. My mother is involved with talking to parents about young actors. It’s a strange community of people – these young actors – that I’m proud to say I was a part of. There are not a lot of people to talk to about it.

As far as Shirley Temple, and Mickey Rooney who we also just lost, they were the icons of child actors. They began it all. You look to someone like Shirley Temple Black because she was so influential in so many ways including her later work in politics and at the United

Nations. She really was able to give back to the community that built her up and she also stayed positive throughout her life.

HollywoodChicago.com: At what point in your life did you suddenly wake up and think “I’m Fred Savage: the brand name and my own person” rather than Fred Savage – the kid who is taken from audition to audition without quite knowing what it represents?

Savage: I don’t see myself in that way at all. *[laughs]* I’d go to work, I had friends and I was a brother to my siblings. That’s how I saw myself.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you are given a script for a piece you are directing, what’s the first thing you do after reading it to begin breaking down what you need to do as the director?

Savage: The first thing I do is look at it at two different angles. My creative viewpoint is about just making sure that all the characters have a track on their journey and a clear arc, so that when we shoot out of sequence, the actors will still know what they’re doing. And then there is the technical part – the location scouting and casting you have to do early on. They take the most time. So there is the creative side and the production side and they have to work together.

The next Cinema/Chicago event is the 2014 Summer Gala, which honors actor Kevin Kline. [Click here for details.](#) [16] The 50th-anniversary showcase of the Chicago International Film Festival will take place from Oct. 9 through 23, 2014.



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [18]

Senior Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

pat@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

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