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# Entertaining Options

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## “Rock and Roll Man” is headed straight to the top!



By: Allen Foster

It's not every day that a joyous, high-energy musical with its sights set on Broadway has its world premiere run in a quaint little Bucks County village. But that's exactly what's happening! *Rock and Roll Man: The Alan Freed Story*, has just entered its final week at New Hope's storied Bucks County Playhouse, which means you only have till Sunday, October 1 at 2 p.m. to see what is quickly shaping up to be the next Broadway smash.

Writer/producer Rose Caiola is no stranger to the fabled theatre district. She has produced countless shows (*Dear Evan Hansen*, *All The Way*, *The Color Purple*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), which have garnered heaps of well deserved praise and acclaim. The move to New Hope has been like a breath of fresh air for this driven individual.

“New Hope is very serene and peaceful and things have been going pretty well here,” Rose told *Entertaining Options*. “When staging a new show, there are always things that need to be addressed. A lot of things, as a matter of fact. But, when you get a show on its feet in front of a live audience, it's very informative. We are taking notes and keeping in mind our next steps, but the crowds have really been enjoying themselves. And that's really inspiring.”

*Rock and Roll Man* dives inside the head of Alan Freed, the man responsible for bringing rock and roll to the masses. It wasn't an easy task to achieve in those days because many viewed the intermingling of blacks and whites as "wrong." But Alan saw how this music was uniting people and changing the world. At the expense of his family, and the gradual loss of his sobriety, Freed became a resolute champion of the Civil Rights Movement. In doing so, however, he was also vilified by the people of power who didn't want this music "destroying" the morals of America.

Although *Rock and Roll Man* doesn't shy away from the darker shadows of Freed's life and career, it doesn't linger on them either. We get all the dirt, but it doesn't tarnish the upbeat, feel-good vibe of the production. Which is quite a marvelous accomplishment.

"That's great to hear," Rose expressed. "We really didn't want to whitewash his story, but at the same point in time, it's a delicate balance trying not to make his character appear to be dwelling too much in the dark, sleazy side of the business. This really was something that everybody was doing, but that didn't make it right. Nobody wants to see a saint. Hamilton was not a very likable person, but what he did was pretty amazing. It's all about balance. You want your audience to be fighting for your main character. You can acknowledge the mistakes he made, but the focus should be on the joy he brought to this world and how he was changing the nation's perspective on race."

A key component that makes this production work so amazingly well is the fact that it is so perfectly cast. George Wendt from *Cheers* plays the villain, J. Edgar Hoover, with devilish glee (and incredible vocal chops) while Alan Campbell infuses Freed with an electricity that makes you believe one man can change the world. Richard Crandle's Little Richard is an unbridled burst of show-stealing joy, and Matthew Sean Morgan, John Dewey, James Scheider, Michael Siktberg, Melissa van der Schyff, and Bob Ari are simply phenomenal as several different characters.

"No demographic was left untouched," Rose declared. "And the fact that some of those characters were playing eight different roles? I think we really pushed the Bucks County Playhouse to the limits, they've never had a show this size before. But we managed to pull it off. It's such a joy when you're doing something that you're so passionate about and the entire company is really in love with the project too. We were really blessed to find a cast that was able to accurately portray all these historical greats."

*Rock and Roll Man* features appearances by Jackie Wilson, Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Pat Boone, Chuck Berry, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Dick Clark, Bill Haley, Fats Domino, and more. With over 40 musical numbers and a potent storyline, this sizzling production is part book musical, part jukebox musical, and all fun.

"The baby boomer generation is hungry for these songs that recall their youth, but even for the younger people coming to see the show, they've been having a great time discovering music they might not have heard before. All this music in the show, it informs the music these kids are listening to today."

"And the story is so relevant to the times right now," Rose continued. "Alan's path, his journey, it really had such an impact on the future. His courage, his vision... They hunted him down and they destroyed him, but his legacy lives on. That's what really inspired me about his story."

When asked about getting to Broadway, Rose responded, "Every show has a different trajectory. I have produced over 20 Broadway shows at this point and all of them took different paths. It's really

important to get the show up in front of an out-of-town audience, maybe two or three, before it moves to New York. And that's the ultimate dream."

"The crowds have been on their feet and applauding," she continued. "I'm really loving it. We know that regionally the crowds are hungry for this type of entertainment, but when we take it to New York, there are certain things that need to be done, certain sacrifices that we have to make as authors to determine the best path."

The next steps involve getting the show on its feet in a larger theater, something that will let Rose see if it has the ability to dazzle on an epic scale the way Broadway shows do. She might take it on tour, she might move it to D.C., she might even take the show out-of-town in-town to one of the Off-Broadway houses.

"People should come to this show to learn about Alan's story and enjoy this fantastic music. We really found some amazing talent to work with and I'm hoping to see everyone come out for this final week at the Bucks County Playhouse."

*Rock and Roll Man: The Alan Freed Story* runs from now through Sunday, October 1. The remaining dates and times are as follows:

Tuesday, September 26 at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, September 27 at 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, September 27 at 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, September 28 at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, September 29 at 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 30 at 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 30 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 1 at 2:00 p.m.

**Bucks County Playhouse:** [tickets](#) • [website](#) • [Facebook](#) • [Instagram](#) • [Twitter](#)



The cast of "Rock and Roll Man: The Alan Freed Story" at Bucks County Playhouse - Photo by Joan Marcus



Early Clover, Dr. Eric B. Turner, A.J. Davis, George Wendt and Jerome Jackson in "Rock and Roll Man: The Alan Freed Story" at Bucks County Playhouse - Photo by Joan Marcus



Melissa van der Schyff, Alan Campbell, Mathew Sean Morgan (as Chuck Berry), James Scheider and Heather Parcels in "Rock and Roll Man: The Alan Freed Story" at Bucks County Playhouse - Photo by Joan Marcus



Alan Campbell as Alan Freed, Richard Crandle as Little Richard and George Wendt as J. Edgar Hoover in "Rock and Roll Man: The Alan Freed Story" at Bucks County Playhouse - Photo by Joan Marcus



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