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## Norm sings! Beloved 'Cheers' guy plays J. Edgar Hoover in 'Rock and Roll Man'

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### CHRISTENSEN

George Wendt, who played Norm in the TV show "Cheers," will play J. Edgar Hoover in "Rock and Roll Man" at the Bucks County Playhouse (Sept. 12-Oct. 1).



by **John Timpane**, Staff Writer [@jtimpane](#) | [jt@phillynews.com](mailto:jt@phillynews.com)

George Wendt, who played Norm Peterson on the famed TV show *Cheers*, soon takes the boards at Bucks County Playhouse as J. Edgar Hoover in *Rock and Roll Man: The Alan Freed Story* (Sept. 12-Oct. 1). And J. Edgar, that ol' trouper, gets to sing a couple of numbers!

“Right, it’s a little weird,” Wendt said by phone last week. “I usually don’t play the villain, certainly not such a straight-arrow guy as J. Edgar Hoover. But this is a really fun piece, and so I’ll be trying to squeeze some humor out of the bad guy role.”

In the musical, Broadway star Alan Campbell (*Sunset Boulevard*) plays Freed, a DJ who saw the potential of rock and roll early in the 1950s, and for a time, at radio stations in Cleveland and New York, helped inject it into pop culture. He also became entangled in the “payola scandal” and was convicted of taking money from record companies for playing their records.

“A lot of it is a courtroom scene,” Wendt tells us. “It’s a fever dream of Alan Freed’s. It’s the last night of his life. He drank himself to death, and his life flashes before his eyes, and I’m part of the dream. The opposing counsel is ... Little Richard!” Rock and roll dreams, indeed.

Chicago-born Wendt got his theater legs with Second City right after college. “All of us in *Cheers* were green newcomers straight out of theater,” he says. “What was great about the multi-camera TV genre — now so unfortunately passing away — is that you could play to the audience, and the cameras caught what was essentially live theater. It had the same crackle as a live stage show.”

Most of the numbers in *Rock and Roll Man* are classic hits, but Wendt gets to sing a couple of originals. “We’ve been rehearsing in New York city a few weeks, and it’s such a thrill to be in the room with these amazing singers and dancers. “Holy cow,” he says, very Norm-like, “but there are some big voices in the room.”