



This is Jeopardy: The Story of America's Favorite Quiz Show

Episode Two: Here's Your Host, Alex Trebek

A Production of Somethin' Else, Sony Music Entertainment, and Sony Pictures TV

Buzzy Cohen: It's 1979. And "The All-New Jeopardy!" is going...off the air.

Archival: closing credits music of 1978 Jeopardy!

Buzzy Cohen: Merv Griffin tried to revive the show after the original was canceled - he brought Art Fleming back as host, and he thought: maybe, just maybe this would be *Jeopardy!*'s moment.

MUSIC: bright music with momentum begins

Bob Boden: It was the old show, but not really. They eliminated a contestant in the second round, which a lot of people, including me, felt was not true to the format.

Buzzy Cohen: That's Bob Boden. Game show aficionado. He remembers watching the *Jeopardy!* revival.

Bob Boden: Art Fleming was still Art Fleming, but he wasn't the same ebullient self that he was in the earlier run. So *Jeopardy!* was a bit of a disappointment.

Buzzy Cohen: The show had a daytime slot, but the ratings were lagging. Daytime soaps were dominating the airwaves and it was hard to get eyes on a quiz show.

Bob Boden: I was attending UCLA at the time and I was so devastated about losing *Jeopardy!* for a second time in my life that I sent a letter to NBC complaining about the cancellation of *Jeopardy!*.

And I actually got a response from the head of daytime programming. I still have that letter. I'm looking at it right now.

And he explained to me why *Jeopardy!* was canceled, that it just didn't achieve the audience figures that they were hoping for.

Buzzy Cohen: Then an opportunity came in 1983.

MUX: whimsical spacey music begins

Buzzy Cohen: King World Productions, a relatively obscure TV syndicator at the time, wanted to buy the distribution rights to *Wheel of Fortune*.

Merv had launched *Wheel* in the 70s and it was an immediate hit. And Michael & Roger King, the brothers who owned King World Productions, knew *Wheel* could be an even bigger hit if it was in the right markets at the right time slots.

They struck a deal with Merv and the plan was a success. *Wheel* rose to the top of the ratings charts.

So why not try the same thing with another one of Merv's shows.

That's when Merv got an idea: what if he sold *Jeopardy!*?

See, Merv loved *Jeopardy!* He believed in *Jeopardy!* It was his baby. And he would do whatever he could to get it back on the air.

Besides, it was the 80s and things seemed different. The board game *Trivial Pursuit* was outselling *Monopoly* as America's newest obsession.¹ College enrollment was on the up. Even Weird Al Yankovic, the musician known for parodies, got in the mix with the hit: "I Lost on Jeopardy."

Weird Al Yankovic's ["I Lost On Jeopardy"]: I was there to match my intellect on national TV against a plumber, oh, and an architect...."

Buzzy Cohen: Gotta love Weird Al! It seemed like the show had a real chance!

So it was decided. King World Productions would syndicate *Wheel* and *Jeopardy* together. They were now a package deal. You couldn't get one without the other.

There was just one thing...Art Fleming, who had been the host of *Jeopardy!* for 12 and a half years, who had hosted over 2,800 episodes...wasn't coming back.

Buzzy Cohen: But maybe *this* revival called for something different.

THEME MUSIC IN

Archival from Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy!:

Alex Trebek: Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of all of us, welcome to America's Favorite answer in question. Game jeopardy. You know how we play it. We provide the categories and the answers, and it's then up to our contestants to give us the right questions...

Buzzy Cohen: Enter: Alex Trebek.

I'm your host, Buzzy Cohen. And from Somethin' Else, Sony Music Entertainment and Sony Pictures TV, this is Jeopardy: The Story of America's Favorite Quiz Show.

This week: a new host for a new era of Jeopardy.

THEME MUX OUT

<AD BREAK>

ACT I:

Archival from Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy!:

Johnny Gilbert: And now here is the host of Jeopardy!, Alex Trebek!

Buzzy Cohen: September 10th, 1984. This is Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy. He's standing next to the clue board – with a full head of curly hair, a mustache, and a snazzy suit.

Archival from Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy!:

Alex Trebek: If you're ready, then let us play Jeopardy. Here are the six categories you're gonna be dealing with in this first round, lakes and rivers, inventions, animals, foreign cuisine, actors, and roles. And number please.

Buzzy Cohen: Wow, check out this old school clue board [laugh]. It's just... it's just like a wall of TVs. I'm not sure if I've ever actually watched a whole one of these old episodes before. And if you're wondering, I am in fact watching this in real time.

Archival from Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy!:

Alex: *Our very first answer is these rodents first got to America by STOWING away on ships. Greg,*

Alex: *what are rats? Alex,*

Alex: *that is absolutely right. That gives you a hundred select again,*

Alex: *the answer is there are about 40,000 muscles and tendons in this part of an elephant's body. Frank,*

Frank: *what is the elephant's trunk?*

Alex: *Yes, that is right. You're on the board.*

Buzzy Cohen: Alex is going a mile a minute. There's literally no time to take a beat.

Archival from Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy!:

Alex Trebek: *Before we continue with our game, I thought we might take a few moments to chat with our contestants*

Buzzy Cohen: Ah, yes the contestant interviews!

Archival from Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy!:

Alex: *Lois Feinstein, you're sitting in the middle right now, but it says, according to my card, that you're a newlywed, right?*

Lois: *That's right. About five months ago.*

Alex: *How long did you know your husband before you married him?*

Lois: *13 years.*

Alex: *You knew him for 13 years?*

Lois: *Yeah. I guess we wanted to make sure we really like,*

Alex: *Obviously you're gonna make it work this time.*

Lois: *I think so.*

Buzzy Cohen: Hmm.. a little clunky.

Archival from Alex Trebek's first episode of Jeopardy!:

Alex: *And Greg Hopkins, you're an energy demonstrator.*

Greg: *Yes.*

Alex: *What does an energy demonstrator do?*

Greg: *Well, we do things like this. Let's imagine this balloon is a uranium. Take the atom and we shoot it with a neutron. Bang. Pulse sakes, vibrates and splits into two separate atoms, and a reactor gives us energy. .*

Alex: *Greg, try and relax. [LAUGHTER]*

Buzzy Cohen: There's the Alex we know. But he seems kind of nervous too. And honestly, can you blame him?

MUSIC: *bright drum beat with wooden blocks begin*

Buzzy Cohen: I know it's hard to imagine this now... but at the time Alex Trebek was NOT a household name.

So...how did Merv Griffin choose Alex?

It had something to do with a gameshow called *Wizard of Odds* that NBC launched in 1973.

Wizard of Odds game show theme music

Buzzy Cohen: One of the writers was Canadian actor Alan Thicke. Yeah, that Alan Thicke. And NBC came to him, asking if he knew a good host for the show.

Alan thought of someone he hadn't seen or talked to in a while, but had left an impression on him.

A staff announcer with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, also known as the CBC.

Archival from Wizard of Odds game show:

Announcer: *And now the Wiley Wizard himself, Alex Trebek!*

Buzzy Cohen: Alex had been hosting shows for the CBC since the 60s. Everything from teen dance programs...

Music Hop Archival:

Alex Trebek: *From the World Series of Baseball to the World Series of Pop Music, this is it, you've heard about it, Music Hop. And every week at this time, we're gonna be bringing you some of the top tunes from the hit parade charts all across the country.*

Buzzy Cohen: To sports and news shows.

Alex Trebek reading the CBC News Archival:

Alex Trebek: *Good morning. Here is the C B C National News first, the main items, the Inter-American Peace Force....*

Buzzy Cohen: But *Wizard of Odds* was Alex's first big break in the United States.

And pretty soon, word got around that he was extremely sharp.

Peter Marshall: Somebody said, hey, there's this guy from Canada who's hosting the show and doesn't use cue cards. I said, you gotta be kidding.

Buzzy Cohen: This is Peter Marshall, former host of the show *Hollywood Squares*, who became one of Alex's closest friends, but originally just knew him from afar...

Peter Marshall: So I went and I saw a show. The show wasn't terrific, but he was wonderful.

Buzzy Cohen: *Wizard of Odds* only lasted a year.

That wasn't so unusual.

But Alex spent the next several years building a name for himself across the American game show scene with shows like...

High Rollers

High Rollers Archival:

Announcer: Now here's a man with the actions, Alex Trebek.

Buzzy Cohen: *Double Dare*

Double Dare Archival:

Announcer: Welcome ladies and gentlemen to Double Dare. This is a brand new game that has us all very excited.

Buzzy Cohen: *The \$128,000 Question*

The 128,000 Question Archival:

Announcer: And here's your host, the star of our show, Alex Trebek.

Buzzy Cohen: *Battlestars*

Battlestars Archival:

Alex Trebek: *Hello, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you so much for joining us to help us round out the week here on the new Battle Stars.*

MUSIC: *bright music with momentum begins*

Buzzy Cohen: Until one day, in 1980, he got a call from the President of Merv Griffin's company. Would he be willing to fill in on *Wheel* while the host was out sick?

Then came a second call. This time it was big. Really big. Would Alex be interested in hosting *Jeopardy*?

Legend has it that two people put a good word in for Alex for this *Jeopardy* gig.

One was Lucille Ball. Not a bad person to have in your corner.

The other person wasn't famous, but she *was* important to King World Productions, the syndicator. It was the mother of Michael & Roger King, the brothers who owned the company.

Dave Wiliger: **She was very ill, and literally in the hospital.**

Buzzy Cohen: That is Dave Wiliger, who was a producer on *Jeopardy!* in 1984. And also worked on *Wheel*.

Dave Wiliger: **And she had said to Michael— she believed Alex Trebek should be the host of a game show.**

And it was this deathbed [laugh] request, I guess, or command almost that Alex ultimately be the host of *Jeopardy!*.

Buzzy Cohen: The offer came at a critical moment in Trebek's life.

Peter Marshall: **I remember a game show he did in Canada, and they screwed him. They didn't pay him. They owed him \$50,000.**

Buzzy Cohen: This is Peter Marshall, again.

Peter Marshall: **And I can remember because he was struggling. He had done all these game shows, but he got a divorce and the whole thing. And he was kind of looking for work. And when he got *Jeopardy!*, let me tell you. He called me — He called me, Petey — he said, Petey, I, I've just been offered *Jeopardy*. He said, I don't know? He said, I think it's a little esoteric.**

I said, are you crazy? That is the perfect show for you. I said, listen to me, Alex, you're gonna run at least 10 years.

Buzzy Cohen: At * least * 10 years...

MUSIC OUT

Buzzy Cohen: But at that time, the question on everyone's mind was: could *Jeopardy!* be a hit again? Same show, new host.

It all hinged on Alex.

Find out more, after the break.

<AD BREAK>

ACT II:

[Alex Trebek Describes the New 'Jeopardy!' in 1984 | The Oprah Winfrey Show]:

Oprah: How do you feel following in Art Fleming's footsteps?

Buzzy Cohen: That's Oprah interviewing Alex back in 1984 shortly before the relaunch of Jeopardy.

[Alex Trebek Describes the New 'Jeopardy!' in 1984 | The Oprah Winfrey Show]:

Alex: Well, I'm not exactly following in his footsteps because the show went off the air

Buzzy Cohen: Twice.

[Alex Trebek Describes the New 'Jeopardy!' in 1984 | The Oprah Winfrey Show]:

Oprah: But people still do remember the old Jeopardy, you know?

Alex: They do, and I think it's going to help me because what it does is the new audience who will be watching us now come to our program with a good feeling about Jeopardy, they remember it fondly.

MUSIC: whimsical spacey music begins

And for that, I have to thank Art Fleming because he was such a good host for 12 years on NBC and helped the show become the hit it was.

Buzzy Cohen: For many Jeopardy fans, Art Fleming *was* the face of *Jeopardy!* and for some, he always would be.

Dave Wiliger: *Art Fleming was Jeopardy!. And Jeopardy! was Art Fleming.*

Buzzy Cohen: That's Dave Wiliger again.

Dave Wiliger: *You couldn't imagine Jeopardy without Art.*

Art Fleming's Host Intro on Jeopardy!

Don Pardo: And now here's the star of Jeopardy!, Art Fleming!

Art Fleming: Good morning, thank you players, thank you Don Pardo, thank you my friends...

Buzzy Cohen: That's who people were missing.

Even after Alex took the stage, some folks were holding out hope that Art would come back...

Art Fleming on KIRO News at Noon Nov 1990

Host: this is out of the blue, but any possibility you'll return to a Jeopardy! show?

Art Fleming: No, I don't think so. I did it for 12 and ½ years, 2858 shows. There are other things much more important in my life. I love it. I think the show is great. I'm glad it's back, but my life takes me all over the world.

Dave Wiliger: Maybe even the first year, we would get hate mail. Alex would get hate mail. Alex would go through the fan mail himself and read these sometimes horrible letters from fans. And he couldn't just necessarily toss them aside because that wasn't Alex. Alex wanted to contact these people.

I can't tell you how many times I actually walked into his office. He was sitting there with a fan letter on his desk, and if there was a phone number attached to it, he would call these people and he would spend time on the phone asking these people to please give him a chance because he loved the show and he was gonna be good for the show. He was gonna be a great host.

MUSIC IN: suspenseful drumming beat begins

Buzzy Cohen: Alex was determined to convince the public that he was right for this job, even as the letters kept rolling in. At first, his more reserved style seemed to alienate viewers.

Lisa Brofman: I think people were fascinated by Alex Trebek, but not necessarily in love with Alex Trebek. He was so handsome in the eighties, and he dressed like Don Johnson from Miami Vice.

Buzzy Cohen: This is Lisa Brofman, longtime Jeopardy producer.

Lisa Brofman: And there was a long period of time when people thought he was a bit arrogant. He was very good about foreign accents. They felt that he was showing off sometimes.

Buzzy Cohen: Part of that was thanks to Alex's French-Canadian upbringing — he could speak fluent French.

But it carried over to other pronunciations too. Here's Suzanne Stone, a former senior researcher at Jeopardy.

Suzanne Stone: If he had to pronounce a town in Finland, he wanted to make sure that the local consulate told us how to pronounce it correctly. And sometimes he would get on the phone too, with whoever it was to make sure that he heard exactly how to pronounce a foreign phrase or a foreign word.

Jeopardy! Show 3170 Archival

Alex Trebek: It's spoken in Hameenlinna & Hyvinkaa
 Contestant: What is Finnish?
 Alex: That's it!

Buzzy Cohen: He was meticulous. But to the audience, it seemed like he was kind of being a bit of a snob.

Still, the people at *Jeopardy!* knew that their host had some... je ne sais quoi. It was just a matter of getting the audience on board.

They had launched a campaign to promote Alex as the new face of *Jeopardy!* and decided to lean into the traits that viewers were critiquing: Alex's suave demeanor and debonair attitude.

In one of the ads - there's a beautiful woman, floundering in the water - Trebek, looking particularly natty in a tux, comes to her rescue and offers her a hand.

[1985 - Jeopardy on WMC - Alex to the Rescue Commercial]:

Alex: you can stay here

Actor: it may be dangerous

Alex: how do you think I got the yacht?

Actor: By putting yourself in Jeopardy

Buzzy Cohen: Never has a quiz show seemed so saucy

[1985 - Jeopardy on WMC - Alex to the Rescue Commercial]:

Actor: Andou don't mind being in Jeopardy?

Alex: Jeopardy is my life, it's the second most exciting game I know

Buzzy Cohen: There was a whole string of ads that played off of this Trebek persona. In one ad, he coolly reads a paper in an office full of people dancing.

In another, he jokes about knowing the difference between the two Twains.

Jeopardy! Archival:

Alex Trebek: I don't know the answers to all the questions, but I do know the difference between Mark Twain and Shania Twain

Buzzy Cohen: On top of the ad campaign, Alex took other steps to try and connect with Jeopardy viewers.

MUSIC: fast paced beat with momentum begins

He started talking directly to the audience.

Dave Wiliger: During the show when we'd be taping, many times, you know, the host of a show is more worried about what's coming up in the next segment.

And they're studying their notes and, you know, obviously *Jeopardy!*, there's 61 questions in the show. And, he needed to be up on everything that was coming up and focused. But he would always take the time to go out into the audience and talk with those audience members.

And he was funny and, you know, clever and silly at times. And he was winning them over basically one by one. And I think maybe they went home and told their friends and, you know, and so on and so on.

MUSIC OUT

DAVE WILIGER: But it still took time. There were still several, you know, years probably before people really started accepting him as the *Jeopardy!* host.

Buzzy Cohen: And several years before people started embracing the new *Jeopardy!* in general.

MUSIC: suspenseful beat builds

Suzanne Stone: The first couple of years were the hardest.

Buzzy Cohen: Suzanne Stone again.

Suzanne Stone: Who knew what was going to happen in television? We would have real hiatuses where we would file for unemployment.

Buzzy Cohen: The show was on shaky ground. It was new and finding its footing...

Dave Wiliger: We were only on, I wanna say like a dozen stations that had picked up the show. And in Los Angeles, we were on, I believe it was midnight or 12:30 AM. We were so disappointed because, in such a major market like Los Angeles, you know, who would ever watch our show.

And if you're not successful in Los Angeles, then the show's gonna go away very quickly.

Buzzy Cohen: And to complicate things, when Alex signed on to host, he also took on the role of producer.

[Howard Stern Show, Remembering Alex |

Alex Trebek: I said, who's going to produce? We don't have one yet. Ok, can I produce? Yes.

Buzzy Cohen: That meant, along with his hosting duties, Alex was making decisions about how the show was run. Everything from the set arrangement to wardrobe, to the content itself.

He was the face of the show and the person who was studying the show from backstage trying to figure out the necessary tweaks to make it a success.

But as we all know, it's hard to wear two hats at once.

More after the break.

<AD BREAK>

ACT III: THE FUTURE OF JEOPARDY

MUSIC: bright and fast paced techno beat begins

Buzzy Cohen: As producer, Alex raised the standards of the show. Suzanne Stone again.

Suzanne Stone: He wanted the material to keep lively, but also have that bedrock of information that we could be trusted with and that the audience could, you know, use or share in their daily lives that, oh, I saw something on *Jeopardy!* last night. And that proved to be true.

Buzzy Cohen: Here's Alex Trebek, in an interview with the Television Academy...

Alex Trebek on Jeopardy! Categories | Television Academy Interviews, 2007:

Alex Trebek: In the beginning we weren't sure how long we were going to last because I was getting feedback "too tough" - and I told them I'd ease up on the material - and I didn't ease up on the material...two months later, they said, hey you did well, it's all softened up, and I hadn't done a gosh darn thing.

Buzzy Cohen: But the most important change Alex introduced as producer had nothing to do with the content. It was related to the buzzer.

Let's go back to that first episode of Alex hosting Jeopardy. Notice anything weird?

Alex Trebek First episode of Jeopardy!

Contestant: Lakes and rivers, 400. Alex,

Alex: beating of a new category, the river mentioned most often in the Bible, Lewis.

Lois: The Nile. What the Nile.

Alex: incorrect? Greg,

Greg: what is the Jordan?

Alex: That is the right question. Select again for me.

Greg: Lakes and rivers for 200, please.

Alex" The answer is Scottish. Word for Lake Frank.

Frank: What is Locke?

Alex: That is right.

Contestant: let's try Inventions for a hundred, please.

Alex: Brand new category. The answer. Marco's wonderful wireless

Buzzy Cohen: Hear that beeping sound? It comes almost as soon as Alex starts to read the clue? That's a contestant buzzing in. They could ring in whenever they felt they knew the correct response - even before Alex was done reading the clue.

So after the first season, Producer Alex instituted a new rule that would help host Alex immensely.

Alex Trebek on Jeopardy! Categories | Television Academy Interviews, 2007:

Alex Trebek: I made one change after the first year that we've kept up all these years. And that is that the contestant can't ring in until I've read the clue in its entirety.

Buzzy Cohen: That rule-change solved a few problems.

MUX IN: whimsical spacey music begins

Buzzy Cohen: First, players couldn't be ringing in early only to pause...trying to come up with the right answer. So there were fewer incorrect responses, which makes the game go much smoother.

It also cleared up viewer confusion because audiences at home had no idea who rang in first if they just heard this beeping while Alex was mid-clue.

And, finally, the new rule would allow the audience watching at home more time to read the clues along with Alex. You got to play along too.

We're gonna get into this when we do an entire episode on the buzzer.

But the game wouldn't be what it is today without that rule-change.

Alex was working around the clock, but hosting and producing was a lot to take on and sometimes the two jobs seemed in opposition to each other.

Lisa Brofman remembers Henry Lickel, the show's former art director, getting peeved about this.

Lisa Brofman: Henry was a wonderful character. He always came dressed in a three piece suit. He was so dignified and so well spoken but at one point, he went storming up to Merv and said, you've got to put this host in his place. He's trying to tell me how to design the set and I won't have it. And Merv looked at Henry and said, Henry, he's also the producer.

Buzzy Cohen: Here's Dave Wiliger again.

Dave Wiliger: I do recall times, when we first began taping the show, where we'd be in the middle of the show and Alex would make a mistake and he would just, he would shout out, let's cut.

And, like, we'd all look at each other and why did he just do that?

He was wearing that producer hat as he was wearing the host hat. And both those hats did not fit at the same time. So I finally said to him, look, during the show, you host the show. I'll take care of the other stuff.

Buzzy Cohen: After doing double duty for the first three years of the show, Trebek turned to hosting full time.

He had catapulted the show forward, but there were still some other kinks they had to work out.

Previously, clues were presented manually. They were written out on little boards and someone would pull up a card when it was time for that clue.

But now there was a new system for clues. They were uploaded onto a disc, which was inserted into a computer on the stage, and that loaded the clues onto the board. Like all technological developments, it saved time.

But it also caused some grief.

Lisa Brofman: At the beginning, we had some glitches about once every five shows when the game board would change from the logos to the dollar amounts, something might happen where all of the monitors didn't pop on or the wrong things popped on the monitors.

And Alex Trebek would take off his shoe and throw the shoe at the game board and then say some bad words.

Buzzy Cohen: But Alex being Alex, he played it up as a bit and got huge laughs from the studio audience.

Lisa Brofman: It became a regular thing and we would go on with it.

Buzzy Cohen: Eventually, the electronics system engineer, Ron Schwab, was able to fix the issue, and that was the end of Alex's shoe-throwing days.

With fewer malfunctions, Jeopardy started to find a rhythm. Alex was building a rapport with the audience and ratings were picking up.

Suzanne Stone again.

Suzanne Stone: I think it was in the third season that Alex happily announced that, you know, we were going to be year round employees

MUSIC: whimsical spacey music begins

Buzzy Cohen: It seemed the tides had finally turned... People liked the new *Jeopardy!*...and they really liked Alex.

He won his first Emmy in 1989. And then, just kept on winning them...

Alex Trebek at '90s Emmy Award Show:

Alex Trebek: Thank you very, very much. I can't tell you how scared I was today with two out of three nominations if I had not. I don't think I'm a good enough actor to sit out there and put a smile on my face and say, isn't that special? Bob won it again. But I am, I am honored to, uh, have been selected as a winner

Buzzy Cohen: A playful little jab at fellow gameshow legend Bob Barker. But the truth was, Alex (and *Jeopardy!*) were taking off in ways that other hosts and other game shows never had. TV programs and movies started name-dropping Jeopardy.

Like in 1990, Cheers built a whole episode around it!

In it, one of the bar regulars, Cliff Clavin (played by John Ratzenberger) makes it on *Jeopardy!*, with Alex guest starring as, of course, himself.

Cliff Clavin on Jeopardy Archival:

Johnny Gilbert: This is Jeopardy. Now entering the studio are today's contestants. A doctor and chief of neurosurgery at Boston General Hospital, Milford Reynolds, a lawyer and mother of six Agnes Boors and a mailman Cliff Klavin. And now here is the host of Jeopardy, Alex Trebek.

Alex Trebek: Thank you, Johnny. Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

Hi everyone, and welcome to a very special edition of Jeopardy!

Buzzy Cohen: Cliff is in the lead going into final Jeopardy. The category is movies.

Alex Trebek: *Here we go. Our final jeopardy answer is Archie Bald Leach, Bernard Schwartz and Lucille Luer. Good luck players.*

Buzzy Cohen: Cliff's response?

Cliff Clavin on Jeopardy Archival:

Alex Trebek: *You wrote down, who are three people who have never been in my kitchen...No, I'm sorry. That too is wrong. But the right response is what were the real names of Cary Grant? Tony Curtis and Joan Crawford.*

Buzzy Cohen: Despite Cliff's protests (those people, of course, were never in his kitchen), he loses. But later Alex comes to the Cheers bar to tell Cliff that his response *should* have been accepted – and then tries to resign...

Alex Trebek and Cliff Clavin at the Cheers Bar Archival:

Alex Trebek: *You know, it's a funny thing. You spend years hosting a show and you get into the habit of thinking there's just one correct question for every answer. But life doesn't always work out that way. The world is much more complex and you discover that there are many different ways of looking at the universe.*

Cliff Clavin: *Yeah. So, uh, what are you gonna do?*

Alex Trebek: *I think I'm gonna quit my job as host of Jeopardy!, maybe spend a little time in Tibet.*

Cliff Clavin: *Oh, no, Alex. Alex, sit down here. I mean, you got, you don't know what you're saying.*

Alex Trebek : *Well, now wait a minute. How can I go on hosting the program if I'm filled with all these doubts?*

Cliff Clavin: *All right, Alex, think about what Jeopardy means to America. Yeah, it's more than just a game show. I mean, This is much a part of the national fabric as the postal uniform that I wear with pride every single day.*

Alex Trebek: *So you think I should stay as the host of Jeopardy?*

Cliff Clavin: *Absolutely.*

Buzzy Cohen: Cheers nailed the episode — capturing what Jeopardy meant to viewers across the country. And Alex nailed his cameo.

By the 90s it was clear that Merv had finally created a version of the show that had real staying power...

And despite some initial skepticism, Alex Trebek had real staying power too.

THEME MUSIC

Buzzy Cohen: Next time on This is Jeopardy: The Story of America's Favorite Quiz Show...

Fritz: Over the course of the next four months, I actually did about 25,000 practice buzzes. I tried with my right thumb and my left thumb. I tried with index finger. I tried it with my pinky. I tried it with all 10 fingers, actually, just in case one of them turned out to be super fast.

CREDITS

This is Jeopardy! The Story of America's Favorite Quiz Show is a production of Somethin' Else, Sony Music Entertainment, and Sony Pictures TV.

It's hosted by me, Buzzy Cohen.

This episode was produced by Julia Doyle and Sylvie Lubow.

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Our theme music was composed by Hannis Brown. Our engineer is Cedric Wilson.

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CITATION

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