

Payola's First Fatality

by June Bundy



There are many ironic aspects about the untimely death of Alan Freed. Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that the man who pioneered rock and roll as we know it today should die just as r & r is finally establishing itself as a respected and respectable programming ingredient of big time television.

Freed was the fall guy in the deejay payola investigations of 1960, just as Charles Van Doren was the scapegoat of the TV quiz show scandals. We certainly don't condone the practice of payola. However, we most decidedly **do** condemn an industry (and that includes trade papers) where one man—stupid, weak, naive, call him what you will—was made to bear the brunt of punishment, while hundreds of others—equally if not more guilty of the same crime—escaped because they were shrewd enough to “legalize” their take. Freed was much used by many record and show business people who profited far more from his power than Freed himself did.

One thing is certain, Alan Freed was far more sensitive and vulnerable than the vast majority of jocks who were mixed up with payola.

Of the seven men indicted with Freed on payola charges back in 1960, three are currently spinning disks on New York radio; one just joined a “Top 40” Miami Beach outlet; and one is the program director of a Los Angeles station.

Failed to bounce back

Only Freed failed to bounce back. Instead he became payola's first fatality, a tragic lesson for the entire industry.

The press gave Freed's demise a big play and a few papers (mainly the trades) paid belated recognition to the fact that Freed had been the “whipping boy for the record and radio business.”

However, three of Freed's fellow deejays summed up

best the bitter reaction of those who had known and liked him both before and **after** the hard fall.

George “Hound Dog” Lorenz wrote “If Freed died of anything other than a liver condition it can be attributed to a broken heart, which of course no hospital could mend. There are a good many guys on Broadway today and other major cities who are mighty rich due to the tremendous assistance and advice of Alan Freed. It'll be interesting to see how expensive their floral pieces are at the funeral.”

Tom Donahue and Bob Mitchell, KYA, San Francisco, were equally caustic. “Too much of the public,” they said in last week's Tempo, “he (Freed) became a figure of ridicule, a symbol of what we all know we are but don't want the world to find out. To his friends he became a figure of pity, unable to realize what had really happened or to what a degree he had taken the rap for thousands of others.

... His death may make it easier for those who turned their backs on him, to live. Or maybe they've been pretending he was dead since 1959.”

Around the Dial

Rock and roll and “Top 40” personalities are also invading situation comedies on TV this year. British stars Chad (Stuart) and Jeremy (Clyde) sing and act as part of the plot on “The Dick Van Dyke Show” (CBS) February 10, and ABC is readying a new situation comedy series, “Gidget,” which will feature rock and roll and surfing backgrounds. The “Top 40” field even rates a documentary this year. David Wolper, who won several awards for his “Making of a President” series, is currently filming a special report on Phyllis Records President Phil “Tycoon of Teen” Spector for NBC.

MAN TO REMEMBER. If the tears are few, the realization should be great on the part of the music industry that he was one of the most important men to appear on the pop music scene in the past two decades.

Alan Freed would have liked to be remembered for introducing Negro artists to a wider audience, and for popularizing them and their music. For that he should be remembered. He was a bigger man than those who turned their backs on him.

BOB ROLONTZ