

Movie on disc jockey Freed should pain true Akron fans

PEOPLE USED Alan Freed during his brief and, at the end, stormy career as a popular announcer and disc jockey here.

In turn, to help him climb the popularity charts, Freed used them.

As anyone who has spent some time around entertainers knows, this is normal behavior on both sides. The motivation is obvious enough — a desire for money; a feeling not exclusive to the entertainment business by any means.

His Akron years were a terse forecast of what would occur after he moved to Cleveland and then, in 1954, to New York.

His fame grew, largely as a pioneer, at least, of rock 'n' roll music; his stage shows drew huge crowds.

But, as in Akron, it all ended in bitter feelings, domestic troubles, an abrupt exit from the airwaves and scenes in a courtroom.



Alan Freed
... in 1959 photo

AND NOW

FREED, who deserved a better fate in every way, is to be the gimmick for a movie about "the music, the beat, the rowdiness, the excitement" of rock 'n' roll.

The film, titled "American Hot Wax," is in the can. Most of the scenes were shot at the Wiltern Theater on Wilshire Boulevard, the Civic of Los Angeles.

It was produced by Art Linson and directed by Floyd Mutrux for Paramount Pictures. The action covers a week in the life of Freed "and an assortment of other characters" during his New York days.

Lee Grant, writing in the Los Angeles Times, reports that Tim McIntire, recently of "The Choirboys," plays Freed with "greased hair and a gaudy checkered sport coat."

This last statement is painful. Freed had naturally curly hair — and good taste in clothes (his father, Charles, owned a clothing business in Salem, Ohio). His one departure from the norm was a passion for snowwhite raincoats.

IN FACT, the whole concept of "American Hot Wax" is painful.

Director Mutrux told the Times writer, "It's great fun to make a movie about rock 'n' roll. I was, as a kid, heavily into it."

Ken Nichols



Fun. The Times article continues, "The stage show will be the film's climax as the characters' lives come together. It ends, as did a 1958 Alan Freed concert in Boston, in a riot."

So the picture is to be sound and fury. It could have been a memorable character study of a little man done in by too much applause.

There have been film biographies in such a vein but most of these, if not all, have concerned themselves with the corroding effects of sudden wealth or political power.

FREED GREW UP in Salem and graduated from Salem High in 1940. He attended Ohio State for two years before landing a full-time radio job.

He wanted that job. At home he drove his parents to distraction by reading aloud every story in the newspaper each night "for practice."

At New Castle, Pa., he earned, at first, \$17 a week.

Freed came to WAKR in 1947 from Youngstown. His wife, Betty Lou, was ill. They had two children. People who were around the station then feel he was "befriended" by owners S. Bernard and Viola Berk. They gave him opportunities to earn "talent fees" on a number of shows.

After he was established, more and more representatives of record companies dropped around for a visit to the broadcast booth. They brought gifts, often a bottle. Their attitude, if nothing else, said "please play our records."

Freed was unsure of himself then. When he was assigned to do a late-hour Christmas charity show, his first move was to line up several well-known people as "helpers." If the show dragged, he could call on them. But the donations rolled in by telephone and showed no signs of slacking off. He never called on a single helper to spell him at the microphone.

ONE OF HIS new-found friends was a night club owner and sometimes showman. "The station," he assured Freed, "is growing rich on your work," or words to that effect. His idea: He and Freed would buy the time from the station for the record show and sell the commercials themselves. "No," the Berks said.

Freed tried to move to another station here but WAKR invoked the clause in Freed's "milkman's" contract which forbade him from broadcasting for a rival. The courts upheld the contract.

FREED TRIED his hand at TV in Cleveland without notable success (the medium was still in the raw). He returned to radio — WJW in Cleveland.

His "Moondog" show, slanted in many respects to those who liked the music of black performers, became such a success that he was lured to New York by station WINS for a reputed salary of \$75,000 a year plus percentages. A long way from New Castle.

By that time, he had a second wife, Marge, and, in time, would have two more children.

The New York years were tumultuous.

He was sued by a competitor who claimed the "Moondog" title was rightfully his; he was arrested in Boston for inciting a riot (in a theater with his "Big Beat" show); he left WINS, charging the station failed to back him up in the Boston hassle; and he was dropped by his next employer, WABC, in a disagreement over the "payola" scandal of those years.

He and his third wife, Inga, left New York in 1959 for Palm Springs, Calif. In 1962, Freed pleaded guilty to two charges of accepting commercial bribes (payola); two years later an indictment for income tax evasion was returned against him by a federal grand jury.

HE DIED AT Palm Springs in January 1965. "American Hot Wax" blames it on alcohol.

Betty Lou has six children by another husband; Marge is living in Connecticut and Inga in New York, we're told. Alan Jr. is a student in Texas; Lance, with AM Records in Los Angeles; Sieglinde is the wife of a Methodist minister in Florida, and Mrs. Alana Libertore in California.

Freed is to be presented in "American Hot Wax" as "a rebel against the establishment." That's not true. He was a victim of the recorded music establishment of the '50s.



Inga Freed