

# Why Freed cried at 'Moon Dog Ball'

By JANE SCOTT

ROCK CRITIC

"Moon Dog Madness" ... "Moon Doggers 'Break It Up'" ... "Moon Dog Ball Is Halted as 6,000 Crash Arena Gate."

Those were the headlines on March 22, 1952, after the world's first rock concert at the old Arena.

Many people today feel that Alan Freed, the "King of the Moon Doggers," got a bum rap.

The next night Freed took to his WJW radio microphone to give his side of the story. He was not the promoter, but hired as the performers were, he said. And the show was not oversold.

The Call and Post, which reported that radio show a week later, called it one of the most unusual programs in the history of radio. "Moondog Promoter Weeps in His Beer," read that headline.

On his show Freed said he was so sick at heart at the crush of people at the dance that "I went off by myself and cried."

The tape, acquired by Norm N. Nite, rock author and host of a weekend rock program at WCBS-FM in New York, shows Freed close to tears in his appeal to his fans.

*Everyone was having a good time until the crushing press of 10,000 people smashed open the doors. . . . Then some 7,000 persons without tickets 'bulged the inside of the Arena and the whole show went out of control.'*

"Hello, everybody," he started out. "This is Alan Freed speaking — and I want to have a little talk with you before our regular 'Moon Dog Show' tonight."

He had no idea that the turnout would come anywhere close to the tremendous number at the Cleveland Arena, he said.

"If anyone even in their wildest imagination would have told us that some 20 to 25,000 people would try to get into a dance — well, I suppose you would have been just like me, and you probably would have laughed and said they were crazy," he said.

Denying that the house was oversold, Freed said: "Internal revenue figures can prove that only 9,700 tickets were sold. The sale of tickets was stopped at that point by authorities and not by anyone connected with the promotion or management of the show. We were still some 2,300 admissions sold short of the capacity of the Arena."

Freed pointed out that 13,000 tickets were sold a few weeks before for a Harlem Globe Trotters game at the Arena, almost 4,000 more than for the "Moon Doggers."

For the first hour of the show everyone was having a good time until the crushing press of 10,000 people smashed open the doors, Freed said. Then some 7,000 persons without tickets "bulged the inside of the Arena and the whole show went out control."

If he were the promoter he would want to refund the tickets to all those who couldn't get in, he said.

"It has been emphasized in the newspapers that I was the promoter of the ball, and I want to clarify that at once," Freed stressed. "I was engaged just as Tiny Grimes, and Paul Williams, and the Dominoes and Varetta Dillard and Danny Cobb. Solely to act as your master of ceremonies and to use the 'Moon Dog'

radio show to advertise the ball."

The promoter and business manager of the event was Lew Platt of Akron, "one of the most honest and sincere theatrical promoters in America," Freed said.

By the middle of the tape Freed's strong rapport with his "Moon Dog" listeners came through loud and clear. "Tell us tonight that you are with the Moon Dog," he said, asking for their calls, telegrams and cards. "I will make it right with you . . . as Erin Brew, the Standard beer, Northern Ohio's largest selling beer, brings you the 'MOON DOG SHOW!'"

Those with unused tickets would get the best seats in the house at the next shows, he promised. Keep those telephone calls coming.

The ads on May 17, 1952, told the story. "By popular demand — The King of the Moondoggers Alan Freed Presents the Moondog Maytime Ball at the Cleveland Arena, Saturday, May 17, at 10 p.m., Sunday May 18, at 10 p.m. Plus a Special Teen-ager's Matinee Sunday at 3 p.m." The Dominoes headed the show again.

Freed also had a "Moondog Caravan of Stars" on May 24, 1952, at Public Hall. Seems the city fathers could find no legal way to prevent the shows.



The King of the Moon Doggers — Alan Freed — in happier times.