

# Alan 'Freed' us to rock and roll

## Concert info

**WHAT:** Moondog Coronation Ball

**WHEN:** March 25 at 8 p.m.

**WHERE:** CSU Convocation Center, 2000 Prospect Ave., Cleveland

**TICKETS:** \$25.50; Ticket-master, 241-5555.

Henry Niedzwiecki  
The Chronicle-Telegram

To those fans of Megadeth and Soundgarden, the Moondog Coronation Ball may be ancient history. But for those growing up in Cleveland during the 50's, the mere mention of that name brings back memories.

Alan Freed, born Albert James Freed in 1922, graduated from Ohio State University as an engineer. His career began as a disc jockey at WAKR in Akron in 1945. In May 1951 he tried playing records on Cleveland TV station WXEL (Channel 9).

That idea didn't work but Freed stayed with the station, hosting an afternoon movie.

In July 1951, Freed began a late-night radio show originally known as the "Moondog House" or "Moondog Show."

Freed was certainly different. Never before had a white DJ played "race music or sepiä." When they found out, he had parents 'going ape.'

The "Moondog" was heard from 11:15 p.m. till 2:30 a.m. on Sat-



Alan Freed

urdays on radio station WJW. The show opened with the howling of a dog followed by the theme song "Blues for the Red Boy" by Todd Rhodes. Freed then took requests, and for the first time, we heard music with a real beat.

Freed and the first Moondog Coronation Ball made headlines Saturday, March 22, 1952, when newspaper accounts proclaimed "Warrants Brought in Blues Ball Brawl." Supposedly 8,700 tickets were sold at the door on top of 6,000 advance tickets. Still more people wanted in and it was just too much for fire and police forces to handle.

It didn't help that Freed had promised but did not book the Orioles. The bill of performers did include The Tiny Grimes Band, Paul Williams, The Dominoes

(formerly the Royals), Baretta Dillard and Donnie Cogg.

The old Moondog made some serious waves.

That same night, we were listening for the "Mondog Howl." It didn't come. Instead, we heard a rather somber Alan Freed telling us his version of what happened at the Arena the night before.

For the first hour, 9,700 people were inside enjoying the show when 7,000 fans outside smashed their way inside.

Freed's fame began that night when he asked anyone phoning in a request to say "you are for the Moondog."

The response was overwhelming. Not only did people call. They came to the station and even sent telegrams. The station management must have been on hand because within an hour a new, upbeat "Moondog" announced that there would be a daily "Moondog Matinee" starting March 24.

Freed thanked his "Moondoggers" for sticking with him through thick and thin, and his sponsors, Erin Brew the Standard Beer, and Record Rendezvous.

One night while playing a Bill Haley tune entitled "Rock-A-Beating-Boogie," Freed was pounding on a telephone book keeping time when he heard the words "Rock, rock, rock, everybody, roll, roll, roll."

According to Haley, that's when Freed coined the phrase "Rock-N-Roll."

The Cleveland DJ would wait till about 1:30 a.m. when he fig-

ured the station manager was asleep and play some of the really "dirty recordings."

Songs like "Work With Me, Annie" by the Midnighters and other 'Annie' songs, and the Dominoes with "60 Minute Man," and Shirley and Lee's "Let The Good Times Roll."

Some of these songs were a lot more than suggestive, if you knew what the words meant.

Freed had another ball at the Arena in May of 1952 called the Maytime Ball. He had a tough time getting the required permits but was determined to make good on the first show. There were three shows and an extra 50 police.

Freed was one of the first to find a base that brought blacks and whites together through music, dancing and the heavy beat.

The freelance DJ did his final "Moondog House Show" for WJW Sept. 4, 1954.

Two days later Freed began broadcasting at WINS, a 50,000-watt station in New York City that paid him a guaranteed \$75,000 annual salary and began syndicating his show to 40 markets across the country.

Freed was 32.

He did so well in the New York area that he began to make movie appearances for Paramount Pictures, the biggest of which was the

1957 movie "Don't Knock The Rock." Freed was paid \$29,000 a day. His movie co-stars included Bill Haley and the Comets, the Treniers, Little Richard, Allen Dale and Dave Dappell.

Freed also appeared in "Rock, Rock, Rock" and "Rock Around The Clock."

When asked his impressions of Times Square, Freed was quoted as saying "It ain't square — man, it rocks."

On Nov. 26, 1959, Freed was subpoenaed to answer questions about payola in connection with his TV show "The Big Beat" on New York City's WNEW-TV.

He was fired for refusing to deny he took payola, and in 1962 he pleaded guilty to two counts of commercial bribery. Freed received a six-month suspended sentence and a \$300 fine.

In March 1964, a New York federal grand jury indicted Freed on a charge of evading \$37,000 in income taxes. He died Jan. 20, 1965 of uremia at age 42.

This year's Moondog Coronation Ball will be Saturday, March 25 at 8 p.m. at the Cleveland State University Convocation Center.

Presented by WMJI-FM 105.7 and Canterbury Productions, the 1995 edition will feature 12 acts including Jay Black & The Americans, Little Anthony & The Original Imperials, The Drifters, and The Chordettes.