

Rock show still a thrill for Chuck Berry

By CARL ARRINGTON

HE DROVE crowds crazy with it. He'd profile, bending one leg and bouncing the other in front of him, and slide across the stage with unabashed glee.

At 43, Chuck Berry is still doing the "Duck Walk." The place to catch him in the act is at your local theater in "American Hot Wax." It is an apocryphal tale centered loosely around the life of the late legendary disc jockey Alan Freed, who purportedly coined the phrase "rock 'n' roll" in 1952. The film is more a celebration of a spirit of the early rock era than a factual recreation.

Berry, who is to rock what John Wayne is to movies, plays in himself. He has a brief dramatic exchange with Freed and then sings a couple of songs.

The seven minutes he is on the screen certainly don't begin to suggest the impact Berry has had on popular music. Besides his own raucous, innovative style that yielded hits like "Roll Over Beethoven" and "Sweet Little Sixteen", he was a major inspiration to groups like The Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

This week Berry was in New York to talk about his life and career.

Berry looks well-preserved, though not as youthful as he does in the movie. His eyes and grey hairs in his sideburns are the only obvious evidence of his age.

Recalling 1959, the year in which "American Hot Wax" is set, Berry said, "Kids really were crazy at the shows and dancing in the aisles. But I was moving so fast from gig to gig and putting out records at that time it's hard to remember specific things."

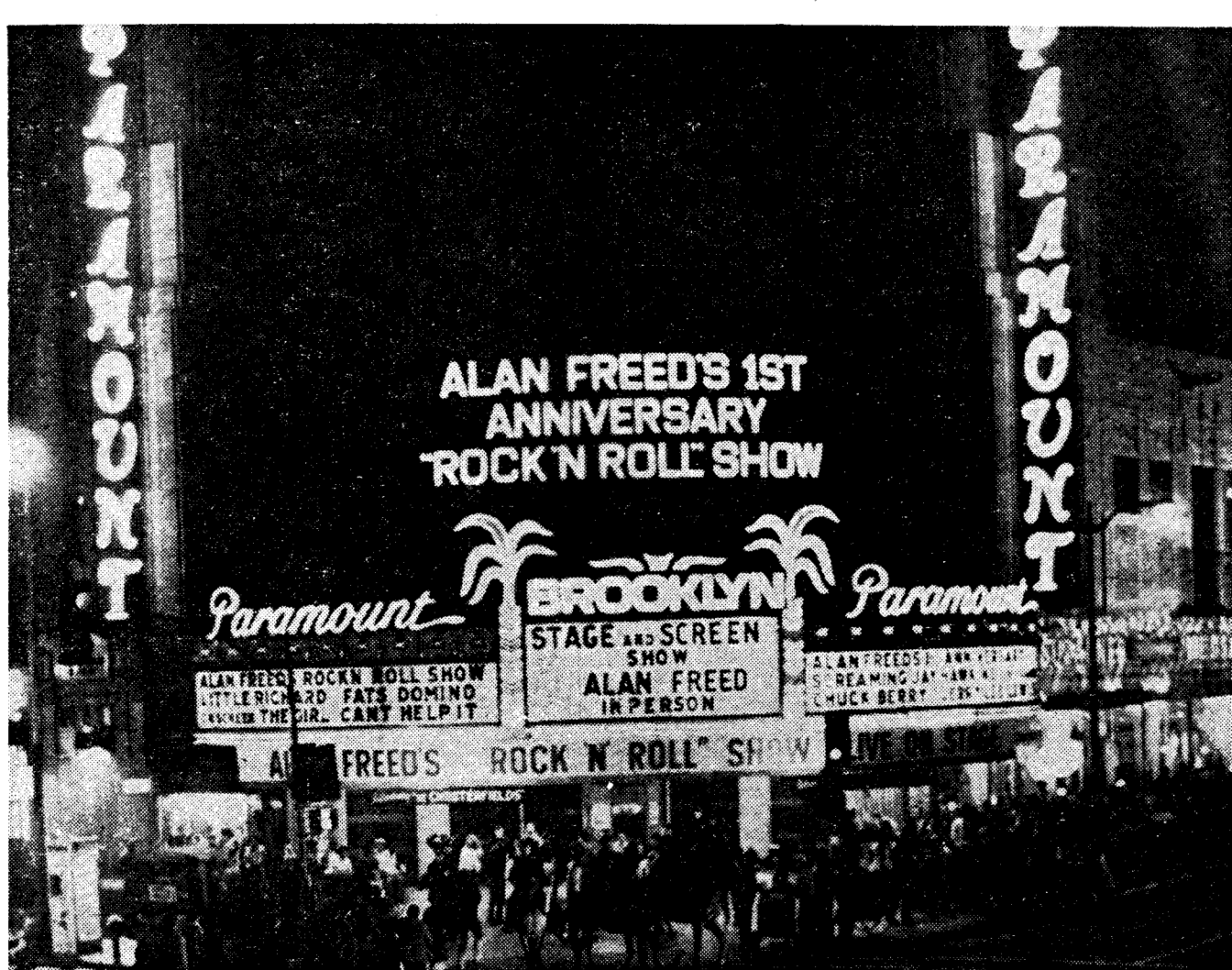
Berry has numerous connections with the real Alan Freed. Freed not only broke Berry's first hits but also on his first major song, "Maybelline." He also played at a number of Freed-sponsored shows.

Berry is no longer living life in its fastest lane, but he is still cruising. He still performs about 40 times a year, composes and records and enjoys it when he can get together with old friends like Muddy Waters (who got him his first record contract with Chess), Fats Domino, Vaughn.

However only a small portion of his life is devoted to rock 'n' roll. He lives on a large estate in a town called Wentzville just outside St. Louis with his family.

Most of his time is devoted to his business interests which include real estate, a commercial videotape company and a recording studio.

He says his busy schedule allows him time to listen to current rock only when he goes to an awards ceremony or concert where someone else performs.



The Brooklyn Paramount of 1959 as recreated in "American Hot Wax."