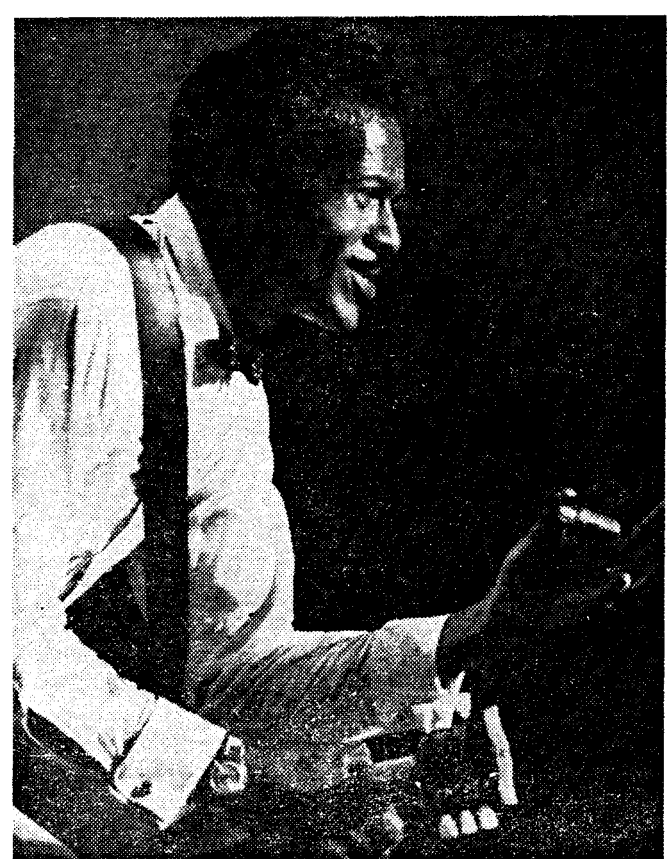


The Brooklyn Paramount of 1959 as recreated in "American Hot Wax."

THE SCENE'S LOU O'NEILL JR. LOOKS AT 'HOT WAX' FROM ANOTHER VIEW

At last, an honest look at an era



CHUCK BERRY

ABOUT A month after Elvis Presley died, I found myself visiting an old friend, WNBC D-J, Norman N. Nite, at his Park Avenue apartment.

Over the course of the evening the name of the late Alan Freed came up. Nite, the author of "Rock On," the chronicle of the '50s scene, noted that Freed, the man who invented the words rock 'n' roll had become one of the forgotten figures of rock.

Well, not any more. "American Hot Wax" is about the life and times of Alan Freed and all the wonderful music which came out between 1954 and 1959.

The movie opens with a shot of Tim McIntire, the young actor who so convincingly brings Freed to life, sitting between a radio station console ready to go on-the-air. The first words we hear are "This is Alan Freed and this is rock 'n' roll." A second later we hear the sound of Little Richard's '50s standard "Tutti Fruitti."

As the movie continues we see Freed portrayed in countless real life situations. Whether besieged by record company sharples hot on the hustle to get their singles played on Freed's show, or trying to arbitrate a cease fire between his loyal secretary, Sheryl (Fran Drescher) and his limo driver, Mookie (Jay Leno), Freed is portrayed as a regular person and not a figment of a screenwriter's fantasy.

We enjoyed "American Hot Wax" because of the film's profound realism and honesty. Producer Art ("Car Wash") Linson obviously put painstaking research into the production. The music is fabulous. Kenny Vance, originally of Jay and the Americans,

served as a sound consultant to Linson. Vance clearly knew which songs to include. Chuck Berry, Screamin' Hawkins and countless other stars of that era all make personal appearances.

The climax of "American Hot Wax" occurs at the Brooklyn Paramount theater where Freed is staging his annual rock show. It seems that every figure of authority wants to bust the young D-J because, as one cop puts it, "It's Allen Freed we hate. He's got these kids behaving like animals. He's making them behave like a bunch of animals."

If all this sounds farfetched, remember we're talking about 1959 and the rampant hysteria and fear the adult population had of rock 'n' roll and the bizarre behavior it seemed to produce.

In the final scenes, the cops decide that Jerry Lee Lewis, who is on stage rocking up a storm, has gone far enough, and order the house lights on. Only seconds earlier, Freed tells the cops "you can close the show, you can stop me, but you can't stop rock 'n' roll."

I didn't expect to enjoy "American Hot Wax" as much as I did. It's the most honest film since "American Graffiti" and deals with a pivotal period in the history of music.

This movie carries the PG (parental guidance suggested) rating, primarily because of some salty talk and itchy fingers on the part of Freed's driver Mookie. Nonetheless, "Wax's" value as a conveyor of the way it went down, far outweighs its spicy dialog. At last, someone's made an accurate rock movie which captures the style and wonder of the '50s.