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*Golly: Alan Freed (Judd Nelson) and Little Richard (Walter Franks).*

## 'Mr. Rock 'n' Roll'

By Barry Garron

Disc jockey Alan Freed lived life on the cutting edge of early rock 'n' roll, which must have been pretty heady and packed with excitement and emotion. In other words, it probably bore little resemblance to the tepid, bleached-out and cliché-ridden film that purports to tell the story of Freed's rapid rise and even more rapid descent in rock's first decade.

Based on John A. Jackson's book "Big Beat Heat: The Alan Freed Story," "Mr. Rock 'n' Roll: The Alan Freed Story" turns the chain-smoking, hard-drinking, free-spending disc jockey into a naive Boy Scout motivated strictly by a love for the music. Sure, Freed, like other figures in rock's early years, was unfairly accused of destroying teen

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### MR. ROCK 'N' ROLL: THE ALAN FREED STORY NBC

A von Zerneck/Sertner Films production  
 Executive producers ..... Frank von Zerneck,  
 Robert Sertner, Andy Wolk, Matt Dorff  
 Co-executive producers ..... Erik Storey, Larry Levy  
 Producers ..... Randy Suttler, Rick Arredondo  
 Co-producer ..... Ted Babcock  
 Associate producer ..... Peter Sadowski  
 Director ..... Andy Wolk  
 Teleplay ..... Matt Dorff  
 Based on the book by ..... John A. Jackson  
 Director of photography ..... Derick Unterschultz  
 Production designer ..... Peter Cosco  
 Art director ..... Humberto Garcia  
 Set decorator ..... Rex Fields  
 Editor ..... Mark Conte  
 Music ..... Lawrence Shragge  
 Costume designer ..... Trysha Bakker  
 Casting ..... Susan Glicksman,  
 Fern Ornstein, Clare Walker

**Cast:** Judd Nelson, Madchen Amick, David Gianopoulos, Daniel Kash, Leon, Paula Abdul, Fabian, Bobby Rydell, James C. Victor, Walter Franks, Joe Warren Davis, Michael Dunston, LeRoy D. Brazile, Michael Hall, Fulvio Cecere, Mark Wilson, Ross Petty, Richard Fitzpatrick, Aron Tager, Reg Dreger, Bruce Hunter, Emidio Michetti, Egidio Tari, Robert Thomas, David Crean, Britany Whalen

Airdate: Sunday, Oct. 17, 9-11 p.m.

## 'Mr. Rock'

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morals and pushing black music on white audiences. And he was unjustly hounded by authorities. Meanwhile, though, he made a ton of money from national tours, movie appearances, promotions and unethical acceptance of payola.

This NBC telefilm all but absolves him of his poor judgment for taking payola for record airplay, for getting even more money as a record company "consultant" and for virtually ignoring his kids from two marriages. His poverty at the end of the film comes as a surprise because, in its zeal to transform Freed into the person he wasn't, there isn't a hint that he has been spending every cent he made. Nor do we ever learn where the money went.

The movie suggests that Freed, whose influence was largely in Cleveland and then New York, single-handedly spread the gospel of rock music throughout the country, paving the way for white acceptance of black artists. There is no mention of Elvis Presley or other white artists who appropriated and repackaged the music, thus giving it wide exposure to white teens.

Judd Nelson ("The Breakfast Club") gives a fairly one-note performance as Freed, as if wandering through life with blinders. But then it's hard to bring to life such trite dialogue as "I was still lost, and deep inside I knew it." Meanwhile, director Andy Wolk puts so many scenes in darkly lit, hazy rooms, studios and concert halls that the film should carry a warning for secondhand smoke.

Madchen Amick ("Twin Peaks") plays second wife Jackie, an even more one-dimensional character than Freed. Matt Dorff's teleplay provides her with little emotional range. Mostly, she's there to be the dispenser of sound logic and reasonable advice — which, of course, is unheeded. Then there's David Gianopoulos, who plays record label owner and mob associate Moe Levy as if plucked straight from central casting. In addition, there are cameos by Bobby Rydell and Fabian, '50s teen idols whose music isn't played here.

The one bright element here is the use of the original recording artists for the movie soundtrack, though even the impact of that decision is diluted by some of the worst lip-syncing this side of "American Bandstand." □