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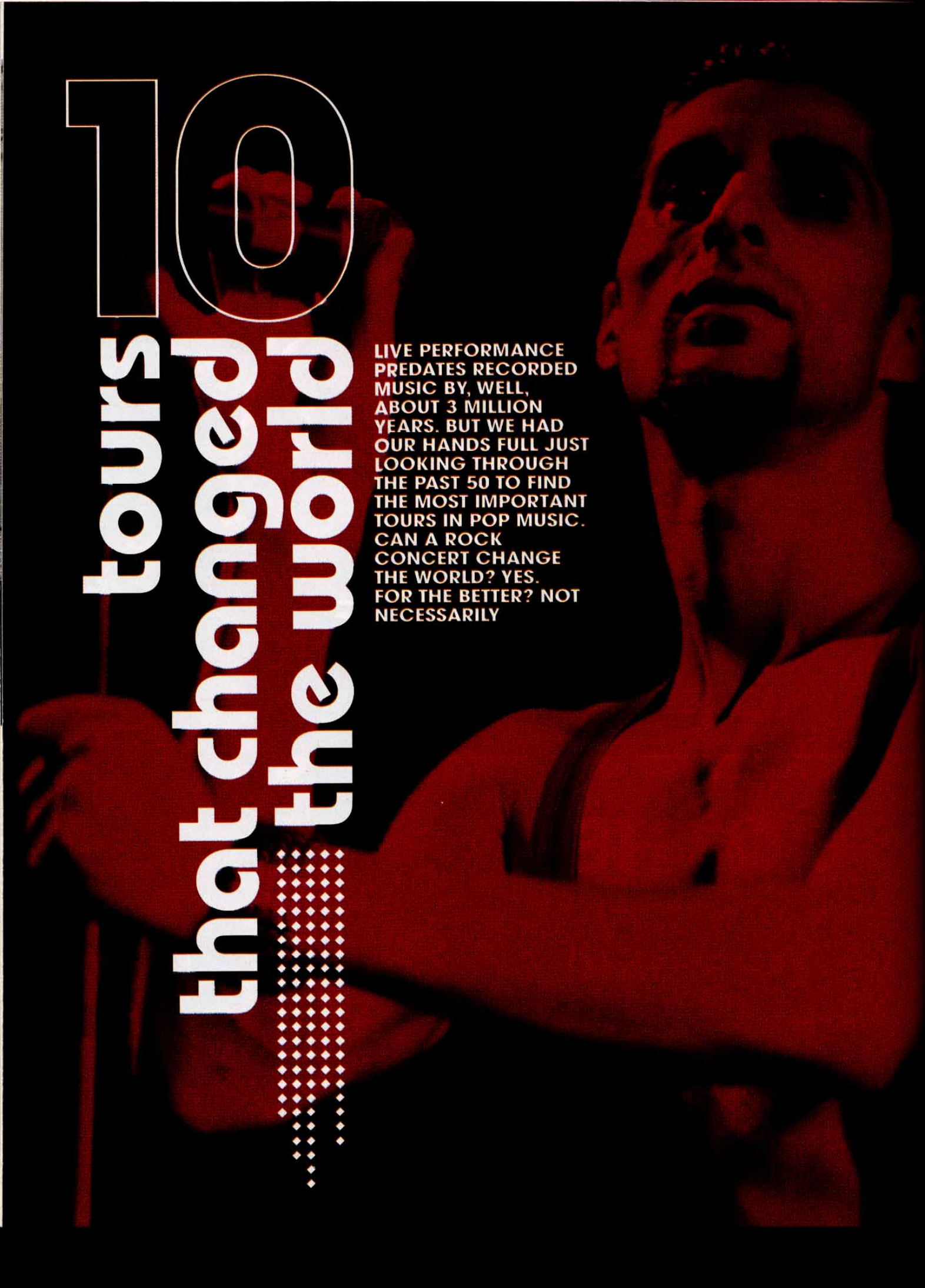
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10 tours that changed the world

LIVE PERFORMANCE
PREDATES RECORDED
MUSIC BY, WELL,
ABOUT 3 MILLION
YEARS. BUT WE HAD
OUR HANDS FULL JUST
LOOKING THROUGH
THE PAST 50 TO FIND
THE MOST IMPORTANT
TOURS IN POP MUSIC.
CAN A ROCK
CONCERT CHANGE
THE WORLD? YES.
FOR THE BETTER? NOT
NECESSARILY



Various Artists

Alan Freed's rock'n'roll package tours, 1952–1958

6 THE MOST TERRIBLE BALL OF THEM ALL! screamed posters for the Moondog Coronation Ball in spring 1952. More than 20,000 teens gathered outside the Cleveland Arena for a show headlined by now-forgotten R&B performers Paul “Hucklebuck” Williams and Tiny Grimes. The arena seated only 10,000, so police shut the event down before it started—and all hell broke loose. The result, according to the late critic Robert Palmer: “The first rock and roll concert was also the occasion of the first rock and roll riot.”

The ball's 30-year-old mastermind, local DJ and promoter Alan Freed, soon appropriated the name “rock'n'roll”—an old blues double entendre for fucking. The sound wasn't new, but the audience was: On radio, stage, and TV, Freed took gutbucket, juke-joint R&B and brought it to postwar white youth starved for sexual release. “They had ten years of crooners and undanceable music,” explained Freed, who was promoting what *The New York Times* called “an epidemic hysteria.” This cut deeper than the idol

worship of Sinatra or, later, Elvis, because it wasn't about celebrity but strictly about the music: a raw underground sound that Freed called the “Big Beat.” The hysteria was real.

By the mid-'50s, Freed was based in New York City, and his package tours had become the stuff of instant legend, featuring larger casts of performers, black and white, and bigger melees, packing large halls and skating rinks. This was cultural anarchy long before the Sex Pistols, as racially mixed audiences worked themselves into a collective frenzy. In '58 came Freed's Big Beat extravaganza—12 acts, including Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis, barnstorming 38 cities. It imploded in the 7,000-seat Boston Arena, where rival gangs converged, fights erupted, and a sailor was stabbed. “The absolute fear on Chuck Berry's face told you it wasn't ‘normal’ crowd rowdiness,” recalls George Moonoogian, then a high school senior who was near the stage. Freed was banned in New Haven, Connecticut, and the rest of the tour fell apart. But the revolution was on. **EDDIE DEAN**