

# Alan Freed, Rose and Fell To Music of Rock 'n' Roll



Alan Freed

A few years ago, when Alan Freed was "Mr. Rock 'n' Roll," when 90,000 teenagers would pack a Brooklyn theater for his show's one-week stand, when he made rock 'n' roll movies, when every New York City household with a teenager kept a radio tuned to his station, Mr. Freed is supposed to have said:

"In this business your career is so short you got to get it from all the angles."

Mr. Freed's career was short, partly because of the angles from which he "got it" and the fact that he was a principal figure in the national "payola" scandals.

Mr. Freed died yesterday at Desert Hospital in Palm Springs, Calif., where he had been living since he left New York after the scandal. He was 43 years old.

Surviving are his wife, Inga; two daughters, Mrs. Alana Liberatore, of Alaska, and Sieglinde, of Palm Springs; two sons, Alan jr. and Lance, and his parents, all of Palm Springs.

Mr. Freed was considered the discoverer of rock 'n' roll and his relatively short career had been immensely profitable.

When he was indicted for income tax evasion last year, Federal authorities said his taxable income was \$137,977 in 1957; \$57,243 in 1958, and \$75,081 in 1959. They charged that he failed to report \$56,652 of that income, most of it derived from payola, and owed \$35,000 in taxes on it.

In those years, money was no object. He laid white wall-to-wall carpeting in his home in Stamford, Conn., and there were stories that he once destroyed a vicuna coat in one wearing.

In 1963, he described himself to reporters as "bankrupt," with a government lien on his home in Palm Springs.

A native of Johnstown, Pa., Mr. Freed was raised in Salem, Ohio, was graduated from Ohio State University with a degree in mechanical engineering and spent two years in the Army before being discharged for mastoiditis in both ears.

He entered radio as a part-time \$17-a-week announcer for a station in New Castle, Pa., and moved from there to WAKR in Akron, where he became a disc jockey in 1949. The next year, he became a disc jockey at a Cleveland television station, but decided within six months that television was not the proper medium for the job.

A record store owner in Cleveland talked him into returning to radio and also suggested that he play "rhythm and blues" records, previously known in the trade as "race records" and sold only to juke box operators

in Negro neighborhoods.

Mr. Freed agreed and named his program "Rock and Roll Party." The name shortly was being applied to the music and rock 'n' roll quickly became a sensation. His first rock 'n' roll dance drew 30,000 teen-agers.

After three years in Cleveland, Mr. Freed was hired by Radio Station WINS in New York. Just before he was ready to leave, he fell asleep while driving and struck a tree, suffering severe injuries which kept him hospitalized for four months. After that, he refused to drive.

## ARREST

His program was an immediate success on WINS, but it ran into legal difficulties. In Cleveland, Mr. Freed pretended to be a wise Negro named "Moondog" while he was introducing his records. In New York, he found himself being sued by a blind streetsinger named Louis Hardin, who had long been known as "Moondog" and claimed prior rights to the name. Mr. Freed went back to his own name and personality.

His dance parties and stage shows also became sensations. In 1958, his "Big Beat" show in Boston was blamed for a riot and he was arrested for inciting a riot, a charge he fought for two years at a cost he estimated at \$30,000.

The show was banned in Newark and New Haven.

Rock 'n' roll was suspected by many adults of being immoral and of tending to promote juvenile delinquency. Mr. Freed defended it at every opportunity and also defended his fans as decent youngsters. Only a few "bunnies" (his term for delinquents) appeared for his shows, he said.

By this time, he was a movie star, with three rock 'n' roll movies to his name, a promoter, a disc jockey, a master of ceremonies at his "Big Beat" show and a general showman.

Then, in the fall of 1959, the payola rumors started. Mr. Freed had left WINS and was at WABC with his show. The station asked him to sign a statement denying that he had ever accepted payola, he refused and was fired.

Mr. Freed subsequently signed a denial for WNEW-TV, but his teen-age dance show was dropped, anyway.

There were rumors, Congressional investigations and a grand jury investigation. The result was criminal informations charging him with commercial bribery in accepting about \$30,000 from seven record companies. He pleaded guilty to two charges in December, 1962, five other

charges were dropped and he was fined \$300.

He continued to appear periodically in New York City, but lived mainly in Palm Springs, holding jobs with radio stations in Los Angeles.

In 1962, he operated a Twist Club in New York City, but it was closed within two weeks after it was raided for allegedly selling liquor to minors.

Mr. Freed maintained that, if he had his career to live over, he would have done things differently, but he denied ever taking direct bribes, maintaining that he accepted gifts only when he played records that he was sure would be hits anyway.

"No one ever paid me to play a specific phonograph record," he said, after his fine was paid in 1963. "But I would never do it again. I've made too much money the other way. There's no need to get involved."

His fans remained devoted to him even during the Congressional investigations, but he indicated in 1963 that he no longer heard from them.

"They're grown up, for the most part," he pointed out.

JAMES W. SULLIVAN.