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# ROCK 'n' ROLL - 'n' RIOT

## By ROBERT SULLIVAN

**B**Y this time whatever damage was done to the Brooklyn Paramount by the recent rock 'n' roll outburst has been corrected, and the raw nerves of Gene Pleshette, managing director of the house, have been salved by consideration of the staggering gross of \$154,000 for seven days.

His share of the take is about \$70,000, which adds some weight to his remark that in 26 years in the house end of show business he had "never seen anything as exciting." The rest of it went to the performers and to Alan Freed, a dynamic disk jockey who is generally conceded to be the king of rock 'n' roll and in fact so describes himself on his WINS show.

The insistent, galvanic beat which is the heart of rock 'n' roll apparently has ensnared teenagers and a good many who are past their teens. It electrifies its devotees and exhausts those who provide it. Freed, who emceed the show, finally had to take three days off his daily platter-spinning to recover his voice. Tony Bennett, who was signed to sing for the week, was used up after two days; he broke a small blood vessel in his throat in his efforts to be heard above the violently expressed acclaim of the audience.

Rock 'n' roll is not exactly Tony's dish. He is a ballad singer who frankly admires Rodgers and Hammerstein. He was in this one for his name and he is willing to go along because he believes jazz to be a genuine American product that needs recognition in all its forms.

Tony has his own following and has known what it is to be mauled by eager followers. However, beyond losing some of his clothes occasionally and once getting an ankle sprained, he has not suffered much from it. The popular singer who doesn't have to get police protection once in a while knows he is slipping. This time Tony was protected by the stage apron of the Paramount, which was probably a good thing because the audience had a tendency to crowd down front.

### **Tony Says He Never Saw Anything Like This**

"I never saw anything like it," said Tony. "It was chaos. It's a much stronger thing than with swing or bop. They can't sit still. They jump around and dance and scream. It scared the hell out of me."

He could feel the tension across the footlights. It was like being near a place where lightning has just struck; there's electricity in the air. The band which is producing the beat (Red Prytock's outfit has two sets of drums) is the main thing. When the band plays, if the number has words, the audience sings along with it.

When the singer comes along, they sing with the singer too. In between times they just scream and moan and hoot.

Tony tried to get above the noise but even with the mike stepped up, the strain was too much. He lost his voice on the second night. He had a contract which he wanted to carry out, so they tried playing his records and letting him mouth at the mike, explaining carefully to the audience that this was the old Mario Lanza bit. It didn't matter to the audience. They were just as quick to scream their approval.

The Benedetto boy from the Bronx is reasonably rugged, but seven songs in a set, six times a day, finally put him to bed. The doctor he consulted told him he'd better not even whisper for a week or so.

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**T**HE show ran from Thursday to Thursday, at \$1.50 and \$2 admission. The house holds 4,200. Those who came during the day for the most part remained until evening, when they were driven out by their own hunger. The evening shows ran about normally, with a turnover after each show.

A semi-formal survey of the audience, mostly by the manager's practiced eye, provided the surprising conclusion that about half of the audience was under 20, the other half shading off into the upper age brackets. About 75% was white. The manager said also that the early evening shows brought out a surprising number of families.

Some of the evening patrons might have come to see the picture on the bill, which was "Fox Fire," a nothing starring Jane Russell and Jeff Chandler. As far as the daytime audiences were concerned, there was no picture. They sang, talked, walked around and emptied the candy and popcorn machines while waiting for the next rock 'n' roll session. "We could have showed a newsreel just as well," said Pleshette.

The man responsible for this cataclysmic event, and who has built rock 'n' roll into an epidemic hysteria just short of the Danc-



ing Madness of the Middle Ages, is Alan Freed. The secret of his success seems to be a sincere devotion to jazz.

He communicates his own enthusiasm for what he chooses to call rock 'n' roll to his radio listeners. There is some deep human instinct which gets a message if it is genuine — and rejects it subconsciously if it is phony. This same quality, of course, is extremely useful to advertisers. The admirers who take Freed's word as law when he says a record is good, or great, also seem to believe him when he throws in a mention of hair products, sweaters, soft drinks or whatever is paying the freight for his show.

It is fairly easy for him to

## All Used Up

*Tony Bennett, who has his own following, was one of the performers at the Paramount until his throat gave out. Left, some of his fans pin him against stage door. Right, doctor tells him he broke small blood vessel in throat, will have to quit.*

build up an advance fever to be present in person at a rock 'n' roll "concert." He had one six months ago at the Brooklyn Paramount and this was his second. He probably could fill the Garden easily and has even had some vagrant thoughts about Yankee Stadium.

The bigger the place, however, the greater the cut for the house and the Garden's slice of a one-nighter would leave Freed and the performers with a net that probably wouldn't pay for the frazzling of their nervous systems.

## Horries His Family by Becoming An Announcer

Freed comes to New York from New Castle, Pa., by way of Youngstown, Akron and Cleveland. He is a graduate mechanical engineer who horrified his parents by taking a job as a radio announcer at \$17 a week right after he got his baccalaureate. He had enjoyed a sound musical education in his youth and selected the trombone as his vehicle. In fact, he once thought of trying for the Cleveland Symphony. But somewhere in between he was exposed

## The King

*Alan Freed, disk jockey, is largely responsible for the rock 'n' roll craze among youngsters (and somewhat oldsters, too) because he plugs the cult on his show. He also whipped up the rock 'n' roll charivari at the Brooklyn Paramount, which in one week had the biggest gross in its history. Alan really likes his work, is here giving some kind of signal to his engineer (invisible behind glass in background) who actually does the platter-spinning.*

to the sounds brought forth by Glen Miller, Benny Goodman and others.

When he heard jazz his eyes would glaze over and he would go into a semi-coma. He loved it in all its forms and would bore and frighten his mother by detailed description of the performance of some band he had just heard. He couldn't figure why anyone else wouldn't be enthralled by the same sounds which had removed him from this world for the time he was hearing them.

As to just what it was he heard