

**LIFE**

# Rock & Roll at 50

With an  
Introduction  
by Dick Clark



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# The Disc Jockeys

Rock has always been about freedom of spirit, the quest for independence. But without the intervention of a certain species, the music's history would have been very different. The breed of cat we're talking about may be unable to whistle "Brown Eyed Girl," and there's an excellent chance they couldn't play a chord even on an air guitar. However, they know what music they like, and that is usually what we will like.

If Alan Freed hadn't heard that indefinable something that made his (and then our) hair stand on end, we might have spent the '50s hearing only the likes of Julius La Rosa, who had been brought to the fore by another talent hound, Arthur Godfrey, who then dropped him like a square bowling ball. But Freed had what any impresario must: faith. So he gave rock 'n' roll its name and a way to be heard—on his radio show and at his movies and stage shows. He talked to us, late at night, and knew what we needed to hear. Alan Freed lifted the music up and placed it in our laps.

Of course, others were into the sound. The "Ace from Outer Space," "Jocko" Henderson, had his *Rocket Ship* radio show that he broadcast in both Philadelphia and New York. A marvelous raconteur, Jocko loved to tell of the time someone was kicking on his front door at four a.m. "I put my bathrobe on, put my gun in my pocket," and found a fellow named Sam Cooke standing there, with a song called "You Send Me." Jocko played it, "and in three weeks it went to No. 1 in the country." He introduced a lot of great acts at Harlem's Apollo Theater, and once had to drag a shy Diana Ross out from behind the curtain. Jocko's whole style of rhyming patter and endless hippery helped mold the young music's ethos.

Murray the K was another New York deejay who influenced listeners, with his broadcasts for "submarine race watchers" and his holiday shows with top lineups. When the Beatles hit, he got the idea right away, and when they flew into New York, he cast himself as the Fifth Beatle.

In the '60s, Wolfman Jack had a show on a



**Wolfman Jack was born with the no-frills name Robert Smith. Fans of his radio shows and TV work on *The Midnight Special* know why the name had to change. "Jocko" Henderson looks demure in the photo below; his *Rocket Ship* shows were a blast.**

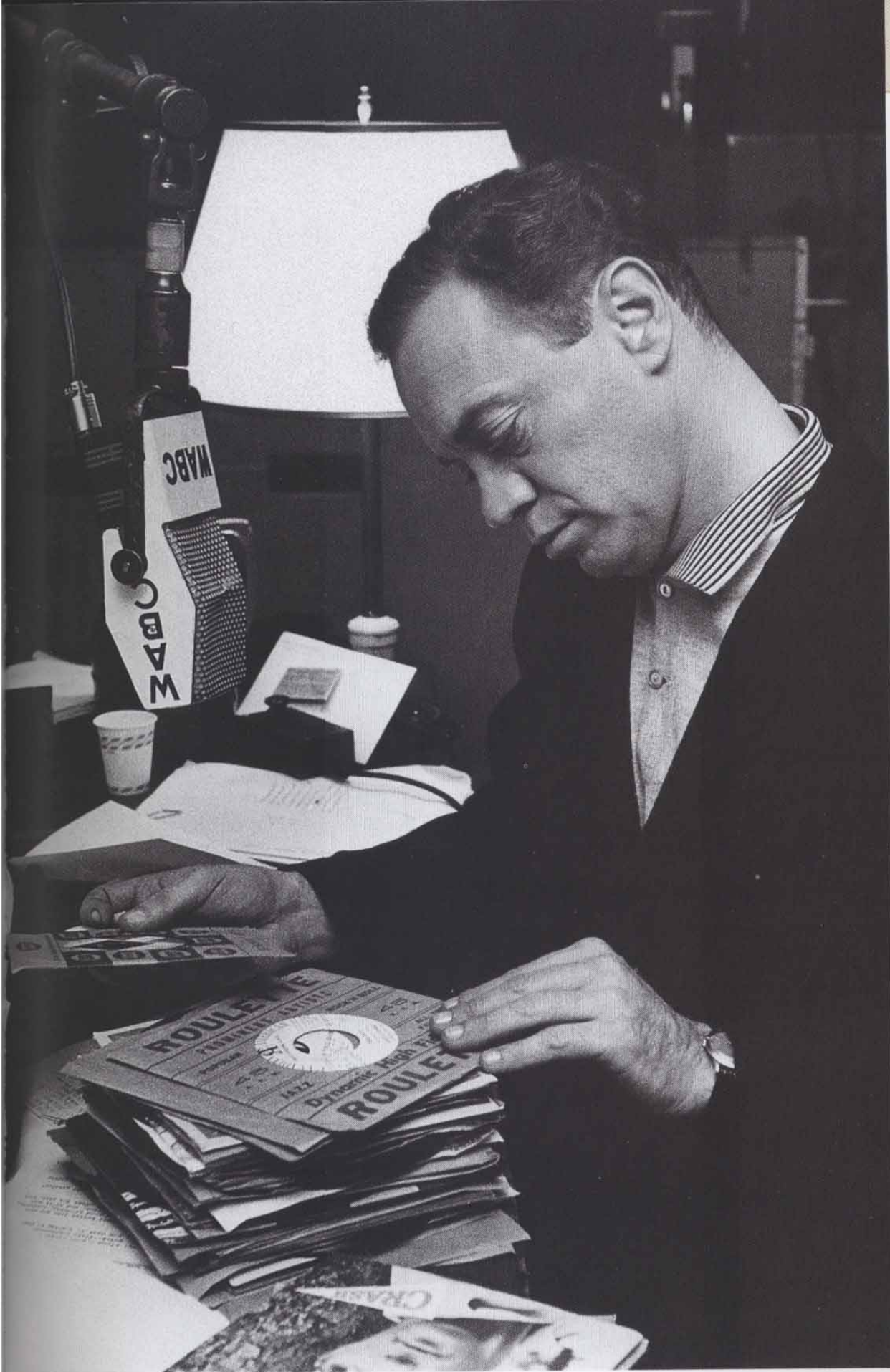


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250,000-watt Mexican station that reached Alaska, spreading the word via his raunchy, howling humor and great selection of rockin' music. You could hear him in your car, on the front step, at the beach. George Lucas understood the role of the deejay, and in his 1973 classic film, *American Graffiti*, the Wolfman has a pivotal role, as himself.

By the late '60s, the deejay—that is, the disc jockey who spins records over the air rather than the deejay in the hip hop sense—was fading as a purveyor of musical tastes. The radio personality was being replaced by playlists, so that on-air talent basically told a joke and then played the song he was told to play (very much like the veejays who were to come). A lot of listeners turned to FM radio, where the sound was better, there were fewer commercials and there was a chance of hearing something hipper.

Colleges also jumped on the FM bandwagon around then, and today those stations are crucial transmitters of the music known as college rock. Once again, the sound of the new is being aired by people who know what they like, and what we will like, at least eventually. Rock's spirit of independence thrives, with a little help from its friends.



In the history of rock 'n' roll, Alan Freed (left) was as important as anyone. Host of the *Swingin' Soiree*, Murray the K (above) took over Freed's WINS prime-time radio slot. Below: Carson Daly began his veejay gig on MTV in 1997.



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