



# Alan Freed May Have Invented Rock 'n' Roll Radio But He Had Help

THE AMAZING STORIES OF  
DR. HEPCAT, PROFESSOR BOP,  
GROOVER BOY & JACK THE CAT



“Okay kats and kittens, get on your boppin’ mittens. We’re gonna freak and squeak ‘til we crack our beak, lay down some crass sass on the mellow grass. Alroot! Alreet! Tweet! Tweet! Tweet!”

The days of the primitive rock & roll disc jockey are over. There was a time though, not so long ago, when tuning in your radio was akin to eavesdropping on outer space, so much raw individuated craziness lurked amidst the airwaves. The hysteria was caused by old DJs trying to find a broadcasting approach to equal the sounds of the frantic new music. Throughout the early and middle ‘50s, individual broadcast styles evolved from mello tones to black mello tones to black jive to teenage slang to speed rap. They’ll all be illustrated lavishly in the pages ahead, but first, let’s try and pinpoint the origins of the R&R jock (after all, he didn’t just mutate out of Arthur Godfrey’s ukelele).

Our story begins in 1946. In Nashville, a guy named Randy Wood is introduced to Gene Nobles, a local DJ. Wood has a problem. He recently bought a home appliances repair and sales shop in nearby Gallatin. Back in the storeroom he’s come across some 2000 78s (the speed of the time) of “race” artists—that meant black in those days—and he doesn’t know what to do with them.

Nobles, an ex-carny, recalls the popularity of the old Southern minstrel shows—every outfit used to carry one—and how popular their music always was with a white audience. Maybe his listeners would dig it—hell, they might even buy it—for, with some isolated exceptions, downhome blues, R&B—dirty stuff—just wasn’t on the air.

## Bibles & Baby Chickens

Luckily Nobles had his show over WLAC, a station with 50,000 watts that reached Montreal in the North, El Paso in the West and the Caribbean in the South. He and Wood bought a one minute spot to advertise the rec-

ords at six for a dollar. Nothing happened so they bought 15 minutes. Still nothing. They were about ready to pack it in when on the third or fourth Monday they were hit by a flood of mail and in no time at all Gallatin’s third class post office became a first class one.

From 1946 on, Albert Ammons—“Swanee River Boogie” introduced Nobles’ delicious double entendre shows. (Years later the tune served as the theme for shows by John Richbourg and Bill “Hoss” Allen.)

The word spread. Up the Eastern seaboard to bored college kids ready for a new fad, and around to the potential black audience itself. Allen himself was a native of Gallatin, a town with more blacks than whites. His hipness to Southern black customs and speech—plus a deep, slow drawl—did not read as white to his listeners. “I used to say it was ‘get down time.’ That’s what the pimps call the hour they put their girls out on the street. My opening would always be ‘The Horseman’s down for Royal Cream (a hairdressing) and Randy’s Record Mart. The world’s largest mail order record shop. In the business of sending out those phonograph records to you, my friends, by mail C.O.D. guaranteed safe delivery no matter where you be. Just pay Uncle Sam and he’ll lay it on you, man!’” Hoss also pushed bibles and baby chickens, just as he does today on his gospel show on the same station.

Unlike Allen, John Richbourg (“John R way down in Dixie”) was a soap opera announcer from New York who had to learn the lingo from scratch. He began “breaking” new records on his one to three o’clock in the morning show. Randy’s Record Mart Show became so popular that a promo man from an independent label would bring in only an acetate and 100

