



AMERICAN HOT WAX

It is 1959, and there is a cultural revolution going on in America. Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis have taken over the charts which had been controlled by Perry Como and Patti Page. James Dean and Buddy Holly have become legends—and Elvis reigns as King. It is one of the pivotal moments in American history—the birth of the teenager as cultural force, as consumer, as tastemaker.

Rock and Roll, though no one knows it at the time, is really here to stay—and Alan Freed is its high priest.

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American Hot Wax, the film that chronicles that moment, is not only a film about the music business, about disc jockey Alan Freed, and about the people that hounded him for playing that “jungle music,” but also a success story, for it concerns the rise of a young Brooklyn street-corner doo-wop group, The Chesterfields. As such, it is in the mainstream of the American tradition, for it is a story of triumph against seemingly insurmountable odds.

On the way, there is plenty of good music, as the A&M soundtrack album clearly demonstrates.

One disc, as you have probably discovered, contains original masters of the period, by names such as The Cadillacs, Bobby Darin, The Moonglows, Jackie Wilson, The Drifters, Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs, Chuck Berry and the immortal Buddy Holly.

The other disc, which features music from the live concert at the Brooklyn Paramount which forms the climax of the film, showcases newly-recorded performances by Chuck Berry, Screamin’ Jay Hawkins and the incredible Jerry Lee Lewis. It also features performances by The Chesterfields, who really *are* a modern-day street corner group—and also signed, incidentally, to A&M.

What the soundtrack album is, then, is a compendium of some of the finest rock and roll you’ll ever hear—a worthy album of music in its own right, but one that also chronicles the music that was part of the fevered atmosphere of that moment in 1959, when Rock and Roll became king.

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American Hot Wax, frankly, is nothing more or less than a labor of love. Art Linson, producer of the film, comes out of the music business (producer of “Car Wash” as well as a manager of rock n’ roll bands); for those who look closely, the movie is filled with many denizens of the music world, including Kenny Vance (ex. of Jay and the Americans), who also produced the soundtrack album, record producer Richard Perry, Los Angeles rock club owner Elmer Valentine, songwriter-producer-manager Artie Ripp, singer Eric Mercury, and rock writer Cameron Crowe.

(over please)

Linson notes that “the intention was always for it to be an ensemble movie, with the disc jockey as the central character with several others who were equally important . . . the more research we did, the more we got into it, we realized that you can fictionalize everybody else, but you just can’t fictionalize Freed. He just continually cropped up as the main protagonist in the rock and roll scene in the fifties.”

Linson, a friend of Freed’s son, Lance, who is also a part of the A&M family (a vice-president of A&M’s publishing wing), discussed the project with Lance and secured the rights for the story.

The writer of the film, John Kaye, also manifests the love of the period and its music: “I’ve always been into fifties music. Rock and roll as it was. I remember how exciting it was for me when I was in high school. I would be driving to school in my car and the d.j. would say, ‘All right kids, right now this record promotion guy from a company just walked in with the new Jerry Lee Lewis record and we’re going to hear it at the same time.’ And he put on ‘Great Balls of Fire.’ As a kid, it was so exciting to have that music happening that was all yours.”

Director Floyd Mutrux (“Aloha Bobby and Rose”) spent as much time listening to rock n’ roll as he did watching movies and has what is called “the rock and roll consciousness.” He understands that rock and roll has always been the music of the rebel: “It’s about the rebel versus the establishment . . . and the battleground is rock and roll. This movie is about the music, the beat, the rowdiness, the excitement.”

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The movie centers *around* Alan Freed, who came out of little stations in Ohio and Pennsylvania to WINS in New York (and then later, WABC) to bring a new kind of music to America. It is said that he literally invented the phrase “rock and roll,” that he used to pound on a phone book on the back beat to emphasize the rhythm.

The movie, though, is not *about* Alan Freed, as much as it is about teenagers, the music business, the hustling, bustling panorama of songwriters, singers, arrangers, producers. Laraine Newman, of “Saturday Night Live,” plays a young teenage girl who wants to write songs The Chesterfields are, well, themselves, street kids trying to get on a rock n’ roll show Tim McIntire *is* Alan Freed.

In short, there are many stories interwoven, culminating in the apocalyptic concert at the Brooklyn Paramount. And through it all is the music, the incredible music.

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As the raw energy of that concert makes clear—and as its aftermath makes equally clear, that moment forever changed American culture.

And as this soundtrack makes *unmistakeably* clear, the music is still vitally alive.

To quote from a song of the time:

Rock and Roll Will Stand.



PHOTO CAPTIONS:

There are four photos in your press kit.

1. Chuck Berry guest stars as himself in Paramount Pictures' *American Hot Wax*, a film about the exciting days of the music of the fifties. It was during an Alan Freed Show, re-created in the film, at the Brooklyn Paramount, that Berry invented his unique duck walk. Berry is represented on the A&M soundtrack album by three songs, the original "Sweet Little Sixteen," plus newly recorded "live" versions of his classics "Reelin' and Rockin' " and "Roll Over Beethoven."
2. Jerry Lee Lewis guest stars as himself in Paramount Pictures' *American Hot Wax*, a film about the time and the music of the fifties. Lewis again proves that he is one of contemporary music's most electrifying performers in his appearance at the re-creation of an Alan Freed Brooklyn Paramount concert which forms the climax of the film. On A&M's soundtrack album, he is represented by newly recorded "live" performances of his classics "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" and "Great Balls of Fire."
3. A&M recording artists The Chesterfields are seen performing on a street corner in Brooklyn and in a publicity shot of the period. Their success story forms one of the central themes of Paramount Pictures' *American Hot Wax*. They appear on the A&M soundtrack album singing "Why Do Fools Fall in Love" and "Baby, That Is Rock & Roll."
4. The hottest rock and roll show of all time, hosted by legendary disk jockey Alan Freed, lives again in Paramount Pictures' *American Hot Wax*, a film that recreates the excitement of early rock and roll. Bringing back those days at the Brooklyn Paramount Theatre in the movie are (clockwise, from top left), A&M recording artists The Chesterfields, a group formed especially for the film; human whirlwind Jerry Lee Lewis; the inimitable Screamin' Jay Hawkins; the dynamic Planotones; Tim McIntire as Alan Freed; and the incomparable Chuck Berry. All of the artists are heard on the A&M soundtrack album.