IAN GRAHAM:

YOUNG PRINCE OF THE MOONDOGGERS

By Jim Hutter

Anyone well-versed in the history of rock music is aware of Alan Freed. In the early ‘fifties, the Cleveland-based disc jockey was a pioneer who broke social taboos by crossing the so-called color line by playing rhythm and blues artists for a predominantly Caucasian audience. In order to avoid the racial stigma of the music, the self-proclaimed “Moondog” co-opted an old sexual euphemism and dubbed the style “Rock ‘n’ Roll.”

By 1956, as younger artists like Elvis Presley popularized the genre, Alan Freed became the spokesman for this controversial music. Not only did The Moondog continue to champion the cause through his radio broadcasts, but he became a concert promoter, television personality, and the star of several films showcasing rock ‘n’ roll artists. Unfortunately, it was revealed that Freed accepted payments from record companies to play certain artists over others. This broke into a scandal called Payola, ultimately costing the media personality his career and sending him into an alcoholic spiral that ended with his death in 1965.

Fifty years later, a young visionary from Central Ohio has drawn inspiration from Alan Freed and created one of the most diverse and exciting radio programs to grace our airwaves, “The Rock and Roll Radio Show.” That visionary is one Ian Graham, a 22-year-old disc jockey on WQTT 1270 AM, Marysville. Dubbing himself “The Young Prince of the Moondoggers,” Graham has attracted a cult following with his weekday afternoon slot, playing an amazing mix of rock-related music from the past sixty years. The host affectionately calls his fans “The Moondog Kingdom.”

Who, then, is Ian Graham and how did he come to feel connected to an individual from long before his time? Blessed with parents who shared their collection of ‘fifties and ‘sixties rock ‘n’ roll, Ian also developed a passion for this music. As a Marysville High School senior with journalistic aspirations, a key event happened that would shape his future.

“When I was a senior in high school,” he explained, “I was editing my school newspaper. I wrote an editorial on how I felt about industry where I lived, here in Marysville, Ohio. I felt like it was funneling kids who weren’t academically inclined into that industry without helping them get into college. There wasn’t much opportunity. When it went to press, there had been no editing. The editorial ran as I wrote it, including sour comments about Scott’s and Honda and the school. I got suspended from school during the first semester of my senior year. I kind of got pissed off at the whole faculty and the system…so I just dropped out.”

Working various jobs while getting his ECOT diploma online, Ian accidentally discovered WQTT and realized that the oldies format played the very music he loved. After a bit of networking with the disc jockeys at the Union County Fairgrounds’ Garage Sale, Graham impressed his elders with his knowledge of ‘sixties pop music. Shortly thereafter, he was hired for a station internship. The future Young Prince of the Moondoggers assisted with production of the morning show and writing ad copy. He left such a positive impression that he was given a paid position as one of the morning show hosts.

Prior to January of 2015, WQTT’s afternoon drive-time was programmed by satellite. When the provider went out of business, the station opted to produce their own show. Ian Graham was offered the 3 pm to 6 pm weekday slot, and “The Rock and Roll Radio Show” was born. The Young Prince of the Moondoggers had arrived.

In keeping with the station’s oldies format, “The Rock and Roll Radio Show” plays a wealth of rock, pop, and soul from the ‘fifties, ‘sixties, and ‘seventies. The playlist goes deeper than most, playing album tracks, obscurities, and other surprises. Unlike the majority of oldies shows, Ian Graham freely and passionately mixes tracks from the punk era and beyond. On a typical afternoon, one could very easily hear Eddie Cochran, Mott the Hoople, and The Black Keys played in rapid succession. The Young Prince presents all of it with equal passion, often punctuating songs with his own uninhibited Moondog howls.

How has the mix of old and new been received? Fortunately, it has been very positive with very little objection to sometimes wilder post-punk artists like The Cramps, Ramones, or Sex Pistols. Fans seem to get the connection between old and new and appreciate the common spirit between all of it.

As an added bonus, “The Rock and Roll Radio” show also features performances by local artists. Not only will Graham play their demos, but invites bands to play live on-the-air every Friday. To date, guests have included The Pink Flamingos, Rick Salazar, Bosswood, The White Outs, and others.

Throughout all of this, Ian Graham remains as passionate as Alan Freed, championing rock ‘n’ roll in a time when its popularity is seemingly eclipsed by rap, hip-hop, lightweight dance pop, and Americana. For those of us raised on rock, passions run deep, and those very passions are stoked and satisfied by the enthusiasm of Ian Graham and “The Rock and Roll Radio Show.”

NOTE: “The Rock and Roll Radio Show” airs 3 to 6 pm weekdays on WQTT 1270 AM in Marysville. Broadcasts can be heard over the airwaves in Union, Delaware, and northwest Franklin Counties. It also streams on the web at <http://www.qt1270.com>.