

dick clark

The story of our friend Dick Clark begins November 30, 1929. He is born Richard Wagstaff Clark in upstate New York, lives with his family in Mount Vernon. That changes when he gets a call from his brother inviting him to come up to Utica and become sales manager of radio station WRUN. This is Dick's first taste of what radio is about.

At the age of 17, Dick himself joins WRUN as an announcer and then becomes a news anchorman on station WKTV. He changes his name from Dick Clark to Dick Clay, not to be confused with his dad, whose name also is Dick Clark.

In '52 Dick is offered a job in Philadelphia on radio station WFIL, which also has a TV facility. He begins doing a radio show called *Caravan of Music*. At the same facility, the station is doing a TV show called *Bandstand*, which began the same year Dick comes to Philly and changes his name back to Dick Clark. It is hosted by Bob Horn. Enter Jerry Blavat, a 13-year-old dancer on *Bandstand*. In 1953, I would see Dick in the hall walking to his radio booth as I was getting ready to dance and put the dance committee on *Bandstand*.

In 1956, *Bandstand's* host, Bob Horn, loses the show. At that time no one knows who the station is going to replace him with. I lead a group of dancers from the show, in protest, and we picket every day. We want Bob back.

At this point the station makes the decision to put in Dick Clark, and in July 1956 Dick Clark becomes the new host of the number one TV show in Philadelphia, *Bandstand*.

I'm picketing. I get arrested for leading the pickets. Nothing against Dick Clark; my loyalty to Bob would have been such no matter who took over the show. But when I get pinched, that's when the picket lines go down. The kids who danced on Bob Horn's are now dancing on Dick Clark's *Bandstand* — and that's the beginning. Dick Clark is on his way to stardom. Thirty-seven years later *American Bandstand* holds the record as TV's longest-running music variety program.

I am sure there are critics who might have said at the time, "Perhaps Bob Horn could have taken the show nationally." Not so. Why? The reason is simple. Every day Clark did something the former host could never do. No one else in this country at that time had the look, the cooperation, the pulse and the

appeal that Clark had — not even the great Alan Freed who had the ear but not the look. Clark was what was about to happen in America — so much so that a year later, in August of 1957, he convinced the ABC network to take the show national.

There is not a major artist or record company that does not owe a great deal to Clark. True, his was not the first TV show to feature rock performers. But it *was* the first TV show to feature performers who sang and recorded our music. It was the first TV show devoted exclusively to our industry.

Most of all, Dick Clark is the man who was instrumental in stopping the practice whereby the major labels would cover the little independent labels. Up until that time, the majors would cover the indies, because they had the distribution, the money and the power to run nationally with a record.

This all stopped when Clark played the original record by the original artist. The majors did not have time to cover it. It became an instant hit. The record business then became a record industry, the majors no longer had all the power, and distribution for the little guy sprouted up in America.

Dick had the vision to know that this little thing, which Alan Freed termed "rock & roll," could be the gigantic business that it is today. As a human being, he genuinely loved the people, and the industry that he served. As a businessman and a talent, he took us all to another level.

The real impact Dick Clark has had on our industry is that he developed, created and sent forth the message through his TV outlets that this music and its artists were very much as real as America itself was. None of us today, whether it be a disc jockey, record company, publishing company, agent, artist, manager would be as accepted as we all are, internationally, if it weren't for the contribution of Dick Clark.

I am proud to say that he is my friend. I am sure you feel the same. I wouldn't be where I am in this industry today if it were not for Dick Clark, who back in the early Sixties said on *Bandstand*, "I just heard a guy on a station in Camden, New Jersey, playing great songs by James Brown, Fats Domino, the Isley Brothers, the Four Seasons, the Shirelles — and he's called the Geator with the Heater, the Boss with the Hot Sauce, Jerry Blavat." Thank you, Dick.

- JERRY BLAVAT

