

# Buccaneers of the Dial

CALL 'EM PIRATES OR MICRO-BROADCASTERS —

TINY, ALMOST-LEGAL RADIO BROADCASTERS ARE

SAILING INTO MINNESOTA AIRWAVES.

**A**lan Freed has never liked being called a pirate, and never will.

"I can't remember if it was the NAB (National Association of Broadcasters) or the national group of state organizations who had the audacity to refer to me as 'longtime pirate, Alan Freed,'" he fumes. "Longtime! I was only on the air for 103 days!"

**BY BRIAN  
LAMBERT**

MEDIA CRITIC

While a bona fide buccaneer to licensed broadcasters, Freed thinks of himself as a kind of revolutionary. He has no desire to destroy the Federal Communications Commission. No desire to crush the FCC's Byzantine by-laws, most of which protect what is an increasingly exclusive club of multimillion-dollar license holders.

All Freed wants to engender is a little common-sense change, and a lot of danceable rhythm.

Where your stereotypical radio pirate is a stoned teen-age techno-nerd operating out of his parents' basement, Freed is out to counter that image with one of professional focus and decorum. Even if it is on a much smaller scale than the average \$35 million metro-area FM licensee.

Where the quintessential pirate delights in blasting an attitude of merry anarchy into the established stations' frequencies, interrupting their computer-groomed regimen of ads, 30-year-old Who classics, ads, ads, 35-year-old Rolling Stones classics, ads, more ads and traffic updates, Freed is out to prove a point.

Freed gained notoriety when FCC agents raided his Loring Park apartment on Nov. 1, 1996. For 103 days prior to the raid, Freed had been operating — competently but illegally at 97.7 FM — an infectious club dance music format called "Beat Radio." At the time, 97.7 was a more or less vacant slot on the Twin Cities radio spectrum.

There, Beat Radio pushed a whopping 20 watts of power out across a three mile-or-so radius from Loring Park, "From downtown to Uptown," as Freed is fond of saying.

But FCC rules are FCC rules, and under those rules a licensed station as far away as Rochester can, and did, charge interference. However implausible the reality of any interference, the charge by a licensed broadcaster was enough to bring the feds down on Beat Radio.

Enter the FCC agents. Exit Freed's transmitting equipment. And commence expensive legal action to make some sense of the whole situation.

Since that fateful night Freed, 40, editor of



BEAT RADIO CONTINUED ON 2E ▶

## BEAT RADIO/Dance to it

▼ CONTINUED FROM 1E

the music trade magazine *Impact*, a veteran of four Twin Cities stations including KMOJ-FM and a man with connections to a certain rebel tier of legitimate broadcasters in town, has negotiated Beat Radio back into a semblance of exposure. In November 1997, KFAI-FM (90.3, 106.7 in the Twin Cities) gave Freed and Beat Radio three hours a week, from 2 to 5 a.m. Sundays.

Then, in mid-February 1998, Freed cooked a deal with the Children's Broadcast Co., parent company of kiddie-oriented Radio Aahs at 1280 AM, WWTC. Until Sept. 1, when CBC expects to close a sale to Catholic network out of San Diego, Freed will continue broadcasting Beat Radio from 6

p.m. to 6 a.m. Better yet, the deal gives Freed and Beat Radio access to 10 other stations — all AMs — in the CBC network. (Freed says response has been best "in Phoenix, Denver and here.")

The format's central gimmick are sets programmed by DJs from local dance clubs. But Beat Radio proved popular enough with other respected programmers that such cult figures as former REV-105 jocks Kevin Cole and Shawn Stewart also file sets, via Digital Audio Tape, from their new homes in Seattle and Philadelphia, respectively.

"But after (Sept. 1)," says Freed, "I have no idea what will happen. It's back into the netherworld, I guess." He expects to continue his agreement with KFAI and hopes to squeeze out of the graveyard shift there.

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## SHOWTIME

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