

Special

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SKETCHES OF SOUTH AMERICAN RADIO

by Don Jensen

(Recently returned from tour)

Broadcasting in the Peruvian highlands is as different from that of the coastal cities such as Lima, as is night from day. Of course part of the difference is due the fact that metropolitan area surrounding the capital tends to be more cosmopolitan while the highlands are more rural in nature. Secondly, and perhaps importantly, programming in the Peruvian high country is definitely slanted to the predominantly Indian population.

Arriving in Cuzco, the oldest continuously occupied city in the western hemisphere, ancient capital of the Inca empire, 11,000 feet above sea level, the first facet of programming one notices is the heavy dose of Andean type music...that is the plaintive Indian melodies characterized by the sound of a local reed flute-like instrument. A curious note is that even singing commercials, popular in LA, reflect this influence. Commercials for such nationally advertised products as Inca Cola, Nescafe and Kiwi, while retaining the same lyrics as those heard on Lima stations, have different melodies with the Indian flavor when received on highland stations such as those in Cuzco and Puno.

Among the medium wave stations heard in Cuzco were Radio Cuzco, 1470kc, announcing as "la voz de la capital arqueologica de America"; Radio La Hora, 1400kc, "mil cuatrocientos kilociclos"; an unlisted outlet operating on about 1520kc; and transmitting from studios on Avenida Sol, Cuzco's main thoroughfare, Radios Erres, announcing as "la primera en la montana" and "capital de las Incas". Avenida Sol was also the location of Radio Tawantinsuyo, 1200kc//6217kc. Located just 100 feet from my hotel, this station proved to be something of a shock to me, even though by this time I expected to find smaller SA stations operating in chaos. It is housed in a small, single-story green stucco building, reminding one very much of an old abandoned service station. Front door open to the street, only about four rooms were seen and each with a single light bulb for use at night. Equipment was extremely primitive and such things as soundproof studios are apparently unknown, with a fellow pounding on a workbench across the hall from the open room that served as a studio for broadcasting. It was surprising that the on-the-air results were as good as they were and almost unbelievable that a station as chaotically operated as this would ever reply/respond to a listeners report. However, while visiting a Brazilian DXer later, I did in fact see a verification letter from this station.

Perhaps one of the best stations noted in Cuzco was that operated by the University of Cuzco. Announcing variously as "Unversidad, mil cinco cientos siesenta kilociclos" (1560kcs) or "Radio Unversidad", this station featured both pop and classical music and public service announcements ("bulletinos meterological"). The university is located right on Cuzco's main square, Plaza de Armas, on the corner of Avenida Sol. During the day, music and anns blare out on the plaza from loudspeakers rebroadcasting the stations programs.

By incredibly slow trains and a fascinating lake steamer that plies Lake Titacaca, over two miles high, I traveled to Bolivia. Observations of the stations in LaPaz were much limited by my stay in the Bolivian capital. However, in a general sense, programming was much like that of the Peruvian highland outlets. Andean type music was heard in the main, though LaPaz stations had rock and roll too, often sung in Spanish. Radio El Condor had a telephone request show one evening with a pleasant-voiced amcr taking calls on the air, apparently from teenage girls. Also heard were a number of unlisted stations, most likely many of them "bootleg" unlicensed operations run by miners and labor unions in smaller cities outside the capital.

In contrast to Bolivia and Peru, Brazilian stations were a real pleasure to listen to; Featuring much U.S. recordings such as by Billy May, etc., as well as the fluid and lilting Brazilian rythms and generally without the raucous commercials common in the

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Spanish speaking countries. Of course Brazil has more broadcasting stations than any other country in the world, so any comments must only be made in the broadest terms. Any generalization is sure to have a dozen exceptions; However I particularly liked the low-keyed programming of stations like Radio Guanabara, Radio Jornal do Brazil, Radio Tamoio and Radio Tupi, in the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro. In huge Sao Paulo, five million people and growing at the rate of a new residence every eight minutes, and a completed commercial building every 27 minutes, much the same holds true, though in keeping with the much faster pace of the city, the programming heard is slightly more "up-tempo". Brazilian stations, while many are in smaller towns and cities, are marginal operations, seem more prosperous and better operated than in the other two countries I visited.

So after some 22 days south of the Equator, I boarded an Aerolinas Peruanas flight and began the long trip home. While I still don't feel I have found the answer to a problem bugging many listeners, myself included, "how to get a better verie return for Latin American reports", I felt I at least now have a better idea of broadcasting conditions in at least several of the South American countries. I hope perhaps now you do too!