

Shortwave Center

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Book Review

Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today (ISBN 978-0-7864-3674-3)

Written by Jerome S. Berg

Published by McFarland & Company

Reviewed by Richard A. D'Angelo

Can lightning strike twice or maybe three times in the same place? If your radio shack library contains the "On The Shortwaves" trilogy by Jerry Berg, then I would say yes, yes and yes. *Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today* is the third book in the "On the Shortwaves" franchise that Jerry has authored. The latest Berg saga takes us on a year-by-year adventure of what was happening on the shortwave radio broadcasting scene. This book brings back a lot of memories for those of us that lived through the years covered. If your shortwave listening experiences began during the period, you will appreciate how things evolved prior to your shortwave listening days. If you are new to shortwave radio, there is no better place to get a comprehensive handle on what shortwave broadcasting was, what it evolved into, and how it changed over the years.

You will recall that way back in 1999, Jerome ("Jerry") S. Berg's delivered the work of art *On The Shortwaves, 1923-1945: Broadcast Listening in the Pioneer Days of Radio* which received worldwide critical acclaim. *On The Short Waves* was a book that captured the thrill and excitement of the early days of radio broadcasting, radio listening and DXing. If you have never read it, picking up a copy will help round out the reader's knowledge about the development of our favorite broadcasting medium. This was followed by *Listening on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today* which I previously reviewed in *The Journal*. *Listening* is an excellent book providing the history of the shortwave radio hobby from a listener's perspective.

The development of the organized listening hobby by one of the veterans of the era made for superb reading over the recent holidays.

So, who is Jerry Berg? Good question and there are times Mrs. Berg would like to hear an answer for that query because a guy who does all this research must be keeping himself pretty busy with things other than household chores. Jerry has been an active shortwave listener for several decades with memberships in numerous clubs worldwide. Currently, he is a member of the North American Shortwave Association's Country List Committee, Executive Council and Chair of the Committee to Preserve Radio Verifications. As a shortwave radio historian, Jerry has been doing general research into the early days of radio broadcasting and listening, collecting much material over the years and disseminating this information during lectures at radio gatherings. Consequently, there is nobody more accomplished than Jerry Berg to write about shortwave radio from both a listening and broadcasting perspective. Jerry Berg's continuous research into the history of shortwave radio/listening resulted in these two new releases under the McFarland & Company banner. His publisher, McFarland, is a leading U.S. publisher of scholarly, reference and academic books located in Jefferson, North Carolina. McFarland & Co. publishes books that can be found in libraries worldwide.

Shortwave broadcasting originated in the 1920s, when stations used the new technology to increase their range in order to serve foreign audiences and reach parts of their own territory that could not easily be covered by regular AM stations. Experimentation began in the United States, but soon spread throughout the world. The discovery and development of shortwave technology during the 1920s and 1930s permitted radio stations throughout the world to transmit

their programs over long distances, even worldwide, for the first time. The thrill of hearing broadcasts from faraway places produced a dedicated American audience. Developments in shortwave broadcasting and shortwave listening from their inception through the war years were covered in *On the Short Waves, 1923-1945: Broadcast Listening in the Pioneer Days of Radio*, published by McFarland in 1999. Last month I provided a review of *Listening on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today*, which concentrates on the listeners, picking up the story in 1945, describing the resumption of organized shortwave listening after the war and its development in the years since. This review is of the companion volume, *Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today*, which focuses on the world's shortwave broadcasting stations.

Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today (ISBN 978-0-7864-3674-3) focuses on the stations and the environment in which they operated. The book covers a range of topics in nine chapters. It contains a detailed account of the shortwave bands for each year from 1945 to the present. Written from the standpoint of the listener, it reviews what American listeners were hearing on both the international and domestic shortwave bands, describes the arrivals and departures of stations, and recounts important shortwave events. It also introduces readers to the several categories of broadcasters, explains the impact of relay stations, frequency management, and jamming, and describes technologies with the potential to benefit and burden shortwave listening. It also addresses the changes in, and challenges to, shortwave broadcasting since the end of the cold war. The book is richly illustrated and indexed, and features extensive notes to facilitate further reading or research.

The story is told in a year by year format with each decade its own chapter. Details of new stations first entering the shortwave broadcasting battles and favorites leaving the air are covered as they happened. Name changes were an all too often occurrence as broadcasting entities sought to change their image or at least appear more relevant.

Clearly, the height of international broadcasting on shortwave was during the Cold War years where east and west used the shortwave medium for news, cultural and information spreading as well as a generous sprinkling of disseminating political agendas. The post Cold War transformation signaled the changing of the guard as shortwave stations struggled to find relevance in a shifting political world. As new media developed, shortwave broadcasters seemingly lost their way. The author's approach of following the trends on a year-by-year basis will not only bring back memories but enable the reader to assess the evolving nature of shortwave broadcasting as it was happening. It is a fascinating story that is well done.

On the domestic side, the use of shortwave was important to reach listeners. Numerous stations existed throughout all of Latin America providing shortwave listeners around the world great stations to enjoy on a regular basis. However, as the years faded, so did many of the stations as FM replaced shortwave in many regions. Nevertheless, the evolving domestic shortwave broadcasting scene was rich in stations and formats that provided listeners with many interesting hours of entertainment as well as DX targets. While those days are now gone, for the most part, *Broadcasting* provides a useful roadmap to the evolution of domestic shortwave broadcasting from a listener's perspective.

The first chapter provides an overview of shortwave broadcasting. The next seven chapters are the heart of the book; a decade by decade review of the shortwave broadcasting scene starting with the post-war years 1945-1949 and concluding with the new millennium, 2000-2008. The final chapter discusses the changing shortwave environment before concluding with an Appendix that details stations by year, Chapter Notes, Selected Bibliography and an Index.

Similar to *Listening on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today*, the Chapter Notes enhance the reading. These little nuggets of important details add to the richness of the story and

should not be missed as is often the case in scholarly works; at least by me! I conscientiously read them flipping from chapter text to the notes for additional details. So much material is packed into the notes, it is as if another book is hidden within the Chapter Notes; definitely worth reading. I would suggest reading them as you read each chapter because they do add considerable fine points to the saga.

Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today By Jerome S. Berg is a 496 page, hard-bound (7 x 10 inch) book, which includes 190 photographs, an appendix, and a detailed index. For the benefit of those wishing to do additional reading or research, comprehensive endnotes and a selected bibliography contain extensive references to both popular and academic resources. The book is available direct from the publisher, McFarland & Co., Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640 for US\$65.00 plus US\$4.00 shipping and handling in the United States

and US\$6.00 elsewhere. Also, orders may be placed by telephone (1-800-253-2187) or FAX (1-336-246-5018) or through the publishers' website <<http://www.mcfarlandpub.com>>. Orders can be charged to VISA, MasterCard, AMEX, or Discover cards. The books are also available from Universal Radio in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and from major Internet booksellers such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Waterstone's.

Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today, along with its companion *Listening on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today*, are two radio-related books that need to be in every radio listener's library. Similar to *Listening* what sets this book apart from any other books written about the early days of radio broadcasting is that a radio hobbyist, with the insight of a true radio hobbyist, has written this one. What better time than today to dig into some terrific hobby reading. Definitely, these two books are "must reads" for every radio enthusiast.