

Passport to World Band Radio

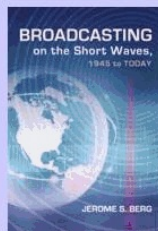
2009

World's #1 Selling Shortwave Guide!

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Just Released: Final Volume in Radio Trilogy

Jerry Berg's *Broadcasting on the Short Waves 1945 to Today*, like the final slice of Wagner's "Ring," completes one man's lengthy trilogy on shortwave broadcasting and listening. At slightly under 500 pages, this new volume is packed with enough material to keep any radio buff occupied for several enjoyable evenings.



Listeners' Perspective

International broadcasting has long suffered from inadequate documentation, especially in recent times. And some of what has been written has been selective, misleading or worse. But even more to the point, these books have usually been by and for professionals or scholars, not folks in the listening audience. These have offered a valid perspective, but from only one appendage of the elephant.

Berg's new book, along with the prior two, help resolve this. Together, they form the magnum opus of a lifelong radio enthusiast writing for fellow enthusiasts; yet, this third volume resists the tendency to focus narrowly on hobby interests, insider chatter and personality clashes.

The book is divided into an overview and several year-to-year histories. The overview is broken down by broadcaster and topic, while the vast remainder of the book is in time clusters of five to ten years apiece. The writing flows well and avoids ponderous argot, making it an enjoyable read even if you're not a rabid veteran of the shortwave dials.

Overview

Although the 55-page overview is in a relatively scholarly topic sequence, it reads well. Especially enjoyable is the beginning which covers individual major broadcasters, along with smaller and clandestine stations. Unsurprisingly, the emphasis is on stations that have most piqued the interest of radio enthusiasts; for example, there are fully three pages on shipboard and hobby pirate stations.

However, its coverage of what is arguably shortwave broadcasting's most important asset—its one-of-a-kind ability to resist gatekeeping—lacks central facts and conveys unfortunate impressions. This presumably reflects not just a listener orientation, but a listener orientation rooted outside target areas of jammed broadcasts.

For example, it is *twilight immunity* (which takes advantage of geographic differences in maximum usable frequencies), not raw power or frequency shifting, that is and has long been key to overcoming jamming. Also unmentioned is that *DRM transmissions*, unlike conventional analog broadcasts, are readily jammed, nullifying shortwave broadcasting's central *raison d'être*. And while Ed Murrow's two "Sunday Punches" go unmentioned, over a page is devoted to one listener's utterly ineffective campaign to eliminate jamming. (That said, it's a neat little story.)

Most other subjects fare better, even with limited depth and few insider yarns. Especially commendable is the book's analysis of the commoditization of shortwave, which in turn forms part of a larger explanation of the growing shift away from home-based transmission facilities.

An exceptionally important topic appears not in the overview, but at the end of the book: the future of shortwave broadcasting. Here, too, the importance of shortwave's being uniquely able to overcome gatekeeping is not the writeup's strong suit, nor is there an evaluation of the contrarian shortwave activity of China Radio International. Yet, overall this is easily one of the best explanations we've come across to date of how shortwave has changed in recent years and where it appears to be headed. Meat and potatoes, it is researched, detailed, thoughtful and meaningful. You can agree or disagree, but if you're interested in that topic you need to read this analysis.

Year-to-Year History

Listener orientation thrives in the time-sequence chapters on what took place and what these events have meant. This, the beefy part of the book, produces something of a flowing story. And like any good yarn, it holds your interest.

It is a potent story, too, albeit one that tends to have been overlooked by newly minted international broadcasting managers. These folks, alas, have often been painfully unfamiliar with the track record and audience impact of global shortwave radio.

For example, during the Cold War years covered by this volume, words were more decisive than weaponry to ultimate victory. Indeed, resistance leaders and eventual heads of state *Lech Walesa* and *Václav Havel* have stated flatly that it was Western international broadcasting—usually shortwave and often jammed—that was key to winning the Cold War. Unfortunately, the glitz and drama of military confrontation, espionage and similarly tingling activities have caused this important historical lesson to have been lost on most of the public at the time, and subsequently by historians as well.

Bottom Line

This book completes what amounts to a three-volume listener's feast of 1,199 pages on the history of world band radio from its outset through much of 2008. It is inconceivable that this trilogy would have come to pass except under the aegis of Jerry Berg, who for decades has been persistently unearthing bits of radio history and securing the QSL card collections of leading pioneer DXers before or just after they've died. Indeed, many of these QSLs are pictured in the book, and perhaps someday PBS will produce a documentary on Berg's little-known but fascinating sleuthing adventures.

These books aren't cheap, so many folks will probably prefer to start off with just one volume, leaving the others for possible later purchase. Given the trilogy's listener orientation, the volume that seems most appropriate for world band aficionados remains *Listening on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today*.

Call it love, call it passion or call it compulsion. But whatever has motivated Jerry Berg to snare these documents and write these volumes, we are the beneficiaries. If over the years you've found yourself dusting off old shortwave radios to once again revisit a dormant passion, these books are worth obtaining not only for a great initial read, but also to revisit in the years to come. —*Lawrence Magne*

Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today, McFarland & Company, Inc., 496 pages, ISBN 978-0-7864-3674-3, \$65. Available from radio dealers, bookstores or at www.mcfarlandpub.com.

Also, *On the Short Waves*, 280 pages, ISBN 978-0-7864-3029-1, \$39.95; and *Listening on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today*, 423 pages, ISBN 978-0-7864-3996-6, \$65.00 (see [below](#)).