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Listening on the Short Waves 1945 to today

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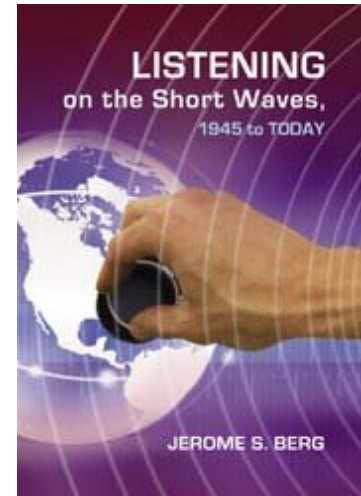
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Publisher's description: *The discovery and development of shortwave technology during the 1920s and 1930s permitted radio stations throughout the world to transmit their programs over long distances, even worldwide, for the first time, and the thrill 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. This book picks up the story in 1945, describing the resumption of organized shortwave listening after the war and its development in the years since. The companion volume, Broadcasting on the Short Waves, 1945 to Today, focuses on the world's shortwave stations.*

Written from the standpoint of the serious shortwave enthusiast, this book begins with an examination of the broader shortwave listening audience. It then presents in detail the histories of the major North American shortwave clubs and reviews the professional and listener-generated shortwave literature of the era. It also covers the DX programs and other listening fare to which shortwave listeners were most attracted and the QSL-cards they sought as confirmation of their reception. The book presents a chronology of the shortwave receivers available and discusses how changes in receiver technology impacted the listening experience. It also addresses the important role that computers have played in the shortwave listening of recent decades. The book is richly illustrated and indexed, and features extensive notes to facilitate further reading or research.

Review by Andy Sennitt

Jerry Berg, now retired, is a well-known and highly respected shortwave listener. Ten years ago his first book, *On the Short Waves 1923-1945*, was published to great acclaim, including from Media Network. That book, which is still available, tells the story of shortwave broadcasting from the

earliest days up to the end of World War II. At the end of 2008, the story was brought up to date with the publication of two more titles dealing with the same subject from 1945 right up to the time of printing. Because there was a lot more information available on post-war shortwave broadcasting, it was decided to split the material across two titles, one called, *Broadcasting on the Short Waves 1945 to Today*, dealing with the stations themselves, and this volume, which deals with specialised subjects related to the hobby of shortwave listening.

Worldwide coverage

Although the book is written from a North American perspective, it covers the situation worldwide, and is the most authoritative history of the hobby of DXing and Shortwave listening that has ever been published. There are separate chapters dealing with clubs, literature, listener programmes, receivers, QSLing and computers. From a personal point of view, the chapters on literature and listener programmes are especially interesting, since they include the *World Radio TV Handbook*, on which I worked for 19 years, and of course *Media Network* as a radio programme, for which I was a contributor throughout its existence.

As one might expect of someone who has worked in the legal profession, Jerry Berg's attention to detail is a major plus point in all his books. Those things in which I was personally involved, as well as events of which I have personal recollection, are all described accurately. But I also discovered a lot of additional information that put some of these events into a broader context.

Appreciating the difficulties of others

Refreshingly for a North American writer, Jerry Berg understands the difficulties encountered by hobbyists in other parts of the world. As a personal friend of Victor Goonetilleke from Sri Lanka, I was pleased to see a reference to his "herculean efforts" in producing the bulletins of the Union of Asian DXers. Jerry observes that "*the UADX bulletin would distinguish itself as the only third-world DX newsletter with a major following throughout the world. Its reputation was well-deserved*" and that "*the many practical difficulties that the club often faced made publication a triumph*". But Jerry doesn't forget to mention the other key people who helped Victor in those years - Sarath Amukotuwa, Oliver Goonawardena, Sarath Weerakoon, and Gerhard Werdin.

Younger readers will be fascinated at some of the 120 photos included in the book, which include a range of shortwave receivers, many of them with dials that made accurate frequency readout impossible. However, by the 1980's digital readout of frequencies to the nearest 100 Hz was common, and radios were now being made without 'dials' at all. The writer pays appropriate homage to the famous Sony ICF-2010, which he says "*was to portables what the Hammarlund HQ-180 was to vacuum tube sets - the best performing set on the market, a reputation it maintained for two decades.*"

Computers

The penultimate chapter of the book describes the growing influence that computers have had on the hobby of shortwave listening. I was pleased to see a screenshot of Pete Costello's Shortwave/Radio Catalog, created in 1994, that was in its day "*the most comprehensive index to radio on the Internet*", and indeed pre-dated the first website of Radio Netherlands. Jerry Berg points out that, although Pete Costello's site is long gone, the site <http://www.radio-portal.org/> has a searchable database of over 42,000 URL's [in fact over 44,000 at the time of this review]. There's an interesting section on what was around before the Internet, and mention of Bulletin Boards and dial-up modems, which brings back some memories. The observation that '*early dial-up modems operated at 300 bits per second*' might seem amusing to younger readers, but that's how it was. I must remember that next time I complain about our network being 'slow'.

Thematic rather than chronological

The author's decision to arrange this volume thematically rather than chronologically makes it an ideal book to read in short bursts, and not necessarily in any particular order. But one by-product of this arrangement is that some people show up in several chapters in different roles. In my case, the fact that the literature chapter is immediately followed by the one on listener programmes happens to chronologically match my move from the WRTH to Radio Netherlands Worldwide, but that's just a lucky coincidence. Jonathan Marks, a friend and former colleague who was also my boss for a time, shows up in various places, all meticulously indexed.

As in the companion volume, the combination of a very detailed index, copious chapter notes and a selected bibliography make it possible to do follow-up research on numerous subjects or individuals. The fact that the references are so detailed is testimony to the amount of work that Jerry Berg has put into this book. It's unlikely that anyone will be able to emulate his efforts, so this and its companion volumes look destined to become *the* definitive history of shortwave broadcasting and listening. Moreover, such an accolade is well-deserved.

Disclaimer: This review was done independently of the author and publisher. Radio Netherlands Worldwide has no financial connection with either and provides the information above in good faith.

Tags: 1945 , Jerry Berg, short wave, shortwave