



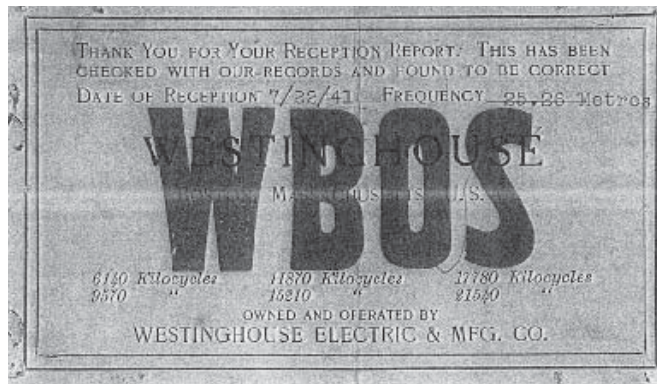
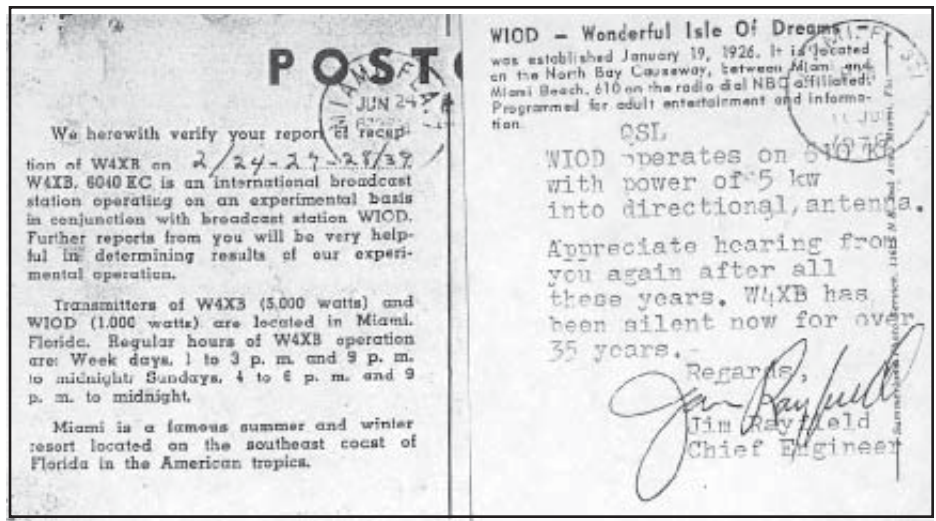
Looking Back

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Looking Back is a nostalgic reflection on the shortwave scene of yesteryears, written from the personal experience of the author, who has been DXing the shortwave bands for over seven decades.

Musical Memories Part 1: Big Band Swing

In the pre-WWII years, and through them, European fans of “pop” music reveled in the era of swing music, played by the classic big orchestras, such as Benny Goodman (“The King of Swing”), Artie Shaw, Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, and others. To be accurate, some of these famous musicians also had their smaller groups, such as the Benny Goodman Quintet.



"The Voice of Westinghouse"

Also noteworthy is how well-trained these performers were. Goodman, for instance, was a maestro on the clarinet and played occasionally with classical music orchestras.

For the shortwave listener of those times, much of it came to us on the HF spectrum from several U.S. stations. At this time they were privately owned, but affiliated to the major networks (CBS, NBC and commercial powers such as RCA and Westinghouse).

One of my favourite stations, pre-war, was W4XB (later to become WDJM) which transmitted on 6040 kHz and put in a regular good signal to England in the “wee” hours of the night and early morning. Excellent reception was noted during 1939-40, with lots of swing music and their evocative station ID, “By the palm-fringed beaches of blue Biscayne Bay in tropical America”. They relayed WIOD, “Isle of Dreams”, mediumwave 1300 kHz. Peak reception

time seems to have been around 0400 GMT (=UTC), which was encouraged by our duty of fire-watching in the local Home Guard (We were required to look out in the gardens and houses nearby for Molotov Cocktails, a bundle of incandescent “burning bomb” type of incendiary dropped by the Luftwaffe!).

Other favourite stations bringing us the Big Band music were W3XAU (WCAU Philadelphia); W1XK - later WBOS - “The International Voice of Westinghouse”, Boston; W2XAD/F (WGEA/O) in Schenectady, NY; and WNBI, RCA New York; to name a few. The swing style of music could be well enjoyed by the listener, as opposed to classical music, where the continuity line might be lost due to fading or static.

However, the shortwave scene was changing, as the need for news broadcasting in “foreign” languages became more urgent, and signal reliability became important in a “service” context. So, quite soon after the start of World War II in September 1939, the U.S. government stepped in and insisted on beam antenna systems and a minimum power of 50 kW. This put paid to a number of lesser stations such as WDJM and the Chicago stations W9XF/W9XAA (I never managed to hear the Chicago ones). Times were “a-changing” and soon one heard U.S. stations in European languages and even utility transmitters pressed into service. Not long after came the first Voice of America broadcasts.

Big Band music still lingers on, of course, especially in the hearts of aficionados like yours truly! But it was more fun in those days.

Until next time....