

Nighttime AM radio

Lets listeners escape into another world

By RANDY WALKER

Carr building sleeps when I return from the library at 2 a.m. I open my door and a beam of light falls across my roommate, sleeping on the top bunk. I lay my books down softly in the dark. A few minutes later I crawl into bed.

Then I escape into another world. It's not the world of dreams. Not exactly. It's the nighttime world of AM radio.

I plug in the earphone, switch on my bedside Motorola and tune in Rev. Ike.

The Pope of the airwaves, Ike is perhaps the greatest of the radio preachers. Tonight, he promotes a book on how to change your luck with the aid of Jesus. With this book, you can improve your love life, make more money, stay happy and healthy. The book is

absolutely free, but a small donation will be most helpful.

Rev. Ike rules a coast-to-coast radio empire. Every night he speaks to his subjects. In his theology, Jesus runs the American dream; He rewards Ike's listeners and contributors with new cars and stereos.

I remember a story I heard on a competition Reverend's show. It seems one of Rev. Al's listeners had lost the way of the Lord. She got fired, her health was shot, her family life was in ruins. Then she made a small donation to Al's ministry, and damed if Jesus didn't straighten things up right away! He even gave her, not one, but two Cadillacs. That story made a believer out of me.

Rev. Al had a toll free number you could call to get on his mailing list. Al sent me all kinds of great stuff, like the Magic Healing

Hand and a miniature cross made of actual wood from Israel. For a small fee, Al would send you a vial of water from the Dead Sea and a bottle of dirt from the Holy Land.

Rev. Al, how can I hear you from so far away? What magic carries your voice hundreds of miles, high above sleeping suburbs and empty cities and cornfields waving in the night, through my Motorola and a 90-cent earphone into my sleepy head?

That magic is called the Kennelly-Heaviside layer.

AM transmitters emit two types of waves: ground waves and sky waves. Ground waves follow the curve of the earth, while sky waves go into the atmosphere. During the day, the sun destroys the sky waves and receivers only pick up the limited-range ground waves. But when the sun sets, the sky waves bounce off a layer of ionized particles 68 miles above the planet—the Kennelly-Heaviside layer. It's kind of like natural satellite transmission.

Because signals can travel thousands of miles at night, two stations far apart can interfere with each other's signals. The Federal Communication Commission regulates stations to prevent that. The FCC designated about 45 transmitters as "clear channel stations." That means that they have almost exclusive right to their particular frequency. The clear channel stations blast out 50,000 watts, the maximum permitted by the FCC.

Tiring of radio gospel, I turn the dial, seeking the great clear-channel powers of the East: WLS, Chicago; WGAR, Cleveland; WCAU, Philadelphia; WABC, New York, among others. All stations east of the Mississippi have call letters starting with W, except for a few pioneers like KDKA, Pittsburgh, America's first licensed station and still on the air. Sometimes by freaks of the Heaviside layer, I pick up K-stations from the West or C-stations out of Canada.

I spend a few minutes with Larry King, talk-show emperor, coast-to-coast on Mutual Radio Network. I drop by Jarrell's Truck Plaza on I-95, where Big John Trimble rides 50,000 watts out of WRVA, Richmond. Then I grow tired of talk and seek out music.

Spinning the radio dial, you can hear pop hits, classical symphonies, rock oldies, Muzak, country, funk, soul, jazz, Latin, bluegrass or anything else Americans listen to. But late at night I like the music of the '30s best.

Muted trumpets and trembling strings call me back across time. I settle on what seems to be an oldies program. The transmitter must be far away, because the station fades in and out; the Heaviside layer, which makes long distance radio possible, also causes the wavering sound.

The signal comes back, and a tenor voice sings about lost love. Even through the scratchy record and radio static, he sounds alive—could he really be dead and turned to dust when he sings to me this very moment?

Perhaps the signal left the station in 1935 and got caught in a time warp, and is only now reaching my radio.

Or maybe it is something else. The song grows faint. I sink ever deeper into sleep. Then I hear:

"Live from the Stardust Ballroom, this has been Ramon Ramirez and his orchestra."

I couldn't have really heard it, it must have been a dream. Or perhaps, somehow, time broke and I slipped back into Depression-time. Maybe, for a moment, it really was 1935.

But it is too late to care. The sound in the earphone recedes to a whisper of voices, music and static. It is time to sign off. In the gentle glow of the AM dial, I am asleep.

Randy Walker is a staff writer for The Daily Tar Heel.

On sports

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continued to train for the next two years.

Swimming is another sport in which an athlete's highest goal is the Olympic Games.

"For the premiere athlete, I think it would be worth considering to continue to train with that goal in mind," UNC swim coach Frank Comfort said.

Comfort added that most swimmers probably leave the sport altogether.

"Most of them probably go into retirement after swimming and weightlifting for so many years," he said. "That is difficult to continue when you don't have a team to support you."

Those who want to stay involved in the competition get involved in Master's Swimming, a program of age-group swimming that "goes right into the 80s and 90s."

There was a women's professional volleyball league several years ago, and when it folded, so did a big opportunity for volley-

ball players. But the United States Volleyball Association does provide a chance for good players to continue competition, but only in certain areas of the country.

"You can only play in USVBA if you happen to be living in an area that has a team," Carolina volleyball coach Beth Miller said. "I'd like to see pro volleyball started again, for the players' sakes, but I'm not sure if they could make a go of it financially."

Both Miller and Comfort said coaching is a way that athletes can continue to be involved in their sport.

"It's the feeling of giving something back to the sport," Comfort said.

"There are many coaching opportunities in volleyball," Miller said. Former UNC star Jane Foley is currently the head coach at Virginia.

Norman Cannada is the sports columnist for Spotlight.

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