



DX Listening

By Glenn Hauser

CANADIAN CAPERS

WHEN THEY have a choice, avid shortwave listeners usually prefer tuning in a country's domestic service (especially if it's in English), rather than the international service. Domestic relays on shortwave last for many hours, allowing foreigners to get essentially the same radio programming heard within the country.

International services tailor their programs for a foreign audience, in repetitive blocks that are typically only 30 to 60 minutes long. International broadcasters believe it is part of their job to explain basic facts about their country; they assume their audience is basically ignorant. So for example, the Voice of America usually tacks on a geographical locator when mentioning a certain state—"the midwestern state of Ohio" and so on.

Despite the great overlap in culture between the USA and Canada, Radio Cana-

da International does the same thing: Nova Scotia has to be identified as an "Atlantic province." But such talking-down to an audience goes much deeper. Humor, for instance, is seldom broadcast; when carried, it is carefully screened or explained. CBC domestic radio generally has one or two Canadian comedy shows running, but to hear them one must tune in something besides Radio Canada International.

For many years now, RCI has been the victim of its own misconceptions about how best to fulfill its mission with the limited resources available. A study showed that, to be effective, a high degree of redundancy must be introduced. (This may be true for distant target areas, but not for the country next door!) As a result, the same half-hour program (except for news updates and the Sunday DX-Digest) is broadcast to the USA



four times each evening (five times in the summer), in the hope that at least one of the airings will reach all listeners.

A secondary reason is the time-zone difference. While this does introduce a convenience factor, it is absurd to assume that everyone listens to the radio only at 8 pm local time. The fact is that everyone in North America can hear all of the broadcasts without difficulty.

Of course, it requires much more than half a man-hour to produce a half-hour program. But RCI could better serve its American audience by continuing to produce its special 'for external use only' program and broadcast it twice, liberating another hour (which ought to be in a one-hour block instead of two half-hour blocks) for re-broadcasting some of the best Canadian domestic radio programs. This would simply be a matter of juggling tapes and should involve very little additional production costs.

RCI is constantly faced with budget problems. An obvious solution would seem to be to relay more domestic programming and produce less original programming. The RCI staff would probably consider this a step backwards, an admission of defeat, while RCI listeners would welcome access to more Canadian domestic radio via powerful short-wave transmitters.

What about the CBC Northern Shortwave Service? For many years, Americans have had an alternative to RCI. But the mission of the CBC NS is not to allow Americans to listen to CBC domestic radio. On the contrary, its mission is to serve the few remaining isolated areas in the Canadian North where there is still no local radio and no satellite receiving terminals.

The director of CBC NS revealed in an interview on RCI that the Northern Service is mainly concerned with reaching only 13,000 people in northern Quebec, the native language of the great majority of whom is either Inuktituk or Cree. The fact that many CBC NS programs are still in English is considered a necessary evil, resulting from a limitation of resources necessary to produce programming mainly in Inuktituk and Cree.

But CBC NS has been making progress. Little by little they have been systematically dropping English-language programs. Last year, among those to be dropped were: the last hour of "Morningside" on weekdays; the first third of "As It Happens", and then all of it; "Booktime", "Eclectic Circus", and the weeknight entertainment strip at 8:04 pm local, which includes comedy, drama, nostalgia and quiz shows.

Americanization of Programs. Ironically, much of the time gained in this way has been given over to playing American-style country and western music, with native lyrics, which is undeniably popular among the Indians and Inuit, but is no more native to their cultures than Beethoven or Barbara Frum. Perhaps we should charitably consider this a remarkable effort by English Canada to cease imposing its cultural values on native peoples. In reality, it seems to be a case of "give 'em what they want," rather than "give 'em what they need."

I maintain that this trend is *not* progress, but serves to further isolate native peoples from some of the best aspects of western culture. An RCI spokesman maintains that it

is progress; and we are frequently reminded that the American audience is of no concern to the CBC NS.

Fortunately, there is some hope that RCI will adopt some of the programs dropped by CBC NS. The RCI broadcast of "As It Happens" (the weeknightly newsmagazine which inspired NPR's "All Things Considered" in the USA) has become one of its most popular items. For the past several months, RCI's new director, Betty Zimmerman, has been reevaluating how RCI can best fulfill its mission with an inadequate budget, and carrying more domestic programs on shortwave is one of the options.

RCI's own programs throughout the evening are carried on from three to five frequencies at once. By breaking away just one of these, an alternative programme of CBC domestic radio could be made available to U.S. listeners, while traditional RCI programs to be broadcast on the remaining channels.

There is still another alternative for U.S. listeners: Tune in to CBC Radio on AM (in some cases, FM). Americans close enough to the border can get CBC Radio via a "clear" channel at night, and even closer to the border, they can be heard also in the daytime. These are the main ones: Halifax 360, Moncton 1070, Montreal 940, Toronto 740, Windsor 1550, Thunder Bay 800, Winnipeg 990, Regina 540, Calgary 1010, Edmonton 740, Vancouver 690.

Unfortunately, CBC domestic radio itself is embarking on a trend in the wrong direction. Big changes are in store during the prime-time hours of 8-10 pm as of March 31. Currently, after the 4-minute 8:00 o'clock news, there is a different 25-minute entertainment program each night, followed by an hour and a half of a different musical style (quebecois, folk, country, rock, jazz). CBC programmers have now seen the (American) light and decided to take all this material and mix it up together into a two-hour magazine each weeknight, without any specific identity. In a way, that'll be a help to listeners like me, giving me two hours during which I can safely not listen to CBC. Little gems from "Dr. Bundolo's Pandemonium Medicine Show" may be in there somewhere, but damned if I'm going to sit through 10 hours to find it.

Canada is inundated by American culture, including American radio and TV. It's a constant topic of concern, and moves frequently surface to Canadianize their own broadcasting services. This is certainly all to the good. Not only Canadians, but Americans are bombarded with too much American-style programming in too little variety.

But why doesn't CBC retaliate, by making an effort to get Canadian programming into the U.S.A.? An old-fashioned inferiority complex may be at work here: Canadians like to run down the efforts of CBC as second-rate, while tuning in to American (or American-style) commercial stations and networks in large numbers.

The Grass Is Always Greener. Americans who have had a taste of noncommercial CBC Radio, a national network with block programming of classical concerts, book readings, science programs, children's programs, a weekly nationwide call-in, drama, documentary, comedy and satire—in other words, a well-rounded, intelligent radio service—are eager to hear more CBC Radio.

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Reception of CBC NS on shortwave is not reliable, nor is it intended to be in the U.S.A. Two 250-kilowatt transmitters in New Brunswick operate at half-power on a beam heading of 348° (almost due north), so we are lucky to hear anything at all, more or less off the side of the beam. The problem is compounded by the extremely conservative frequency policy of CBC NS. All their frequencies suffer various degrees of interference, ranging from light to extreme, but no changes are ever made to improve the situation as far as reception is concerned.

There is a final ray of hope for would-be American listeners to CBC Radio. Though certainly there are small numbers of hunters,

hermits and nomads throughout the vast Canadian North not within range of a community radio station and without a dish to receive satellite service, it's questionable whether these people actually depend on shortwave while it is still available. Once that pocket of 13,000 shortwave-dependent people in northern Quebec is served by satellite and local radio, CBC NS may consider its shortwave mission accomplished, and close down that portion of its effort. This would liberate two powerful transmitters for other uses. We can hope that at least one of them would be dedicated to dawn-to-midnight broadcasts of CBC Radio toward the USA. It would serve us right.