

HAVING FUN WITH YOUR RADIO

By Henrik Klemetz

From previous visits to the country, I knew that Colombia was not a bad place from a DXing point of view. So when I moved there in 1992 for a period that was to last until 1998, my idea was to keep a close look on the tropical bands.

Our house, in a lower middle-class neighbourhood, called "Bolivia", on the Western outskirts of the 6-million Colombian capital, Bogotá, was relatively free from electrical noise. I was surprised, though, to see that installing a phone line did make a difference, and even more so the Compaq PC we installed a bit later.

Knowing that it is sometimes rather difficult to obtain a written verification from some of the stations you hear, I started out to document my findings by way of a logbook and tape recordings, keeping them in chronological order.

Some time later, I created a kardex file in frequency order, which enabled me to keep track of all frequency moves and station changes.

As soon as we were on the phone, I added a fax machine, an answering device and a phone patch to the rest of the equipment.

The receiver I used was a Sony ICF2001D, and sometimes also a Sony ICF6500W, with a 7-metre wire strung on top of our three-story house. Towards the end of the period, I added a simple antenna tuner, and when I was going outside of town, for instance to Villa de Leyva, 150 km north of Bogotá, I brought a German-made LP-shaped tunable frame antenna, which was quite useful for MW reception.

- Reporting techniques

Initially, I sent my reports by letter, although I did, at times, report by phone or by fax, especially if a station was requesting this kind of listener response, and this did in fact happen from time to time.

Sometimes, when I was approaching a brand new station, I would request a specific tune to be played for me at a given date, and in the show and time slot that I had been monitoring.

A positive feedback from the station was a verification in itself. The address I had picked up on the air was now OK and, additionally, on the air there would also often be some kind of reference to the contents of my letter, and so just as good a verie as a written acknowledgement.

During my six years in Colombia, very few stations ignored such a music request. I think one must conclude that a good deal of stations just love to devote a chunk of their programming to distant foreign listeners.

WAITING FOR THAT SPECIAL PROGRAMME

Tuning in a quarter of an hour prior to the time you have set for your music request, you sometimes sense that there is something special cooking. The speaker sounds happier than usual, the announcements are different and more emphatic than before. The station has "alcance internacional" (international reach), which is something new, and the radio waves now "llegan más allá de nuestras fronteras" (reach out beyond our frontiers).

Such was the case of Radio Centro, in Ambato, Ecuador, 3289.8 kHz, a morning in January 1994.

Just before sunrise, which is prime DX time, in the equatorial zone, I used to listen to a music show conducted by the co-owner and manager of the station, who at this time of the day was taking phone calls and playing requests for friends and acquaintances.

One morning I recognized a theme which was used as a cue on a show which I remembered hearing in 1983 when I was stationed precisely in Ambato. The tune was called "El sanjuanito de Yaruquí" and so I decided to write in to inquire about the DJ who used to do that show. It was not quite what you would call a reception report, only kind of a reaction from a listener who wanted to have a question mark straightened out.

In my letter I said that I would be listening next Sunday morning at 5.30 am, local time, should he want to comment on my letter.

When tuning in a 5.10 am, I immediately noticed that señor Luis Alberto Gamoá Tello was up to something special. Sure he was greeting all the regulars, such as señora Marcela

Zurita, at the Urbina Food and Grocery Market, asking her to keep the usual portion of chicken for the Radio Centro staff. But now he was also warning "Atención Bogotá. En 15 minutos vamos a leer una importante carta que nos ha llegado desde la capital colombiana" etc. The announcement was repeated a couple of times until 5.30 when went on to comment on my letter.

In the course of this show, Gamboa handled phone calls from various local and semi-local listeners, but at the very end of the show, when taking leave of his listeners, he asked me to give him a ring, "A ver, amigo de Bogotá, por qué no marca el 82 24 40, cosa que le agradeceremos mucho" (Now, why don't you dial our number? We would certainly appreciate that). I felt I had to do so, but I did not do it immediately, only next Sunday morning when I had figured out which was the actual area code for Ambato.

From then on, I was included in Gamboa's greetings list, together with señora Marcela and all the others. There was, however, one question that had to be dealt with first. From my letter and phone call, he did not seem to understand whether his listener in Bogotá was a Colombian or a "gringo" (foreigner). "Carambas, este colombiano también tiene un nombre medio especial de gringo" (Gee, this Colombian also has a rather foreign-sounding name). So in a subsequent phone call I explained that "Nils Henrik Klemetz" was a Colombian resident, not a Colombian citizen. I said I felt that I had a special connexion to Ambato, having been there for quite some time to teach Spanish to a bunch of Scandinavians who were building a hydroelectric power plant.

And so, when Gamboa received the mike from the regular nighttime conductor of "Rumbo al amanecer", he started off by saying "Qué tal, amigos, ya están disfrutando de la música ecuatoriana. Buenos días a nuestros oyentes, buenos días a mi amigo en Bogotá." (Friends, how are you doing. You are now enjoying our Ecuadorian music. Good morning to our listeners, good morning to my friend in Bogotá).

Eventually, the "Amanecer andino" (Dawn in the Andes) show turned into kind of a letterbox for reports from listeners abroad, Japan, USA, Sweden, Finland etc. as their early morning transmission coincided with a period of decent propagation to many parts of the world.

Gamboa was happy with this, and so were all reporters, too. Radio Centro was a good verifier at the time.

About a year later, at 10 pm or so, local time, at a time when I was usually sound asleep, I casually tuned the band and was surprised to hear señor Gamboa on the air, and even more surprised to hear him talk about his "loyal foreign listenership". He was thinking of many, but in particular of one very special listener in Bogotá, Colombia. What if Klemetz was listening at this very hour, he asked rhetorically.

I immediately phoned him to tell him that I was.

This made a profound impact on Gamboa, who shortly afterwards sent me a package including some goodies and a T-shirt from their FM operation, Radio Bonita.

- Programming

The Radio Centro programming on shortwave in 1994 was from 9 pm to 9 am (0200-1400 UTC) and on Sunday mornings it included a midnight show called "Rumbo al amanecer" (Heading for dawn), at 5 am, "Amanecer andino" (Dawn in the Andes), 6 am, "Serenata musical" featuring Mexican rancheras, 6.30 am, "Los valsecitos" featuring Ecuadorian and Peruvian pasillos and waltzes, 7 am, "Notas de la semana" (This week in review), 7.30 am, "Aquí Ecuador" (Here is Ecuador), and 8.30 am, "Boleros románticos".

Canned announcements were rare on Radio Centro. Here are two versions that I recorded in 1994:

"Desde Ambato, jardín ecuatoriano, transmite Radio Centro [music] 1130 kHz onda media, 3290 kHz onda corta, banda internacional de los 90 metros" [theme: "Morena linda, te quiero dar la serenata"]

preceded by either of the following two announcements:

"Ambato, poesía de tierra pintada de blanco, perpetuos y verdes campos. Ambato, incrustación de oro en los Andes ecuatorianos" [theme: "Ambato, tierra de flores, tierrita linda, cuna del sol"]

or

"Ambato, flor y perfume, tierra de frutas, tierra corazón. Ambato, centro de esfuerzo y hombres de trabajo" [music]

A FRIENDLY COSTA RICAN VOICE

Looking for Colombian parish broadcasters around 1600 kHz and working with my LP-shaped loop antenna, I happened to come across a tiny Costa Rican on 1599.7 one morning in March 1994.

Radio Cultural de Pital, also called Radio Pital, and listed with a power of 250 W, was noted at 1026, staying readable until 1038, which coincided with my local sunrise.

I heard a morning show called "Amaneciendo en el campo" (Waking up in the countryside), with ads for local enterprises such as "Servicentro El Rápido", which despite its name catered for bicycles only, not cars, at "25 metros al norte del Terminal de buses aquí en Pital de San Carlos" (25 meters north of the Bus terminal here in Pital, San Carlos).

I sent them a report and a fortnight later I was surprised to take a phone call from Víctor Julio Víquez, the man behind the programme. His morning show was from 3.45 to 6 am, local Costa Rican time, he said. In addition, he had a daily news programme between 5 and 6 pm, called "Ecos del progreso". He talked for a while to me, and then his wife talked to mine.

I asked him to mention my letter on the air next morning, and so he did. At 5.31 am, local time, he started to read my letter, "una carta que nos llenó de alegría" (a letter that filled us with joy), "un reporte que ha causado sensación" (a report that has caused sensation). I could feel that this was what he needed to boost his ad sales.

Subsequently, there was a "linda canción folklórica colombiana con el conjunto de Aniceto Molina", and before the signal faded out I heard him assure me that the 15,000 people of Pital would all very much like to meet us. There was no need to look for any hotel, should we ever go there. Many people would love to have us stay with them. Pital was a friendly and prosperous agricultural town next to the Nicaraguan border, supplying all of Costa Rica with pineapple and other produce.

In Pital, Víctor Julio had had the pleasure of seeing "la princesa Nohra del Principado de Liechtenstein", he said, confirming thus what I learnt during a visit to San José in 1987. Most of the small Radio Cultural outlets in Costa Rica had been set up with foreign aid from the tiny Principality of Liechtenstein.

We later received a magazine and a personal letter from Víctor Julio, and I phoned him a couple of times during his show in March and April.

A few years later, the peaceful town of Pital suddenly hit the newspaper headlines, not only in Costa Rica but also abroad. Two European women - I believe they were German or Swiss, or perhaps even from Liechtenstein - were abducted during a visit to Pital. They were held as hostage for several months until a ransom was paid. The delinquents were eventually seized and turned out to be Nicaraguans.

SOLVING A LONG-TIME MYSTERY RADIO CATOLICA NACIONAL DE COLOMBIA

On 3580 kHz, a Colombian pirate, calling itself Radio Católica, was heard in the 80's by Juan Carlos Codina, in Peru, and also by John Ekwall, in Sweden.

So when I discovered the station on January 27, 1994, I decided not to give in until the mystery was solved. "instalada en San ... departamento de Nariño, Colombia", was all I understood at the time besides a weird frequency announcement, "3500 kilociclos onda larga, banda de 90 metros onda corta".

Unfortunately, the station was inactive for most of 1994, so it was not until one year later that I got another chance. Meanwhile, I had been travelling to the southwestern province of Nariño, on my way to Ecuador, and according to a broadcaster in Pasto, this station was probably located in a place called Cuatro Esquinas, not far from the town of Túquerres.

[See "Pirate Broadcasting in Nariño", pp. 162-166, in LA DXing No. 5 1992].

When hearing the station for the second time, on January 24, 1995, I noted Ecuadorian music, a few 5-minute spots and occasional ID cues recorded from Radio Católica Nacional del Ecuador ("Escuchan Radio Católica Nacional") as well as several spoken references of the station QTH, "instalada en el primer sector de la vereda de San Carlos", and the live ID was given as "Radio Católica Nacional de Colombia" and also as "Radio Católica Nacional Campesina".

As "campesino" is equivalent to Indian, or indigenous, this had to be a station operated by some local indigenous people with previous broadcasting experience from Ecuador.

The speaker said that the station was located in Colombia but the music was Ecuadorian, and a few of the ads were for commercial firms in northern Ecuador.

The programme ended with a cue which was recognizably a steal from the station's Ecuadorian namesake, "Han escuchado ustedes, Para nuestra gente, una producción de Radio Católica Nacional".

"Para nuestra gente" was a programme I remembered hearing on Radio Católica Nacional del Ecuador, 5050 and 880 kHz, in the mid-80's.

The DJ at sign off said his name was José Celio Díaz, and so I had sufficient stuff for a report.

Still the address was somewhat of a mystery. "Vereda" means village, and I did not find any "San Carlos" on my maps, and so I went to the Agustín Codazzi Geographical Institute, which is Colombia's main mapping centre. On one of their maps I did, in fact, find the place, located two miles or so outside of the town of Túquerres, in Nariño.

I took the precaution to seal my letter with a Vatican Radio sticker, and exactly one week later I noticed that there was something special going on on 3579.8 kHz. At 0048 UTC, when fading in, there was mention of a letter from Bogotá with "una banderilla de Radio Vaticano" (a little flag from the Vatican Radio).

There was more to come. In fact, for almost four hours, José Celio Díaz, was playing music and telling me about his years in Ecuador. "Yo trabajé en Radio Zaracay, monté en Radio Huancavilca, Radio Cristal, Radio Progreso de Loja y Radio Centro, de Ambato" (I worked with ..., I joined ...)

In my letter, and referring to the Ecuadorian music he used to play, I mentioned that I, too, was quite fond of Ecuador, having stayed for quite some time in Quito and Ambato. Commenting on this, the Católica speaker said, "Yo estuve siete años en Ambato, la conozco como la palma de mi mano" (I was in Ambato for 7 years; I know every inch of this town").

His Indian descent and having married an Ecuadorian woman was sufficient reason for playing Ecuadorian music only. "In Julio Andrade [Ecuador] and in places like Iles and Gualmatán our people are listening in to us. They are having "aguardiente" (liquor) and in such venues there is nothing like Ecuadorian music, which is sometimes merry, sometimes sad", he said.

As a botanist living in an Indian reservation near Túquerres, broadcasting was just a hobby and a pastime.

My letter, he said, was brought to him by the local judge, who happened to see it when he was at the local post office.

Later, when in Túquerres, José Celio Díaz would go to the Telecom office to phone me to see if I could find him two 807 tubes for his transmitter. I published the request in various DX bulletins and I did receive several price quotations. However, nothing ever materialized. Meanwhile, the station was getting out as often as the power was turned on.

I was genuinely saddened when I learnt that Radio Católica was one of the numerous Colombian pirates to be busted by the police in a nationwide crackdown late November and early December 1995.

I still continued to receive mail from José Celio Díaz urging me to pull whatever strings I could to get him an ordinary broadcasting license. In one of his letters he included a copy of a 5-page police report detailing the crackdown on Radio Católica. In an enclosed 60-minute cassette tape he laments his bad luck and decries corruption in official quarters.

José Celio Díaz once said he had received a report from Boston, USA and one from Uruguay and Argentina each. I do not think he ever answered any one of them.

VOICE VERIE FOR A SNAIL MAIL REPORT

La Voz de la Colina, in Risaralda (Caldas), Colombia, was heard in 1995 on frequencies varying around 3200 kHz. The station was announcing 1600 kHz, and so I believed I was hearing their second harmonic. When they finally got around to mention their address, Avenida San Joaquín 1-05, salida a San José, Risaralda (Caldas), I decided to give it a try.

What I got was no written reply, only a message on my answering machine.

From their programming I knew that they were not on the phone, so I guess someone from the station was calling me from a public phone booth or from the hq of one of their advertisers.

Here is what was on the answering device:

"Aló. Es un saludo muy especial de parte de los integrantes (de) La Voz de la Colina. Damos los más sinceros agradecimientos para usted, señor Nils Klemetz, por el reporte de sintonía. Esperamos de nuevo tratar con usted, señor. Lo estaré llamando muy pronto. Gracias por su reporte de sintonía. Es usted muy amable. Hasta luego".

(For those who might wonder, Nils is the first of my three Christian names. To an average Latin, Nils has a nicer ring to it than Henrik. I am not trying to convince anyone: I know for sure. Secondly, while living in Colombia, where security risks are at a premium, I thought that I might at times use Nils instead of my normal name).

LISTENING TO PERUVIAN SPECIALS

- Estación Yurimaguas

Dozens of Peruvians have greeted me on the air upon receipt of my report. Relatively few, however, have come back to me in writing. I think this can easily happen when a listener writes in to say that he enjoys listening to the station rather than to ask them if he is.

Estación Yurimaguas, which I discovered on 5046.2 kHz in March 1993, reappeared on 6238 at the end of April 1994. I picked up their address on the air, and when I noticed that Adolfo Ojanama Tanchiva was doing the same show as one year before I found an excuse for writing.

Was it "Chizaneando en la selva"? Or was it rather "Chichaneando en la selva"? And what was the meaning of the first word, I asked. There was no such thing in my dictionary.

On May 17, there was a brief mention of a letter from the USA, no name given, but the next morning, a large part of the programme was devoted to my letter, which was read by Alberto Heliodoro García, just out from prison (!) and with the station manager Luis Humberto Sánchez present. "Chizanear" means to go out and look for food in the jungle, it was said.

Considerable attention was given to my letter. "This letter is postmarked Bogotá and arrived here in sealed condition, so it is clear that someone over there really wishes to get to know something about this programme", which, as a matter of fact, was a rather unusual one, where Ojanama and his friend Bardales were impersonating two Indian tribesmen talking to each other in their locally flavoured dialects.

Also, in the programme it was said that the letter from the USA they had received was from someone in Albany, GA.

On May 19, Adolfo Ojanama again explained the programme title to "nuestro gran amigo radicado en Bogotá". He also said that he would appreciate any further letters directly to his home address, at Jirón Malapi 203, Sector de Moralillos, Yurimaguas.

I sent him a card to that address, too, but there was no reply.

I then wrote to a school teacher who is the moderator of the show "Enseñanza y aprendizaje" (Teaching and learning) which starts at 1100 on weekdays, and, lo and behold, the reaction was immediate.

- Adstrings

It may not come as a surprise that commercial adstrings tell us a lot about the conditions of the place where the station is located.

As Yurimaguas is a riverside port in the Peruvian jungle, road transport facilities are not likely to be publicized on the air.

And so, on May 23, I decided to check the contents of their canned adstring, which contained 10 ads, one for an airline, four for steamship companies.

- Faucett Perú (airlines)
- Peinados Unisex Geraldina, Teniente César López (hairstyling)
- Botica Central, esquina Atanasio Jáuregui (chemists)
- Motonave fluvial Victoria Regia (river transport company covering the route Yurimaguas-Iquitos)
- Panadería Yurimaguas, owned and managed by Victoria P. de Escobar (bakery)
- Botemotor fluvial Danubio (river transport company, covering route Yurimaguas-Lagunas-Bagua)
- Molinos San Martín, Jirón Julio César 329 (flour mill)
- Motonave Gran Caimán (river transport along the Marañón river)
- Los Hermanos Santacruz, curanderos bolivianos (healers)
- Botemotor Santa Gema (river transport, Lagunas & other ports)

The canned ID announcements used in 1994 were like this:

"Estación Yurimaguas rompiendo con todo"

"Una perla en el Huallaga: Estación Yurimaguas, 103.3 en tu dial."

The canned ID announcement at s/on 1005 UTC on June 28, 1994, went like this:

"Buenos días, señoras y señores. Estación Yurimaguas, la señal que identifica la Perla del Huallaga, da inicio a sus transmisiones habituales con en sano deseo que los programas que emitamos a partir de esta hora sean para que usted y yo despertemos aspiraciones de renovación, superación y corrección de nuestros defectos, limitaciones y errores.

Estación Yurimaguas transmitirá a partir de este momento en sus dos frecuencias en simultáneo, onda corta banda internacional de 60 metros [sic] y nuestra FM estéreo "sonido elegante".

Los que laboramos en los distintos programas les decimos gracias anticipadamente por soportarnos en el lugar donde te encuentres, con el sano compromiso de ir mejorando cada día.

Y con estas palabras y contagiados por nuestro entusiasmo, esperanzas, trabajo y superación, anunciamos nuestro primer programa:" [live: "Por los caminos del Perú"].

BELATED SPECIAL

Radio Paucartambo, 5894.8, was audible almost every evening in November 1994 until s/off at midnight.

I noticed that there was a programme called "El bus musical" weekdays from 2300 to midnight. From the slogan "amistad mediante la radio" (friendship by radio) I thought I might send a letter to the programme host rather than to the station.

I planned for my special greeting to coincide with a weekend DX trip to Villa de Leyva (Boyacá), 150 km north of Bogotá. The signal was there, but there was no greeting or anything special on the show at the time I had suggested.

Suspecting that my letters might have been lost - in fact, I sent him two, one by registered mail and the other by ordinary mail - I made it a point to check the programme upon my return to Bogotá.

Finally, on December 12, three weeks after sending my report, there was a rather short greeting on the programme for me and my wife. This programme contained lots of romantic stuff by singers like José Luis Perales ("Te quiero"), Yuri ("Amame") and Manolo Otero ("Qué puedo hacer para olvidarte", "Camisa de seda", "Te he querido tanto", "Ahora canto a tus ojos negros", "La mujer española" and "El amor fue bueno conmigo").

The greeting was heard only once on the programme, which was rather disappointing, I thought. And so I was happy to receive a lengthy letter from Manuel H. Loaiza C., moderator and presenter of the programme (whose name I previously did not know), where he said that both letters had been received OK but with some delay.

Someone may ask, how did I address a letter to someone I did not know the name of? And did I have the right address to the station? The answer is: "Para el presentador del programa "El bus musical", Radio Paucartambo (Emisora municipal), Paucartambo (Cusco), Perú".

From Loaiza's reply one may understand that the letters had been retrieved at the Post Office by the station's message boy.

Here is what he writes:

"Increible pero cierto le digo que las dos cartas me fueron entregadas el mismo día (12 de diciembre) al comenzar el programa y lo saludé de inmediato, ojalá haya estado en la sintonía, ya que Ud. me refiere que tenía que escuchar el día 6, pero no fue posible por las dificultades del correo en el Perú".

Summing this up, what he says is that he greeted me immediately upon receipt of the letters, and hopefully was I listening that day, although I said I would be listening in for my greeting on December 6, but this was impossible due to "difficulties" with the Peruvian postal service.

In his letter, Loiaza gives "Correo Central" as his return address, which probably means that he has to go to the P O and inquire himself about any mail.

BELATED LETTER.

Radio La Voz del Marañón, Cajabamba, was logged on May 4, 1996, on 5604.1, right next to various EE and SS utility stations. I was fortunate enough to grasp the address, "Jirón Bolognesi 1300, Barrio Alameda, Sector Los Delfines" in the town of Cajabamba. As they were asking for reports, I did not think twice about sending them one.

I also informed about the station in my "Dateline Bogotá" bulletin. (See <http://www.algonet.se/~ahk/Dateline.htm>)¹

Nothing happened, though, until several months later when Håkan Sundman, in Finland, reported receiving a reply from the station. OK, I said to myself, that happens every now and then. You discover a station and then comes someone else to fetch the verie or to claim that he discovered the station...

Meanwhile, my QSL-letter was stacked in a P O Box right next to mine at the Alamos P O in Bogotá. And I did not know it.

As it happens, the Avianca post boxes are partly transparent. There are three small vertical peep holes on the front door of each box. This enables you to see if there is any mail inside without having to open the box door.

¹ Currently accessible at: <http://www.hard-core-dx.com/swb/Dateline.htm>

As most of these boxes are rather slim, the box door measuring only 10 x 12 cm, the letters have to be stacked in a vertical position. You can then easily see if you have several items in the box or just one, or none whatsoever, but you cannot see what kind of letter it is or where it comes from.

As I had been receiving mail addressed to someone else's box, I decided to ask the P O manager to check the 95,474 box for me. It was right next to mine. No one ever seemed to empty it, and it now contained several letters, one of which decidedly from Peru judging from the red-white stripes, typical of Peruvian air mail envelopes, that were visible through the peep holes.

Grudgingly, the box was opened. "We don't usually do this, you know. There is no reason to do it", the P O man said.

However, there it was. And several other misplaced letters. Now, don't you believe that this led to improved sorting of mail at the Alamos office. But that is an altogether different story.

In his letter, Eduardo Díaz Coronado, says he is sorry that the answer is late, and so he asks me to stay tuned to the show "Brisas del Marañón" (Breezes from the Marañón river) from 6 to 7.30 pm, local time, where "we will be greeting you with our Peruvian music" as a token of appreciation for "my precious letter".

From the return address on the envelope I can see that the street number actually is 130, and not 1300, as reported by me. But to the Peruvian P O this did not seem to be of any importance.

In some other places, as we have just seen, one single digit sometimes makes a lot of difference.

Ooo