

# zero bias: a cq editorial

BY RICH MOSESON,\* W2VU

## *Voices From the Air*

One of the interesting things about being a magazine editor is that sometimes an issue “talks to you” as it’s being put together. I’ve written here a couple of times about issues that tell me what’s going to be in them rather than the other way around. This is *not* one of those issues, but it is talking to me and is telling me what to write about right here (and if I know what’s good for me, I’ll listen, HI). It wants me to talk about the magic of “voices from the air” and to urge all of us never to lose that magic in the name of “progress” as our analog world becomes more and more digital.

For many of us, our love affair with radio began with voices from the air, whether it was listening to a faraway station on the AM broadcast band on a winter night or listening to voices and music from halfway around the world on the short-wave bands ... or maybe, just maybe, a trucker a thousand miles away on CB “skip.” Regardless of the source, it was those voices that drew us in – distant voices snagged magically from the air by our antennas and coming through our headphones or speakers. They provided us with a connection to other humans across the country and around the world, and a reminder that, regardless of language or politics or anything else, people everywhere have more similarities than differences. For us hams, that reminder is reinforced by being able to send our own voices through the air, to talk back to those faraway humans and maybe make new friends a half a world away.

Today, though, many of these voices are disappearing from the airwaves. AM broadcast radio is becoming an endangered species, with homogenized content from megagroup owners and struggles for financial survival in smaller markets. Car manufacturers would love to drop the AM band from their “entertainment centers” in favor of subscription satellite services that earn them commissions from every new subscriber.

The international broadcast bands on shortwave are getting less and less crowded, as government “broadcasters” shift their signals to satellites and the internet. I am reminded of this by reader Kris Herzog, WPC9WHO, who complains in our letters column on page 18 that he not only has trouble finding new stations to tune in but finds that fellow short-wave listeners are becoming more and more scarce as well. The shortwave bands themselves are unlikely to be abandoned, though, as a group of international stock traders is petitioning the FCC to allow high-speed, high-power, digital transmissions on multiple frequencies that threaten to cause significant interference to adjacent ham bands.

On the ham bands themselves, the explosive growth of FT8 and its cousins has come mostly at the expense of our traditional voice and CW modes. While FT8 “came of age” during our most recent sunspot minimum and essentially saved DXing during that timeframe, conditions are spectacular right now but it can still be difficult to find someone to chat with on SSB or CW. And FT8 definitely is not a “chat” mode.

Don’t get me wrong. I have nothing against digital modes. I was a very early adopter of packet radio and, in fact, wrote

the first user guide to operating packet (“... How to Work it, Not How it Works”) in these pages back in the 1980s. In the ‘90s, Digital Editor Don Rotolo, N2IRZ, and I wrote about early efforts in digital voice in *CQ VHF*. Digital modes are in my ham radio DNA. But there is still something special, something different, something magical, about hearing distant voices coming through your speaker vs. seeing words from a distant computer scrolling across your screen. And we need to be careful not to lose that magic in pursuit of digital “progress.” We need to maintain a balance and exercise our microphones as well as our keyboards and keys.

There will be a great opportunity to do that at the end of this month, when the HF ham bands will be packed with voice signals during the SSB weekend of the CQ World Wide DX Contest, ham radio’s most popular contest and perhaps the world’s largest participation sporting event. It doesn’t matter if you’re a contester or not. It doesn’t matter if the QSO is very brief. There will be voices out there, voices from all over the world, voices from distant places, all with a common goal – to talk, yes, talk – with as many other people as possible in as many different places as possible within a 48-hour window. The best solar cycle in decades promises to make the CQWW weekend all the more exciting as we welcome hundreds of “voices from the air” into our stations and send ours back across the airwaves to theirs. Please dust off your mic and join the fun on October 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **In This Issue...**

This issue is chock-full of great articles (even if they didn’t try to tell me what to write about here!), starting with a project in keeping with the theme above, a transceiver-to-computer interface (p. 65) that lets you easily switch between voice and digital modes without needing to adjust audio levels. We’ve got our eye on youth as usual, with reports on the Newsline Young Ham of the Year presentation ceremony in Huntsville (p. 7) and this year’s Youth on the Air Americas summer camp in Ontario (p. 8). In our cover story, Z35M celebrates his 1000<sup>th</sup> portable operation on page 12, a trip to a place called Snake Island and a look back at his out-of-shack experiences over the past 14 years. We also take a couple of trips back in time with WD5GYG’s article (p. 20) on the radio gear aboard Thor Heyerdahl’s Kon Tiki raft, a *CQ Classic* look (p. 26) at “QRP in the South Pacific” and a review by N1EA of VE1BC’s book on the history of ship-to-shore radio (p. 31).

Next, we head to Rome for a behind the scenes look at last summer’s 1A0C activation from the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM) for the first time in four years (p. 32) and a visit to a radio museum in Scotland’s Orkney Islands. And while we’re visiting the distant past, Analog Adventures editor KL7AJ takes a look at “Analog Computers” that a few of you out there might still use (p. 82).

There’s much, much, more, so I won’t hold you here any longer and cordially invite you to read on, but be sure to take a break on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of this month to be one of the “voices from the air” that keep the magic of radio alive!

\*Email: <w2vu@cq-amateur-radio.com>