

# Happy New Year Around the World in 24 Hours

By Fred Waterer

New Years Eve is a time of traditions. As one year comes to an end and a new one looms on the horizon, it's a time to look back – and to look forward, to what we hope will be better times. It's also a time of some very ancient traditions and some more recent ones. For instance, shouting and cheering at midnight is a very ancient practice, designed to frighten away any evil spirits. Being surrounded by friends and loved ones at midnight, toasting the New Year, and singing *Auld Lang Syne* are also long-standing traditions.

My personal tradition is to try to listen to radio stations all around the world, as the planet celebrates the arrival of the New Year. And with the advent of the internet, one can now get an even more local flavor to the worldwide celebration.

## Early New Year Broadcasting

Special programming for the holidays is nothing new. In fact, the first ever radio broadcasts were reportedly transmitted on Christmas Day and repeated on New Years Day, 1906, by Canadian inventor Reginald Fessenden. One could perhaps argue that these two broadcasts represented both the birth of radio programming and of the DX hobby. The programs consisted of some phonograph music, Fessenden both speaking and singing (with violin accompaniment), and general wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. They subsequently received reports of reception from as far away as the West Indies.

Fast-forward to 1929 and the inauguration of what was to become a broadcast tradition for parts of six decades, initially on radio and then on television. Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians began a New Year's Eve staple, playing the Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. Thanks to the broadcast of this performance across Canada and the United States, listeners across the continent could share in the celebrations vicariously. So popular was this broadcast that one year, his New Year's Eve show was on two networks, switching from CBS to NBC at midnight.

The Lombardo broadcast is an example of the power of the relatively new medium of radio. During that first 1929 performance, Lombardo chose to play his arrangement of a song he had often heard sung by Scottish immigrants during his youth near London, Ontario.

That song was of course, *Auld Lang Syne*. So many people heard it and accepted it as a New Year's "tradition," that it became one of the largest selling records of the time; even today over 75 years later, radio stations that would normally never think of playing Lombardo's style of music (billed as "the sweetest music this side of heaven") will play his version of *Auld Lang Syne* at midnight. You are also just as likely to hear it from Australia or South Africa, as you are to hear it in New York!

## A Worldwide Celebration

The celebration of New Years Eve and New Years Day is certainly not just a North American phenomenon. Virtually every country in the world that uses the Gregorian calendar has some sort of celebration as the old year comes to an end and a new one begins.

It's always been a fun exercise to follow the progress of the celebrations around the world, as each country and region rings in the New Year. As world band radio listeners, we have always had the ability to do this, and with the arrival of the internet, we can enhance the experience by having access to any number of local and regional radio stations throughout the world.

CNN did a visual version of this on Dec 31, 1999, as they celebrated the arrival of the new millennium (which wasn't actually the turn of the millennium, but that's a whole other story). It was fun to watch.

## How to Get Started

So what does one have to do to follow the events around the globe? Rising early on December 31<sup>st</sup> (from a North American perspective) one can easily begin the journey around the world as the New Year arrives in each time zone.

The first method is to listen to the BBC World Service. As each time zone begins its own celebration, the BBC announcer will wish their listeners in that particular region a Happy New Year.

What follows is a brief rundown of suggestions as to where to tune and when, in order to hear the New Year celebrations in different regions of the world. May I recommend

that you consult your favorite guidebooks, DX programs, and websites in advance, in search of last minute program information, and try to tune in your preferred station well before the stroke of midnight. Also, keep an eye on <http://www.timeanddate.com>, which was consulted for this article.

## Asia-Pacific

Beginning west of the International Date Line in the Pacific, the New Year arrives in New Zealand at 1100 UTC Dec 31. One can try for Radio New Zealand International or one of the local radio stations in New Zealand via the internet.

The New Year next arrives in the Melbourne studios of Radio Australia at 1300 UTC. Try 3AW in Melbourne via the internet for the local perspective <http://www.3aw.com.au>. Australia is obviously a large country spread across three time zones; therefore, it takes three more hours for the New Year to arrive in Western Australia. In the meantime, try for local programming in Brisbane at 1400 and Darwin at 1430. Perth in Western Australia parties at 1600. For local flavor, try <http://www.6pr.com.au> for New Year celebrations in Perth.

Midnight in Tokyo is at 1500 UTC. NHK Radio Japan joins in with special programming taken from the NHK Tokyo service in Japan. Check regular NHK Radio Japan services in the 1100-1530 UTC time span. Reception of this has reportedly been spotty over the years, at least in North America.

Taipei, Beijing, Manila, Hong Kong, and Singapore all celebrate midnight at 1600 UTC. Your best bet for hearing any special programming from these countries in North America may be local programming via the internet.



Voice of Vietnam circa 1986



З Новим роком!

Radio Kiev circa 1984 "Happy New Year"

### South Asia, the Middle East and Russia

Moving eastward, the New Year arrives in Pakistan at 1800, in New Delhi at 1830, and in Kabul at 1930 UTC.

Now we are arriving at one of the busiest time periods. Many countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa all join the New Year in the next few hours.

First up at 2000 UTC are Abu Dhabi and Iran. Then at 2100 UTC, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Nigeria all greet the New Year. 2100 is also, as the song says, *Midnight in Moscow*. While you would be wasting your time looking for anything special on the Voice of Russia at midnight, Moscow time, perhaps one could try for something domestically, such as Radio Rossii, or one of the on-line private stations. I often listen to one or other of the feeds at <http://www.101.ru> out of Moscow. Perhaps something could be heard there.

### Europe and Africa

At 2200 UTC, midnight arrives in a large number of countries, including Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine, South Africa, Belarus, Romania, Finland, Greece, and Bulgaria. You might hear something via shortwave from Israel or Greece. Many Israeli networks are online. Once again, if you live outside of Europe, look for something online from the other mentioned countries.

One annual New Years Eve tradition, which is long gone, was the annual phone-in from Radio RSA in Johannesburg, South Africa (now known as Channel Africa). Heard in the early eighties, this may in fact have been the first example of what is now a common type of program, the international call-in show. During the apartheid era, it was a

typical attempt to foster goodwill. Hosted by the self-proclaimed "Two Mail Bags," Shirley Veal and Kathy Fitch, it was a unique opportunity to talk directly on the air, and was widely listened to for several years. In 2006 this type of program can be heard on any number of stations, for example BBC's "World Have Your Say," or VoA's "Talk to America."

At 2300 UTC, much of the rest of Europe joins the party, including Poland, Serbia, Croatia, Austria, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, France, and Spain. Austrian (ORF), German (Deutsche Welle), and Spanish (REE) programs should have live broadcasts. Italian (RAI), Croatian (HRT), French (RFI) may be available live. HRT Radio in Zagreb, Croatia is certainly available 24/7 via the internet <http://www.hrt.hr/hr/>

At 0000 UTC Jan 1, 2006, as the time suggests, it is midnight at the BBC, and also in Dublin, Iceland, and Portugal.

New Years Eve is perhaps the only time of the year that one can hear the world's most famous bell chime. Located in St Stephen's Tower, "Big Ben" is the nickname of the largest bell in the tower, the bell that marks the hours. A few minutes before midnight UT, tune in to BBC World Service and hear "Big Ben" in London ring 12 times as January 1<sup>st</sup> arrives. Occasionally, you can hear the crowd cheer as the 12<sup>th</sup> chime sounds and before the BBC cuts back to the studio.

Don't forget that you can listen to any number of BBC broadcasts online. It might be interesting to check out some of the domestic networks and regional stations such as BBC Radio Scotland or BBC Radio London. Just go to the BBC website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio> and browse for your station of choice. Or if you prefer Ireland, try RTE Radio 1 online, <http://www.rte.ie/radiol/index.html>

Portugal should be audible on both shortwave and the internet. There is an impossibly long URL for the live audio, so just log on to <http://www.rdp.pt> and navigate to radio and RDP International.

### The Americas

Staying with a Portuguese theme, there is now a two-hour wait as one crosses the Atlantic to Brazil at 0200 UTC. Try the tropical and shortwave bands for Brazilian stations.

Next, at 0300, much of the rest of South America comes into play, with Argentina and Chile reaching midnight local time, followed at 0330 by the Canadian province of Newfoundland as the New Year finally arrives in North America. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation website may be quite useful. I am not really sure that CBC stations across the country do anything special at midnight (the TV network has been known to show films that begin before midnight and run right through into the New Year without even acknowledging it). However, you can try accessing the stations across the country. For links go to <http://www.cbc.ca/local/>



Shirley Veal and Kathy Fitch hosted the now defunct New Year's Call-In Show on Radio RSA in the 1980s.

At 0400, the areas in the Atlantic Time Zone ring in the festivities (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Cuba, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico). Powerhouse CBC station CBA in Moncton, NB (1070) is a good bet to be heard in Eastern North America. Venezuela is a more difficult catch than it used to be. Perhaps try for Cuban stations as well, such as Radio Rebelde.

At 0500 the Eastern Time Zone arrives at midnight, including major areas of North America such as Quebec, Ontario, New York, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Washington; and outside North America, Colombia and Peru. Any number of clear channel AM radio stations will be on the air, including CKAC 730 Montreal; CFRB/CFRX (1010/6070), CHOW 740, and CHUM 1050 in Toronto; WABC 770, WNBC 660 and WCBS 880 in New York; WBZ 1030 in Boston, WSB 750 in Atlanta and many others, many of which will be streaming on the internet as well.

Since most of the American shortwave stations are Christian in orientation or platforms for paid programming, don't expect too much live programming, if any, from most of them. Possible exceptions may be WBCQ and WRMI.

Next up at 0600 is the Central Time Zone (Winnipeg, Chicago, Minneapolis-St Paul, New Orleans, Houston, Dallas, Nicaragua, Mexico, and much of Central America). 0600 is probably a good time to cruise the tropical bands looking for Central American signals. Also, I have noted





**Inside and outside of a New Years Card from Radio Tashkent, circa 1986. The slogan in gold on the cover reads "Happy New Year" in Russian**

a number of Mexican stations stream online. WRNO, also sadly gone, was heard one year virtually simulcasting with WWL.

Garrison Keillor's weekly radio show will broadcast twice on Dec 31, 2005. "A Prairie Home Companion" can be heard during its regular Saturday timeslot from 5-7 pm CT. Later in the evening Keillor will present a special live broadcast from 10pm-1am CT. The program originates in The Fitzgerald Theatre in St Paul, Minnesota.

The New Year finally arrives at 0700 in the Mountain Time Zone (Edmonton, Calgary, Denver, and Phoenix) and at 0800 on the West Coast (British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California). As with the East Coast, look for programming from the big cities, Vancouver, LA, Seattle, and so forth.

0900 is midnight in Alaska. I have no idea if it has any special programming, but I do occasionally listen to a radio station online in Anchorage, KNBA 90.3 FM. Despite the call letters, it has nothing to do with basketball, but is operated by the Koahnic Broadcast Corporation (KBC), a nonprofit, Alaska Native governed and operated media center located in Anchorage, Alaska. "Koahnic" is an Athabascan word in the Ahtna dialect meaning 'live air'. <http://www.knba.org/> Since Alaska is rarely heard here in the south, you may have to peruse the internet.

And 23 hours after we began the journey, we reach the end of the line at 1000 UTC when the New Year arrives in Hawaii, just east of the International Date Line. There is nothing much here on shortwave, beyond KWHR and WWVH. Your best bet in North America may be the internet.

## More to Hear Than Just Auld Lang Syne

Don't think that all you will hear is 15 or 20 versions of *Auld Lang Syne*. In the days and nights between Christmas and New Years Eve, and later on New Year's Day, most international broadcasters present programs looking back at the current year as it comes to an end and looking forward

to the year to come. Since this period is often a holiday period for staff, most programs were prepared well in advance. Regularly scheduled programs may have "special editions" or may be dropped in this period and replaced with special end of the year programming. So you are likely to hear reports on the year in sports, the year in politics, economic reviews and previews, and so forth.

There is much light-hearted fare as well. Some stations exhibit a real sense of humor. For instance, Radio Moscow (as it was then known) had a very enjoyable program one year featuring members of the staff sending greetings and singing songs (*Auld Lang Syne*) sadly yet good-naturedly, quite off key.

Another radio station exhibiting quite a sense of humor is Radio Prague. Over the years, Radio Prague has become notorious for being able to laugh at themselves and their countries' politicians. For instance, in 2003 on New Years Eve, Radio Prague aired a program in which they parodied many of their regular programs. One Christmas, Radio Prague also poked fun at the Czech Prime Minister, with Santa Claus being accidentally confused with (then) Czech Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, leading to some very funny misadventures, which were set right in time to save Christmas. It's impossible to imagine the Cold War Radio Prague making light of Communist boss Gustav Husak. More evidence the times have changed indeed.

New Year's Eve was a big celebration in Soviet times; to some extent this lingers today. Look for some entertaining programs from the Voice of Russia and other former Soviet states.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has a history of dropping their regular schedule on Christmas Day and New Years Eve/Day (and all statutory holidays, for that matter). You never know what you might hear. For a number of years one of the highlights of the season for me was a program called "Snap, Crackle and Pop." Roy Forbes seems to "pop" up on Canadian holidays on a regular basis. The CBC describes the show thus: "Ring out the old year and ring in the new with two hours of great music on 'Snap, Crackle, Pop.' Singer, songwriter and record producer Roy Forbes draws on his huge collection of vintage recordings for music by Jack Teagarden, Brent

Titcomb, Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters and yes, even Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians. So make a date with Roy Forbes and co-host Paul Grant for New Year's Eve." (CBC Hotsheet Dec 31 2001) I've heard these shows for many years. Forbes has an amazing collection and an encyclopaedic knowledge of the music he plays. Just an example of what you can hear.

Another New Year tradition originates in Vienna. The annual Vienna Philharmonic New Year concert is seen or heard by an audience estimated at 1 billion persons. With audience participation reminiscent of the BBC Proms, the lively Strauss music is an annual treat. It can be heard via shortwave on ORF and can usually be seen on television in North America. Check out the Vienna Philharmonic website closer to the time.

So, there is a brief retrospective of some of the programs one can hear at New Years. It's always an interesting time to listen, and I wish you luck in your listening efforts.

As a final observation, just after midnight arrives in your time zone, it's interesting to surf up and down your local dial. It's amazing how many stations will be playing either *Auld Lang Syne* or *New Years Day* (or both) as by performed by U2. At one time you might have heard 1999 by Prince, but that is fairly passé now.

## Orthodox Christmas

And finally...if you are not too tired of Christmas yet, don't forget that Orthodox Christmas is celebrated in a number of countries, including Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia (and many of the former republics of Yugoslavia), on January 6. Try some of these around this time of year, as each country has for all intents and purposes a "state" church.

### About the Author:

*Fred Waterer has been a shortwave listener for close to thirty years, with an interest in radio history. He's also been editor of the "Programming Matters" column in the Ontario DX Association's publication "Listening In" for 20 years. Fred resides in St Catharines, Ontario.*

## Best Bets on Shortwave

UTC	Country, Station	Freqs kHz
1100	New Zealand, RNZI	9885 (0800-1059 UTC) 15530 (1100-1259 UTC)
1300	Radio Australia	9580 11660
1500	Radio Japan	9750 11815 (Japanese; 11705 via Canada) 7200 9875 (English; most frequencies beamed to Asia)
2200	Greece, Voice of	9420 7475 (15485 to North America, ends at 2200)
2300	Spain, REE	9535
	Germany, DW	6075
	Austria, ROI	6155 5945
	Croatia, HRT	9925
	Italy, RAI	11800
0000	United Kingdom, BBC	5975
	Portugal, RDP	15540 9715 at 0000 UTC
0330	St John's NF, CKZN	6160 (not an easy catch)
0400	Cuba, Radio Habana	6000 9820 (English)
0500	US, WBCQ	5110 7415 9330
	US, WRMI	7385 9955
0800	Anguilla, Caribbean Beacon	6090 (Is the late Gene Scott's ministry live on New Years Eve?)
1000	Hawaii, WWVH	2500 5000 10000 15000 (time standard station)