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Sangean WFR-20 Wifi Radio
Pick your own Programming

As I type this review, I'm listening to the crisp brass of Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien* emanating from the two 3" stereo speakers in a small desktop radio. But this radio is something quite different from what I'm used to; its wireless interconnect feature has linked it to the Internet through my host computer from a distance of up to 300 feet, allowing me to visit hundreds of classical music broadcasts at any one time, and countless other stations and stream sources throughout the world.

You don't even have to have a computer; it can be used as a stand-alone receiver working into a broadband Internet connection and a wired or wireless router.

The radio is from Sangean and it's the WFR-20, their new WiFi Internet radio. Its sleek, black cabinet with one dial belies its multi-functional capability. A touch of that dial allows many menu choices, and a tiny infrared remote control makes the tasks even easier.

This little radio with big sound offers a menu with options of some 60 genres of music including favorites like jazz, flamenco, folk music, classical, rock, new age, rap, country, bluegrass, Christian, blues, hip hop, Latin, oldies, and many more. Talk radio, sports broadcasts, news, interviews and other non-musical programs are also available at the touch of the dial.

You can search for these stations with the radio or you may use your favorite web browser and upload them to be filed in the "My Stations" folder. Many of these stations offer a choice of "Live" (current broadcast) or "On Demand" (previously-broadcast) sources, the latter of which can be fast-forwarded or fast-reversed.

It is estimated that there are currently more than 20,000 active Internet radio stations and audio stream sources available. These are registered for your reference on the Reciva portal website: **www.reciva.com**. By registering with Reciva, the listener may configure his WRF-20 to access an enormous database of stations and streams of his preference, effectively increasing the radio's initial 12-channel memory substantially.

Internet radio is like listening to satellite XM or Sirius, but with an astronomically larger selection, and without a monthly fee! Granted, the satellite feeds are available to portable and mobile radios wherever they roam, while Internet radio still requires the computer connection.

❖ Features

The WFR-20 supports MP3, WMA, WAV, AAC, AIFF, FLAC Real Audio, and AU formats. A choice of display languages is user-selectable. A clock/sleep/timer/alarm is yet another functional selection, adjustable for 12 or 24 hour format.

And, if you'd like to use the WFR-20 to access your personal digital media library via your wired or wireless networked computer, you can select Windows™ Media Player™ using the radio's UPnP Server, or optionally call up your Microsoft™ Shared File Folder function using any of the formats listed in the paragraph above. Your computer's hard-drive-recorded programs can be fast-forwarded or fast-reversed by a simple click of the remote control.

Sound quality on the Sangean is quite good for a table radio. A single dial controls volume, bass and treble, as well as station and mode selection.

The three-line, backlit LCD display is easy to read, and provides all the programming information as it is manipulated either by the dial or the remote control. After the station is selected, the display automatically announces the station along with the contents as provided by that specific program.

Since starting this review, I've switched channels. Right now the scrolling display is telling me that I've selected AccuRadio Classic Crossover, and I'm listening to Alfred Brendel's Sonata No. 3, Opus 53 D. 850, 2. con moto, and that Real is enabled at 64 kbps in MP3.

The multilingual display vocabulary may be selected from any of 11 different languages.

The display offers a wide viewing angle of large characters, and brightens when the dial is pressed or turned to make an adjustment, dropping back to a softer glow when simply scrolling its information. The backlight dial may be adjusted for brightness levels to suit the user.

What distinguishes the new wifi radios isn't their hardware – it's what you can hear on them!

The WFR-20 is powered from AC; internal audio power to its speakers is 5 watts per channel, available for optional external speakers or a set of headphones from rear terminals. To feed the receiver's audio to an external amplified stereo system, a stereo line output is also provided. Both audio sources employ standard 3.5 mm (1/8") jacks.

There is an additional 3.5 mm input jack for allowing the radio to accept an external audio source with two different programmable sensitivity choices to accommodate high or low input levels.

Its WiFi connection is supported by both 802.11 b and g, or the user may wish to utilize a direct LAN (Ethernet) connection (cable included). The radio measures 11-1/2"W x 4-1/2"W x 7-1/4"D.

As with all digital equipment, future upgrades are inevitable. Any such upgrades for the WFR-20 may be accessed on line via the Configure menu item.

❖ Internet radio peculiarities

One annoying characteristic of Internet Radio is the capricious nature of some program sources; you may be listening to your favorite music and suddenly it's switched to another piece. Or the buffering of the incoming data is choked by the connection and you experience frequent audio dropouts during your favorite passages as it catches up.

Not all programs announce their program content, so it may be impossible to identify what you're hearing without having access to their program schedule. And finally, not all channels are active all the time.

Switching through the memorized stations is not rapid; it may take anywhere from a few seconds to nearly half a minute for the radio to load on each newly-selected channel.

❖ A final note

Internet Radio is just one more staggering achievement in the evolution of the worldwide web. It offers the potential to draw divergent civilizations closer together. And what better way to do it than with their music and their voices? *MT* will continue to bring you Internet Radio programming information in regular installments. Stay tuned to the *GlobalNet* column!!

The new Sangean WFR-20 WiFi Internet Radio is in the $300 price class and is available from *MT* advertisers.