

Voices of the Night: AM Radio and the Globalization of R&B

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Abstract

Mid-century R&B is a topic with a rich history of scholarship rooted primarily in the liberal arts. However, one relatively unexplored aspect is the impact of long-distance radio transmission on its movement into the mainstream of popular culture. A geo-scientific perspective reveals how this phenomenon, known as the skywave effect, is associated with AM as opposed to FM transmission, favoring nocturnal broadcasts in particular. This technical point of view informs existing discourses regarding cultural appropriation and the rise of the independent record labels. We invite a reading of the serendipitous broadcast of songs, voices, and recordings arising from marginalized communities against prevailing hegemony. The skywave effect reveals disruption of ideological and economical status quo as well as the propagation of late 1940s rhythm and blues music spreading over the following decades into new forms including Caribbean ska and early Rock & Roll.

Keywords: skywave effect, rock & roll, radio history, AM radio, music business, race records, ionosphere, twentieth century popular culture

Paul Linden has toured North America and Western Europe as a blues and roots-american artist. He has performed on *Austin City Limits*, CBS, NPR, and Mike King's award-winning documentary on Chicago Blues. Festivals and venues Linden has played include the Montreal Jazz Festival, Memphis in May blues festival, Atlanta's Fox

Theater, New York's Beacon theater, Portland's Roseland Theater, and the Fillmore West. He has worked with Bo Diddley, B.B. King, Jerry McCain, Nick Moss, Susan Tedeschi, and Kim Wilson. His research interests include interdisciplinary and theoretical approaches to music industry studies. A selection of publications includes "Entrepreneurship: Theory and Application in a University Arts Management Setting," "Translating Race and Genre in Popular Music," and "Malcolm Chisholm: An Evaluation of Traditional Audio Engineering." Linden's research has been cited in the most recent authoritative history of Fender amplifiers, *The Soul of Tone: 60 Years of Fender Amps* (Hal Leonard 2007) and *Vintage Guitar Magazine*. He is also a regular contributor to magazines like the *Tone Quest Report* and the French-based magazine *Blues & Co*.





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