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# Grammy-Nominated Musician *Raul Midón, AE3RM,* Takes Radio on the Road

This blind ham, jazz singer, songwriter, and guitarist blends radio with his music career, while operating from his accessible stations at home and on tour.



## Jim Millner, WB2REM, and Gene Hinkle, K5PA

Amateur Extra-class licensee Raul Midón, AE3RM, and his twin brother have been blind since birth. When he was young, Raul enjoyed listening to his Zenith Trans-Oceanic radio and was fascinated by the communications and music he heard from around the world. He first learned to play a flamenco guitar at the age of five, and was introduced to amateur radio at 12 years old by his science teacher at the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

## Mixing Radio and Music

Raul participated in the Studio Music and Jazz Performance Program at the University of Miami, with an emphasis on guitar. In his early performing years, he provided backup singing and instrumentals for performers such as Julio Iglesias and José Feliciano. He worked in the prestigious Miami session scene, ultimately accepting a gig in Shakira's band as a singer and background vocalist from 1999 to 2001. As a solo artist, Raul made his debut on *The Late Show with David Letterman* and has appeared on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and television shows around the world. In 2017 and 2018, Raul's albums, *Bad Ass and Blind* (2017) and *If You Really Want* (2018), were nominated for Grammy awards.

Raul has combined his passions for music and ham radio by including Morse code in many of his songs. His major-label debut album, *State of Mind* (2005), includes the song "Sittin' in the Middle," which features Morse code. His old call sign, KB5ZOT, can also be heard as the rhythmic pattern of the song. His next album, *A World Within a World* (2007), features Morse code in the song "Peace on Earth." On *Don't Hesitate* (2014), Raul used Morse code at the beginning of "I Can See For Miles," which was originally performed by The Who.

Raul enjoys making DX contacts from his home station, as well as remotely when he's on tour. Although he says he likes the sense of anonymity from being on the air, he doesn't mind talking about performing, traveling, and the music business if he's asked. He's always happy to meet local hams when traveling around the world, as it makes him feel at home and provides a personal touch for hams that attend his performances. You can find out when he'll be in your area at [www.raulmidon.com/tour.html](http://www.raulmidon.com/tour.html).

## A Song About Ham Radio

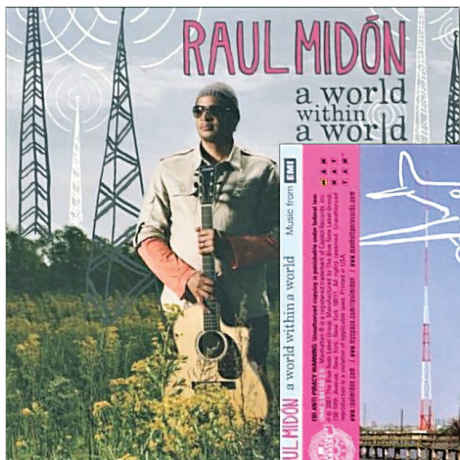
Although Raul has included Morse code in his songs, he had never written or performed a song about the hobby. We asked if he could, and he created "Bottom Cycle Blues." His song can be heard on YouTube, at [https://youtu.be/cq9hzqD3\\_Ow](https://youtu.be/cq9hzqD3_Ow). Be sure to listen for the Morse code message during the guitar passage toward the end.

## An Accessible Home Station

Raul enjoys operating from his home in Maryland, where he has assembled a top-notch station of Kenwood transceivers, an Ameritron ALS-1306 linear amplifier, a 55-foot crank-up/tilt tower, and an assortment of HF and V/UHF beams. "My favorite radios are the Kenwood TS-2000 and TS-480, due to their operating ease for blind hams and all-mode, all-band coverage," Raul said. He explained that these radios have an excellent verbal readout of control settings and the right mix of knobs for tactile rig control. He has found that many of the newer radios, especially software-defined radios (SDRs), use menu systems and graphical interfaces that make it harder to find and set controls.

In addition to the verbal readout for Raul's Kenwood TS-2000, he uses LDG Electronics TW-1 and TW-2 Talking Wattmeters to hear the RF power and antenna matched condition. These meters also emit a tone that changes frequency as the standing wave ratio (SWR) is lowered during tuning. This enables Raul to tune his antenna for minimum SWR when using an external tuner.





The song "Peace on Earth" on Raul Midón's, AE3RM, 2007 album, *A World Within a World*, features Morse code.



Reliable access to the internet is required to operate this remote radio system, and that can be a challenge while staying in hotels. Raul finds that a personal computer allows him to initially set up internet access. As an alternative, he also uses *RCForb Client*, which can be downloaded from [www.remotehams.com](http://www.remotehams.com), allowing him access to other remote radio servers from around the world and providing a lot of flexibility for staying in touch with friends.

## Staying in Touch

Raul uses ham radio to touch base with ham friends while he's on the road, performing in the US and around the world. He hasn't

Station computers are commonplace, which presents some difficulty to a blind operator. Raul uses several software programs to assist him with reading his computer's monitor, including the world's most popular program screen reader, *JAWS*® (*Job Access With Speech*) and a powerful computer accessibility program for displays, called *HotSpotClicker*. Both programs are essential to help Raul navigate computer readouts and controls.

Raul enjoys on-air activities, such as making long contacts, working DX, some contesting, and monitoring the ham bands. His favorite modes are SSB and CW.

## Radio on the Road

Although he has traveled with radios, Raul finds it more convenient to take a remote setup with fewer components with him while on the road. "When I'm connected to my home station, my remote setup doesn't require a heavy power supply, HF transceiver, antenna system, or other components," he said.

Raul's remote station includes a Microbit RemoteRig RRC-1258MkII to interface his radio to the internet while he travels. His Kenwood TS-480 has a detached front panel that allows the main body of the radio to stay at home. This piece is light, making travel easy. At his home station, the TS-480 radio body is attached to the linear amplifier that remains connected to his antenna system. In addition, he can remotely operate his rotator controller and amplifier.

let his visual impairment become an obstacle to his career, nor his enjoyment of amateur radio. His use of auditory aids put him on an even playing field with sighted amateurs, and his musical genius is recognized around the world.

We're grateful to Raul for answering our questions, as well as producing and performing "Bottom Cycle Blues," per our request (see the sidebar, "A Song About Ham Radio"). We hope you enjoy that song, along with his others, as much as we did.

All photos by the authors.

Jim Millner, WB2REM, has been a ham for over 50 years. He's an avid DXer, world traveler, and licensed psychologist. He first began experimenting with remote control linking in the 1980s, and published the article, "The Missing Link," in the September 1986 issue of *73 Magazine*. Additionally, his remote link was featured in a portion of the 1988 ARRL video, *The New World of Amateur Radio*. In the January 1995 issue of *QST*, his article, "The WB2 'REMote' Link," presented a hardware solution to remote linking. He has written other related articles for *QST*, as well as articles about his profession and the current state of amateur radio for *CQ Magazine*. Most recently, a photo from his article, "HD8M DXpedition to the Galapagos Islands," was featured on the cover of the April 2020 issue of *QST*. Jim can be reached at [wb2rem@verizon.net](mailto:wb2rem@verizon.net).

Gene Hinkle, K5PA, began experimenting with ham radio at a young age, which led him to a career in RF engineering. He earned a Master's degree in electrical engineering from The University of Texas at Austin, is an IEEE Senior Life Member, and a retired professional engineer in Texas. Gene is an ARRL Life Member and Volunteer Examiner (VE). He recently retired from a radio technology company specializing in radio geolocation. His favorite ham radio pursuits are CW, low-band digital signals, and making DX contacts. His interests, photographs, and many publications can be found on his website, at [www.k5pa.com](http://www.k5pa.com). Gene can be reached at [k5pa@arri.net](mailto:k5pa@arri.net).

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