

Hello again, and welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

I’m June Simms.

Today we pay tribute to one of America’s greatest composers.

And we visit a play that honors one of the world’s most beloved reggae musicians.

But first, we hear from the “leader of the free world,” or at least someone pretending to be him.

Being President of the United States Takes Work

In some countries, people can be put in jail for impersonating a political leader. But in places where freedom of speech is protected, you may see people copying politicians in public or on television. Today, Kelly Jean Kelly tells us about one such impersonator in the Washington, DC area.

Larry Graves looks a lot like President Obama and Mr. Graves spends much of his time acting like the first black president of the United States. He recently spoke at an environmental conference in Arlington, Virginia.

“I want to thank the Environmental Information Association for having me here today. Now I understand this is your 30th anniversary, so congratulations.”

As expected, some people attending the conference thought they were seeing President Obama. Mike Farrell was one of them.

“It’s really astonishing how close he actually is -- his mannerisms, the way that he speaks, actually his hair, you know the whole package.”

The crowd smiled and laughed once they understood that Larry Graves was just a President Obama look-alike. His performance includes two men who act as Secret Service agents, protecting the look-alike. Matt Baldwin has worked with Mr. Graves for five years.

“People have actually come up to me and asked 'Is that really the president?' Like really. I've had fun with it and I just didn't say anything.”

Many people wanted to have their picture taken with the look-alike president, including Eric Goeller of Arizona.

“I just sent this picture of myself and Mr. Obama back home and I've gotten about 25 text messages.”

Environmentalist Sean Fitzgerald spoke at length with Larry Graves about the dangers of asbestos, which is known to cause cancer.

“I was thinking what would it be like if this was the real president.”

Mr. Graves is shocked that people talk to him like that, even knowing that he is not the president.

“I find it slightly incredulous that people do come up to me with such reverence, with such respect, with such awe.”

He says it took time to perfect the way President Obama speaks. He also uses makeup to help him look more like the president. This includes, darkening his eyebrows, deepening his lip color, and adding a mole.

Besides facial similarities, Larry Graves says he and the president have other things in common.

“We’re about the same size, body size. We’re both left-handed. We both like basketball.”

He has yet to meet the president, but hopes to one day. And he would like to face him in a game of pick-up basketball.

“I don’t think that Obama could beat me in a game of basketball.”

When he is not playing president, Larry Graves works as a substitute teacher in Gaithersburg, Maryland. His fifth grade students watched a video of his performance. At first they thought they were watching the president.

“It looked like our gym teacher but it was really hard to tell.

“It looked just like Obama. It feels like I’m getting taught by a famous gym teacher.”

The students say eventually Larry Graves’ voice gave him away.

Vince Brennan of Vermont was among the delegates at the Environmental Information Association meeting. He enjoyed having the President Obama look-alike stop by.

“It’s great to have great people like the president come down and see us.”

I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.

You are listening to As It Is, your daily magazine show from VOA Learning English. I’m June Simms.

Bob Marley’s Music Comes to Life

One of the world’s most beloved reggae musicians is at the heart of a new musical now showing in Glen Echo, Maryland. The musical is called “Three Little Birds.” It combines the music of reggae star Bob Marley and a story by his daughter, writer Cedella Marley. The name of the play, and the book on which it is based, is taken from one of Bob Marley’s most famous songs.

The music of Bob Marley mixes with a story by his daughter Cedella Marley to create a charming children’s musical.

“The play is about a little boy named Ziggy who is nervous about all the outside issues like hurricanes and mongoose.”

“I have to stay home and watch the weather report.”

“And so he decides to stay in his house and watch TV.

Michael Bobbitt is Producing Artistic Director of Adventure Theatre MTC in Glen Echo, Maryland. He made the musical production from the book.

Ziggy is also afraid of Duppy, an evil spirit who steals the hair of young people to become powerful.

“More hair, more power, more souls.”

Ziggy’s friends and family have decided to get him out of the house so he can start to enjoy life.

“Life is full of danger, but also adventure.”

Eventually they succeed.

“In his travels, he of course encounters all the things that he’s a little bit afraid of, especially Duppy. And then Ziggy learns that yes, life is filled with dangers, but adventures are a lot more fun than danger.”

The young people who attended the show seem to agree. They talked about the parts of the play they liked best.

“I liked the part when the witch was sneaking up and wanted to take the hair.”

“I liked the part when he winked his eye.”

“Three Little Birds.”

“Three Little Birds” is the name of one of Marley’s most popular songs. Based on the excitement of the crowd, Bob Marley’s music is touching a whole new generation.

Remembering Irving Berlin

Finally, American composer and song writer Irving Berlin was born 125 years ago today. He wrote more than 1,000 songs during the course of his career and is considered one of the greatest songwriters in American History. We leave you with one of his most famous songs as sung by Kate Smith.

That's As It Is for today, I'm June Simms. Thank you for sharing your day with us. We welcome you to share your ideas with us as well. Send an email to special@voanews.com.

Have a great day!