



Welcome to American Mosaic from VOA Learning English.

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

On the show today, we play unlucky music in honor of Friday the 13th!

We also tell about a Muslim American rapper who sings about Jesus.

But first, we take a boat ride across the Potomac River near Washington.

White's Ferry

Ferry boats once were an important method of transportation across rivers. There once were more than 100 ferries in operation on the Potomac River. That is the river that runs through the Washington, DC area and into the Chesapeake Bay on the eastern coast of the United States.

All but one of the ferries have been gone for many years. The historic White's Ferry has served the DC area since the late 1700s. And the business is still doing very well. Faith Lapidus has more.

Cars are pulling onto the boat at White's Ferry under the watchful eyes of the captain. Next are the bicycles. Scott Lake and his friends use the ferry service on their way to train for a race.

"I love the ferry. It feels like it is a step back in time. You get to enjoy being close to the river while also cutting your ride back down to a manageable distance."

"The best thing is that it's nostalgic. It is not updated. It is a throwback ferry. It does its job."

Since it began running in 1786, White's Ferry has been a popular way to cross the river that separates Maryland and Virginia. The boat -- the General Jubal A. Early -- is named for a Confederate commander during the Civil War.

Over time, the business was sold. Malcolm Brown's family has owned it since 1946.

"My father came home from the war, World War II, and he and some other fellows got together and bought the rights. And in 1972 when I came home from the service they asked me to get involved with it and run it. I really didn't want to, but I agreed to do it for a year. And it got busier and busier."

As the business grew, so did the boat. The Browns' first ferry carried just three cars. That was replaced by a steel boat for 15 cars. Now White's ferry service uses a cable-pulled boat that can carry up to 24 cars.

White's is the only ferry operating on the Potomac River. It is popular among some local workers.

"It's a lot less traffic, it is a lot less headache. I use it every day. I take it on the way to work. I have been doing it for about eight years now."

“It is certainly much quicker to get where I need to go. And also it is a lovely ride.”

The ride is about three minutes one way, and five minutes the other. And the price is reasonable - \$5 one way or \$8 round trip.

David Pierce Jr. is one of the ferry’s four captains.

“Wish it was a longer ride, not three and a-half minutes. It takes really a multi-task. We have to look at the river, land, the boat and collect (money) all at the same time before we get to the other side.”

There are no plans for building a bridge in the area. So, White's ferry is expected to continue connecting Maryland and Virginia over the Potomac River for some time to come.

American Muslim Raps About Jesus

Young Muslim musicians who write songs about Islam are gaining popularity in the United States. Their appeal is spreading even among non-Muslims. Mo Sabri, from Tennessee, is one such musician. Sabri wrote and recorded a song about Jesus that has gone viral on the web.

“We can go umrah, hop up on a jet, just to go jummah.”

Mo Sabri is singing about Mecca, although rap is not generally known for spiritual messages. He says there are too many songs on the radio that urge children to do bad things. But, Mo Sabri wants to be a good influence.

One of his latest songs got more than one million views on YouTube.

“In the West, they call him Jesus, in the East they call him Isa, Messiah, Christ, the same person that you speak of.”

Sabri says he really wrote "I Believe in Jesus" for the people of east Tennessee. He says he wanted them to know that Muslims respect Jesus.

"The son of a virgin, they say it is illogical, probably improbable, but God made it possible."

"I grew up in an area that didn't really have any Muslims, and I was able to see that they were all more similar than different. I was like, 'I want to reach out to my neighbors and show that Muslims and Christians as a whole can experience what I experienced.'"

Sabri says that Muslims do not believe that Jesus was the son of God, like Christians believe. But he says Muslims do believe that Jesus was a prophet, a messenger for God.

"There's so much misinformation about Muslims, to think that a Muslim can't talk about Jesus, or can't love Jesus, is, I think, just the wrong idea."

Mo Sabri says his goal is to correct that misunderstanding.

“My goal is to dispel that idea.”

He says he was inspired by another musician, Matisyahu, a Jewish reggae artist who has also rapped about religion. Sabri praises Matisyahu’s work.

“It’s really nice to be a role model for the kids and the adults because there’s not too many people doing what I’m doing.”

And Sabri wants to continue that tradition.

Music for Friday the 13th

Do you have paraskevidekatriaphobia? It means fear of Friday when it falls on the 13th day of the month. Friday the 13th has been considered unlucky for hundreds of years. No one really is sure why. There is no scientific evidence to support the belief. But people think it just the same.

So today we are celebrating Friday the 13th with music. Here's Mario Ritter.

In 1972, Stevie Wonder released "Superstition," a song about beliefs and fears that have no basis in fact. The song goes: "13-month-old baby broke the looking glass, seven years of bad luck, the good things in your past." The song advises against worrying about things that are not real.

Blues musician Albert King sings about bad luck connected to the Zodiac. Those are twelve signs linked to the apparent position of planets, the sun and other stars. Albert King's song seems to make fun of the belief that the Zodiac governs our lives.

In "Born under a Bad Sign" he sings, *Born under a bad sign / been down since I began to crawl / if it wasn't for bad luck / You know, I wouldn't have no luck at all.*

The California punk rock band Social Distortion celebrates a dark humor. The band's members named their recording company "13th Floor Records." Their albums include "Mommy's Little Monster," "Prison Bound" and "Somewhere Between Heaven and Hell."

One of the group's biggest hits dismisses the power of superstition. It includes the lines, *thirteen's my lucky number / to you it means stay inside / black cat done crossed my path / no reason to run and hide.*

We leave you with Social Distortion performing "Bad Luck."

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly. Our program was written and produced by Caty Weaver. June Soh and Jerome Socolovsky provided additional reporting.



Do you have a question about American life, people or places? Send an e-mail to learningenglish@voanews.com. We might answer your question in a future show. You can also visit our website at learningenglish.voanews.com to find transcripts and audio of our shows.

Join us again next week for music and more on American Mosaic from VOA Learning English.