

Malala Yousafzai, a Year After the Attack

Welcome to American Mosaic from VOA Learning English.

I'm Avi Arditti.

This week on our show, we have music from Lorde, Katy Perry and Miley Cyrus.

We explain how a Somali-American found himself acting in a major new film with one of Hollywood's biggest stars.

But first, President Obama had a special guest at the White House recently: 16-year-old Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai. One year ago the Taliban shot her because of her efforts to support education for girls.

The White House said the president wanted to thank Malala for her work on behalf of girls' education in Pakistan. First lady Michelle Obama and their older daughter, Malia, were also at the meeting. Kelly Jean Kelly has our story.

The White House visit came on the same day that the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize. Malala was considered a favorite to win this year. However, the prize went to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is currently working in Syria. But a day earlier, Malala won the European Union's top human rights award, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

The president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, made the announcement in France. The Sakharov prize will be presented on November 20. The annual prize comes with an award of more than \$65,000.

Mr. Schulz said the European Union is a proud ally of people like Malala, who stand up for equality for girls and women.

"An 11-year-old who was told she's going to be killed because she simply wants to go to school. Just imagine the courage that she has shown. As far as I'm concerned, Malala is an incredible personality of the 21st century."

Malala was 11 when she became an activist for women's education and

freedom in Pakistan's Swat Valley. The Taliban banned women from attending school there in 2009.

She began a blog, writing under a different name, and quickly became a voice for women's rights.

Then, on October 9, 2012, Malala was shot while returning home from school in the Swat Valley. Two other students with her were also wounded.

Malala was shot in the face. She was taken for specialized treatment in Britain. She recovered, regaining her sight and her voice, and has continued to fight for women's rights.

"Education is the only solution. Education first. Thank you."

Now, one year after the attack, many Pakistanis express their pride in Malala Yousafzai.

Mazhar Abba is a Pakistani journalist.

"It's great not only for her, for her family, but for the whole nation."

But not everyone in Pakistan is celebrating Malala's success.

Mohammad Sohail lives in Karachi.

"My point of view on Malala is that the whole thing is a drama. There are lots of issues here, like drone strikes, other things happening. You are ignoring all the issues and following a girl."

In Malala's hometown in the Swat Valley, she is a hero to student Saadia Shah and others.

"She is an extremely intelligent and brave girl. I want to be like her. She did a lot of work for the education of girls."

Malala now lives in England and promises to continue her work for years to come.

"Captain Phillips"

Barkhad Abdi poses for photographers as he walks the red carpet at a screening for the movie "Captain Phillips" at the Newseum in Washington on October 2

The new movie "Captain Phillips" is earning praise for its star, Tom Hanks, and its realistic presentation of a hijacking by Somali pirates. The young actor who plays the lead pirate in the film is also winning praise for his performance.

"Look at me. Look at me. I'm the captain now."

Barkhad Abdi is a Somali-American who spent his early years in Somalia. He has spent his more recent years driving limousines in the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. He told VOA he never dreamed he would get to act in a major Hollywood movie.

Barkhad Abdi's life changed because of a report he saw on a Minneapolis TV station. It said producers were looking for actors to play parts in a film about Richard Phillips. He was the captain of the American ship Maersk Alabama that was hijacked by Somali pirates in April 2009.

He says his background in Somalia helped him relate to the part.

"I was always fascinated by the pirates, and I was amazed by what they do. And I'm a Somali myself -- I was born in Somalia, I left Somalia when I was seven years old, and I witnessed the war. So I could relate to the pirates in a lot of ways, I know a lot of people who came from Somalia who lived with us in Minneapolis."

Minneapolis is home to the largest Somali immigrant community in the United States. Thousands of Somalis have moved there over the past 20 years, fleeing war and poverty in their homeland.

The 28-year-old Abdi suddenly found himself working with two-time Oscar winner Tom Hanks and a major Hollywood director, Paul Greengrass. He says both men helped him feel at ease on the movie set.

"Tom Hanks is really a humble guy that, you know, was there with me, and, you know, just helped me through it. And Paul Greengrass was the one that gave me a chance and who believed in me from the get-go. And so if ever I'd do anything wrong, he'd take me aside and help me get the scene better. So I'm really grateful about working with them."

Barkhad Abdi says that before the movie came out, he received some criticism within the Somali community. Some people said the part he was playing could make Somalis look bad. But now, he says, those feelings are gone.

"The Somali community, they're loving it. I received all kinds of messages on Facebook and Twitter, complimenting me and telling me how proud they are of me."

Abdi says he does not have any offers for future parts, but he hopes to keep acting.

Hot Songs

Robin Thicke and Miley Cyrus perform "Blurred Lines" at the MTV Video Music Awards on August 25 in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. So what songs are you and your friends listening to this week? We asked Larry London, host of "Border Crossings" on VOA Music Mix, about some of the most popular songs on this week's Billboard magazine Hot 100 chart.

Currently the number one song is by a 16-year-old newcomer from New Zealand. Her name is Lorde.

So we are talking about "Royals," the name of this song by Lorde. Tell us a little bit more about Lorde.

She's a newcomer, as I mentioned. There is kind of a dark side to her. She is little known. She keeps herself private, and yet she has chosen a very public industry to be a part of. She writes great music. A lot of people are really applauding the music she's written, and this is her debut effort. And she sounds like Adele. A lot of people are comparing her voice and the timbre of her vocals to an Adele-sounding song.

And number two on the Billboard Hot 100 chart this week is "Roar" by Katy Perry.

Now that song is interesting for a variety of reasons. First of all, it's the first song off of Katy's new album, which is her second album. It is called "Prism," coming out in November. But the song itself, you know, she made a video. The video has already had millions and millions of hits on YouTube. But because she used animals in the video, she is already coming under fire for her use of animals in the video. People from PETA are --

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

-- are giving her criticism for, you know, exploiting animals. She says she had the Humane Society on the set with her and she did not hurt any animals.

Moving on, we have got number three on the Hot 100 this week, is "Wrecking Ball" by Miley Cyrus.

What is the story with Miley Cyrus? If people have been missing some of the publicity recently, tell us about it.

Well, she has managed to find different ways, whether they are good or not, whether people approve of them or don't, but she has [found] ways to keep herself in the mainstream, in people's top of mind these days, whether it be for her VMA performance, or the twerking or the tongue sticking out – all of her different antics. But she still keeps herself out there. And people are talking about her.

They're talking about the VMA [MTV Video Music Awards] performance a month after it took place. So she has managed to keep herself out there. She has the number one album. Right now, she is the 'It Girl.' Miley Cyrus is the It Girl.

And breaking with her past, for those who will remember her as "Hannah Montana" or the daughter of Billy Ray Cyrus, the country singer.

Now, she said on "Saturday Night Live" when she was doing one of the skits, when she was a guest and a host, she said "Hannah Montana was murdered." She kind of said that in jest, and everybody got a laugh out of that, but I think there's a lot of truth to that.

She is trying to distance herself as much as possible from the image of "Hannah Montana" because she is now 20 and she did that when she was 13, 14 years old. So it is very, very different now. She wants people to accept her as the artist she is, not as "Hannah Montana" and the illusion she created as that Disney character.

Let's talk briefly about this next song, "Wake Me Up."

"Wake Me Up." Avicii is a Swedish DJ, and Avicii doesn't sing. The vocals on this song are not Avicii's, they are a different singer. But this song is doing very, very well, and it seems like there is a trend these days for DJs.

Swedish House Mafia, and the list goes on and on -- David Guetta. There are so many that are very popular right now as far as DJs. Five years ago that was not the case, but right now if you are a DJ and you attach yourself to some popular vocalists, you can have a mega-hit.

And one more song, we have got to talk about "The Fox."

OK, well that's the European brothers who are making this. It is crazy, what the fox said, and what this said and what that said. I have it as a ringtone on my phone right now, that song.

I first saw them on a television show called "Ellen." She introduced these two --
Ellen DeGeneres.

Right, and these guys came on and performed the song. And in the video, which has again gotten millions and millions [of views], they wear these different animal costumes. They are known as funny writers, parody writers back at home in Europe where they are from.

They are Norwegian?

Yes, Norwegian brothers.

And they are known as, well, Y-L-V-I-S.

Yill-vis.

Not Elvis.

Not Elvis. Ylvis has left the building.

Larry London is the host of "Border Crossings" on VOA Music Mix.

Time for us to leave the studio. That's all for American Mosaic this week. I'm Avi Arditti. You can read and listen to our programs and add your comments at learningenglish.voanews.com. You can also find us on Facebook at VOA Learning English.

Contributing: Harun Maruf, Dan Joseph and Pam Dockins