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YouTube Notoriety for Lafayette Man

By Cathy Dausman



Photo Cathy Dausman

Ian Walters of Lafayette holds an English degree from UC Davis, yet he's never read Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables." He hasn't seen the movie, either. Still, he's familiar with the plot, and has a special fondness for Fantine's haunting solo, "I Dreamed a Dream." Walters and his friend Susannah Long often played the song at full volume when closing up the bookstore where they worked. One night after work Walters parodied the song using the voice of Gollum, a Tolkien "Lord of the Rings" character, and sent it to Long on Facebook.

"Gollum is way more sad than Fantine," Walters pronounced, sounding just a tad bit professorial. Long encouraged him to post it on YouTube. Several thousand views later, the bit was noticed by the viral detection website BuzzFeed. As of this writing, the parody had earned more than 1.47 million hits. And that was just the start.

Days later, Walters posted a sequel on YouTube, using Smeagol's (Gollum's other name) voice, this time a parody of the Tears for Fears song "Mad World." That earned 1.16 million views.

In March, Walters released a third parody: "Gollum the Relationship Specialist," for which he sang "Now You're Just Somebody that I used to Know." Salt Lake City radio station KSL taped an interview with him in early March, Walters said.

"I always need a creative project," he said. He views his 15 minutes of fame as a platform as much for his talented friends as for himself. Contributors include Greg Weitzman, playing keyboard in the second video, Relationship Specialist artwork (shirt and matching tees) by Thelonious Elliott, and performance by singer/actress Gia Battista and videography by Collin Davey.

Although he has a financial agreement with BuzzFeed to create at least one more parody, Walters is not ready to quit his day job as sixth-grade math and history teacher at

Oakland's Head Royce School.

The projects are really fun, Walters said, and they prove he's not taking himself too seriously. And just in case anyone is unfamiliar with his Lord of the Rings references, Walter's advice, in his own voice, is simply, "Go read the book."

You can view Ian Walters channeling Gollum on these YouTube postings:

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