

Yusnor Ef: Songs about Life

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He is a repository of information and insights into the Malay music scene in Singapore from its earliest days, having been an active part of the action, while also leading initiatives to document its history and development for future generations.

As a lyricist for more than 250 songs since the late 1950s, Mohd Noor Mohd Yusofe is better known as Yusnor Ef, a pen name given to him by his mentor, actor and composer P. Ramlee. The other name by which he is often addressed – *Cikgu* (Teacher, in Malay) – gives an idea of the respect he commands for his work, and his breadth of professional experience.

During a career that has spanned more than 50 years, Yusnor Ef has been a teacher, a lyricist, a writer, a documentary producer, and a film historian. Today, he is regarded as a living repository of information and insights about the history of the Malays in Singapore, especially in the areas of music and film.

Yusnor Ef's lyrics, whether written for love songs or for festive occasions, have always been inspired by his life experiences. Born in Singapore, he grew up in the Geylang area as the youngest of three children in a poor family. "My father died during the Japanese Occupation, and we had to live with other people, 'tompang' a room in their home. I remember lining up with my mother to get \$7 in welfare.

"My brother had to leave school and became a peon, while I continued until Standard 7. In the afternoons, we would sell home-made *kuih* and *nasi lemak*. One day I was wrapping a packet of *nasi lemak* in newspaper, and noticed a story about the need for Malay teachers. I asked my former *Cikgu Besar* (Headmaster) *Cikgu* Wahid, who discouraged me because I was so small-sized, but I applied anyway. I was selected and had to go for an X-ray and medical check up. I failed the test because my belt buckle could be seen on the X-ray! In those days, we wore our pants very high up!"

In 1954, Yusnor Ef began his career as a Malay teacher, and he was posted to Telok Saga Malay School on Pulau Brani. "I had never been on a boat before, and we took a *sampan* to the island. The principal introduced me to the staff and students by saying something like 'Although he is small, he is your teacher.'

"We had no resources, and I didn't know how or what to teach, so I gave the children some Maths to do," describes Yusnor Ef, who went on to the Teachers Training College at Patterson Road with the first batch of Malay teachers to be trained in Singapore. Prior to this, Malay teachers were trained at the Sultan Idris Training College Tanjung Malim in Malaya.

Yusnor Ef also became active in the arts through the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union, the Malay Youth Literary Association (4PM) and *Taman Bacaan*, and was an actor and playwright for stage, radio, television and films. Yusnor Ef was also in the main committee of *Majlis Pusat* (Central Council of Malay Cultural Organisations).

In the late 1960s, he became the compere and script writer for the first Malay children's programme on Radio Television Singapore (RTS). While directing one particular stage play, Yusnor Ef wanted to break new ground. "I wanted to introduce a new element – I wanted the heroine to sing a song. I asked composer and arranger Kassim Masdor who was then with Shaw Brothers to compose the song and I wrote the lyrics, and that was the start of my career as a lyricist."

In the 1970s, Yusnor Ef also produced several albums with Kassim Masdor. Together they set up the recording company Senada, which produced albums featuring Sanisah Huri, Rafeah Buang, Rahimah Rahim and A. Ramlie.

In 1983, he transferred to the Ministry of Education and became a textbook writer and then a producer of educational materials for television. After suffering a heart attack in 1994, Yusnor Ef retired the following year. "It was very stressful to be a media producer but I learnt a lot. You must learn the hard way. I relaxed for one year, then went to Malaysia and started producing programmes but I lost a lot of money through inexperience." But by 2001, he started a company called YKNA Network and began producing TV programmes in Malaysia and Singapore.

The Process

"The melody comes first. I do not read notes or play an instrument, but I have a sense of melody. So when I hear the music, I can sense the mood of it. When I listen, I get the feeling of whether it is a happy or sad song and so on, then I write the lyrics. But first I ask the composer if he has an idea of what kind of song he envisioned when he wrote the music. Then when I've written the words, I check with the composer again and make some adjustments with his inputs. Then we pick the singer and coach them on the correct pronunciation, emphases, and so on."

Yusnor Ef has written lyrics for more than 250 songs, including film songs which were composed by the late P. Ramlee, Yusof B, Zubir Said, Kassim Masdor, S. Atan, and Dato' Ahmad Nawab. He also wrote the Malay lyrics for Dick Lee's *Home (Tanahairku)*.

One song which he is particularly proud of is entitled *Pemimpin Bermaruah*, which was composed by Iskandar Mirza Ismail. The song was written for Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, and performed during a special dinner to pay tribute to him when he stepped down as Prime Minister.

Among his most successful – and favourite – songs are *Gelisah* (Love) about his own search of love which culminated in meeting the woman who would become his wife; *Kasih Sayang Suami Isteri*, which was inspired by his 22nd wedding anniversary; *Kembalilah Anakku*, about a tragedy faced by a friend; and *Tak aku Sangka*, about failed love.

Scriptwriter, Author, Producer, Adviser

Yusnor Ef has written dozens of plays for stage, film and television, and produced no less than 20 documentaries and series for TV in Singapore and in Malaysia, mainly for the ASTRO Channel. Among his works are documentaries on P. Ramlee, a history of Malay film (which is still used today as a resource for students of film), and the history of Malay music since 1940.

Because of his commitment to the film and music professions, Yusnor Ef has also played a role in various committees, including being on the Board of Directors of the Composers and Authors Society of Singapore (COMPASS), Chairman of the Malay Music Development Committee of the National Arts Council, and also a member of the committee of *Majlis Pusat*. In 1992, he founded and became President of PERKAMUS, the Association of the Malay Music Professionals, Singapore.

Quote

“Music is a world language. *Musik makanan jiwa* – music is food for the soul.”

Awards

1986: EMI Malaysia for *Life Time Achievement Award*

1995: *Long Service Award, Pingat Bakti Setia* (PBS)

1997: 3rd Composers and Authors Society of Singapore (COMPASS) Annual Awards, *Meritorious Award*

2000: Radio Warna/Mediacorp for *Arts Champion Award*

2001: *Anugerah Jasawan, Majlis Pusat*

2003: People’s Association Singapore for *Arts Champion, MESRA*

2006: Life Records Singapore for *Life Time Achievement Award*

[year unknown] Public Star Award, *Pingat Bakti Masyarakat* (PBM)

Works

ADA KERJA ADA GAJI
AIDILFITRI
AKIBAT BANYAK JANJI
AKU BINTANGMU
AKU DAH LULUS
AKU DAH TEROK
AKU DAH TERUK
AKU DATANG LAGI
AKU DIA DAN LAGU
AKU GUGUR KEKERINGAN
AKU JANGAN DITINGGAL TINGGALKAN
AKU KECEWA
AKU KEMBALI LAGI
AKU MASIH SAYANG PADAMU
AKU TEMAN KE PESTA
AKU TETAP MERINDU
ALLAHU AKHBAR
ANAK ZAMAN INI
ANDAM PENGANTIN
ANTARA DUA DUNIA
AYU LESTARI
BAJU MERAH DARINYA
BATINKU TERSEKSA
BELUM MASANYA
BENTUK HATIKU
BERPISAH
BERPISAH DI MALAM PERSANDINGAN
BERPURA PURA
BERSABARLAH SAYANG
BERSEDIA
BIKER S BLUES
BIMBANG
BINTANG DI SAYANG
BINTANG HATI
BINTANG MALAM INI
BINTANG SUKAN KU
BUAH-BUAHAN TEMPATAN

BUKU HARIANKU
CAHAYA BULAN DI AIR TENANG
CINTA YANG PALING UTAMA
CINTAKU JAUH
CITAK KU JAUH
DARI SINGAPURA KE SEMENANJUNG
DENDANG REMAJA
DETEKTIF BERBAKTI
DI MALAM PESTA
DI MANA HATIMU
DI PENTAS NYANYIAN
DI RANTAUAN
DIKAU JAUH
DIKAU MENGHILANG
DIKAU TEMAN SUNYIKU
DIMALAM PERSANDINGAN
DUGAAN KASIH
DULU PERNAH KU LUKA
DUNIA INI ANA YANG PUNYA
DUNIA KU DI HATI MU
DUNIA MANUSIA
ENGGANG SAMA ENGGANG
ENGKAU KEPUNYAANKU
ENGKAULAH
ESOK DATANG LAGI
ESOK DATANG LAGI (JUWITAKU)
GADES PANCA DELIMA
GADIS DAN FESYEN
GADIS DIRUMPUT YANG HIJAU
GADIS KILANG
GADIS YANG KU RINDU
GELISAH
GELOMBANG HIDUP
GELOMBANG SEMALAM
GEMBIRA BERSAMAKU
GITAR DAN GADISKU
GUGURNYA DI PUSARA SENJA
GUGURNYA MAWAR DESA
GUGURNYA SEBUTIR BINTANG
HANCURNYA ISTANA CINTA

HARI BENDERA
HARI CEMERLANG
HARI INI DAN SEMALAM
HASRAT KU DIDADAMU
HATIKU DALAM SEHARI
HATIKU DAN HATIMU
HATIKU MALU MALU
HATIKU PERNAH LUKA
HIBURAN DI HARI MINGGU
HIDUPLAH SEMPURNA
IBU KU SAYANG
IDILFITRI
IKUTLAH JEJAKNYA
INAI PENGANTIN
INDAH DI SEPANJANG PERKENALAN
INTANKU LIANA
JAGA JAGA KALAU BERKATA
JALAN BERSAMA
JALAN BERSAMAKU
JANGAN BERJAUH HATI
JANGAN KECEWA LAGI
JANGAN KU DISALAHKAN
JANGAN MARAH KU TERLAMBAT
JANGAN MEMBAZIR
JANGAN MENANGIS LAGI
JANGAN PERGI JAUN BANG
JANGAN SALAH TAFSIRAN
JANGAN SAMPAI DUA KALI
JANGAN TERJADI
JASAD DAN NYAWA HALANGAN BUDI
JASAD NYAWA KALANGAN BUDI
JAUH BERJALAN LUAS PANDANGAN
JAUH DIKENANG DEKAT DISAYANG
JEJAKA PUJAN
JENAKA BANGSAWAN
JINAK JINAK MERPATI
JIWAKU DI JASAD MU
JOGET ADEK SAYANG
JOGET ADIK SAYANG
JOGET AIDILFITRI

JOGET ANDAM PENGANTIN
JOGET BUDAYA
JOGET CINTA MANIS DI MULUT SAJA
JOGET MAK ANDAM
JOGET MALAM BERINAI
JOGET PENGANTIN BARU
JOGET SATU HATI
JOGET SATU HATI
JOGET SELENDANG BUNGA CEMPAKA
JOGET SI MANDI MANDI
JOGET SI MANDI MANDI
JUMROSH SUNIA
KALAU AKU JADI KAHWIN
KALAU JODOH TAK KEMANA
KALAU KU BAYANGKAN
KAMI
KAN KU PULANG NANTI
KASIH DI HATI SAYANG DI MATA
KASIH DI PUSARA IBU
KASIH SAYANG
KASIH SAYANG SUAMI ISTERI
KASIH SEPANJANG MASA
KASIHKU YANG DULU
KATA DAN JANJI
KATA DAN JANJI
KATA DAN JANJI
KAU HARAPANKU
KAU PENGHIBURKU
KAU YANG KU PILIH
KAWAN SERIBU
KAWANKU BINTANG CAPRICORN
KEBERSIHAN SATU KEIMANAN
KEMBALI UNTUKKU
KEMBALILAH ANAKKU
KEMBARA RASA
KEMURNIAN KASIH
KENAPA AKU DILUPAKAN
KENAPA DEWI
KERANA KAU
KESAH CINTA

KESAH DAN ILHAM
KESAH TUAH DAN TIJAH
KESAH YANG TERJADI
KESAH YANG TERJADI
KINI DAH TIBA
KISAH AKU DIA DAN LAGU
KISAH BADIGOL - SOOD
KISAH CINTA
KISAH DAN ILHAM
KISAH DI SUATU PAGI
KISAH LUKISAN 10 TAHUN
KISAH TUAH DAN TIJAH
KISAH YANG TERJADI
KOPI CAP KAPAL API
KORINA
KU BERANGAN ANGAN
KU BERIKAN PADANYA
KU CERITAKAN
KU DATANG LAGI
KU JANGAN DI TINGGALKAN
KU NANTI KAU PULANG
KU PULANG UNTUKMU
KU SAMPAIKAN SALAM
KU SAYANG PADAMU
KU SAYANG TUNANGKU
KU TAK KAN LUKAKAN LAGI
KUMBANG DENGAN BUNGA
LADA GILING LAP NANGKA
LAGU DUA IRAMA
LAGU PERIBAHASA
LAGU PUJAANKU
LAGU SAYANG AYAH
LAGUANAK RANTAU
LAGUMU TEMANKU
LANANG TUNANG TAK JADI
LIDAH TAK BERTULANG
LOOK DETERGENT
LUKISAN RASA
LUPAKAN LAH JANJI
LUPAKANLAH SAJA

MADAH PERPISAHAN
MALABAR MASALA
MALAM BERINAI
MALAM ITU
MALAM PESTA
MALAM TUJUH LEKOR
MANCHARI BAHAGIA
MARI MENYANYI
MENANGIS SESUDAH KETAWA
MENARI DENGANMU
MENCARI BAHAGIA
MENCARI KEDAMAIAN
MENCARI KESAYANGANKU
MENGAPA BERJAUHAN
MENGAPA PERCAYA CINTA
MIMPIKU MALAM TADI
MODE CIRCLE
MULA BERJUMPA
NILAI CINTA
NORMILAH
NYAWA DAN JASAD KALANGAN BUDI
PACIK KU BERGAYA
PAK PANDIR
PAKAIAN KITA
PAMANKU YANG PELUPA
PANDANGAN DIKOTARAYA
PANDANGAN KU
PANTUN CINTA SAYANG
PAPA KU PULANG
PEMAIN GUITAR
PENDEKAR MUSTAR
PENYAMUN TARBUS
PENYANYI DI SAYANG
PEPATAH PUJANGGA
PERASAAN DI PAGI HARI
PERIBAHASA
PERMATA YANG HILANG
PERNAHKU JUMPA
PERPISAHAN
PERTAMA YANG HILANG

PESTA DI MALAM INI
PESTA HATI
PILAI HIDUP
POH KONG GREETINGS
POH KONG JEWELLERS
POSNITA
PREBET LAPOK
PUSAKA BANGSA
PUTERI GUNUNG LEDANG
RENTAK SERBA SALAH
RENUNGANLAH MATAKU
RIANG RIA DI HARI RAYA
RINDU DALAM LAGU
RINDU DI DALAM LAGU
RINDU KASIH
RINDU KU HILANG
ROS MERAH
ROSE MERAH
RUMAH ITU SYURGAKU
RUPANYA SI DIA
SAHARI DALAM KENANGAN
SAJAK BERLAGU BUAT KEKASIH
SAMPAIKAH HATIKU PADANYA
SAMPAIKAN HATI INI KEPADANYA
SAMPAIKAN SALAMKU
SATU NADA SATU IRAMA
SEDEKIT RASA CINTA
SEDIH SEKELIP MATA
SEINDAH MATA MEMANDANG
SEIRING KATA BERMADAH SAYANG
SEKATA SATU JIWA
SELAMAT DATANG
SELAMAT HARI RAYA
SELAMAT PAGI CIKGU
SEMENJAK BERJAUHAN
SENANDONG NELAYAN
SENANDUNG NELAYAN
SENANGKAN HATI
SENIMAN KEHILANGAN ILHAM
SENJAKALA

SERAMPANG TIGA
SEREMPANG TIGA
SERULING HATI
SETAHUN AKU MENANGIS
SETANGKAI TAK SEBAU
SETITIK EMBUN DI PADANG PASIR
SINAR HIDUPKU
SINGAPURA KU
SOFTCUT
SOFTCUT I
SOREH SOREH
SUASANA HARI RAYA
SUASANA RIANG DI HARI RAYA
SUDAH DIINAI INAIKAN
SUDAH JATUH HATI
SUNNY
TADIKA
TAHUN SEDIH BAGIKU
TAJ MAHAL
TAKKAN KU LUPA
TALIPON BERBUNYI
TANAH AIRKU
TANGISAN JIWA
TANGISAN MALAM
TELEPON OPERATOR
TEMAN KU
TEMANKU
TENANGKANLAH JIWAKU
TEPISAH AKHIRNYA
TERPISAH AKHIRNYA
TIADA LAGI BERBICARA
TIDAK KU SANGKA
TIGA GADIS JELITA
TUAH DAN TIJAH
TUGAS TENTERA
TUNANG TUJUH PURNAMA
WARNA GAMBARAN HATI
WARNA WARNI
YANG MULA DAN AKHIR
ZAMAN PANCARоба

ZUNIKA
ZURAINI

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