SINGAPORE SWING

a jazz album of Singapore songs.
Nationhood is a composite of many things - shared geography, language, experiences and also the unique culture, dress, dance, myths, music and songs of a people.

Every country has its own national anthem, which is revered by its people. Singapore also has its own unique genre of music which has over the years acquired a range of names - “Community Songs”, “National Day Theme Songs” and “Singapore Songs”. All these songs share something in common. To sing is to celebrate an identity, and these are all songs of joy, sadness, love and memories of happy days and places, reflecting the hopes and aspirations of a people. Their appeal, like any good and timeless piece of music, is one that traverses both time and space.

Under the umbrella of the Sing Singapore programme, initiated by the then-Ministry of Communications and Information in 1986, many new community songs were composed. A few struck a chord with Singaporeans and were selected to be featured at the annual National Day Parades as part of the Singapore Song medley before the fireworks. National Day theme songs were first introduced in the mid-1980s beginning with “Count On Me Singapore”, featured in the 1986 National Day Parade, coinciding with Singapore’s 21st birthday.

This album is an eclectic mix of 12 familiar favourites, put together by Cultural Medallion winner Jeremy Monteiro. With his talented band of friends, they have explored various nuances of jazz rhythms - swing, bossa nova and contemporary. We hope these pieces will help rekindle pleasant memories and reflections of being Singaporean and being in Singapore - this place we call our home.
A Note from the Producer, Jeremy Monteiro

Over the years, I have been fortunate to have worked on the National Songs of Singapore. I was music director and orchestrator of the original recordings of three songs, and composer (with lyricist Jim Aitchison) of "One People, One Nation, One Singapore".

I believe that a nation that sings together, stays together. During the recording of these songs, I have been struck by the beauty and universality of the melodies and was convinced that they could stand alone as instrumental versions in any musical style or genre.

I am primarily a jazz musician and have dreamt of doing an instrumental album recording of Singapore songs in jazz style. Besides presenting my fellow Singaporeans with another opportunity to enjoy these timeless melodies, I felt that these beautiful melodies would be able to travel the world and become familiar to our friends overseas as well.

I want to thank the staff of the National Resilience Division at the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts for sharing this dream with me. I am also grateful to my fellow musicians. My thanks also to my long-time friend and recording engineer John Herbert who worked with me on the original recordings of all our National Songs.

Finally, I am grateful to the composers of these beautiful songs. Together with my musician colleagues, I dedicate these heartfelt performances of our Singapore songs to my fellow Singaporeans. I am so proud and grateful to call Singapore home."
1. Singapura, Sunny Island
(Music by Van Moring, Lyrics by SBC)
This is a popular song that has been sung by many local singers. With its simple lyrics - Singapore as a sunny island in the sea - paired with an equally simple yet memorable tune, this composition is immediately recognisable as a Singapore song.

Jeremy: “Singapura is one of the first melodies I remember from my school days and I have always imagined it as a swinging jazz melody. This rendition swings from the first few notes in the introduction on the bass, played by one of the great bass players of the world, Christy Smith, who made Singapore his home more than 10 years ago.”

2. Chan Mali Chan
(Music by Matt Nambing, Lyrics by Haji Sarif Medan)
This Malay community song is popular in Singapore and the region. Its lyrics are often likened to the teasing between a courting couple, with the man poking gentle fun at the lady while the lady plays hide and seek with the man (and allows herself to be deliberately found!).

Jeremy: “I gave this joyful song an “island feel”, combining rhythms from the Caribbean with those found in Malay music. Mohamed Noor shines on the bongos here.”

3. Gelang Sipaku Gelang
(Malay folk song)
This originated as a children’s folk song popular in Singapore and the region. While the lyrics refer to the shaping of kites from bamboo, they are metaphors for community spirit and the virtues of respect and tolerance. The word “Gelang” sounds like “Geylang”, a colourful district in Singapore, and the song is often sung as “Geylang Sipaku Ceylang”.

Jeremy: “This is another song from my childhood. I imagined this song as a groovy jazz waltz in the style of legendary jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery. Singaporean guitarist Andrew Lim plays a great solo in this rendition.”
4. Xi Shui Chang Liu
(Music & Lyrics by Dr Liang Wern Fook)
One of the pioneers and most well-known figures of Singapore's xinyao movement in the 1980s and 1990s, Dr Liang Wern Fook penned the evergreen Xi Shui Chang Liu in 1987. In 2003, a local poll placed this song as the greatest xinyao song ever written.
Jeremy: “The original version of this song was recorded in a rousing, lively style. However, whilst listening to this song I kept hearing it in my head as a heartfelt gentle waltz, reflecting the personal nature of close friendships. The gorgeous saxophone solo by Shawn Letts brings a tear to my eyes and makes me think of my closest friends.”

5. Five Stars Arising
(Music by Lim Su Chong, Lyrics by Lim Su Chong & Gregory Chan)
This was written four years after Singapore gained independence, and Singaporean composer Lim Su Chong took his inspiration for this song from the elements of the National Flag. The lyrics speak of a new moon, five stars and a new flag “arising out of the stormy sea”. It is a crowd favourite, often sung during National Day celebrations.
Jeremy: “Andrew Lim’s guitar playing of this song evokes, for me, images of the great western movies and pioneers of the wild, wild West. This rendition of the song is dedicated to the brave Singaporeans who travel the world to live and work overseas.”

6. One People, One Nation, One Singapore
(Music by Jeremy Monteiro, Lyrics by Jim Aitchison)
Written specially for Singapore’s Silver Jubilee celebration, this song was first featured during the 1990 NDP, which shared the same slogan, “One People, One Nation, One Singapore”.
Jeremy: “The memory of sitting at the piano with my friend lyricist Jim Aitchison in 1990 to compose this National Song is still fresh in my mind. There was magic in the air as we worked together to write a song that would reflect the shared history, values and aspirations of Singaporeans, past, present and future. That magic was also present as we recorded this soulful jazz version. When we finished recording, there was a silence in the studio as we soaked in the energy we had felt from playing the song.”
7. Jinkli Nona
(Portuguese folk song)
Extremely popular amongst the Eurasian community, this catchy folk song was originally performed in Kristang - a spoken patois of Eurasians with origins from 17th century Malacca. The song, about a poor suitor’s attempt to win the affections of a lady dancer, is often played during weddings and has proven to be a timeless favourite with Singaporeans of all backgrounds.

Jeremy: “I grew up watching my parents and grandparents singing and dancing to this song and enjoying those happy times. I decided to give this version an asymmetric time signature, in the style of, Dave Brubeck, pioneer of this type of jazz rhythm.”

8. Home
(Music & Lyrics by Dick Lee)
Popular song Home was the result of a nation-wide search for a new Singapore song in 1998. Dick Lee’s composition was selected for its meaningful lyrics and unforgettable tune. For the first time, Singapore songs took on a softer edge, akin to a ballad, suggesting that the Singapore identity did not only consist of rooting oneself physically on Singapore soil, but that one could stay permanently true to Singapore, for it is “where my dreams wait for me”. It was adopted as the theme song for Singapore’s 33rd National Day Parade, and sung by well-known singer Kit Chan.

Jeremy: “I have been travelling the world playing my music but there is no greater feeling than coming home to Singapore where my friends and loved ones are. I have always felt that Dick Lee is one of Singapore’s master songwriters. The first time I heard this song, tears came to my eyes, for love for my country. I chose to record this song in my favourite jazz configuration of piano, bass and drums - also the most challenging format for me. We did this in a true jazz ballad style.”

9. Munnaeru Vaalibaba
(Indian folk song)
A perennial favourite with Singaporeans, this catchy Indian folk song celebrates youth progressing in life and working together to rise above adversity.

Jeremy: “For me, this fun-filled melody was, in a musical sense, the foundation for this whole project. I felt that if I could come up with a jazz arrangement of this song, the whole album would come together. Besides the wonderful blending of Indian and Latin percussions by Mohamed Noor, the lyrical flute solo by Fabian Lim made this song so much fun to play. The arrangement is a blend of Indian and Bossa-Samba styles.”
10. 小人物的心声 Xiao Ren Wu De Xin Sheng (Voices from The Heart)  
(Music by Tan Kian Chin, Lyrics by Bon Sek Yieng)  
This song won an NTUC song-writing competition in 1986 and was featured as the theme song of a popular local Mandarin series 《芝麻绿豆》 (Zhi Ma Lü Dou) the same year. Describing the struggles and aspirations of ordinary Singaporeans, the song immediately resonated with the people. The late President Ong Teng Cheong liked it so much when he was the Secretary-General at NTUC (1983-1993) that he helped translate it into English. Twenty years after the song was first launched, it was performed at the 2006 NDP by Tan Wei Lian, the winner of local Channel U's first “Project SuperStar” singing competition.  
Jeremy: “This was another song, along with 细水长流 Xi Shui Chang Liu (Friendship Runs Deep), that was originally arranged in a lively style. But I felt that the melody also lends itself to being played as a lovely jazz ballad. Greg Lyons plays the melody beautifully on this rendition with the tenor saxophone.”

11. Di Tanjung Katong  
(Malay folk song)  
Translated literally as “In Tanjung Katong”, this is a well-known Malay folk song about the charming Tanjung Katong district on Singapore’s east coast.  
Jeremy: “This is a perfect example of a universally adaptable melody, which we did in a swing style. Drummer Tama Goh keeps the pulsating swing rhythm going in what sounds like a happy jam session in a jazz club.”

12. Stand Up For Singapore  
(Music and lyrics by Hugh Harrison)  
“Stand Up For Singapore” was commissioned in 1984 by the then-Ministry of Culture. Hugh Harrison from the ad agency McCann-Erikson penned the music and lyrics to celebrate 25 years of self governance for Singapore (1959-1984).  
Jeremy: “When I worked as the music arranger for the original recording of this song, I wrote the arrangement for a Pop Orchestra and choir of almost 50 people. But there is a personal element involved in feeling proud of one’s country and that is why I have decided on a solo version. The unique thing about this track is that I deliberately chose to record it without a written musical arrangement in front of me. With only a lead sheet of the basic melody, I wanted to just let my feelings pour out, dancing around the melody; departing from and returning to it as a metaphor of my life as a travelling jazz musician.”
Jeremy Monteiro

Jeremy is regarded as one of the foremost jazz pianists in Asia and has been referred to as Singapore’s King of Swing by Singaporean, Malaysian, Thai and Japanese press. In 2007, he celebrated his 30th anniversary as a professional jazz musician. He has more than 20 jazz albums under his belt and has played on numerous other jazz albums by other artists, including one by Grammy Award-winning saxophonist Ernie Watts, which he also produced.

Jeremy is Visiting Chair of Jazz and a professor at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore and a fellow of the London College of Music which is part of the Thames Valley University in the UK. He has received the pinnacle award in Arts Achievement in Singapore, the Cultural Medallion, and is the first jazz musician in Singapore to be given this accolade.

Greg Lyons

Greg Lyons was born in Newcastle in the northeast of England. He enrolled into Berklee College of Music in Boston USA, where he immersed himself in the stream of jazz education. He has played with great musicians such as Billy Cobham, Terumasa Hino, Eugene Pao, Randy Bernsen, Steve Thornton, Michael Stanton and many more. He moved to South East Asia and began performing regularly in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur whilst teaching at the International College of Music in Kuala Lumpur. Greg Lyons is a part-time lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore and a Fellow of the London College of Music.
Tama Goh

With over 30 years of drumming experience, Tama Goh is much sought after for ‘live’ sessions in the pop genre and is equally adept in jazz. He has toured with pop artistes such as Sandy Lam, Eric Moo and Anthony Lun, and has worked with Andy Lau, Coco Lee and Elisa Chan, amongst others. He has played in several bands together with Jeremy Monteiro since 1989, and has performed with Terumasa Hino, James Moody, Ernie Watts, Eric Marienthal and Mitch Holder. He has also worked with jazz musicians like Eldee Young, Nestor Torres and Carmen Bradford. Tama was conferred the COMPASS Artistic Excellence Award in 2005.

Fabian Lim

Fabian Lim is a well-regarded musician in Singapore. His ability to adapt to various musical genres has led him to be involved in numerous events in theatre, jazz and popular music. He was recently involved in the finale of the Singapore Management University's Arts Festival, playing saxophone, flute and clarinet in their musical, *Honk!*. Fabian is a music graduate from Berklee College of Music.
Shawn Letts

Saxophonist and keyboardist Shawn Letts was born and bred in Oklahoma. Even at the tender age of 18, his talent was recognised by the late jazz giant Bill Evans, who wrote that he showed “unexpected poise, maturity and thoughtfulness”. Shawn has lived in Singapore since 1988, and has collaborated with many brilliant Asian musicians, including his own world music group, Transformasi. He produced the Heart of Asia sound collection which has been used by Michael Jackson, Coca-Cola and CSI.

Mohamed Noor

Having grown up in a multi-talented musical family, Mohamed Noor began his music career playing the percussion at the age of 5 at Victoria Theatre. Though he was solely trained to play Indian percussion, his desire and love for music has inspired him to play a greater variety of percussion instruments. He has performed at music festivals such as the Big Bang Percussion Festival (London), Seoul Jazz, ASEA Jazz Festival (Malaysia) and others. He has performed with great musicians like The Gypsy Kings, Eric Marienthal, David Bowie, Robbie Williams, Dennis Chambers, Akira Jimbo, Manu Katche of “Sting” and many more. Today, Mohamed Noor plays more than 25 percussion instruments from around the world.
Andrew Lim

Jazz guitarist Andrew Lim has been performing extensively ever since his return to Singapore’s music scene from the prestigious Berklee College of Music, where he studied jazz guitar and composition under many of the great masters there, including Bret Willmott, Jon Damien and Mick Goodrick. He has worked with Jeremy Monteiro, Claressa Monteiro, Louis Soliano, Don Gomes, Judy Roberts, Greg Fishman and Howard Levy, amongst many other notables in the jazz scene. He believes in the lyricism of the melodic line and plays with an understated, soulful sound.

Christy Smith

Christy Smith has been involved in Singapore’s jazz scene since 1993. He is not only an accomplished professional bassist, but is also a composer, arranger and teacher. Currently performing as the in-house bassist with his band Chromazone at Harry’s International Quayside six times a week, he has played alongside well-known jazz artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Ernie Watts, Eric Marienthal, Teramatsu Hino, Paul Jackson Jr, Eric McCain, Jeremy Monteiro and many more. Christy is currently teaching the double-bass and the bass guitar at LASALLE College of the Arts and United World College South East Asia.
1. Singapura, Sunny Island
2. Chan Mali Chan
3. Gelang Sipaku Gelang
4. XiShui Chang Liu
5. Five Stars Arising
6. One People, One Nation, One Singapore
7. Jinkli Nona
8. Home
9. Munnaeru Vaalibaa
10. 小人物的心声 Xiao Ren Wu De Xin Sheng
11. Di Tanjung Katong
12. Stand Up For Singapore
1. Singapore, Sunny Island (Van Moring/SBC) (6:48)
2. Chan Mali Chan (Matt Nambing/ Haji Sarif Medan) (3:58)
3. Gelang Sipaku Gelang (Malay folk song) (5:45)
4. Xi Shui Chang Liu (Liang Wern Fook) (4:59)
5. Five Stars Arising (Lim Su Chong/Lim Su Chong & Gregory Chan) (2:46)
6. One People, One Nation, One Singapore (Jeremy Monteiro/Jm Aitchison) (4:58)
7. Jinkli Nona (Portuguese folk song) (5:57)
8. Home (Dick Lee) (4:18)
9. Munnaeru Vaalibaa (Indian folk song) (4:20)
10. Xiao Ren Wu De Xin Sheng (Voices from the Heart) (Tan Kian Chin/Bon Sek Yieng) (3:16)
11. Di Tanjung Katong (Malay folk song) (4:49)
12. Stand Up For Singapore (Hugh Harrison) (5:48)

Jeremy Monteiro - Piano & Organ
Christy Smith - Double Bass
Tama Goh - Drums
Andrew Lim - Guitars
Shawn Letts - Tenor Sax
Greg Lyons - Soprano Sax & Tenor Sax
Mohamed Noor - Indian Percussion & Latin Percussion
Fabian Lim - Flute

Produced by Jeremy Monteiro
Recorded, mixed and mastered by John Herbert
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