

## Yusnor Ef: Songs about Life

by **Perera, Audrey**, written in August 2010

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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:** 3<sup>rd</sup> 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  
SEANGKAN 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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