

# Call him Encik Negara Ku

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His was the voice generations of Malaysians heard over radio and television, advocating feelings of patriotism.

**P. SELVARANI** discovers something significantly more about the man with the deep booming voice

"SINGING wasn't my profession. It was my hobby."

This was the passionate declaration of the bubbly 70-year-old Jamaludin Alias.

Telecoms Department technician, sports writer, sports commentator, news announcer, radio deejay, founding member of and singer with a *keroncong* band and "government" singer.

Jamaludin was all this and more: He was the first to sing the *Negara Ku*.

And this was way back in 1957, more than a month before independence in August.

"Tunku (Abdul Rahman-Putra Al Haj) wanted a national anthem for Merdeka," Jamaludin remembers clearly during this interview at his home in Kelana Jaya where he lives with his wife, Kalsom Othman.

"He chose the Perak anthem but changed the lyrics.

"I was then instructed to teach the people to sing the national anthem over radio, under the guidance of (Tan Sri) Dol Ramli with Alphonso Soliano on the piano.

"Every day during that one month before Merdeka, I would slowly sing the song, line by line, for 15 minutes over radio, to help the people learn to sing *Negara Ku*."

A recording of the national anthem sung by the Radio Malaya choir — Jamaludin was a member of this choir — continued to fill the airwaves in the years after Merdeka.

As Jamaludin says, there was "no turning back" after that.

He quit his job as a Telecoms Department technician and after a six-month stint at the *bilik gerakan* (operations room) of the Prime Minister's Department, he joined Radio Malaya as a part-time announcer, deejay and later as a news announcer and sports commentator.

By this time, Jamaludin, who has a passion for *keroncong* songs, teamed up with Radio Malaya composer Johar Bahar to form the *keroncong* band, "Orkes Rindu Malam", which performed over radio. (The band is still around with a new set of members.)

Jamaludin got into singing young, thanks to his eldest sister, Halimah, a teacher who loved singing.

The 8-year-old Jamaludin, who

Jamaludin Alias, the voice behind many patriotic songs



lived with Halimah in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, would sing along and it wasn't long before he started participating in school talent time competitions with his school mate, the late Zain Azman.

By the time he was 17, Jamaludin was already a guest artiste over Radio Malaya, singing *keroncong* songs.

His break came in 1957 when he was roped into Radio Malaya's Merdeka Choir under the stewardship of the late Tony Fonseka.

The 20-odd member choir was assembled in preparation for the Merdeka celebrations to sing the many patriotic songs penned by, among others, Johar, Jimmy Boyle and (Datuk) Ahmad Merican.

"For that whole month, we practised every day from 9am to noon.

"There was never a prouder moment than when all of us — Malays, Chinese and Indians — stood in our various (ethnic) costumes at the Se-

langor Club Padang on the eve of Merdeka.

"We sang *Malaya Tanah Airku* as we watched the Union Jack being lowered and the Malayan flag raised."

Earlier that evening, Jamaludin had joined the great P. Ramlee and Saloma and other popular artistes to perform at a pre-Merdeka banquet hosted by Tunku at the Residency.

"And on Merdeka evening, we performed at the floating stage of the Lake Gardens for the public."

The Information Ministry wasted no time in putting Jamaludin's voice to good use to inspire a sense of patriotism among the citizens of a new nation through songs such as *Putera Puteri*.

And at the height of the Confrontation with Indonesia, Jamaludin's voice boomed over the airwaves to fuel the fire of nationalism with songs such as *Malaysia Berjaya*, *Samudera Raya*, *Gagah Perkasa* and the ever-popular *Perajurit Tanah Air*, accompanied by the Royal Malaysian Police band.

"(Tun) Ghazali Shafie, who was the information minister, had commissioned the late Saiful Bahari to compose the songs.

"I did the recording for these songs from 7pm to 1am at the Film Unit (later called Film Negara), which was located at the site of the present *New Straits Times* building

in Bangsar.

"It was hard work but I enjoyed it."

Jamaludin was paid a "princely" sum of RM50 for the effort.

After each recording, the song would be played before Tunku Abdul Rahman and members of his cabinet for approval before it was broadcast.

*Perajurit Tanah Air* is Jamaludin's favourite because of its touching lyrics. It is one song many of us identify with, especially the opening line "*Inilah barisan kita...*"

And he was soon singing other campaign songs for the government such as *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa* (to promote the national language), *Keselamatan Jalan Raya* (road safety) and *Mari Mengundi* (for the general election).

His popularity as a singer of patriotic songs earned Jamaludin the nickname *penyanyi kerajaan* (government singer).

"I did not mind it (being called the government singer) at all.

"I viewed it as my contribution to the country," says the grandfather of four.

"I am happy that Malaysians still remember these songs and today's children are still singing them.

"Some of my songs are still played over (Radio) Klasik Nasional.

"I have done my part and I am proud of it."