

Over the moon about Malaya

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■ By Shahrul Hafeez
news@nst.com.my

IPOH: Singers Camilo Gomes, Horace Sta Maria and Ernest Rodrigues did not mind going hoarse that night as they joined hundreds of others in cries of "Merdeka" at the Selangor Club Padang.

After all, independence came once in a lifetime and they were not about to keep quiet as Malaya gained nationhood.

As the clock struck midnight, they were on their feet with fellow citizens to usher in a new era: Malaya had been born.

Today, only two of the Trez Amigos (three friends) are in the country. Sta Maria has migrated to Australia.

The years may have passed but Gomes remembers Aug 31, 1957, like it was yesterday.

They had performed several numbers at Istana Negara including *A Calypso to Tengku Abdul Rahman* before making their way to the field.

"It was fantastic. People were crying and the Tunku (Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj) kept on shouting 'Merdeka' time and again."

"We were delirious and joined him with all our hearts," he told *The New Straits Times*.

Met at his home here, the 81-year-old says memories of that night would never be erased from his mind.

Gomes, a teacher, retired in 1980 while Rodrigues, a former Customs officer, was in Kuala Lumpur.

"The two of us were the more laid-back members of Trez Amigos. Sta Maria was a more dynamic person."

According to Gomes, the music scene was very multi-racial those days with only a handful of Malay songwriters, including Tan Sri P. Ramlee and Tan Sri S.M. Salim.

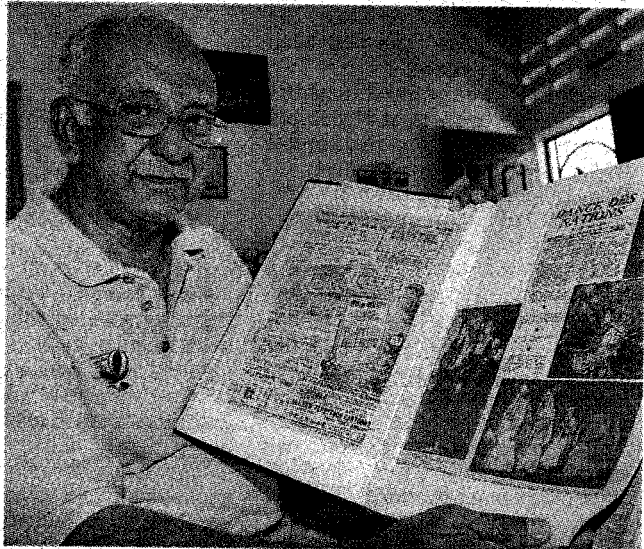
Trez Amigos stepped into that vacuum and wrote Malay songs, some of which became popular.

He said Sta Maria was the songwriter who would pen a song in English and then have it translated into Malay.

One of their more famous songs was *Oh Bulan*, a song sung by Malayan prisoners of war on the Death Railway in Burma during World War Two.

Gomes said the title was actually *Oh Bulan Chemerlang Menyinar di Malaya* but fans shortened it to *Oh Bulan*.

Singing might well be a



Gomes showing his scrap book on the group's performance on Aug 30, 1957. — NST picture by Jamah Nasri

“
I was born here
and my family
had a good life.
”

Gomes

glamorous career, but Gomes mostly remembers the pain of being pioneers in the field.

The group, formed in 1947, received RM10 for a 15-minute programme over Radio Malaya.

As their popularity grew, there were show offers in Kuala Lumpur, but that was not as lucrative as some might think.

Fortunately for the group, they found an unlikely friend in a producer who liked the group's meticulous preparation.

By recording two radio programmes at each show, the group managed to increase its payment.

"Remember, though, back then we had to rent a car from Malacca to Kuala Lumpur, and hire a driver too as none of us could drive," he added.

For the group, who all held full-time jobs, it was being on the go all the time.

"It was driving off after work to sing and record and then driving back home as we had to work the next day," he said.

This led to the demise of the group with the beginning of the end starting with Rodrigues being transferred to Johor Baru.

It made the going tougher, but the trio circumvented the complications by recording in

GOLDEN
MERDEKA
Memories

MERDEKA. The very word evokes emotion. How did those who took part in the epochal gatherings at the Selangor Club Padang and Merdeka Stadium on Aug 31, 1957 feel? What memories do they have of the nation's founding fathers?

If you had participated in the Merdeka celebrations or know of someone who did, please drop us a line.

If you have any Merdeka memorabilia, we would like to know too. We may want to interview you.

Please contact us at 03-22821970 or send an email to news@nst.com.my

Singapore. The death knell for the group came when Gomes was transferred to Kota Baru.

What are his reflections on Merdeka day after 49 years of independence?

"I was born here and my family had a good life.

"These things you just can't trade for anything in the world," he said.