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## Documenting the Complete Recordings of Biduan Negara Puan Sri Saloma 1970 to 1983

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### Abstract

Biduan Negara Puan Sri Datin Amar Saloma, or her real name Salmah Ismail, was born on January 22, 1935, in Pasir Panjang, Singapore. She started singing professionally at 13. For a legendary singer of her stature, unfortunately, Saloma's contribution to the music industry in this country has not been properly documented, appreciated, and upheld. It is not known how many albums Saloma had released in the first 10 years of her career, as EMI Malaysia Sdn Bhd, the local distributor of artists signed to EMI Singapore Pte Ltd. As a result, most albums before 1970 were not listed.

Keywords: recordings, documentation, singer

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### 1.0 Introduction

Legendary singer Puan Sri Saloma (henceforth to be referred to as 'Saloma') could be considered the counterpart of several renowned international singers, such as Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, and Doris Day, to name a few. Unfortunately, unlike Fitzgerald, Lee, or Day (where their respective legacy has been treasured and celebrated in their home country), Saloma's contribution to the performing arts and music industry in this country has been anything but properly documented, and appreciated and maintained. Born on January 22, 1935, in Pasir Panjang, Singapore. She started singing professionally at the tender age of 13, under the tutelage of her stepfather, Mum Yusoff, a freelance keroncong musician.

Saloma was offered a recording deal from Pathe Company (an EMI subsidiary) in 1954, after several appearances in movies produced by Nusantara Film Productions Limited. Her first recordings (released in an SP 2-song format) were "Pandang Kasih" and "Jika Tak Berjumpa". Under Pathe, Salmah began to release more hit records, such as "Burong Ponggok", "Senyuman Ta' Berbalas", "Jauh Malam", "Menanggung Rasa", "Hujan Lebat" and "Inang Baru", her first cooperation with the legendary P. Ramlee, who would later marry her in 1961. Throughout the 1960s, Saloma's popularity soared to a higher echelon; she still recorded for EMI Singapore (rechristened from Pathe, and remained with the company until 1977) and acted in several feature films under Malay Film Productions. Upon her relocation to Kuala Lumpur, she released more hit recordings such as "Biarlah Aku Pergi", "Selamat Pengantin Baru", "Bila Larut Malam", "Bunga Tanjung", "Yang Di Tunggu Tak Tiba" and "Aku Dia Dan Lagu" and continued to act in films under Shaw Organisation's Setudio Merdeka.

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Simultaneously, she became a regular performer on both RTS (in Singapore) and RTM, appearing in TV programs such as *Istana Pesta*, *Kalong Senandong*, and *Konsert Perdana Bersama Orkestra RTM*.

While Saloma had recorded extensively throughout the 1960s, her recording outputs started to dwindle in 1970. First, Saloma was working comprehensively as a headliner in nightclubs and supper clubs around Malaysia, as well as in Singapore and Thailand. Owing to her commitments, EMI managed to release an EP each from 1970 to 1972, while releasing a couple of compilations in keeping her name abreast. Moreover, EMI's major recording stars at that time were Rafeah Buang, Sanisah Huri, Sarena Hashim, and newcomers Sharifah Aini and Anita Sarawak; by then, Saloma was considered more of a legacy artiste. In addition to commercial releases, Saloma also recorded several songs for Radio Televisyen Malaysia, specifically for radio shows. She stayed away from the limelight shortly after the sudden passing of P. Ramlee and only returned to recordings in early 1974. After releasing her final album with EMI in 1975, Saloma was busy with her popular TV show on Radio Televisyen Malaysia, *Saloma Show*, and appeared in a number of programs such as *Hiburan Malam Minggu Sarena Hashim*, a series of *Konsert Perdana*, *Malan Seniman Silam* and *Ahmad Daud Show*. In 1981, she released her final album *Biduan Negara Saloma*, this time under Indra Rekod, an independent Bumiputera recording company. *Berita Harian* reported that Saloma was gifted a red Mitsubishi Colt and \$20,000.00 in cash when she agreed to be the first signee of Indra Rekod, thus turning this into the most lucrative recording deal ever for a Malaysian singer. She also continued as a playback singer in some feature films: *Serampang Tiga*, *Gelombang*, *Bukit Kepong*, and *Bila Hati Telah Retak*, where she made her final cameo appearance in a feature film.

Alas, it is not known how many albums Saloma had released in the first 10 years of her career, as EMI Malaysia Sdn Bhd, the local distributor of artists signed to EMI Singapore Pte Ltd., was only established in 1966, thus the non-existent of proper documentation. Once EMI opened a local branch in Kuala Lumpur, the system of documenting album releases was more systematic and reliable. Throughout her career, Saloma's songs were released in SP (containing 2 songs – 1 each on a side), and EP (containing 4 songs – 2 songs on a side); this was the most popular format that most recording companies used to release songs from Malaysian and Singaporean singers), and LP (10 to 12 songs – 5 to 6 songs on a side). Her recordings with EMI in the 1970s were also released in both 8-track cartridge and cassette formats.

## 2.0 Literature Review

Utah Folk Art Program has archived many folk arts with assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant. LP album of historic Utah folk music produced by Hal Cannon and Tom Carter from the project (Edison, 2004). If we look at the grant support from an authority, we can learn that the archiving project is not only about documenting. As stated by Paul Ricoeur, "declared memory" plays an important role in defining archives since it is the collection of documented evidence (Labrador & Chilton, 2009). The declared memory is not only limited to events such as war, sports, or ministers' speeches but may also cover cultural arts and this is done in a rich culture country - Indonesia.

Archiving cultural arts digitally is essential for Indonesian to appreciate and document the culture which in the future will be one way of appreciating local arts (Herdiani, 2021). Indonesia has a rich cultural heritage and most of them will be difficult to find the original form today due to the popularity of imported arts from the outside. More than 1000 ethnic groups in Indonesia and each group has different ways to express arts. Documentation will be needed to preserve the arts since traditional arts is a fundamental way to learn more about a group of people whereas contemporary and popular culture assists in creating awareness about the said arts.

However, Herdiani (2021) also says that Indonesia has not done digital documentation more aggressively even though there is potential in making it. Some groups did not continue the digitalization due to budget constraints and the government has not taken the project into a bigger national project. Digitalization and documentation are two things that are difficult to do. They involve a lot of research and metadata to store information in an information station. More research means more money is needed to cover the cost of production. A noble arts research may cost higher compared to popular arts due to the subject for the research being more difficult to find and longer periods are needed to conduct it. Even though it is difficult, the digital world has made sharing information available to a mass audience.

Sharing archives with the public will be an important effort to promote any document or event - this attempt may bring light to many people such as scholars (Lim & Aman, 2015). It is not only useful for the resource country but also for other researchers around the world. This may open new discourse regarding Malaysian Biduan Negara Saloma. Scholars from different disciplines and countries may look at her works from different points of view. YouTube is one of the digital platforms and resources for Saloma's songs and acting performances. This is widely known by people. RTM has an archiving center called *Rakam Khanah*. Collecting most programs from RTM and they also have a meta-data technology for people to find more information, video, or any archival products or Saloma in digital forms. The meta-data is a new art of preservation that include multimedia-based machines, software, and electronic systems (Gagnon, 2004). Besides, they also have a collection of Saloma's recordings in hard copy.

Book as a printed document about Saloma has to be taken into account. Books about Saloma written by Ahmad Fauzi in 2011 have collected and focused more on Saloma's songs and works compared to other books where other writers focus on her husband or Saloma as a fashion icon. Saloma is novel research since she is overshadowed by her husband's popularity, the legendary P.Ramlee. Writings in academia about Saloma were done by Sallehudin in 2021. Most academic writings will associate her with folk melancholic songs or as mentioned earlier a wife for the legendary P.Ramlee.

## 3.0 Methodology

Collecting data for documenting Saloma's recordings was done using a thematic qualitative method. New knowledge from a series of library research was collected and analyzed. Documentation of this preliminary research is useful for future research on any topic related

to Saloma's works. Primary data were collected based on three times field trips to RTM's library and archive from 2019 until 2021. RTM is the main source of data since she was a renowned artist and RTM was the only television and radio station back in her era. Simultaneously, interview sessions were conducted with the following interviewees: Dato' (Dr) Johari Salleh (former conductor of Orkestra RTM who was responsible for several Saloma's recordings for both Radio Malaysia and Radio TV Malaysia), Safee Yusof (former Catalogue Manager (Domestic Department) for EMI Malaysia and Warner Music Malaysia), Shashah Hamid (Saloma's niece) and Datin Paduka Julie Sudiro (Saloma's singing partner and lifelong friend). Writings related to her works including newspaper reports were also analyzed using a systematic literature review to produce findings about patterns or themes of her works. Saloma as a case study and as one of the singers from the vinyl disc era works usually have certain themes for each project. Therefore, learning a pattern based on song collections from each record will be helpful to recognize and document her products for this thematic research.

#### 4.0 Findings

The documentation is divided into 5 categories: LP (solo recordings), EP (solo recordings), SP (solo recordings), LP (compilations of materials previously released – solo recordings), and LP (miscellaneous – featuring Saloma's recordings in a various artist compilation).

##### LP (Solo recordings)

Title	Year	Producer	Label / Serial Number
Saloma Sings	1971/1972	Unknown	Radio Malaysia / RMLP-33
Persembahan Saloma	1971/1972	Unknown	Radio Malaysia / RMLP-43
Airmata Di Kuala Lumpur	1974	Kassim Masdor	EMI Regal / SREG 9805
Sesudah Suboh	1974	Kassim Masdor	EMI Regal / SREG 9806
Kelohan Saloma	1975	Ahmad Nawab, Reggie Verghese, S. Atan	EMI Regal / SREG 9842
Biduan Negara Saloma	1981	Kassim Masdor	Indra Rekod / IRA 002

##### EP (Solo recordings)

Title	Year	Producer	Label / Serial Number
Chinchin Ku Ini	1970	Kassim Masdor	EMI Parlophone / S-EGEP 706
Jangan Chemburu	1971	P. Ramlee	EMI Parlophone / S-EGEP 726
Aslirama	1972	Kassim Masdor	EMI Parlophone / S-EGEP 737
Istana Cinta	1974	Kassim Masdor	EMI Parlophone / S-EGEP 783

##### SP (Solo recordings)

Title	Year	Producer	Label / Serial Number
Berhutang Jiwa Di-Bayar Jiwa / Di-Bibiru Terlukis Kata	1970	P. Ramlee	EMI Parlophone / DPE 8218
Seri Paduka Baginda (with Orkes Radio TV Malaysia)	1974	Johari Salleh	Radio TV Malaysia / RMEP 51

### LP (Compilations of materials previously released – solo recordings)

Title	Year	Producer	Label / Serial Number
Irama Kenangan Lama	1969/1970 (?)	Various	EMI Regal / SREG 9513
Saloma (Mengapa Di-Rindu)	1972	Various	EMI Regal / SREG 9544
Di Mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti (with P. Ramlee)	1973	Various	EMI Regal / SREG 9805

### LP (Miscellaneous – featuring Saloma's recordings in various artist compilations)

Title	Year	Producer	Label / Serial Number
Orkes Konset Radio Malaysia Pimpinan Johari Salleh	1972	Unknown	Radio Malaysia / RMM 02
Rampaian No. 3	1972	Unknown	Radio TV Malaysia / LPM 57
Aslirama	1973	Kassim Masdor	EMI Regal / SREG 9549
Konsert Perdana 1973	1973	Unknown	Radio TV Malaysia / LPM 69/70
Selamat Hari Raya	1973	Kassim Masdor	EMI Regal / SREG 9808
Konsert Perdana 1974	1974	Unknown	Radio TV Malaysia / LPM 123/124
Rasa Sayang Eh	1974	Kassim Masdor	EMI Regal / SREG 9827
Selamat Hari Lahir	1974	Kassim Masdor	EMI / EMGS 5001
Malam Kenangan Seniman Silam	1975	Johari Salleh	Radio TV Malaysia / LPM 135/136
Konsert Perdana '76	1976	Unknown	Radio TV Malaysia / RMLP 135/136
Bergembira Di Hari Raya	1977	Ahmad Nawab, Various	EMI / EMGS 5508

## 5.0 Discussion

Most of Saloma's recordings between 1970 to 1983 were either produced by EMI Singapore Pte Ltd (and its Malaysian subsidiary EMI Malaysia Sdn Bhd) or Radio Televisyen Malaysia. While the former was produced for commercial release and distribution, the latter was used for internal broadcast on radio stations across Malaysia and was not available for public purchase. However, some record collectors were fortunate to have them in their private possessions as sample editions (or collectible editions) were distributed to a select few. One would notice that the production credits on most recordings with Radio Televisyen Malaysia were not properly documented, thus most

producers were listed as “Unknown”). On the contrary, EMI was better at documenting production credits, or at least the names of arrangers in each album following the standard practice of international recording companies in the United States and England. For now, the list provided earlier is the most complete and comprehensive list of Saloma’s recordings.

In addition to recordings for EMI, Radio Televisyen Malaysia, and Indra Rekod, Saloma returned to playback singing for feature films – her final stint as a playback singer was for *Laxmana Do Re Mi*, which was produced in 1972 and released in 1973. For *Serampang Tiga*, a production of Indra Film Productions, Saloma performed two songs as duets: *Jasa Perwira* (with Julie Sudiro) and *Kembara Rasa* (with S. Rossley). Film Negara Malaysia invited Saloma to perform main theme song for *Gelombang* (1981) and *Bila Hati Telah Retak* (1983); both songs were written by Rawan Hiba (Seniman Negara Rahman B). Previously, both songs were reportedly written by another legendary writer, Ibrahim Bachik (Sallehuddin, et. al., 2021); he was the arranger for those songs. She also took part in *Bukit Kepong* (1982); her haunting voice can be heard in the film’s final scenes as she vocalized the musical score of Inspector Abu Bakar Long ARMIC, L(MUS) VCM, RMSM.

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

As stated earlier, Saloma was more prolific in recording songs before the passing of her husband P. Ramlee and recorded sporadically after his passing right up to 1976. After her recording contract with EMI Singapore became expired in 1977, she exclusively performed on television programs and fundraising concerts. Alas, she was hospitalized for almost a year at the beginning of 1978 and did not release any new recordings until 1981, when she was given a clean bill of health by her doctor. Her final album was produced and released by a Bumiputera independent recording company, Indra Rekod in 1981. She was supposed to record her Indra Rekod sophomore album in 1982; alas, her bout with an illness returned. After taping an episode of “Puspawarna”, a weekly RTM variety show, she was hospitalized one last time before succumbing to liver failure associated with jaundice (it was later revealed that Saloma was battling a rare type of blood cancer) on April 25, 1983. She was buried alongside her husband at the Jalan Ampang Moslem Cemetery. Ironically, her final resting place is located next to a renowned tourist attraction in Kuala Lumpur, Saloma Link, which was christened after her.

Efforts in documenting Saloma’s body of works and legacy have been erratic and apathetic, even though she was honored with a stately and eminent title *Biduan Negara*, presented to her by SENIMAN in 1978 (shortly after she was discharged from the hospital) and endorsed by the Government of Malaysia. It is rather disheartening that Saloma’s full discography is not complete; on the contrary, the existence of both *Jalan Saloma* and *Pintasan Saloma* can be viewed as titular tributes to the aforesaid *Biduan Negara*, who was one of the prominent singers in Malaysia. While the company formerly known as EMI Malaysia had been prolifically re-releasing her recordings from time to time, it is best for the current owner of all her recordings, Universal Music Malaysia, to start compiling the list of Saloma’s catalogs dating from 1954.

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