

Out to write songs till his last breath

Veteran composer Ahmad Nawab also aims to start online voice-training lessons



By ZIEMAN
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LEGENDARY composer Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Nawab Khan has always set high standards for his songs.

Singers who do not make the mark can forget it.

That is how it has been for the last 60 years.

Even now in his twilight years, the Penang-born composer still maintains the same benchmark.

He sets the record for composing over 2,000 songs, releasing 500 albums and grooming at least 75 singers.

In his heyday, his stable of artistes included well-known singers such as Datuk Sharifah Aini, Datuk Jamal Abdullah, Datuk DJ Dave, Uji Rashid, Datuk Khadijah Ibrahim, Datuk Sudirman Arshad and Salamiah Hassan.

He still has 200 unpublished songs and reserves them "for singers who make the mark".

No, he is not being cocky - it is just not easy to get his stamp of approval.

"But that is how it should be.

"I have to study the singer's voice before I give my songs to them. My songs are tailor-made for them.

"The songs and singers have to complement each other, hence the secret of my songs' popularity," said the saxophonist, who is known for his signature sunglasses, white suit and reserved persona.

These days, he devotes his time playing his saxophone and jogging.

But a few things like his age and family life will remain private.

"All is well ... thank you," said Ahmad Nawab, who has five children and eight grandchildren.

His mission this year is to start an online music class, with help from his granddaughter Suraya Nasir Khan, who doubles as his manager.

"We are finalising the details. It will be great to start online singing lessons or voice-training sessions.

"Meanwhile, I will continue to compose songs until the end of my life, God willing," said the music legend.

He started composing songs at 15 and recorded his first song *Bintang Malam* by Zahara Agus a year later.

As a composer, he also had his fair share of fame and heartaches.

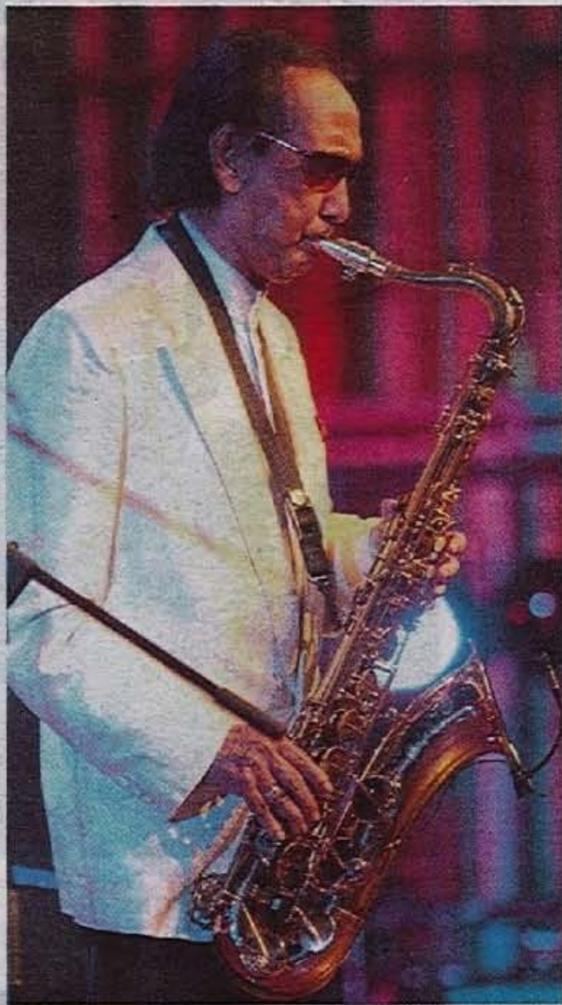
"The worst was in 1960, where I was jobless and had no food for three days.

"I was paid RM5 for the song *Kaulah Harapanku* by Saloma," he said.

The highlight of his career was the *Kau Kunci Cintaku Di Dalam Hatimu* album by Ramlah Ram in 1988, which sold 400,000 copies.

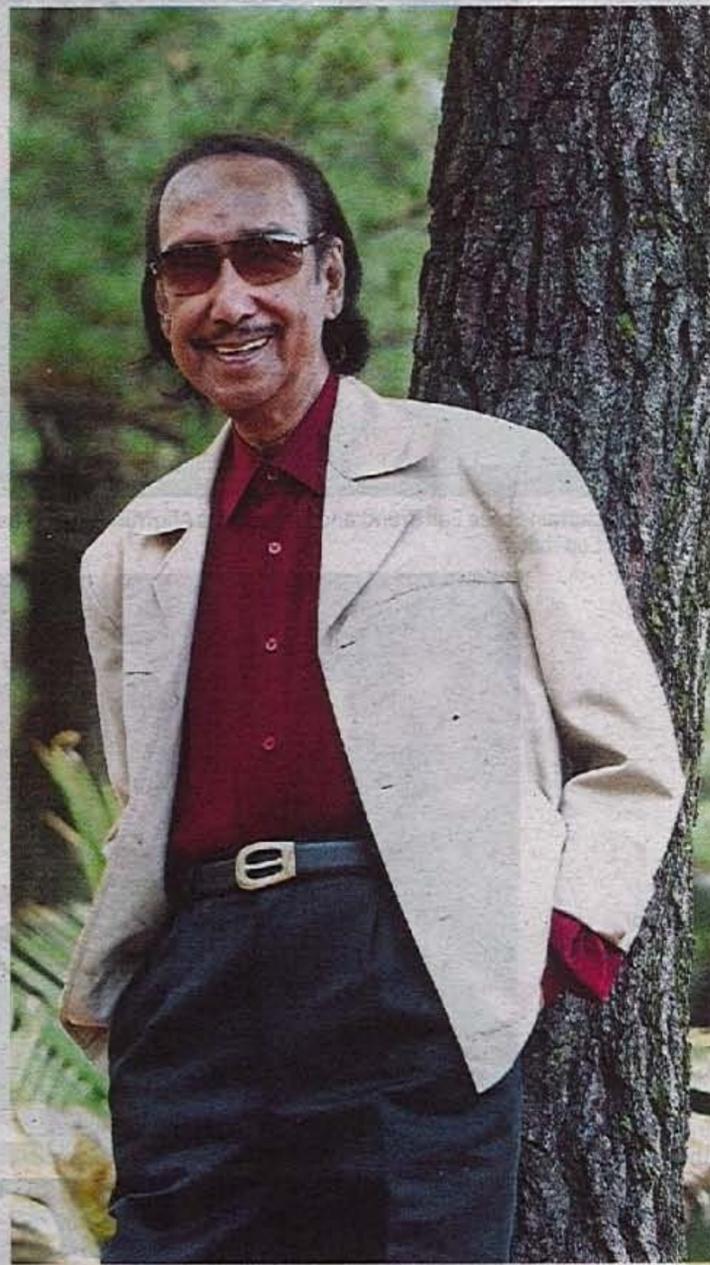
His biggest achievement was the *Malaysia Truly Asia* song, recorded in 17 languages and was used by the Tourism Ministry to promote Malaysia abroad.

But despite all the successes, Ahmad Nawab, who worked with Orkestra RTM for 17 years predicts his fate will be somewhat like



Ahmad Nawab wants to start an online music class this year with help from his granddaughter, Suraya.

(Left) Ahmad Nawab is known as a saxophonist who always dons a white suit and sunglasses.



An early picture of Ahmad Nawab who started composing when he was 15.



Ahmad Nawab with P. Ramlee (left) in a 1965 photo.

P. Ramlee.

"RTM never bothered to play P. Ramlee's songs until many years after his death.

"Likewise, I had slogged for RTM but no programmes were attributed to me.

"I am not creating any controversy but that is the truth.

"I am feeling the rejection. No singers or composers come to me for advice.

"There is plenty to learn and I am willing to teach.

"The reality is old composers like me are forgotten and alienated.

"Now I know how P. Ramlee felt towards the end of his career," he said.

For him, P. Ramlee will always be special.

"He was a dear friend. So many

facts about him have been distorted.

"I used to rent his house for many years in Setapak Garden, in the 1960s. So I know him well," said Ahmad Nawab, who played the saxophone for P. Ramlee in the movie *Masam-masam Manis*.

Another thing that makes him unhappy is the Seniman Negara Award that he received.

"As a Seniman Negara, I should contribute to the industry but nobody wants to do anything with the treasure trove of experience that I have," said Ahmad Nawab, who was awarded the title in 2006, making him the seventh recipient of the prestigious honour.

He is also the only local artiste to be awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in 2000.