Majulah Singapura, meaning “Onward Singapore” was originally composed as an anthem for the City Council in 1958 to commemorate the re-opening of Victoria Theatre after a major restoration.

Mr Ong Pang Boon, Deputy Mayor of the City Council of Singapore, approached Encik Zubir Said, music composer for Cathay-Keris Film Company, in 1958, to write a theme song for the Council’s official functions. Encik Zubir Said subsequently made changes to the lyrics and tweaked the melody from the original City Council version into the version that became our state national anthem.

After some modifications and adaptations initiated by Dr Toh, “Majulah Singapura” was launched on 3 December 1959.

“Majulah Singapura”, as it is sung today is a new recording by Cultural Medallion winner, Mr Phoon Yew Tien. He launched it with a “grander and more inspiring arrangement” as he wanted the national anthem to be “more accessible to all Singaporeans.”

Why is the national anthem sung in Malay?

According to Dr Toh, the national anthem should be in Malay, “the indigenous language of the region, as Singapura is not native to this part of the world.” He felt that the “Malay version of the national anthem would appeal to all races ... it can be easily understood. And at the same time can be easily remembered ... it must be brief, to the point … and can be sung.”

Extract of oral history interview with Dr Toh Chin Chye, 1989.

Do You Know?

The original score of “Majulah Singapura” by Encik Zubir Said.

The current rearranged version of “Majulah Singapura.”

“But the difficulty is in such a short melody, I have to put in all the words … it must be very simple, understandable for all the races in Singapore … I consult also an author in Malay language so that I can do it in proper Malay language but not too deep and not too difficult.”