

Rise for the National Anthem

Music can do two things very well. First, it can cut right to the emotions. There seems to be a song out there for every feeling that a person could possibly have. Second, music can be a great way to express individuality and pride. Every song has a personality, and people are quick to respond to the one that “fits” them. Countries are the same way. Today, most nations have a “national anthem,” a song specifically chosen to represent the pride of the people and distinguish the nation. The anthem is usually played on national holidays, as well as at large functions and gatherings (*for example, the national anthem of the United States is often played before sporting events*).

Obviously, when it comes time for a nation to choose its anthem, it’s not always an easy decision. Take Malaysia, for example. By the 1950s, the country (*located in Southeast Asia with over twenty million people*) was about to gain its independence from Britain. Since it was overseen by the British government, it never adopted a national anthem. Malaysian Chief Minister for Home Affairs, Abdul Rahman, decided it was time to get one.

Rahman set up an international contest for songwriters to submit their ideas. The contest resulted in over 500 entries coming from all over the world. There were plenty of good songs, but they weren’t good enough. Rahman decided that none of the entries were suitable, and went back to the drawing board. He decided to hire the best American, British, and other renowned composers to put together the Malaysian national anthem. When they completed, the proposed anthem was nothing short of a masterpiece. But it still didn’t make the cut – at least according to Rahman.



Running out of options, Rahman decided to turn to the individual states of Malaysia. Even though no national anthem existed, each of the eleven states had its own state anthem. Rahman and his committee decided to adopt the state anthem of Perak, a Malay song titled “Terang Bulan” (“*Bright Moon*”). The song was a long-time favorite among the Malaysian people, and seemed to capture the character of the country. In 1957, the song was adopted as the Malaysia’s first national anthem – and just in time, too. That same year, Malaysia gained its independence from Britain, and Abdul Rahman became its first Prime Minister.