

PopLore Episode 1: Origins of Singapore Pop

Lim Sek:

Welcome to *PopLore: Stories of Singapore Pop*, a seven-episode series. I'm Lim Sek. As chief executive of events and management company Music & Movement, I've been part of the Asian music industry for 40 years. In this episode, I'll be tracing the origin of popular music in Singapore, one of Southeast Asia's busiest and most diverse cities. What exactly is Singapore pop music? For this podcast, we asked our singers, musicians, composers and producers this very question.

Let's kick things off with an answer from singer-songwriter, Shabir.

Shabir:

I don't have a straight way of answering that question, but I think I have a lot to think through in that sense. What is the Singapore sound? Do we have a Singapore sound? No, we don't, I don't think we have one right now. Will we? I think it's possible. If you look through history, transit cities always have a little bit of an identity crisis, because people are constantly coming in and going out and moving in and moving out... So I guess that's why it's so important for us to work on identity, whether it's individual, community or national, it's very important to ask these questions. I think it's a very important conversation to have. And hopefully, those conversations will enable us to kind of start looking for those answers, and that could help us find that Singapore sound.

Lim Sek:

It is true that identities are often fluid in transit cities. But the highly porous nature of such cities can also inspire a lot of creativity. Singapore, located at the nexus of major global trade routes, is often called the crossroads to the east. So, what is the soundtrack of this particular crossroads between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, a place marked by centuries of multi-cultural mingling? Let's start with traditional Malay music, which was the popular music of its day. We asked musician Rudi Salim to explain some of these styles.

Rudi Salim:

Asli is the slowest tempo or the slowest music for Malay traditional [music]. It's more of going towards the sad song. So *asli* is actually the Malay original song, original beat so that's what they call it, *lagu asli*. This is the Malay original music. So when we go to make it a bit faster, we change into the beat *inang*. *Inang* is influenced by Indian [culture] and a bit of Chinese [culture] during that time when the migration start, right, so these people come in to Singapore... This is the influence that the Malay adopt and take it lah. So after *inang*, then we got influence from the Arabs, that we call *zapin*. We get this beat *zapin* from Arab... so these traders from Arab came in and they bring in their gambus, you know, the gambus guitar? Ah, that's where they bring into the Malay music and

become part of the *zapin* music. Then the more up tempo, the fastest, we call it *joget* lah.

Lim Sek:

Joget has Portuguese influences, most likely dating back to the Portuguese presence in the region in the 16th century. The same is true of *keroncong*, another traditional style.

Rudi Salim:

Keroncong is totally different from traditional music like *joget*, *inang*, 'cause they're using a different set of instruments. This also influence from the Portuguese, because Portuguese, they go to Indonesia... I think that's the start of *keroncong* because they're using double bass, cello, *cak*, *cuk*, guitar... they have flutes and violin. There's no percussion.

Lim Sek:

The British arrived in Singapore in the 19th century, bringing Western classical music to the island. Military band music was also popular, and this was performed by soldiers shipped in from Punjabi and Sikh regiments of British India. Later, musicians from Goa, the Philippines, and Eastern Europe travelled here. They played in the orchestras of top hotels, where couples danced the foxtrot and the waltz. More waves of migration added traditional Chinese and Indian music to Singapore's soundscape.

By the 1920s, drama troupes from India were staging historical epics in public spaces in Singapore. For these performances, musical ensembles provided live accompaniment. This might have been the earliest origins of later Indian music parties, which were bands that played at weddings, festivals and other community events in the 1960s.

For a period, Chinese opera troupes performed in dedicated theatres in Chinatown. But by the 1930s, many of these shows had moved to the three amusement parks which had opened with great fanfare in Singapore. Named New World, Great World and Happy World, these amusement parks were modelled after similar attractions in Shanghai. They housed dance halls and cabarets, and hosted boxing matches and strip-tease shows. They gave people from all walks of life access to nightlife entertainment for the first time. Everyone from courting couples to soldiers on leave flocked to these three Worlds.

Besides Chinese opera, visitors could also catch *bangsawan*, a form of Malay opera with Western, Arab, Latin American, Turkish, Indonesian, Indian and Chinese influences. Each *bangsawan* troupe had its own orchestra, which had up to 15 instruments.

The amusement parks also had dance halls dedicated to *joget*, and cabarets where live bands played for patrons who wanted to dance the cha-cha, the rumba, and the tango.

By the 1950s, the three Worlds were at the height of their popularity. But around this time, a movement against “yellow culture” started to gain momentum. This campaign was led by Chinese intellectuals and students in Singapore, who were influenced by political developments in China. They viewed pornography, prostitution, and, yes, pop music, as degenerate. In a direct translation from Chinese, such decadent culture was called “yellow”.

Here’s CT Lim, a writer who focuses on Singapore history and pop culture, to set the scene.

CT Lim:

Within Singapore, there's this strong anti-colonial wave that started after the war. And so therefore, when we talk about anti-yellow, right, it's not just about the physical freedom that we want, but it's also the mental freedom to throw down the shackles of colonial mindset, colonial thinking... thinking that the white man is the best, Western culture is the best. That's how I think we can frame anti-yellow culture lah. In that sense, it overlaps... I could say it's a subset of anti-colonialism. Then specifically how it came about, the local context? I would say in 1953, there was a Chinese female student, I think she was 13 years old, she was raped and murdered, the killer was never caught.

And that really sensationalized I think all the headlines, especially in the Chinese press. And of course, a lot of people point towards the British government, the colonial government for the societal ills. Crime was rampant... I think Singapore at one point was known as Chicago of the east, alright, you know, filled with gangsters and all that. If you take a step back lah, I mean, maybe that is true, but maybe that's also been played up by the left wing for their own political agenda. That's how it works, right? Politics, I suppose, fair game lah, whether you're on the left or on the right. That is a real event, that's true. But it's also, in that sense, latched upon or, if you want to be more critical, exploited by the different political groups or interests in Singapore in '53. That is the start of the anti-yellow culture movement.

Lim Sek:

Singapore was still a British colony at the time, but already on the path to self-government. Then-chief minister Lim Yew Hock and his administration viewed the anti-yellow culture campaign as a cover for left-wing groups who wanted to destabilize society. So the government decided to pretty much leave the nightlife culture alone. This would not be the last time that pragmatism outweighed puritanical impulses in the regulation of Singapore’s entertainment scene.

CT Lim:

When I think about anti-yellow in the 50s, right, or even beyond, to me there are three Ps. Alright, one of course puritan, which could be the case, you're very fervent, you really think that the West is sex, drugs and rock 'n roll, is corrupting

our minds. Two, pragmatism. To me that's the other key point and third, of course, is politics.

On one hand, you do have all these left-wing groups latching on to the crime and society ills and massage parlours, cabarets, the Worlds, alright, from a very puritan point of view. But from Lim Yew Hock's government point of view, right, or the British point of view, actually they're quite practical about it. To them, they see that this anti-yellow movement is controlled by the left wing. Does that mean then they suppress the cabaret culture and the Worlds? They didn't do that. So in that sense, the anti-yellow culture movement in the '50s, right, I would say, had a limited impact on popular music. If you just read certain reports, you'd say wow, you know, there must be a lot of people trying to shut down the Worlds... no, it continued to do very good business.

Lim Sek:

As a result, pop music flourished in the amusement parks. In these venues, Chinese opera soon gave way to a new format called the *getai* (歌台), a live variety show featuring song-and-dance performances that is actually a uniquely Singaporean innovation.

Veteran entertainment journalist Alice Kwan, better known as Guan Xuemei (管雪梅), recalls the experience of visiting an early *getai* as a child.

Alice Kwan:

There were bottles of fizzy drinks on the chairs in front of the stage... I remember that they were Green Spot and such soft drinks... and there were peanuts and such... the cost was only \$1, but of course, \$1 was a lot of money back then... and you could listen to the songs, to the singing...

Lim Sek:

This modest set-up of simple snacks, a small band, and a few singers on the bill would evolve over time into a glamorous and very profitable performance format. The *getai* became a launching pad for many of Singapore's earliest pop stars. Shangguan Liuyun (上官流云) was one performer who managed to transition from a Chinese opera troupe to the *getai*. He was also a composer and lyricist, who sometimes used musical styles from other Southeast Asian communities in songs such as *Yin Du Qing Ge* (印度情歌), which means 'Indian Love Song'. These tunes played into a Nanyang-style trend in Chinese pop music at that time. In the mid-1950s, he started acting in movies. Successful *getai* singers often made the leap to the silver screen in those days, says Alice.

Alice Kwan:

Hong Kong had an established entertainment scene by then, and often scouted local *getais* to look for potential actors. Quite a few *getai* singers went to Hong Kong to make movies.

Lim Sek:

It wasn't just Hong Kong's established movie market that offered opportunities for *getai* singers. Zhuang Xuefang (庄雪芳) was a *getai* singer who became a prolific movie star in the late 1950s. Known as "the Queen of Amoy Films", she appeared in many Hokkien movie musicals produced for markets such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan.

Another entertainer who got her start at the *getai* is Poon Sow Keng, or Pan Xiuqiong (潘秀琼). Signed to a record label in Hong Kong in the 1950s, she is the original singer of the Chinese evergreen, *Lover's Tears* or *Qing Ren De Yan Lei* (情人的眼泪). She also popularised the Nanyang style through songs like a Chinese version of Indonesian folk song *Bengawan Solo*.

Singapore's Malay movie industry was thriving as well, thanks to the presence of Cathay-Keris Studio and the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions. Music was a big part of most movies in those days, and Malay movies were no exception.

Since they were being made in a part of the world where hybridity was already a way of life, Malay music was eclectic. *Bangsawan* influences were strong in the early films. Many directors of these movies were from India, and they added music conventions from their own cultures.

This movie business also provided livelihoods for many future icons. Zubir Said, who would eventually write Singapore's national anthem, was a member of a *keroncong* group and the band leader of a *bangsawan* troupe before he started composing music for Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris.

Zubir Said mentored P. Ramlee, who started out as a playback singer for Shaw Brothers before becoming a famous film actor, singer, composer and director. Singer-songwriter Art Fazil describes how this vibrant film industry laid the foundation for Singapore's music industry.

Art Fazil:

Because of the movie industry with Shaw Brothers Malay Film Productions, so all people like P. Ramlee from Penang came down, and all that. The music industry was an offshoot of that, because when they were making musicals, right, so they need to record the music for the film, so that's when the recording industry kind of got into a serious mode.

Lim Sek:

P. Ramlee created many songs for the movies based on traditional styles such as *inang*, *zapin*, and *asli*. But he was also very skilled at incorporating prevailing musical styles into his work. So, as jazz became the dominant sound of popular music, his work changed accordingly.

Rahimah Rahim:

In the '50s, '60s music... more to[wards] jazz music. If you listened to like, Tan Sri P. Ramlee music, there's element of jazz also there, you know, even though it's in Malay. And also Nona Asiah, the legendary singer, and also the late Saloma... they sing all those jazz kind of music. More of the '50s... the rhythm already more to jazz, swing jazz.

Lim Sek:

That is singer Rahimah Rahim. Her father, Rahim Hamid, and uncle, Ahmad Daud, both had ties to the film and music business.

Rahimah Rahim:

My uncle was from Penang. So he came to Singapore to work in one of the clubs, I think, I don't know where, but he's more to singing on film and acting. But my dad, yes, he started in the 50s and he was known as "Nat King Cole of Singapore"... and then he started to sing in all the.. the club scene like Orchard Golden Venus, Westin Point, you know, all those... all the clubs, popular clubs in Singapore. So in the day he worked at Cathay, as sound editor for film. And at night, he was a musician; he sings and he plays the drums.

Lim Sek:

Rahimah started sneaking into clubs to watch her father perform jazz standards when she was quite young. But for those who were not lucky enough to get a front-row seat at these hotspots, there was always the radio. That's how veteran broadcaster Brian Richmond got his tunes as a child.

Brian Richmond:

I grew up listening to, you know, jazz standards, with songs by people like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Perry Como, and the likes, and that's sort of fill my nights... listening to music. It was by radio, and those days, of course, you know, the bigger your radio, the more envied you are by your friends and all that. But I've got a little transistor, which my father gave me. And I used to go to sleep with that transistor radio.

Lim Sek:

Soon, the musical stylings of one Elvis Presley started to compete with the big band sound of the Rat Pack. Elvis could croon with the best of them, but it was the electric rumblings of rock 'n roll in his songs that piqued the interest of many listeners. P. Ramlee, for instance, certainly seemed to take notice of this new kind of music that was taking the world by storm.

Art Fazil:

I mean, this is just my own theory that his singing style could have been influenced by Elvis Presley, because of the sort of nasally, you know, like Elvis would sing... *You ain't nothing but a hound dog crying all the time...* So that's my impersonation of Elvis, by the way. So it's that kind of vocal projection, kind of a bit nasally, you know, in between that the mouth and the nasal passage.

And obviously, P Ramlee had that... *Getaran jiwa*... he's also very crooner style, you know. He was very much influenced by the Western crooner style of singing.

Lim Sek:

For music-lovers who were coming of age during this period, it was an exciting time. Music was changing. A pop revolution was just around the corner, and Lawrence Lee, who eventually joined the 1960s band The Checkmates, remembers clearly how much every teenager he knew wanted to be a part of it.

Lawrence Lee:

Casey Kasem's *American Bandstand*. That came on on Rediffusion every Saturday evening at 11pm. We would crowd around Rediffusion set without fail and listened to his rundown of the top hits of the US. We listened to people like Elvis, Ricky Nelson, the Everly Brothers... and that sort of inspired us to say, hey, listen, we got to be like these guys, we got to play the guitar. That was the flavour of the day. Every teenage boy had to learn how to play the guitar. Some progressed, some didn't. But everybody was able to play the guitar as far as I remember.

Lim Sek:

In those days, schools, and society in general, seemed to have a more relaxed attitude about these non-academic activities.

Brian Richmond:

I had this group from St. Pat's and they were not too confident with their singing abilities. They've heard me sing a couple of times. So they say, Brian, come and join us, you sing. I said, sure! I enjoyed it, you know. I think thanks or no thanks to the teachers, you know, when you don't do well in school, the teachers will tell you this, if you can't study, go and join a band. Heh heh, yeah... there was one particular teacher who told somebody that, you know.

Lawrence Lee:

There were some bands from SJI, right? St. Andrews had its own bands, St. Patrick's School had its own bands, Raffles had its own bands, ACS had their own bands. It was just a phase lah, that every teenager, you know, went through, and I guess it happens throughout all the schools. My dad was quite neutral about it, alright. He never objected to my playing the guitar, but he never encouraged me. I was in primary six, when I started playing the guitar, learning the guitar. And I was going full steam ahead. Eight to 12 hours a day, nothing but the guitar. To the extent that when I went to bed at night, my fingers would be throbbing. But I pressed on. Well, the outset of that is that I achieved completely F9s for my preliminary exams. That was the only time my dad stepped in. He say, hey, listen, this cannot do, alright. I have not objected to your playing the guitar, but listen, hey, you got to get your grades. So I had no choice but put the guitar aside. And fortunately, three months later, at the real final exams, I managed to scrape through.

Lim Sek:

For John Chee and Raymond Ho, parental approval was much easier to come by when they started getting into music. This is Raymond.

Raymond Ho:

As far as my parents were concerned, you know, they were happy that I'm not getting into trouble. I am the eldest of seven children, so my parents got a lot to spare.

Lim Sek:

And this is John.

John Chee:

He's the eldest, I am the youngest... family of six.

Raymond Ho:

In those days, there was no Nintendo, there was no handphone game[s], so there was nothing to do. So when John says, okay, let's go and... and get ourselves involved in Talentime, I say, why not, you know, something to do lah... and it kept us off the streets, you know.

Lim Sek:

So, John, Raymond and their fellow St. Patrick's schoolmate Leslie Chia decided to call themselves The Crescendos, and off they went to try their luck at the 1961 Radio Singapore Talentime competition. They made it all the way to the finals, which was held at Victoria Theatre.

Raymond Ho:

Was it fun? Yeah, it was fun, but it was scary also. Standing on the stage, at Victoria Theatre some more, and then facing two, three hundred people and they were all very well attired. Because in those days, you don't have youngsters attending this, you know, they are all British expats and they were in jackets and evening gowns.

John Chee:

The three of us, we didn't have that kind of money to splurge to have a very beautiful or very nice jacket, or even a long sleeve shirt. So what we did was, we bought ribbon, made it into a bow tie, and that's all we had... just a normal short sleeve shirt with a ribbon made into a bow tie.

Lim Sek:

They sang Dean Martin's *Memories Were Made of This* and placed second. Thanks to their Talentime exposure, The Crescendos were soon performing cover versions of pop songs in many shows.

John Chee:

That was the time when Singapore was growing up, and so were we. Because you must understand, at that point in time, we were the kids that grew up post Second World War, alright, and Singapore was really finding its feet culturally as well as socially as well as economically.

Lim Sek:

In fact, Singapore had only attained self-government two years earlier, in 1959. With that came another anti-yellow culture campaign.

CT Lim:

PAP won the election in May in '59 and within a month or so, they launched the anti-yellow campaign, and it was a joint campaign by three ministries: Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture. But, the question I ask is what impact it had, right, on popular music and I've written that actually it has limited impact. Again, if you look at it, it's very curious. Why this whole rhetoric, why this big bang, show 'n tell, we are doing this... So there were specific policies, and they did ban playing rock 'n roll music on the radio, they banned jukeboxes, they banned pool halls, they also banned air-con massage parlors, I think air-con was a big deal back then, so all these seedy places, alright, so it had an impact on music. But I would say actually, it's on... very surface. It was a big bang in '59 but slowly it tapered off. One sure sign of that is in '61, you have Cliff Richards and The Shadows playing in Singapore.

Lim Sek:

This concert, featuring the most famous English rock 'n roll act of the time, is a seminal event in Singapore's pop history. A teenage Brian Richmond was part of the audience at the Happy World Stadium, having paid for one of the cheaper seats.

Brian Richmond:

Oh, it was, it was crazy. There was no air conditioning. It was all ceiling fans. And despite all the ceiling fans being used, it was still quite hot, because of the number of people who were there. And they were screaming and shouting, after every song, they'll be clapping along and then when, you know, another song comes on, and you know, they're familiar with that song, they'll go crazy, absolutely bonkers. I mean, we listened to Cliff Richard and The Shadows, you know, on radio and what have you and all that. And then suddenly to see them live performing, because you know why we don't get a chance to see them on TV. TV came about only in '63, so before that we never had TV. So we, we never knew what the band looked like until... Yeah, but we are very familiar with their sounds. So when you see that band performing live, we all went crazy because it's like you... you connect with the songs that you've heard on radio, but now being played by the same people who came up with those songs.

Li Sek:

The Crescendos, fresh off their Talentime performance, had scored the plum gig of opening for Cliff Richard & The Shadows.

Raymond Ho:

I was way above the clouds to be backstage with Sir Cliff Richard, Hank Marvin, Bruce Welch. It's unbelievable, you know, I mean, they were friendly, they were talking to us, you know. I mean, to rub shoulders with people like them is unbelievable, right?

John Chee:

While The Shadows were playing their music, I think it was Hank Marvin, the lead guitar, who plays Apache, you remember the song Apache.... while he was playing, he broke his pick. He had to have another pick, otherwise how is he going to play? He just looked at one of us, so we loaned him... that pick never came back.

Lim Sek:

They probably didn't know it at the time, but what The Shadows contributed to the Singapore music scene was priceless. Watching them on stage inspired a whole generation of musicians here.

Raymond Ho:

Electric lead guitar, electric bass guitar, and rhythm guitar, three guitars with one drummer. The British started this sound by The Shadows, and the Americans started it with The Ventures, and then later on everybody copied.

Lawrence Lee:

I think I can safely say that every musician in Singapore, bar none, started because they listened to The Shadows. This was something fresh; this was something new; this was something exciting. Alright, four guys, smartly dressed, good-looking guys playing red Fender guitars, and their sound, woah, it really blew our minds.

Lim Sek:

Now, back to the question of why the government's anti-yellow culture efforts in 1959 had a seemingly light touch for rock 'n roll.

CT Lim:

If you think about it, it's very curious, you know. On one hand, they say rock 'n roll, Western pop music is bad. And on the other hand, they give the license, they allow it [to] happen. And my argument is that it is not just politics, actually they are very pragmatic. Because, you must remember, the British bases were still around in Singapore. And if you check the statistics, the British bases actually create[d] jobs, provided employment, provided defence for Singapore. So it's very important, right, and you do want to keep the your troops happy lah. And they need entertainment... there's only so much beer you can drink... you still want, you know, you want live music, yah.

Lim Sek:

These British bases were important performance venues for the Singapore bands of that period that were playing Western pop music.

Brian Richmond:

We have the RAF, the British Army and the Royal Navy and all that. But more so with the RAF, we had places like RAF Changi, RAF Tengah... and they will have all these functions on weekends, yah. Well, they'll organize their own little dance parties and all that. And where do they get their bands from? From our local boys!

Lim Sek:

Meanwhile, The Crescendos were moving on to bigger things. In 1962, they opened for the Blue Diamonds, a Dutch-Indonesian rock 'n roll duo, at the Singapore Badminton Hall.

Raymond Ho:

When we were on stage at the Singapore Badminton Hall, we had jackets because the Blue Diamonds wore jackets, so we also had to wear jackets. And Cliff Richard and The Shadows, they performed with jackets, so we had to wear jackets. And Singapore Badminton Hall was not air-conditioned. They didn't even have fans at the wings. We were sweating, perspiring like mad, you know, melting from the inside. And that jacket has got to go for dry cleaning after each show.

Lim Sek:

The attention to their image paid off. In 1963, The Crescendos became the first Singapore singing group signed by an international label, Philips. The same year, they performed at "The PHILIPS Television Demonstration" event at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka compound in Kuala Lumpur.

Raymond Ho:

1963, television came to Singapore and Malaysia for the first time, black and white. You know, those huge cathode ray tube, you know. So, Phillips wanted to sell their TV sets to Singapore and Malaysia. So outside this Dewan Bahasa Pustaka compound, they lined up, I think, about nearly 200 sets of their TV sets, just to demonstrate to the people outside who were not able to come inside, that was, you know, what was happening inside. So it was being beamed live.

John Chee:

They wanted to get in to see what's happening inside. So naturally, as spectators... and when you have a mob, everybody pushing, pushing, pushing... they pushed through the main entrance of the door, it was glass and that glass door broke. The security in that building told us that we cannot move out from that building, and they escorted us out of that building through some back alley, back door.

Lim Sek:

For a group whose members were mostly still teenagers, this was as close to living the rockstar life as it was possible to get in those days. But even then, they already knew that they could not go on like this forever.

Raymond Ho:

Because there was no money in it. Take out your calculator. We recorded 11 songs. And we were paid 4% royalties. One single record cost \$1.50. I don't have the numbers, but let's presume we sold a total of 100,000 pieces, that's \$150,000, times 4%, \$6,000 for the lifetime. When we had our friends to join us as a drum... we had the drummer and a bass guitarist, there were six of us, and we divided by six – I had to be fair, friends are friends. And that \$6,000 that we got, let's say the royalties, covered also transportation, costume... We were given royalties in bits and pieces.

It was fun lah. It was nice to be recognized when you're outdoors, in public... of course people pointing at you and whispering, you know... in those days, you can't make a living. In 1960, Singapore's population was what? Less than 2 million. You take the English-speaking group out of 2 million, maybe not 250,000. Out of the 250,000, who can afford to go buy records? Last time, cannot download, you know.

Lim Sek:

The constraints of Singapore's small market continue to be a challenge today. And, there is a flipside to making music at this crossroads. Constant exposure to new sounds means our music-makers are always plugged into the latest trend. But constant access to new music from all over the world also means listeners here have plenty of options. So it can be tough for local acts to create an original sound, and to connect with a local audience. Here is Art Fazil again, reflecting on this perennial problem for Singapore pop.

Art Fazil:

If you are a young musician, if you're an artist in Singapore, you need to do to be grounded in reality because for us, because Singapore is so porous. For a very long time, why we have easily influenced by outside stuff because we are so porous. So we are up against not just competition from outside product, which is the Western music, you're also fighting against people's perception of your product, people's perception of you as an artist. Like, if you're an artist in Singapore, unless you have made it big outside, it's very hard for you to get that kind of recognition that artists who have gone out to do their stuff, and then come back.

But in Singapore, the reality is you can only do one gig a week because you do one at the Esplanade, the whole of Singapore turn up, alright, and then you do another one in Bedok next week, the same crowd might turn up but half might

not turn up, because they've saw you the week before. So we are caught in a situation where we need a bigger market for Singapore.

So the template would be Republic of Ireland or Sweden because we have about the same size population. But compared to these two other countries, their local homegrown industries is thriving because the audience are receptive to their music, and obviously their music reach out to the rest of the world as well.

Lim Sek:

In the next episode of *PopLore*, we take a closer look at how the creators of Singapore's Chinese pop music sought out a larger market for themselves. To do that, they had to create a unique niche based on the mingled music of this crossroads. Stay tuned.

PopLore: Stories of Singapore Pop is produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore's national performing arts centre, in celebration of its 20th anniversary. Look out for more episodes on Spotify and Apple Podcast.

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