

Minden Pioneers

50th ANNIVERSARY

Tabula Rasa Farewell



RM90
Per person

Date: Sat 17th Dec'22 Time: 1430hrs

**Venue: PAUM z Clubhouse
Jalan Susur Damansara KL**

Enquiries: Jenny Tan 0123311418 / Zainie 0193128585

**Payment Maybank Islamic
Account No 115721093288**

Tabula Rasa

Artwork by Mohamed Talhah Idrus



If I were to save a particular time in a bottle, *Tabula Rasa* will be frozen in a big one. The band is good to be with again...and again....

The classes of '73, '74 and '75 particularly, would remember *Tabula Rasa* well. It was Universiti Pulau Pinang's first band. When the university changed its name to Universiti Sains Malaysia in 1972, they were even more recognisable.

Tabula Rasa was not just a rock band, it was an icon of university spirit. Many students relate to the seventies spirit that it managed to encapsulate rather well. The band made music that fellow students not only related

*If I could make days last forever
If words could make wishes come true
I'd save every day like a treasure
then again, I would spend them with you*

Jim Croce, "Time in a Bottle". 1972.

to, but wanted to join in. Off-stage the band members were friends, classmates, and dorm-mates. The switch from stage performers to fellow students was smooth and casual, which drew audiences into a loose band of brothers and sisters. In present parlance, *Tabula Rasa* was a cool happening.

Tabula Rasa Turns Brown Black Blues

turns brown black blues

Mohamed Talhah Idrus
B. Soc. Sc. '74

The band started with the usual line-up of Hamdan as lead guitarist, Junian (to be succeeded by Ihsan) as rhythm guitarist, Rastam on bass, and Omar on the drums. But the ensemble expanded and contracted almost at will. Shaharudin often joined in, sometimes as a flutist. So too would Syed Ahmad who played the congas or bongo, while Ramli occasionally added percussion to the sound.

This casual and spontaneous approach to making music (despite Hamdan always looking stoic and serious on stage) made *Tabula Rasa* unique. Though the boys seldom smiled on stage, it was quite obvious *Tabula Rasa* and their band of brothers and sisters were having a good time.

Anyone interested would be given a chance to show their talent. Like *Delaney and Bonnie and Friends*, the short lived talented American band whose casual ensemble attracted greats like Eric Clapton and Leon Russell, *Tabula Rasa* was out to have a good time through music and friendship.

In the early stages, *Tabula Rasa* did not have a dominant singer, though Zulkifli (Zul) Itam was the first regular. Through time a number of singers would contribute their voices. Zabas, another musician eventually became the resident singer, performing more often than Zul. But the band continued to accompany a host of other singers like Chew Peng, Hamima Dona, Zubir, Johana, etc.

Below: The free-wheeling open attitude of the band was best reflected when Rais who played the mandolin was given a chance to be part of a show! (Photograph courtesy of Hamdan Omar)



Right: Syed Ahmad playing the bongos (Photograph courtesy of Hamdan Omar)



Rastam and Hamdan hanging out outside "Block 10" (now H23) in 1972 (Photograph courtesy of Hamdan Omar)



Zulkifli Itam (Photograph courtesy of Hamdan Omar)

Tabula Rasa Turns Brown Black Blues

"...the concept of man brought to life like an empty vessel that can be filled with anything, a **tabula rasa**."

In a concert in Alor Setar in 1972, a host of impromptu singers joined the band in a colourful rendition of "My Sweet Lord", showering the audience with confetti.

How did it all start?

A casual discussion about music by Hamdan Omar, Syed Ahmad, Rastam and a few others in 1971 led to the formation of *Persatuan Seni Muzika*, a music club. With the hearty support of the then student leader Farid Ariffin, musical instruments and equipment were bought, and a varsity band was hatched. But the band did not have a name. This changed when Dr. Suichi Nagata, a lecturer in anthropology suggested one.



Suichi Nagata (Photograph courtesy of Siti Zaleha)

Actually Dr.Nagata was merely going through his lecture materials in his Anthropology 101 class when he introduced the concept of man brought to life like an empty vessel that can be filled with anything, a *tabula rasa*. Hamdan was immediately struck by the term. His bandmates were also receptive to the name, and the band with no name was henceforth heralded as *Tabula Rasa*!



*Kak Ani and Johana added vocals to the ever receptive **Tabula Rasa** (Photograph courtesy of Hamdan Omar)*

And *Tabula Rasa* played and drew support from the campus and outside. When the class of '74 was about to leave campus, the students had a merry farewell concert.

Even as Hamdan, Omar, and Rastam were leaving, their talent and style of making music had already influenced a band of junior musicians who smoothly took over. This successors band was tagged Bad Taste. Though Bad Taste led by Ihsan, had good musicians capable of delivering great sound, the *Tabula Rasa* aura left together with Hamdan, Rastam, and Omar. Gradually the greater circle of brothers and sisters dissipated. Over the next few years, *Tabula Rasa* was a name no more. Bands changed in succession, but the spirit was gone.



Friends join in to sing farewell to the class of '74 (Photograph courtesy of Hamdan Omar)

Special Feature

Tabula Rasa Turns Brown Black Blues

It was not surprising that Hamdan, Omar and the former brothers and sisters who include Bob, Jenny, Ihsan and Zabas regrouped in 1986 when the same group tried to set up a USM Alumni association in Kuala Lumpur. The association did not materialise immediately, but the brothers and sisters rocked again.

They may not play as often as they used to, but they have a place to meet and make music. Their company, Brown Black Blues Music, deals in musical instruments or accessories sales and repair, event management and provides jamming studio space and equipments for young musicians to unleash their talents.

Tabula Rasa may have turned three shades, but their spirit is evergreen.



Reenacting the seventies during **Balikampus 2007**. Right to left, Ihsan, Zabas, Bob, Hamdan and Jennie. Omar as always is hidden behind instruments and other players. (Photograph courtesy of Hamdan Omar)

Who is Who



ZABAS is Zainol Abidin Ahmad Shariff (B. Humanities '75), Deputy Director/Senior Curator of Money Museum & Art Centre, Central Bank of Malaysia



Omar is Omar Haron (B. Soc. Sc.'74), Chief Operating Officer, Automotive Corporation (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd.



Bob is Dato' Abdullah Abdul Wahab (B. Soc. Sc. '76), retired from the post of Secretary of Parliament. Currently Marketing Consultant, Rafidah Abdullah Enterprise



Hamdan is Hamdan Omar (B. Soc. Sc. '74), is retired and currently CEO of Adant Logistics Sdn. Bhd.



Rastam is Tan Sri Rastam Mohd. Isa (B. Soc. Sc. '74), is the Secretary General of the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Jenny is Jenny Tan Suat Eam (B. Sc. '75), is retired and currently Chief Operating Officer of Adant Management Sdn. Bhd.



Ihsan is Ihsan Ibrahim (B. Sc. '79) Senior System Manager of Sepakat Computer Consultant

Rais is Abdul Rais Abdul Majid (B. Soc. Sc. '74), Director and Chief Executive Officer, Asset Cell Capital Sdn. Bhd.

Taza is Tazazuddin B. Noordin (B. Sc. '79)

Zul is Mohammad Zulkifli Itam (B. Soc. Sc.'74), currently Managing Director of Mark Edge Sendirian Berhad.

Juhana is Juhana Annuar (B. Soc. Sc.'74), runs a bookshop in Crans-Montana, Switzerland

Syed is Dato' Prof. Syed Ahmad Hussien (B. Soc. Sc. '73), Chief Executive, Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)

Kak Ani is Datin Shamsiah Mohamed (B. Soc. Sc. '73), retired from the Institute of Diplomatic and Foreign Relations (IDFR)

Chew Peng is Soh Chew Peng

Hamima Dona is Dr. Hamima Dona (B. Humanities '73), currently with Pusat Penyelidikan Pembangunan Wanita (KANITA), USM



Associate Professor Mohamed Talhah Idrus is currently a lecturer at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, USM. He can be reached at tolamhaha@yahoo.com

Hamdan, Omar, Bob, Ihsan, Jenny, and Zabas gig at **Brown Black Blues Music Sendirian Berhad** located at 34-2, Jalan 27/70A Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur. The company is operated by some members of the group together with Taza and Rais. Jenny in the window