

Sarah and Malaika: The New Female Voices of Imij & Co

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THE BAND Imij and Co is back on the soca scene, revamped, in full gear and entertaining Carnival fetes to the max. And no one who's seen the band perform can miss the two newest lead vocalists: Sarah Hannson and Malaika Ballantyne. The gorgeous duo's performance of outstanding vocals and sultry body rotations are leaving revellers in awe. The two young women have only been working together for a couple of months but they have become fast friends and great performing partners. Hannson and Ballantyne have different vibes and stage personas but complement each other wonderfully, on stage and off. But who are these two lead singers and where do they hail from? WOW Magazine had a chance to chat with these talented ladies to get some answers.

Let's start with Sarah:

SARAH HANNSON

WOW: Where did you grow up?

SH: Born and raised in Gothenburg, Sweden. My dad is Swedish and mom is Trinidadian, but since I was a kid I would come to Trinidad every other year — most of my family is here.

WOW: Childhood dreams?

SH: Music and performing have always been my childhood dream. At school I did the music, drama and dancing. I also began playing the piano at age 6.

WOW: How did get you into the music scene?

SH: Since I could talk I was always singing around the house. I am a song writer as well. I have two Pop/R&B songs out on iTunes ("Living Proof" and "Getting Over"); they were produced by Precision Productions. My dad does music as a hobby in Sweden and sings and plays the guitar as well. He had a band called the Soca Rebels and I also did back-up for him.

WOW: Does he sing soca in English?

SH: Yes, all the songs are in English except for a Swedish version of "Nani Wine" many years ago.

WOW: Why did you come back to Trinidad?

SH: Because of the music I love, soca.

WOW: How did you become part of the band?

SH: My father and Joey (Ng Wai, Imij & Co's leader) had been friends for years and during a conversation Joey mentioned searching for a lead vocalist — the rest was history.

WOW: How long have you been with the band?

SH: I have been in the band about three months now and it has been great; this is my first time experiencing a band atmosphere and I already think I have an alter ego on stage but I don't quite have a name for it yet though (laughs).

WOW: So if you were not singing, what would you be doing?

SH: I would have been an archaeologist, something about digging up bones.

WOW: Who is your inspiration?

SH: Musically I love Christine Aguilera

WOW: Any hidden talents?

SH: I can wine. Many people are amazed when I am performing.

WOW: Most hated musical genre?

SH: What I cannot sit and enjoy is probably the 90s techno music but I love all kinds, country, classical, etc.

WOW: Most embarrassing song on your Ipad?

SH: Probably a Hanson Album (laughs)

WOW: One place in the world you would love to perform?

SH: The Globen in Stockholm

WOW: Local celeb crushes?

SH: I love Machel, Kees and Kerwin Dubois.

WOW: Who would be an ideal soca collab?

SH: Kees.

WOW: Vision going forward as a female

artiste?

SH: I want to continue doing what I love, being on stage and entertaining.

WOW: Advice for anyone to get into the soca world?

SH: Believe in yourself and don't get discouraged; just believe in what you do.

WOW: Best advice ever received?

SH: Be yourself.

A moment with Malaika:

MALAIKA BALANTYNE

WOW: Where did you grow up?

MB: I have always been a "southie" and grew up in Petrotrin camp. It was actually fun because I grew up with a love for golf and swimming — my hobbies.

WOW: Childhood dreams?

MB: I always wanted to perform for large audiences, playing the guitar like Nora Jones — even though the instruments switch from strings to vocals I love it because I still get to entertain people.

WOW: How did you get into the music scene?

MB: My dad, Gregory Ballantyne, aka GB, is a composer. The whole love for music came from him. I would also say he is my inspiration.

WOW: How did you become part of the band?

MB: That contact came from my winning third place in the 2013 "Digicel Rising Stars".

WOW: How long have you been with the band?

MB: I have been in the band two months and my first gig was UWI fete. I felt like I was going to die on the stage that night, though, because being my first I wanted to give it my all. However, the experience was still wonderful and I love being a part of this band.

WOW: So if you were not singing what would you be doing?

MB: Make-up, even though as a child practicing it was real failure (laughs). I can do my face to save my life if I have to, but I am not as good as I wish to be.

WOW: Any hidden talents?

MB: I can cook, I can really cook, but most people don't believe me because most people always think I am in the mirror taking a selfie (laughs).

WOW: Do you like taking a lot of selfies?

MB: Yes, yes. I am the 'Selfie Queen' — but no, seriously, I can really cook.

WOW: Most hated musical genre?

MB: I think I would stick to the Japanese idea because I don't understand.

WOW: Most embarrassing song on your Ipad?

MB: I am 'shame', but the 'Pull up to my Bumper' dancehall.

WOW: One place in the world you would love to perform?

MB: Madison Square Garden.

WOW: Local celeb crushes?

MB: Kerwin Dubois, his ability to sing and perform. He hears music in a different way, it seems.

WOW: Who would be an ideal soca collab?

MB: Locally, Fay-Ann Lyons. Her aura on stage has always wowed me and internationally, Alicia Keys.

WOW: Biggest accomplishment?

MB: Placing third in Digicel Rising Stars 2013 and winning Ms La Reine Rive 2012 — Embacadere Travellers. I also started studying Law a couple years ago but it's on hold because of my pursuit of music.

WOW: Vision going forward as a female artiste?

MB: I want to have a few hits locally and then internationally; no songs recorded just yet though.

