

# WOMAN

## Angelic Imijery

The ladies of Imij and Company

Wayne Bowman  
wayne.bowman@trinidadexpress.com

FROM the very beginning the multi-dimensional band known as Imij and Company has been all about evolution. From the early days when the band then, known as Second Imij, its late patriarch, George Ng Wai along with founding members, Johnny Gonsalves and Joey Ng Wai all had a vision to create a band that would not only be versatile in terms of the range of genres it would perform, but also bring people of every ethnicity and social status together embracing soca music. They have accomplished that and more.

Imij and Company has made another evolutionary step with the introduction of a new element to their performance. Joey Ng Wai has added a female trio to the Imij family in the persons of Sarah Hansson, Malaika Ballantyne and Rochelle Chedz. Collectively they are known as the Imij Angels and although Hansson and Ballantyne are a part of the actual Imij frontline, the trio performs as its own entity alongside the band as well as on their own.

The Imij Angels have just released their debut single, "Ball And Chain", which is a cheeky, fun song about the girls leaving the guys behind and going out for a night on the town. The song which blends pop, soca and rap really showcases the vocal abilities of each of the ladies and also their versatility as a unit and individuals. This is only the first release of what Ng Wai intends to be at least three that will come out during the June to August period before they begin to focus on some music for Carnival.

"Actually I want to release about two songs each month and not only focus on any one season. The idea of the Imij Angels came to us after the Rising Star competition where I met Rochelle (Ng Wai was the musical director for the competition). She has been guesting with the band since after the competition and her style really complements Sarah, Malaika and Kevon (Carter).

"We decided to bring the three women together allowing each to do the style or styles of music that she loves the most. In "Ball And Chain" Sarah sings pop, while Malaika gives the Caribbean flavour and Rochelle does the rap. Their vocals gelled smoothly into what the song turned out to be and we are really looking forward to seeing what else is created as we continue to work in the studio. It has been a lot of fun so far," Ng Wai said.

Hansson was born and grew up in Sweden with her Trinidadian mother and Swedish Father. She grew up speaking English and Swedish and was exposed to her Trinbagonian heritage. She visited Trinidad regularly and knew the various cultural expressions of the two islands well. She of course also loved the calypso, soca, parang, chutney and reggae.



WORK WELL TOGETHER: The Imij Angels, Rochelle Chedz, Malaika Ballantyne and Sarah Hansson.



EVOLUTIONARY STEP: Joey Ng Wai with his Angels.

Hansson has been singing as long as she can remember. It all started with a little red plastic radio and a microphone when she was three years old. When she was five years old Hansson started singing in the local church choir and shortly after that she was learning to play the piano.

In 1990 Hansson's father, Lars formed a band named Soca Rebels, the first and only band in Sweden solely focusing on soca. Soca Rebels have been playing soca and promoting the Trinidadian culture in festivals and clubs in Scandinavia and also teamed up with Crazy on live gigs through the years. Lars Hansson is the singer and guitarist in Soca Rebels.

Hansson started composing her own music as a child in a pop and R&B style. Then in 2005 she combined her Caribbean background with pop and fashioned a style she named CariPop. Her first song in this style, "Never Knew", was launched in Trinidad where she decided to journey several months ago to join the Imij family.

Ballantyne attended St Gabriel's Girls' RC primary school, San Fernando then Holy Faith Convent, Couva. After finishing there she worked at Sasha Cosmetics for a while, developing skills in make-up artistry, which she intends to develop further. She is the daughter of respected calypsonian and hit-creating songwriter, Gregory "GB" Ballantyne. Her mother is Avion Ballantyne and she is the lone girl and youngest among the three siblings.

Ballantyne won the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition's Miss La Reine Rive title in 2012 and has been singing calypso since she was about nine years old. She was a senior dancer in the group Los Ninos School of Dance and also had her own troupe the Dance Angelz Academy for a period of two years. The talented young woman is also a model attached to the Concept Studio modelling agency led by Dexter Jennings.

In 2013 Chedz worked her way up to the top ten finalist in the Rising Star competition, which brought her into the homes of the Caribbean and gave her the platform to showcase her incredible accuracy, style and diction as a rap vocalist. How does a choir girl and box bass player from Holy Name Convent end up becoming a female rapper who can hold her own against the popular men in the game? Sheer determination and skill.

Growing up in Woodbrook, Chedz was exposed to good family values and enough musical energy to ignite one's passion for music and culture as well as an extra dose of street smarts. You can also throw in a splash of tomboyishness for good measure. Chedz is a former member of the Love Movement Choir and was also a member of a parang band playing the box bass for which she won an award for most outstanding bass player.