

## WHO'S NEXT



Jean-Luc Morales

# IMELDA MAY

**HOMETOWN:** Dublin, Ireland  
**INFLUENCES:** Billie Holiday, Luke Kelly, Gene Vincent  
**ALBUM:** *Love Tattoo*, out now  
**WEBSITE:** [imeldamay.com](http://imeldamay.com)

MANY WHO TUNED IN DURING JEFF BECK'S TRIBUTE TO the late Les Paul on the Grammy Awards earlier this year found themselves wondering about the identity of the intriguing young woman singing "How High the Moon" alongside the guitar great. Those listeners were getting their first dose of Imelda May.

Despite her youth, May, 35, was right at home singing a 70-year-old standard—she grew up in Dublin listening to old-school rockabilly and blues passed down from her parents and her four older siblings. (Her distinctive fashion sense, as seen in her retro look at the Grammys, followed suit.) She began singing at age 4, harmonizing with her sister's folk group. May made her auspicious professional debut at 14 singing a commercial jingle for Findus Fish Fingers, and began performing soon after at a Dublin nightclub.

In 1998 she decided to seek her fortunes in London, where she has lived ever since. There she fronted R&B and swing bands—and even spent time performing in burlesque clubs. "I'd sing while the girls were onstage," she recalls. "One of them used to take a metal grinder to her crotch and would produce a shower of sparks. One day a spark flew down my throat when I was singing!"

Her big break in Europe came when she was invited to appear on the BBC TV show *Later ...* after host (and onetime Squeeze keyboardist) Jools Holland caught her live act. In the audience that night was Beck, who had come for the sole purpose of seeing her. In addition to their Grammy performance, she adds her vocals to a version of the standard "Lilac Wine" on his new *Emotions & Commotion* album. Now things are happening fast for May, which is just fine by her. "It's all gone mental lately," she says.