

Budding animators Karimah Fatimah and Andrea Goh tell **Dennis Chua** that things can only get better as more and more women enter the industry

**I**T may be a men's world still, but women have made great strides in various male-dominated professions over the decades, both locally and internationally.

In Malaysian entertainment, Datin Paduka Shuhaimi Baba, the late Yasmin Ahmad, Gayatri Su-Lin Pillai and Nadiah Hamzah have been applauded as successful women filmmakers; their award-winning works have inspired young women to venture into producing and directing.

In animation, however, progress has been slow. However, two aspiring animators, Karimah Fatimah Rahman and Andrea Goh, are optimistic that "change is going to come". They reason that the advent of women in the creative sector has been a "slow and steady" process, and there will always be resistance in the form of male chauvinists. Nevertheless, women will always have some staunch male allies, especially foreign-educated animators with a strong belief in meritocracy and a "fair go for all".

The key to attracting more women into the animation industry is for existing women animators to aim high and come up with quality products that will inspire others to join the industry.

Women in the industry must also get to know one another, network and collaborate more, so as to motivate one another to excel and break the glass ceiling.

Karimah is the managing director of Animatrix Studios while Goh is the technical supervisor of Soba Productions.

The duo recently spoke on A Future In Animation For Malaysian Women at the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation Kreatif 2019 creative content conference and festival held at Cyberview Resort & Spa in Selangor.

Kreatif is an annual platform for members of the animation industry to network, discuss challenges and issues, and share ideas for its growth.

Below Goh and Karimah explain more about the industry and its various facets.

**TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND WHAT YOUR COMPANY DOES.**

**Karimah:** I'm the co-founder of Animatrix Studios and my company has been around for a decade. I have a degree in human development from Universiti Putra Malaysia in Seri Kembangan, Selangor. My company comes up with creative content at all stages of film and television production. This includes motion graphics, content branding, visual effects and 3D animation.

Animatrix is working on Cubic Cats The Series, an original animated series which is educational and targets students. We came up with this animated series two years ago,



Goh (left) and Karimah. Goh is a layout and character artist at Pixar Animated Studios. PICTURES BY ZULFADHU ZULKIFLI

# A future for women in animation

at the Digital Content Creators' Challenge also organised by MDEC, and we were the winners.

**Goh:** I'm involved in the technical and camera aspects of animated productions at Soba, and most recently I helped in the production of a short film titled *Sonder*. I'm also a layout and character artist at Pixar Animated Studios, based in San Francisco, in the United States.

I've been a cinematographer for four years and I studied animation at The One Academy in Bandar Sunway. I later pursued an animation degree at the Academy of Art in San Francisco.

**ANIMATION IS A MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS?**

**Karimah:** Malaysian society is generally conservative, and people tend to define women's roles. While I'm happy that my parents gave me their fullest support when I chose to pursue my current profession, I had some friends and relatives who felt that it was "not appropriate" for me as I had to stay up late and work long hours in the office. I'm fortunate because I'm the only girl in the family, and my four elder brothers shared my love of animation and encouraged me to follow my dreams.

**Goh:** I've always been into technical stuff since my schooldays in Kuala Lumpur. My

parents and siblings were supportive of me, but I had friends who didn't think I could make it in the animation industry as it was a "men's world". They said "you're a girl lah, this is not your kind of job", but this only strengthened my resolve to prove them wrong.

And if we think that this problem only happens in Malaysia, I admit it also happens in the US. Fortunately, there are a "wee bit more" women in animation there, and that means I've got "sisters" who lend me moral support. Patriarchal attitudes are found all over the world, but slowly they will be overcome as more and more women come into various industries.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK CAN BE DONE TO GET MORE WOMEN TO EXPLORE ANIMATION OR CREATIVE CONTENT PRODUCTION AS A CAREER?**

**Karimah:** This can be done by highlighting successful women in the animation industry. Successful women in the industry can be role models for others to join it. For example, Neelofa has become an icon amongst women entrepreneurs, likewise Vivvy Yusof.

And in broadcasting, the names Wan Zaleha Radzi and Ras Adiba Radzi have become legendary. The media can help by highlighting the achievements of women animators.

**Goh:** Strong representation of women

*In the industry, you are your own biggest enemy.*

Karimah Fatimah



A feast for the eyes and ears is promised with *LaguKu 2.0* by Orang Orang Drum Theatre next month, writes **Subhadra Devan**

**C**AN you capture the melodies of a city and its people in a grand symphony? Armed with creativity and energy, Orang Orang Drum Theatre is aiming to do that in *LaguKu 2.0*, set to be performed next month.

It has been four years since theatrical percussion group's *LaguKu*, but the troupe has been busy touring as well as performing original works. Founded by Chew Soon Heng and Leow Sze Yee, Orang Orang Drum Theatre aims to create its own unique works and transform the Chinese traditional art form into a multicultural genre of performing arts in Malaysia.

The group sees drum theatre as a new arts genre, as it offers drums, music, theatrical elements, movements and tales of Malaysian society.

Orang Orang Drum Theatre wowed new audiences during an August tour of Eastern Europe, including one of the most famous music festivals in Budapest, called Sziget Festival. The group's performances, five workshops and four parades were well received and drew lots of positive feedback.

"We introduced Malaysia to lots of people who had not heard about Malaysia before through our music," says Leow Hui Min, co-production manager for *LaguKu 2.0*.

The upcoming 90-minute *LaguKu 2.0* show at the Damansara Performing Arts Centre will maintain percussion as the main ingredient and incorporate different elements.

Says Leow: "This piece turns the observations and attitudes in life into a feast for the ears and eyes. This new piece con-

# City, character and music



Orang Orang Drum Theatre spreading their good vibes in Sarawak.

tinues to capture the hidden loneliness in the chaos of the prosperous city, releasing it in a cacophony of rawness. It blends the everyday life of the grassroots of the society into the framework of the symphony, sometimes keeping in step, sometime completely throwing all structure out of the window, as is life in this city."

*LaguKu 2.0* will also offer some folk songs from Sarawak. "Other than music, you will also experience 'drum theatre', mask performances and physicality during the show.

"How can these two elements, drum and theatre, combine? It will be one of our main experiments in this performance."

There will be 20 Orang Orang Drum Theatre members performing on stage, together with a guest artist from Sarawak, who is the group's vocal and sape teacher, Rosemary Colony Anak Joel Dunstan.

"That's one of the highlights of the performance. We have studied with Rosemary

**LAGUKU 2.0**

**WHEN:** Oct 4-6, 8.30pm with extra 3pm shows on the weekend

**WHERE:** Theatre, DPAC, Empire Damansara, Jalan PJU 8/8, Damansara Perdana, Petaling Jaya

**ADMISSION:** RM68 and RM48 (Concession for students/senior citizens/disabled)

**CALL:** 012-362 2939 / 016-321 2362 or DPAC box office at 03-4065 0001/0002

re-adapted into our percussion together with Rosemary's vocals."

That experience was the group's initial approach with music from Sarawak and Sabah. Their foray in what was called *LaguWaik*, held in July, was a community project where group members shared some of their work in progress, previous works and did collaborative projects with some local musicians.

Meanwhile, music instruments also caught their eye and since collecting such instruments has always been an interest of the team, they came away with different elements in their composition whereby kuling tangan from Sabah become one of the music instruments in their composition.

From such experiences come *LaguKu 2.0*, with some old folk tunes revitalised and layered with drums and theatricality, all revolving around three elements — City, Character and Music.

since October last year, when she conducted a series of vocal and sape workshops with us. She taught us some folk songs from Sarawak, and these songs had been

such films and encouraged me to study animation.

**IN MALAYSIA AND THE US, DO YOU SEE MORE WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN RECENT YEARS?**

**Karimah:** Yes, definitely. Some sectors see slower female participation than others, but things will certainly get better when women who are pioneers in the animation industry "strike gold" and win awards, or create products that are world-class.

Thus far, I know four women who have founded animation companies, and I get along great with them. If women in the industry get to know one another and exchange ideas, they can help more women enter the industry, too.

**Goh:** Progress is just as slow in the US as it is in Malaysia, but I always look at the bright side. Male-dominated industries have seen their walls "open bit by bit" to women over the decades and I'm sure the animation industry does not want to be left behind. I'm glad that women in animation have been getting along great with one another in the US, and such friendships

have resulted in small-scale collaborations, which hopefully, will lead to greater things.

**WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY TO ASPIRING MALAYSIAN FEMALE ANIMATORS OR CREATIVE CONTENT PRODUCERS?**

**Karimah:** In the industry, you are your own biggest enemy. Believe in yourself, because there will always be stumbling blocks. Hard work, self-confidence and perseverance will help you overcome them and soar in your career. If it is your childhood dream to be an animator, go for it.

**Goh:** Giving support to one another is everything. Don't fear getting support from fellow women in the industry. Competition is good but cooperation is also necessary. All of us will have setbacks and occasionally feel insecure, but if we put our heart into our jobs, we will slowly begin to fly. Be brave and speak out when you think it is right. Doing so will build up your confidence and push you to the next level. [dchua@nst.com.my](http://dchua@nst.com.my)