Scant Innovation Across an Ostensibly Amateur Set



MOLLY NILSSON Amateur

/ DARK SKIES ASSOCIATION

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The peril inherent in such a tightly corseted concept is, of course, that one rather heightens the risk of lapsing into repetition.

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BY NICOLAJ ROOS / PHOTO: PRESS PHOTO

"Try doing something that isn't necessary — something superfluous, something wilfully pointless!" Thus spoke Queen Margrethe in her New Year's address eight years ago, a line that has since lodged itself in the popular consciousness. It is, in many ways, the amateur's creed: the dictum of someone who devotes themselves to a pursuit largely out of affection, curiosity, or sheer bloodyminded devotion. In an age obsessed with metrics, optimisation, and the relentless burnishing of one's professional

sheen, declaring oneself an amateur can feel almost insurgent — a small but telling act of defiance against the tyranny of the CV. As a musical motif, however, it is hardly fresh terrain. Molly Nilsson is far from the first to navigate it; artists such as Half Japanese, Daniel Johnston, and Belle & Sebastian have all tilled this soil before her. But it now appears to be Nilsson's turn, elevated to the organising principle of her newest record, Amateur. **READ MORE:** The subversive artist is doing it again

Stylistically, she leans — quite knowingly — into what one might call "deluxe karaoke". Live, she

performs solely with vocals; everything else is piped in via backing tracks. Lyrically, she often smuggles in a political barb or two. In this respect, she is something of a rare bird on the indiesynthpop circuit. Most of the tracks on Amateur are quintessentially Molly Nilsson: she treads that fine, hairline ridge between indie earnestness, kitsch indulgence, and outright cliché – more often than not with considerable aplomb. The prevailing ethos is very much don't bore us, get to the chorus; several songs dispense with a preamble altogether, plunging straight in and carrying on with steady resolve until they simply... stop. What she has, unquestionably, is a preternatural ear for an indelible pop melody, and I've been

ascetically so — and therein lies the risk. The danger of such a readily recognisable aesthetic is that much of the new material could, in theory, have been lifted wholesale from previous albums: the ever-layered, reverb-swaddled vocals; the often Casio-adjacent (some might say gleefully cheesy) keyboards; and the drum machines whose devotion to monotony borders on a philosophical stance. There are, to be fair, a few partial detours: "Classified", with its unmistakable house inflections, and "Get a Life", which is classic Nilsson in spirit but hammered forward by heavy/punk drum

thoroughly taken with many of her earlier releases. The sonics remain disciplined, almost

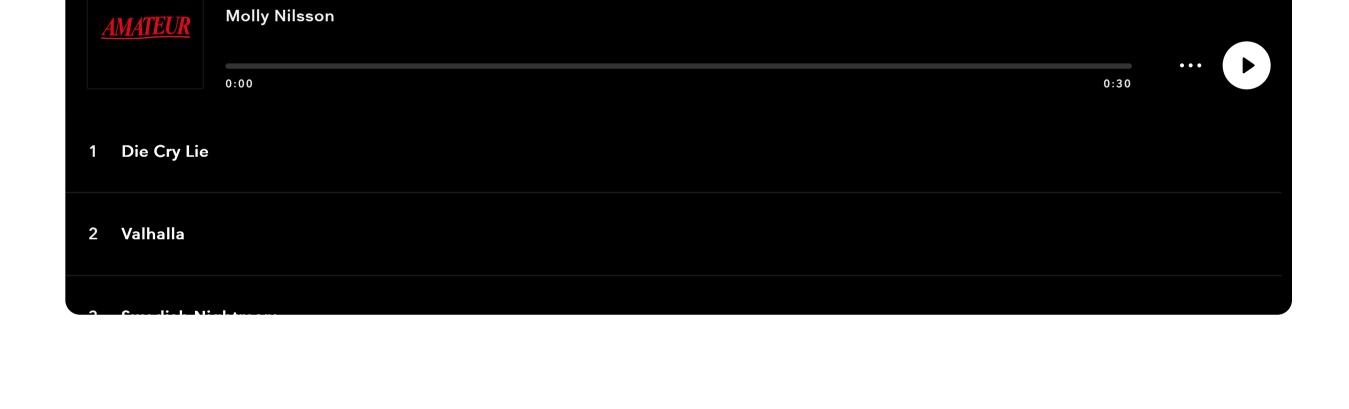
I've long anticipated the arrival of Amateur. Nilsson is remarkably consistent, issuing a new album roughly every other year. The standard has generally been strong, and there is certainly much to enjoy here. New listeners are in for a treat. But for those already familiar with her back catalogue, one might — perhaps paradoxically, given the album's ostensible celebration of amateurism — have hoped for slightly grander ambitions, a touch more audacity, and a willingness to push her

patterns. Their strategic placement on the album suggests Nilsson is perfectly aware that the spell

occasionally needs to be broken — that the deck must, at times, be reshuffled.

unmistakable aesthetic into territory with greater heft and refinement.

Amateur



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