*“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”*

Joan Didion said this, and so did my friend Molly Sarlé, recently, in one of many phone conversations we’ve had about life, and stories, and songs. Molly is an easy person to talk to, because she’s dedicated so much of her life to understanding people. She’s traveled all over the world, and she’s probably met you, or at least someone like you. Her intuition about people—their joy, their fear, their desire—is palpable when you speak to her.

And, after spending the first part of her life observing others--listening to them tell their stories--she is finally ready to tell us her own.

The result is *Karaoke Angel*, a collection of songs by a woman who, unlike most of us, was born understanding that her ability to feel–deeply and without shame–is her greatest strength. It is the result of a free and open-hearted devotion to the search for passion, and the complete, unflinching depiction of truth.

Molly’s songs observe their own kind of internal logic, always a few steps behind or ahead of where you expect them to be. They are occasionally funny, and always uncannily real. When I listen to them, I feel as though I’m constantly floating back and forth between the perspective of the person singing and the one being sung about—as if with just a few words she is able to suggest an entire lifetime of experiences, a deep reservoir of shifting feelings and unconscious desires.

The work on *Karaoke Angel* began in a trailer on a cliff in Big Sur, CA, and continued with stints in Los Angeles and Durham, NC. Along the way, Molly collected songs like snapshots—a troubled but passionate relationship with an addict providing the haunting “This Close,” a letter to a lover’s ex-wife becoming the spare and straightforward ballad “Kimberly.” Like many gifted songwriters, her stories are autobiographical, but her songs project more than her individual reality alone. They unfold in a sort of subconscious, liminal state—a dream in which a lifetime’s worth of characters come together to bring the ever-shifting story to its inevitable conclusion.

Eventually, Molly brought her songs to life at Dreamland—a church-turned-recording studio in Woodstock, NY, with the help of producer/multi-instrumentalist Sam Evian. Taking inspiration from their environment, the sound of each instrument is perfectly sculpted to leave space for the world that Molly’s voice creates. A minimal but carefully assembled palette of guitar, bass and percussion provide the foundation; an orchestra of unrecognizable atmospherics bounce off the high ceilings—but Molly’s delicate, expressive voice is always at the center.

“Who hasn’t talked to god like he’s a man?” she asks in album opener “Human,” articulating in just a few words what it’s like to understand and yet still be held captive by our nature to idealize and project onto each other. “The song could just be about being disappointed by the deflation of your desire,” Molly says, “but I wanted it to celebrate realizing this part of the human experience more clearly. It’s about finding joy in disappointment and letting go.”

In the heartbreaking “Almost Free,” she tells us the story of a parent, who, due to their own pain, must call upon their own child to keep them alive in this world. “I tell my dad what he wants to hear, I say I love you, say I need you here.” But her ability to forgive in the face of this painful aberration is encapsulated in “Twisted,” a direct and simple ode to the reality that we are all damaged in some way— all just doing our best.

And in the gorgeous, wistful title track, the narrator passes her gaze around a familiar cast of characters at a local karaoke bar, reveling in the way you can see people when they don’t see you. The night comes to a close and she laments another night going home alone, but leaves us with the gift of a message: love is not finite. There is enough for all of us. And although it is not guaranteed to be returned from those we share it with, it is still destined to find us in some other fashion. In this way, the story of ‘Karaoke Angel’ finds its way back to love--from all of those who hear the resulting songs and see themselves, too.

*-Jenn Wasner (Wye Oak/Flock Of Dimes)*