

## SWEDISH POP-SENSATION

**A** talented Swedish vocalist and songwriter with a penchant for crafting soulful electro-pop that falls somewhere between Rihanna, Lorde, and Robyn. Zara Maria Larsson first caught the public's eyes and ears in 2008 as the winner of the popular Swedish talent show *Talang Sverige* (the regional version of *Got Talent*). Born on December 16, 1997 in Stockholm, as a child Zara took part in a theatrical version of *Sound of Music* at the Göta Lejon Theatre in Stockholm, playing the part of Marta. She's certainly made a lot of her time so far. She was brought up just outside Stockholm, her father a military man and her mother a nurse. Obsessed with Beyoncé since the age of six, she knew early on she wanted to be a singer ("I've always just wanted people to look at me," she says, with bracingly frank self-awareness) and at the age of 10 convinced her parents to let her appear on *Talang*, Sweden's version of the *Got Talent* franchise.

She's still not the biggest physical presence, eight years later, but that impression of force and strength is still there. She'd felt ready for pop stardom aged 10, but labels weren't so sure and an impatient, frustrated Larsson was forced to return to school and wait until she was 15 to sign to TEN Music Group, the Swedish label among those credited with making Scandinavian pop such a prominent force in recent years, from Icona Pop to Niki & The Dove to Erik Hassle. (The label's also home to Hanna & Andrea, Hanna being Zara's younger sister who, despite being "the quiet one" of the family, surprised everyone by following her sibling down the pop route.)

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TEN licences Larsson's work out to Sony, through the Epic imprint in the US, and through Black Butter Records, now a Sony subsidiary, in the UK. The latter label is something of a kindred spirit to Larsson's "mother company" TEN, having earned a reputation for addictive, sophisticated dance-pop strongly flavoured by the soulful uplift of '90s vocal house: the likes of Gorgon City, Rudimental, MNEK.

She takes not just her love and study of Beyoncé but the whole craft of pop extremely seriously. The songs just sound like a cool, confident young woman living her life. "I think my thing is that... I don't know," she says. "And that's why I don't wanna sing about 'This is me, this is who I am' because, like, even the question 'Tell me about yourself' – what are you supposed to say? 'Ooh, I'm a happy girl, but I'm sad too'? People are so complex. Mostly I just write about feelings that people can relate to. Because, yeah, I don't know who I am, and this is not my sound for ever... I'm a human, so hopefully I will always develop." Catch Zara's 2nd studio album in March 2017 "So Good".