

fourth studio album *The Kansas Sessions* and there's a new version of *Bliss* from her 2002 debut *Honeysuckle* - the album which earned her the first of two BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards nominations.

Although she sprang out of Manchester's new-acoustic scene alongside Elbow and I Am Kloot, McGee's music sits more comfortably with her female folk contemporaries like Thea Gilmore.

She sings like she has the soul of true Irish rover. In fact I was surprised to discover that she was from up north and not the Emerald Isle as at her rawest she sounds like Sinead O'Connor (*Bliss*), at her most sultry it could be Mary Coughlan (*Stonefruit*) while at her most folkie she's reminiscent of Mary Black (*The Last To Understand*).

There's an easy, understated quality to her songwriting.

Sandman and *Dust Devils* are two steamy hot, oppressive blues numbers with Cundy's clarinet adding a haunting and hypnotic touch.

Alibi Blues is a fast-paced banjo-plucking romp for a restless soul, while *Faith*, my personal favourite, is a delicate yet infectious folk / country ballad about being let down.

McGee is out on the road in March and April and if this album is any indication of her live performance, I'm certainly making a date in my diary.

Alison Stokes

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Divided By A Common Language: A Collection Of UK Americana*

★ ★ ★



Let Me Wipe The Tears From Your Eyes - Southern Tenant Folk Union / 1879 - Redlands Palamino Company / No

Easy Kind Of Loving - Alan Tyler / *Lay Me Down (To Rest To Sleep)* - Mat Gibson / *Tillie (Hold On)* - Wild Pines / *Amaretto* - The Snakes / *Death Meets Me Here* - The Barker Band / *If Only Forever* - Sparkwood And 21 / *Girl From The North Country* - Dusty And The Dreaming Spires / Phoenix - *The Cedars* / *Thunder River* - *The Epstein* / *The Highway* - *Roseville Grand* / *Ray Of Sunshine* - *The Hi And Lo* / *The World Can Turn* - *Two Fingers Of Firewater* / *Last Days* - *Treecreeper*

Producer: various

Clubhouse Records

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There has been a recent upsurge in British bands doing exciting and inventive things with American roots music. The trend has acquired the rather contradictory name of UK Americana and *Divided By A Common Language* is the first compilation to draw some of these bands together. American roots music covers a wide spectrum and the British bands expand this further by adding a broad range of stylistic influences from their own experience. So the bands might be huddled under the single banner of UK Americana, but the album reflects a rich variety of sounds and styles.

This is a good representative cross-section as UK Americana and includes leading exponents along with lesser known bands, although one compilation cannot hope to be definitive as there are so many bands involved in this scene. Previously unreleased tracks from Alan Tyler, Redlands Palamino Company, Southern Tenant Folk Union, The Snakes and Treecreeper sit alongside strong album cuts from The Cedars, Two Fingers Of Firewater, The Barker Band, Mat Gibson, The Epstein and The Hi and Lo.

This is an enjoyable listen and a great place to start if you are unfamiliar with the diverse and talented bunch of artists that are playing Americana with a British accent.

Michael Hingston