

## Kirsty McGee - Contraband (2012)

Written by bluelover

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1. *Something Going On* 2. *I Burn For You* 3. *Sequins* 4. *Solace* 5. *Rebecca* 6. *New Bird*  
7. *Setting of the Sun* 8. *God and the Sparrowherder* 9. *Dust Rising* 10. *Aberdeen* 11. *String Baby*  
12. *What Love Entails* 13. *Contraband* 14. *All Thing Must Change* Kirsty McGee - Vocals,  
Guitar, High-String, Flute, Glockenspeil Nick Blacka - Double Bass Carrie Elkin - Vocals Josef  
- Trumpet Hugh Lawrence - Drums, Percussion Barkley McKay - Piano, 1961 Hammond  
Organ, Glockenspeil Clive Mellor - Harmonica Myshkin - Vocals Danny Schmidt - Vocals Inge  
Thomson - Accordion, Vocals Mike West - Banjo, Mandolin

There can be something quite uncomfortable about knowing too much about the pain behind an artist's output. Fans at the more committed end of the spectrum often prefer to know what inspired a song, particularly when it chimes with the idea of the musician as tortured soul. After all, when a song is powerful enough to elicit feelings of sadness in its listener, it's difficult not to ponder the real life events that created it. Still, sometimes not knowing is easier.

Kirsty McGee's latest album *Contraband* deals in wounds and healing with remarkable honesty, and it's not always a comfortable listen. Not through any paucity of quality, but because it openly deals with her recovery from depression and what she describes as "a string of personal disasters". Close to quitting music for good, she instead cobbled together a band of friends and collaborators and distilled the pain in arguably its most potent form — great songwriting. It's unapologetically raw and intense, the rest is melancholy squared. Yet, by the end you come away feeling hopeful and restored, rather than weighed down by the relentless waves of emotion.

McGee — who first came to prominence in 2002 when she was nominated as Best Newcomer at the BBC Folk Awards for her album *Honeysuckle* — has always had a touch of the Amy Rigbys about her: that unique ability to appear at once fragile, vulnerable and knowing.

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Contraband opens in this vein with the bittersweet resignation of *Something Going On*, followed by the cutting, elegantly gut-wrenching *I Burn for You*, one of those love songs that makes you want to join a convent.

It's not all doom, gloom and bottom of the glass reflection, but even the upbeat moments — such as the Waits-esque jazz blues of *Setting of the Sun* and the gentle folk-country storytelling of *Sequins* — talk about the process of loss and letting go. In so many ways, it takes a unique generosity of spirit and grace to make music that shares experience in this way. --- Rachel Devine, folkradio.co.uk

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