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## fRoots No. 20

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Chumbawamba  
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Hasna El Becharia  
Oysterband  
Sui Vesan  
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CATEGORY!



**BIFF**



# VARIOUS ARTISTS

## **Going Driftless – An Artist's Tribute To Greg Brown** Red House RHR CD 145

Apart from his acknowledged prowess as a long-serving road warrior of folk music, Brown was a pioneer in terms of retaining control of his own song catalogue. Way back in the late 70s, Brown set up the Red House label. He passed control of the label to Bob Feldman in the mid-80s, and as a result of intelligent and watchful nurturing, Feldman has built it into one of America's finest independents. Apart from a couple of exceptions, Brown's solo recordings have been issued by the Minnesota-based imprint.


Initially a storyteller who employed a broad canvas, Brown's recent albums contain mostly love songs. Rather appropriately, all the principal vocal contributors to this 14-track tribute album are female, with most of them possessing folk/ country/ roots credentials. From the top of the heap there's Lucinda Williams, Ani DiFranco, Shawn Colvin, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Iris Dement. Current Red House acts Lucy Kaplansky and Eliza Gilkyson add their voice, as does former label-mate Leandra Peak, while the lesser known contributors include Robin Lee Berry and Greg's daughters – Pieta, Zoe and Constie – who perform a song written by Greg as a tribute to his maternal grandmother.

Lucinda Williams' performances can often sound lifeless, but on the opening track, *Lately*, she instils some feeling and belief into Brown's words. On the other hand, Mark Olson joins wife Victoria Williams on a quaint interpretation of *Early* that frankly doesn't do the song, or the album, any favours. As for the best efforts, there's *Wash My Eyes* from Leandra Peak, a seven-minute-plus rendition of *The Poet Game* by DiFranco and the aforementioned Lucinda Williams effort, with Bo Ramsey on electric guitar.

Brown's lyrics, typically, deal with the simple day-to-day facets of life – a sick child, a fondly remembered older relative, girlfriends and wives, the populating of the mid-west and more – and this collection constitutes a fitting tribute for one of the lesser sung heroes of folk music.

UK distributed by Koch International.

*Arthur Wood*

 **Erica Smith** *Erica Smith* (Listen Here! Records LH396) Her second release reprises two traditional tunes, features one Smith original, and a handful of (mainly traditional sounding) songs penned by scribes as diverse as Robert Burns, Lal Waterson and Greg Brown. P.O. Box 2343, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.