



PHOTO: DAMON ALLEN BRUNSON

BORIS SMILE (SOUTHERN LORD)



What to make of Boris? This is a band whose scope has never quite outstripped the irresistible pull of their sheer heaviness. They have an air of innovative impenetrability, but are often found in thrall to conservative, well-worn forms. Their mission statement with Smile is to expand their sound through the incorporation of the 'uncool', whatever that may be this week. Opener 'Flower Sun Rain' achieves this by being a cover of a

cover of a song by 1970s pop group PYG, and one that Boris already recorded for the Rock Dream collaboration with Merzbow. That's arguably three levels of creative redundancy before you even embark upon the song itself, a drearily soporific lo-psych trudge that relies heavily upon Takeshi's strained vocals – never exactly the band's greatest strength. It's a baffling choice for a first song, one that suggests Boris are going out of their way to wrongfoot their fans.

In that respect, it at least paves the way for some of Smile's far superior offerings. Featuring a guest appearance from Ghost guitarist Michio Kurihara, 'My Neighbour Satan' is a purposefully clumsily stitched hybrid of two separate tunes: a spaced-out 1980s tragi-ballad and a bovine desert storm riff-rider. 'Ka re ha te ta sa ki' is sumptuous, heart-breaking, and shockingly, deliriously exciting all at once, an exercise in finding perfect stillness at 750 mph. Best of all is the nullifyingly titled ' ', graced by Stephen O'Malley. A plaintive dronescape is subsumed by moment of violent cataclysm, which in turn is extinguished by near-nothingness before black-hole guitars shape 12 minutes of space in their own image.

It's not all forward ho to new lands. The three highly Kyussy full-throttle denim-and-piss-bottle rockers that form the album's backbone could be Pink or Heavy Rocks offcuts – but for that reason sound staid and tired when surrounded by such wilfully reckless waywardness. So what to make of Smile? Half deeply flawed and half obscenely great, it's not their finest hour when considered as a whole. But, torn as it is between the bold unknown and the comfortingly familiar, it encapsulates their artistic trajectory far better than any other Boris album.

MATT EVANS

panion to the slams of gothic whores. Her playing isn't tied to the ired end of the scale either, there's a gentler and warm playing too (most notable on 'Long Black Veil') that almost becomes wry at times; exerting a lighter humorous touch. With her skills as a player overtaking the sheer strength of her voice, this is a rare Galás release.

SCOTT MCKEATING

DEFLORE EGODRIVE (SUBSOUND)



Self-styled 'Human Indu[b]strial' duo, Italy's Deflore strike out with their sophomore release, a straight-to-the point old-school industrial metal record running the whole gamut of industrial variations that exploded in the early 90s. Equal parts a bombastic assault of the likes of Rammstein and more atmospheric, dubby, pursuits, Egodrive will appeal to fans of early 90s industrial rock and electro-metal of the likes of Nine Inch Nails et al.

BOBBY BONE

DIRECTING HAND WHAT PUT THE BLOOD (DANCING WAYANG)



Directing Hand's affinity with, and love for, original folk forms makes the sometimes overused free-folk tag a misnomer for this duo, despite their evident improvisational muscle. The tracks here are fiercely split between vocal-only readings, improv voyages and traditional folk songs set to sparse backings. But these songs aren't just excavated and displayed as they were first found. The narratives of the traditional re-tellings here inspire a desire to hear the conclusion of the tumbling tales, almost making the listener a silent participant of sorts. Notes spiral like revelatory mathematics/music patterns, Neilson's drumsticks slipping over the skins trying to pound out exactly what he needs to communicate. Elsewhere the harmonium drone and the blink-and-die firefly harp plucks of the title track move the song to a point regardless of time. But the most powerful element here is Lavinia Blackwall's vocal, revealing its full flower across the LP. Spitting red one minute then starsailing the sky on her way to somewhere beyond the next, it's a wonder Neilson managed to prevent himself from leaping over his drum kit to dash himself upon the rocks at her feet.

SCOTT MCKEATING

EVANGELISTA HELLO, VOYAGER (CONSTELLATION)



Carla Bozulich's debut record for the Montreal based label Constellation bore the album title 'Evangelista', but for her second record she flipped

it and named the band Evangelista, possibly after the Italian mathematician who we all thank daily for inventing the barometer. And possibly not. What is known for certain though is that Bozulich's hankering for the disparate and the avant-garde has taken her musical output across several dimensions. She's as comfortable crooning as she is screeching and often she manages to do both - in unison. Hello, Voyager is a sultry look into her world and with the help of that tight-knit collection of Canadian musicians that reside in Montreal (Godspeed!, Silver Mt. Zion et al) Bozulich gets her song-smithery re-born with an impeccable collection of harrowing lullabies. The strings throughout the album set the tone perfectly, keeping everything in that minor key that is repeatedly capable of producing such epic eminence. On 'The Blue Room' Bozulich rolls out her most sincere, heartfelt thoughts as she guides us through pastoral strings before the grand crescendo comes and 'Truth is Dark Like Outer Space' kicks off with a torrent of drones before the fast paced fuzzed guitar scythes into earshot and disappears all too soon. Evangelista is like everything you wish PJ Harvey would be: sickening, awe inspiringly bold, impossibly inventive and dark as fuck. Hello, Voyager shines the dirty edge of rock music until it's buffed up like royal silverware and it's down to the twisted mechanisms of Bozulich just as much as the musicians enlisted to create the pseudo-doom instrumentation. Her wails and abstractions on 'The Frozen Dress' send shivers down spines, proving that you don't have to be riveted to a smile to truly enjoy music.

OLI MARLOW

EXCEPTER DEBT DEPT (PAW TRACKS)



Never a band to settle down into any one modus operandi, Brooklyn-based Excepter's latest full-length follows their beat-laden 'Burgers' 12-inch

(the A-side of which appears here as a bonus track) on Animal Collective's Paw Tracks label. Equal parts electronic noise, beatbox rhythms, and vocals that