

## Bloody Rain

by **Sarah-Jane Morris** (*Fallen Angel 011P CD*)

Bluesy singer Sarah-Jane Morris has kept excellent company during her illustrious career, but with **•••••**, she excels herself. This African-inspired crowd-funded album combines great music and shocking themes to powerful effect. (And it also raises money for SING, a charity raising funds for women and children affected by HIV and AIDS.)

The titular song of **•••••** takes aim at political tyrannies; other themes include reproductive health (this with a calypso), child soldiers (written with the deeds of the Janjaweed militia and the Lord's Resistance Army in mind) and homophobic violence. The last is given face by a song called simply 'David Kato' in furious memory of the murdered Ugandan activist. Morris has enlisted some wonderful talents here: Courtney Pine on sax, the exuberant Zimbabwean singer Eska, the Soweto Gospel Choir, James Brown's right-hand man Pee Wee Ellis, and so much more.

Musically, Morris and her band zip through a variety of African-inspired modalities. They are best in their most expansive moments, not least on the cast's cover of Bob Dylan's 'I Shall Be Released'. But, as with 'David Kato', Morris's big strength is in the close focus. 'No Beyoncé', her arresting song on 'honour' killings, is all the more shocking for its quiet litany of the ordinary things that a dead girl in an otherwise ordinary family will never get: 'No Beyoncé, no Shakira for you, no fashion, no boyfriends too.' Raw.

★★★★ LG

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MUSIC

## The Island of Dr Electrico

by **The Bombay Royale** (*HopeStreet Recordings, HS014 CD, LP and download*)

Australian retro-surf-funk-disco-Bollywood is, by its specialist nature, a genre thin on the ground. But the berserker energy with which Melbourne's Bombay Royale approaches its

**•••** makes up for this lacuna. **•••••**

**•••••** is a fully realized project that melds a love of spaghetti Westerns and **•••••** music with a deep and abiding love of Hindi and Tamil-language soundtracks. The 11-strong Bombay Royale – led by singers Parvyn Kaur Singh and Shourov Bhattacharya – also adopt B-movie identities: Singh becomes 'the Mysterious Lady', Bhattacharya 'the Tiger' and musical director Andy Williamson 'the Skipper', to perpetuate the idea that we are inside an exotic spy drama created from 12 short tracks.

The approach is not as unusual as it first seems. Bollywood composers have long borrowed happily from all kinds of musical styles to create zappy popular soundtracks. Bombay Royale deliver one big post-modern fiction where nothing is quite what it seems and where sitars sit euphoniously next to squelching fuzz guitars and a honking brass section. There's nothing wrong with this, even if it is a bit dizzying, and classically trained Singh's delivery is faultless. You could be driven mad by wondering what songs such as '(Give Me Back My) Bunty Bunty' actually mean, but it's not advisable.

★★★ LG

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