

Black

The Rhythm & The Blues

Dr. Funkenstein Is Operating Again

By NELSON GEORGE

"I told them point blank it's gonna get rough and it would be hard to stay together," George Clinton says, while leaning casually on a couch in Capitol Records' New York office. Dressed in leather pants, a "Computer Games" T-shirt, a funny hat adorned with buttons and a sly smile, "Dr. Funkenstein" is rapping about life before the fall.

"They said they wouldn't leave. But when things did get tight, many did leave, but it was cool. I knew it was gonna happen and I knew we'd get it back together. They still believed in the funk, but between their lawyers, managers, and wives telling them it was their sound that made it happen, it was hard to stay together. Lawyers and wives make it a bitch to keep any band together."



For George Clinton and the P-Funk mob (Funkadelic, Parliament, Bootsy's Rubber Band and a long list of other groups), the crunch came in 1981 with a series of lawsuits, missing paychecks, and poor-selling albums. Clinton's empire, on the commercial ascendant since Parliament's "Mothership Connection" in 1976, appeared to have come apart at the seams.

But Clinton's first solo album, "Computer Games," and "Atomic Dog," an amusing mix of contemporary synthesizer dance music and vintage P-Funk chant vocals, have the funk hardcore howling. On a current national tour that has just been extended until July, Clinton has most of the key group members back. "Bootsy, Eddie Hazel, Maceo Parker, Mike Hampton, Gary 'Mudbone' Johnson, Bernie Worrell; they are all working again to get the funk rolling," says Clinton. In an era when money usually overshadows loyalty, their return is somewhat surprising. Clinton admits that on P-

Funk's last tour, at the time of Funkadelic's "Electric Spanking Of War Babies," most of the players weren't being paid regularly. Still, they are back.

"They remember what I said about it being rough and knew that I hadn't lied," says Clinton. "They had a loyalty to me and what we can do together. I've always said it's everybody and nobody who makes the music. People started saying it was this guy or that one, and they started believing it was just them. People told me it was just me. I didn't need anybody else. But I couldn't do it alone, and neither could they.

"That's what being a bandleader is about today: getting everybody together 'cause they want to be there. You can't do what James Brown did anymore, where he ran it like the Army. Today's musicians will tear you down mentally and physically if you try that. The cats today are too educated, too sophisticated for that.

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You have to maintain that friendship thing happening to keep it together. When they start having to make appointments to see you, it's all over."

Clinton cites the career of Sly Stone as an example of a great artist who relied too much on his own talent. "If it just comes down to writing songs and creating, I'd take Sly over Stevie Wonder," he says forcefully. "His ideas are totally unique. He could have been all four Beatles. But he let himself think he could do it all alone and let his band, Larry Gra-

ham, his brother Freddie and all them, get away. You need all the pieces."