

SOUL UNDERGROUND

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Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives

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Bootsy Collins

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Bootsy's on the Good Foot

Bootsy Collins has a dream.

One day the funk nation really
will be under one groove.

Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives

“Forget all that crap, forget the egos, forget all the stuff we went through. What I want to do is merge the whole funk thang together on stage. The P-Funk thang, together with James Brown and the whole gang. Myself, George Clinton - who is the only one of us who hasn't worked with James Brown. Bernie Worrell, Garry Shider, Mike Hampton, Fred Wesley, Maceo, Pee Wee, everybody. I ain't gonna stop until that happens. It's time to give the people what they want.”



Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives

Since his earliest professional experience, aged 14, at Cincinnati's famed King Studios, William Bootsy Collins has been doing just that. In the mid 80s, he put in time alongside King's finest R'n'B luminaries like Hank Ballard and Bill Dogget. By 1971 the slightly mad, supremely funky Bootsy Collins had been in and out of the JBs and gone on to form the mothership connection with George

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Clinton. Along the way he had started to transform the bass guitar.

"It had been in the background so long", he says. "Larry Graham, that's where I got the idea of coming out real hard in the frontline with the bass. If you listen to the stuff from before then, even James' records never had a lot of bass. We were noticed for the newness of like 'oh man, them guys got some bottom on their records'. It was like 'check those notes that bass is playing'. Nowadays for the kids it's just bass, period. It ain't just bass guitar, it can be a drum machine or anything, as long as they get that bass, they're satisfied. I guess people just want to hear that rumble."

The Bootsy rumble was silenced for most of the early 80s, when playing the part of the Big Bad Bootsy the Superstar had got too much for him. "About 1979-1980 I started to feel like there was so much you had to do, being a superstar, and all that. It was like 27 hours a day."

"One day me and George said 'right, we're gonna cool out and go to the Bahamas and talk about the next record which was 'Aqua Boogie' - this was in 1978 and the mothership was sho nuff peaking. We went over on the boat from Florida, just George and myself. We pulled into port and saw all these people. We thought 'are they expecting someone?'. I looked

at George, he looked at me and said, 'Oh man not again. How did they know we was coming?'. Everywhere we went it was like that and I started to think I was going crazy. It started not being about the music to me. It started to be about everything but music, so I wasn't having fun no more and I just kinda backed off."

Having taken his retirement in mid-life, the still-youthful and exuberant Bootsy bounced back onto vinyl earlier this year via Island. 'Jungle Bass', a 4-track EP, was co-produced by Bootsy and fellow veteran of bass-innovation Bill Laswell. It's that spacy Bootsy bass at its rawest and many of the old P-Funkers are back in the line-up. Most importantly the mothership, or at least a large part of it, is back out on tour. "For us to depend on a record is like waiting for Hell to freeze over", he explains. "The only thing we can depend on is being out there on the road. That's the way we did it before, we were there just doing our thing and the hits came. The real deal is that I like what I do again, I'm having fun again and I'm not thinking about the politics."

He puts this down in no small part to Bill Laswell who weaned him back into "being a musician

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again". The partnership is an apt and effective one. "I had to find someone who was like a George Clinton but legit, or somewhat legit. Bill get's the respect. He can go in and do what he wants to do." Laswell's experimental work blends perfectly with Bootsy's vision, and his production proves he can translate it into commercial work.

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But the problem of where to slot the funk into the highly categorized world of American radio relegated 'Jungle Bass' to only moderate success. "We've been pretty much having trouble with radio all of funk history. So it didn't surprise me when they didn't play it much. One thing that did surprise me though, BLS in New York, they picked it right up and we'd never had any play in New York, period." Riding on the Big Apple's mini-funk revival, Bootsy performed in the city "for the first time in a loong long time."

His guest appearance on Dee Lite's 'Groove Is In The Heart' video brought him to the attention of a whole new crop of potential P-Funkers. "The kids say 'who's that weird guy with the star glasses?' That don't make me feel bad, just makes me think 'you're gonna find out'."

There are plans for Dee Lite to return the favour by contributing to a couple of tracks on Bootsy's next album, and he plans more of these ventures into new territory. Having worked on Eazy E's modestly-titled 'We Want Eazy', more projects are to follow with Dr Dre and NWA. "We're all from the same place, they're just funkin' by mouth instead of using instruments. In the old days funk was a dirty word, you couldn't say it on radio. Rap's the same. We have to work together and we'll both get some positive play out of it."

Whether it's by getting together with a younger generation of musicians, or by fulfilling his dream of the all-time funk reunion show, one thing is certain - nothing is going to keep a rejuvenated Bootsy from performing and creating. Uniting two giant egos like George Clinton and James Brown in one show is sure to create some giant-sized problems, but that won't stop him from trying. "On stage they'd get on fine, it would be big fun ... off stage I'm sure they'd have their differences, but I'm gonna be fresh, I'm gonna be cool. Everybody is gonna love working with me and as far as I'm concerned James can take 51% as long as we can split the other 49%. I ain't gonna have no problems with that."

"The only problem is gonna be between George and James and there's nothing I can do about it. I'm just gonna show them what a good idea it is, I know George can hear me. It's just I haven't discussed the details with Mr. Brown yet, he's next!"