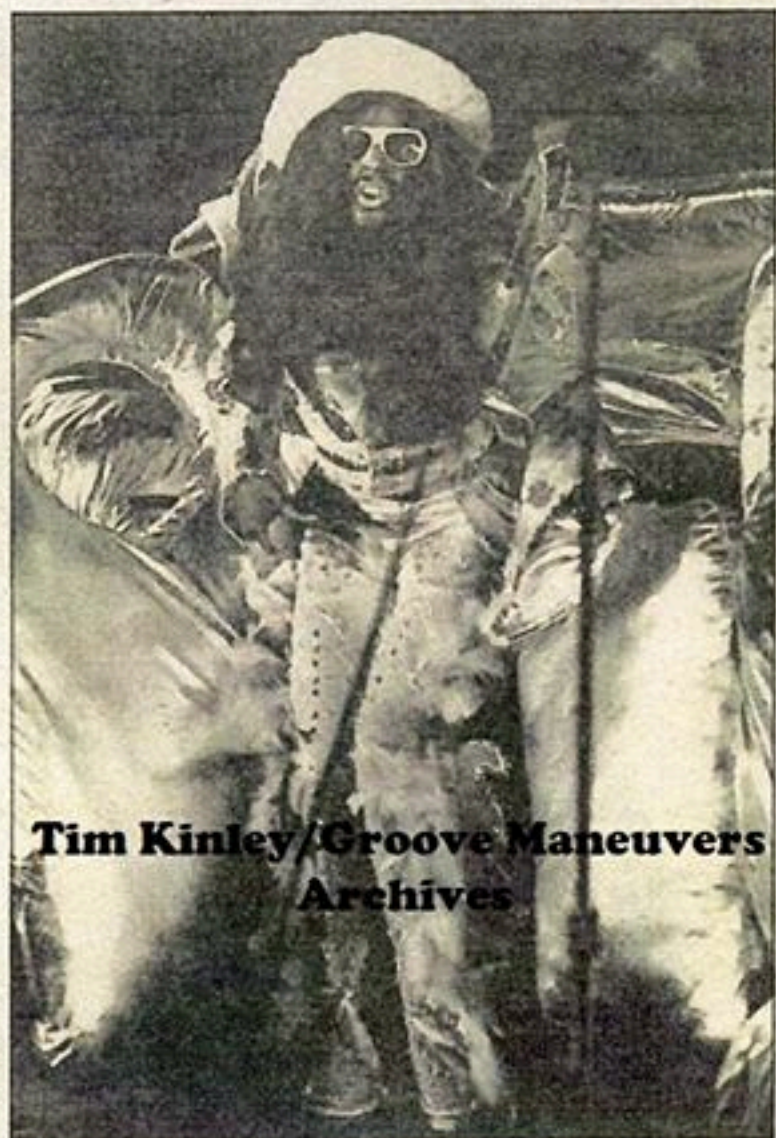


Two faces of funk



Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives



Funkentelechy vs. the Placebo Syndrome
Parliament
Casablanca NBLP 7084

Bootsy? Player of the Year
Bootsy's Rubber Band
Warner Bros. BSK 5095

By Ken Tucker

GEORGE CLINTON, Bootsy Collins and the rest of the Parliament-Funkadelic and Rubber Band hydra seem blessed with unlimited inspiration. Clinton,

who helps produce and write nearly everything these bands release, taps a—you'll pardon the expression—mother lode of black popular culture, gathering up all genres of music, humor and pulp fiction. *Funkentelechy vs. the Placebo Syndrome* is the new "funk opera" by Parliament, while *Bootsy? Player of the Year* further elucidates and obfuscates Collins' deceptively hilarious challenge to modern soul balladry and funk vamping.

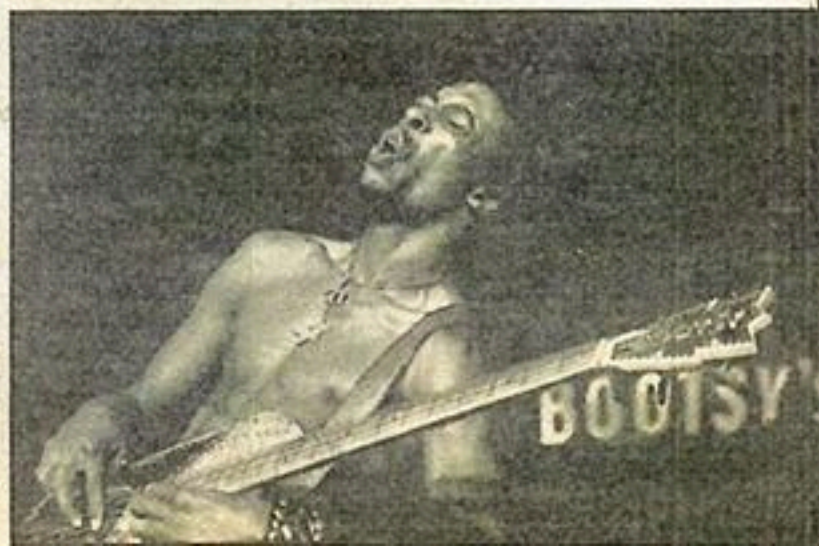
Clinton triggers Parliament's album with a song so hard that bullets bounce off it. "Bop Gun (Endangered Species)" is an R&B wowl tickled by synthesizer fills and mugged by a gang of ribald trumpets. His lead vocal is both playful and passionate: Otis Redding as gunslinger/philosopher. Later, when certain elements of *Funkentelechy's* plot grow cumbersome and impenetrable, Clinton blasts away the confusion by simply losing it in the riffing, which peaks on "Flash Light," a gritty disco digression.

If the name of the main character in Clinton's latest scenario seems corny at first—he is Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk—it's only because no one could possibly foresee the multiple puns, wisecracks and convolutions its creator can wrest from it. From the start, all Parliament-Funkadelic music has been enthusiastically excessive, in everything from verbiage to the number of musicians employed. While *Funkentelechy* is no exception, Clinton's production work here is atypically light and clear. Whereas in the past he's usually encouraged the bass and drums to sound murky, to retard the beat and thereby offset the jangle of his raft of hard-nosed and Hendrix-inspired guitarists, he's now developed an invigorating musical and verbal precision. Michael Hampton's expert guitar solos quiver starkly in the mix, and Clinton even strives to make his own lyrics intelligible—not coherent maybe, but intelligible.

And, if "Funkentelechy" and "Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk (Pay Attention—B3M)" go on too long—the fatal P-Funk flaw—"Wizard of Finance," which sounds a lot like Graham Central Station, and especially "Bop Gun" display a new rigor and brevity.

The dense dance beat of *Bootsy? Player of the Year* rarely lets up. Floating above the never-say-die drumming, the booming bass and the Rubber Band's curt

Player of the Year *Bootsy Collins* (below); *George Clinton* (above)



horn section is Bootsy Collins' voice, a lovely, delicate croon that somehow cuts through the instrumental mesmerism like an FM DJ's ultrasincere inflections infect the airwaves.

Bootsy Collins is the least macho male working in popular music; his pitch is never manipulative or nasty. On "May the Force Be with You" and the loping "Very Yes," the long love songs that pad *Player of the Year*, he pushes beyond slick palaver into the area of the touching ballad. Which is nice, but has nothing to do with his magnanimous radicalism. He's got this notion that absolutely *anything*—any phrase, surrealistic word association, cracked culture quotation, even any mistake—can be used as a narrative device in his stream-of-funk songs (e.g., this record's best cut and Collins' masterpiece to date, "Bootzilla": "I'm a rhinestone rock star monster of a doll, baby/I'm a doll for all seasons...").

Player of the Year begins with a group of children kidding and questioning Collins, who has said that his songs are aimed at children, perhaps to prepare them for Clinton's darker fables. Yet most of Collins' work, while harmless, is erotic. He may say, in "Hollywood Squares" (his version of Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City"), that he's got a "cartoon mind," but his silky voice spins out a stream of perpetual come-ons.

Where George Clinton constructs his own mythology, Bootsy Collins just babbles, albeit sublimely. For three albums now, Collins has expressed at least one incisive, if received, idea: that sensual ecstasy is most purely experienced in a state of childlike openness with a sort of willful innocence. Clinton would undoubtedly concur, with a leer. Fortunately, such clever coyness has not spilled over into either of these men's music. Right now, Collins is the funnier of the two, but the terseness of Clinton's "Bop Gun" puts everything else on today's radio to shame.