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P-FUNK NATION

GEORGE CLINTON & CO. ARE MAKING HISTORY





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OUT OF THIS WORLD

Legacy of George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic is landing at the Smithsonian

By Chris Jordan

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Move over, Spirit of St. Louis, here comes the Mothership. The Mothership stage prop — central to the '75 album "Mothership Connection" — is about the land in the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture where it will be on display at the Musical Crossroads gallery.

P-Funk music and concert footage will play to complete the experience.

"It's definitely going to be right in the lobby when you walk in, so it definitely lives up to the history of the music, because the music has not only been good for us, but good for two generations of artists after that," said Parliament-Funkadelic founder George Clinton. "All of the hip-hop and now electronic, those two eras, the funk has been the DNA of that."

Case in point: the band's "Give Up the Funk (Tear the Roof Off the Sucker)" has been sampled more than 35 times by major artists, everyone from Method Man and Redman to Snoop Dogg, according to the www.whosampled.com website.

"All the music came from the Mothership," said Clinton from his Tallahassee, Fla. home.

The Smithsonian-bound Mothership is a replica of the '70s Mothership, yet it was very active in the '90s and it made its last appearance at Woodstock '99. The original was sold for scrap, according to reports. There is no exact date for the installation but the Smithsonian has stated it is happening soon.

"After (the 1975 album) 'Chocolate City,' which was about black person in the White House, the next one I could see was (a black person) in outer space," Clinton said regarding the creation of the Mothership. "Back in those days, you were getting out of the peace and love generation and into the '70s and while that was still around you had to leave the planet to find it."

"So we were exploring all of that."

And making history. Clinton, who was living in Newark at the time, formed the Parliaments in his Plainfield barbershop on Third and Plainfield Avenue in the '60s. It grew from there into a sublime melange of funk, R&B, rock, gospel, classical, doo-wop and jazz, all set off by outlandish stage costumes, fantastical narratives and stage props like the Mothership.

There wasn't anything like it before and there hasn't been anything like it since. It was at once farciful and fanciful, but it was also a pointed commentary of the turbulent nature of the times. You could take it either way, and that is part of its genius.

"We were just funk-ing around for fun, we were glad to be on the road playing and when we weren't on the road, we were in the studio making all those albums that are out there now," said former member Bernie Worrell, a Plainfield native. "We were just creating, and thank God for that. At least for myself, we weren't thinking about making hits, we didn't go into the studio to make a hit. Who knows what's going to be a hit in the first place? So it's just happened we were blessed."

There are parallels between P-Funk and another Jersey band that traces its origins back to the '60s: the E Street Band of Asbury Park. Both grew into large ensembles, both are masters at multiple styles (although P-Funk uniquely melds multiple styles into single songs) and both have charismatic frontmen, George Clinton and Bruce Springsteen.



ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

George Clinton performing with Bootsy Collins during the opening day of Woodstock '99 in New York state.

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GEORGE CLINTON AND PARLIAMENT-FUNKADELIC

WITH: TL Shider, Milan & The Sour Goat, Small Town Scoundrels and Avon Junkies

WHEN: 7 p.m. Friday, Aug. 22

WHERE: Starland Ballroom, 570 Jernee Mill Road, Sayreville; \$22/\$25 day of show; 732-238-5500; www.starlandballroom.com

"They (P-Funk) were way ahead of their times," said E Street Band member Steven Van Zandt. "They made up their own time."

"The mixture of the black-and-white thing was always extremely interesting and rare. You had Jimi Hendrix and Sly and the Family Stone ... you had a few guys mixing up the black and white thing but George was bringing in the psychedelic concept and mixing that with black culture and it was completely unique."

"They were terrific. The closest thing to it is the E Street Band in a funny way, without the theatrics and the spaceship."

Now, it's legacy time for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame band. The current incarnation of Parliament-Funkadelic is set to tour the States and that includes a near-home town show Friday, Aug. 22 at the Starland Ballroom in Sayreville. TL Shider and his band will open the show; Shider is the younger brother of the late Garry Shider of P-Funk, aka "Diaper Man" and "Starchild."

After that, it's a new album, "First You Got 2 Shake the Gate," featuring guest stars Sly Stone and Chico DeBarge, and Clinton's autobiography, "Brothas Be, Yo Like George, Ain't That Funkin' Kinda Hard on You?: A Memoir."

"Everybody's trying to steal the ownership of all of that music going into the Smithsonian," said Clinton, who has been involved in numerous copyright lawsuits over the past few years. "It shows you how big it really is."

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