

# JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF FUNK

Tim Kinley/  
Groove Maneuvers Archives

## P-Funk Welcomes You Aboard: Where's Your Leader, Ofay?

by Ed Ward

Are you ready? Are you ready for Thuh Bomb? Right now, are you funk-in' for fun or are you still trapped in the Zone of Zero Funkativity? What will you do when the Mothership lands? Will you be prepared to Give Up The Funk? Hey, but don't worry about it—after all, three quarters of F-U-N-K is F-U-N.

Now, I'm gonna be ready, and I owe

“ As soon  
as they (white people)  
think it's hip...  
Intellectually acceptable,  
they'll get on  
board. ”

it all to my friends Tom and Skip. They were the first two people I knew to become fully aware of the existence of the Funk Bomb, who forced me to sit still while I was irradiated with Funkativity, after which, of course, I couldn't sit still at all—I was too Funked Up. After that, we started working overtime to send an emissary to the Mothership so that we could meet the Maggot Overlord, George Clinton himself. What follows

Photo by Robert Markowitz





Part of the charm of the Funkadelic experience is that they're a real family. So when Bootsy disappears midway through a song, the rest of the gang carries on without missing a clone. His bass, you see, is not toilet trained as of yet.



is the amazing story of the changes wrought in our lives by the denizens of the Mothership, including George, Bootsy, and Kidd Funkadelic.

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My first exposure to all of this came in a New Jersey diner in 1967. There was this amazing catchy song on the jukebox (the last nickel jukebox I ever saw, by the way), called "I Just Wanna Testify (What Your Love Has Done For Me)." It was by a group called the Parliaments, who recorded on some home grown label in Newark or somewhere. "Testify" was a great record, and it was a big favorite at parties—it was a good dance workout with a snappy hook in the chorus. Then the Parliaments vanished for awhile, only to pop up again. When everybody got psychedelic, Westbound Records started putting out these lurid records by a group called Funkadelic. Rumors of their weird stage show filtered back from Detroit, where they were based, and on their albums there was reference to a "Parliafunkadelicment Thang." They didn't sound like the Parliaments. They didn't sound like much, to tell the truth. Then Parliament—not the Parliaments—started appearing again. On Casablanca Records, home of Kiss. No thanks, I didn't even want to hear it.

So when I got an album last year that was supposed to be by Parliament/Funkadelic's former bass player, I tossed it. Bad move—a couple of days later Tom and Skip were on my back saying that the record—*Stretchin' Out In Bootsy's Rubber Band*—was "the most danceable ever!" (Skip), "Unnnnnbelievable!" (Tom). I snagged another copy. "New heights in stupid!" I raved. Tom went out and bought *Chocolate City* and *Mothership Connection* by Parliament. We were on to something.

So was the rest of the country: all summer long, the radio was playing P-Funk every minute it wasn't playing Wings. "Tear The Roof Off The Sucker" was an immense hit, and the more we listened, the more we heard.

Then Parliament, Funkadelic, and Bootsy came to Oakland. Tom scored tickets immediately. When we got to the funky old auditorium, we noticed two things: we were just about the only white people there, and we seemed to be about the oldest people there, too. There were all these kids who looked like twins—or clones?—walking around, the girls in billowing dresses, the boys nattily dressed in suits with elegant walking-sticks. It was peaceful until Bootsy hit the stage, when a fan-frenzy like I haven't seen in years erupted. There was Bootsy playing his space-bass, his singers, Peanut and little bald Mudbone, his brother Catfish on lead guitar, and a lethal horn section. Then came Funkadelic, who were weird, and then George Clinton, dressed in a



Photos By Michael N. Marks

## Funk Family: Who's Who

**PARLIAMENT:** The Mothership, the overriding body of the Funk machine, the place where it all comes together. In the show, Parliament is when everybody is on stage, with George singing lead and Bernie Worrell's keyboards providing a lot of the support. Less guitar-dominated, more funk and beat-oriented, with more Funk theology and information in the lyrics.

**FUNKADELIC:** The freak band, and also the guitar band. George usually retires backstage, with the horns, for the Funkadelic sections of the show and Clarence "Fuzzy" Haskins, wearing a Japanese fright mask (at least the

times I've seen them) sings lead. Characterized by two monster chants: "Shit! God Damn! Get off your ass and jam!" ("All you have to do is look like you gonna do that and the audience jumps in," says George) and "If you ain't gonna get it on, get your dead ass home." The little guy in the black gaucho hat and black cape is Michael "Kidd Funkadelic" Hampton, and watch out when he steps out—he's gonna blow your head off!

**BOOTSYSRUBBERBAND:** Easily distinguished, because they open the show, and who could miss a six-foot rubber-bodied bassist with star-shaped mirror specs and a star-shaped mirror bass? Bootsy also uses the horns, and during his part of the show, he's usually got a lot of seven and eight-year-old

kids up front checking him out. They're the core of Bootsy's fans, the geebies, as he calls them, and they're into "silly serious love songs" like Bootsy's big hit "I'd Rather Be With You" and "psychoticbumpmusic" like "Stretchin' Out In A Rubber Band." Bootsy calls his music "Houn' Dog Rock," and I call it "new heights in stupid."

"You know how they say that the teenyboppers and the old heads don't get along?" asks George. "We've actually bridged that gap. The older ones sit up in the bleachers and smoke their joints and be a little cooler, and the geebies get out on the floor, checkin' us out, but it isn't like the kind of separation you'd see between a Grateful Dead audience and a Kiss audience. It's just one of the miracles Funk can perform. . ."

E.W.

**"YOU CANNOT MAKE SENSE  
AND STILL BE FUNKY"**

## **George Clinton** THE THEOLOGY OF FUNK

George doesn't especially like to think of Funk as a religion, per se, but it does have some things in common with religion. Here, basically, is the history of Funk from the prehistoric mists to the coming Funkification of the world:

Hundreds of thousands of years ago, in the days of the Thumpasaurus Peoples and the Funkapus, Funk was a commonly accepted part of daily life. It was a gift from higher intelligences in the universe, but people misused it. The secrets of Funk were eventually interred in the Pyramids with the Pharaohs who understood them.

Earth languished in funklessness for centuries after that, awaiting the day when it could return. Then, not too many years ago, the secret of cloning was uncovered. Cloning is a process by which a living cell can be taken from an organism and used to serve as an artificial ovum, an egg from which a new organism—identical in all respects to the organism that donated the cell—can be given virgin birth. Scientists with the proper knowledge can play with the DNA of a clone, and rearrange various of its parts. (Just in case you think I'm making this part up, go into your back issues of *Scientific American* and look up the articles on the frogs and salamanders that researchers have already cloned—right down to the body markings.)

Confirmation of all this came to George and Bootsy one lonely night in Michigan right after they'd completed the *Mothership Connection* album. They'd basically just been funk'n' around, and they were driving down a deserted stretch of highway, when George saw a light touch down on earth and go back up into the sky. They drove on some more and saw it happen again. When they reached the place where they'd seen it, it hit the car three times. "You said 'Step on it!'" Bootsy recalls today. "And I stepped on it. I mean, we still be superheroes here and there, but when that other thing happened, we just had to run!"

They felt they'd been given orders from the Mothership itself, and the wonders of Funk began from that point—a platinum album, Bootsy and Funkadelic signing to Casablanca's arch rival Warner Brothers, and the two labels uniting behind the cause of Funk. ("If you can do that in the record business," George says knowingly, "you can do it anywhere!")

E.W.

Sim Sala Bim. In Funk theology, only one deity is recognized as all-powerful—Karnak the Magnificent.

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