

WITHOUT a doubt, one of the most exciting new bands to achieve their initial breakthrough this year is Bootsy's Rubber Band, a splinter group from Parliament that also embraces former J.B.'s, Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker.

Their initial album, "Stretchin' Out", is already installed in America's Top 10 and early indications suggest that a similar response has been met in this part of the world, where the album has only just been made readily available.

The front man for the band is bass player, William 'Bootsy' Collins and he hails from Cincinnati, where he was born on October 26, 1951. Before hitting double figures, Bootsy was already showing more than a passing interest in music.

"I guess I would have been about eight or nine," he recalls, "and I used to hide in the closet and play

my brother's guitar. It was the only quiet place in the house and only my mother knew I was there.

"My brother caught me a few times with his guitar but I've made it up to him since — he's in the Rubber Band, too, by the way."

It was in 1968 that Bootsy first became involved in making music professionally and that was in his home town and with a group called the Pacesetters. Brother Phelps (affectionately known as Catfish) played guitar, Frankie Kash played drums (he's another member of the Rubber Band) and the lead singer was another native of Cincinnati, Phillippe Wynne — now lead voice with the fabulously successful Spinners.

The Pacesetters stayed in business for nearly two years before the three musicians went on to join the original J.B.'s.

After a year or so around

Cincinnati. Phillippe left for Detroit and shortly afterwards replaced G. C. Cameron with the Spinners. In fact, at one stage, the threesome were all set to become the Spinners' backing band.

But the two year stay with James Brown proved to be the making of the trio. "We were all real young," he recalls, "so it was like a lesson to us all. But it was a real nice experience for us because we got a lot out of it."

"And the only reason we left was because we felt we wanted to stretch out in our own right. We've stayed in close contact with James ever since."

It's Bootsy's rippling bass that played such an important part on such J. B. epics as "Sex Machine" and "Hot Pants" as well as on the very first J.B.'s recording such as "These Are The J.B.'s" and "The Grunt".

It was after this spell that the opportunity to join the Spinners came. But the trio — still together and intact — decided to become part of the Funkadelic showcase.

"Until now, that was easily our best trip," Bootsy enthuses. "It really put the icing on the cake as far as our learning was concerned. We made the mistake of splitting in 1973 and we went back to Cincinnati and formed a band called the Complete Strangers. I guess we stuck it out for six or seven months but it was never even vaguely successful."

It was at this stage that they reunited with George Clinton and played on such albums as "Up For The Down Stroke", "Chocolate City" and, of course, "Mothership Connection". They were also featured on the Don Davis sessions of the past year — and that includes Johnnie Taylor's "Eargasm" LP (from whence came the "Disco Lady" single) and the Soul Children's "Finders Keepers" debut set for Epic. They also played on various Westbound sessions — although Bootsy would be the first to admit he doesn't know which ones!

It was during this period that the Rubber Band first started to come to fruition.

"We really started working on it when the "Mothership" album was being recorded," Bootsy points out. "We actually cut the tunes at the same time. In fact, the whole thing was done and recorded before we came up with the name. That was the last thing we did — even the sleeve design was done before it!"

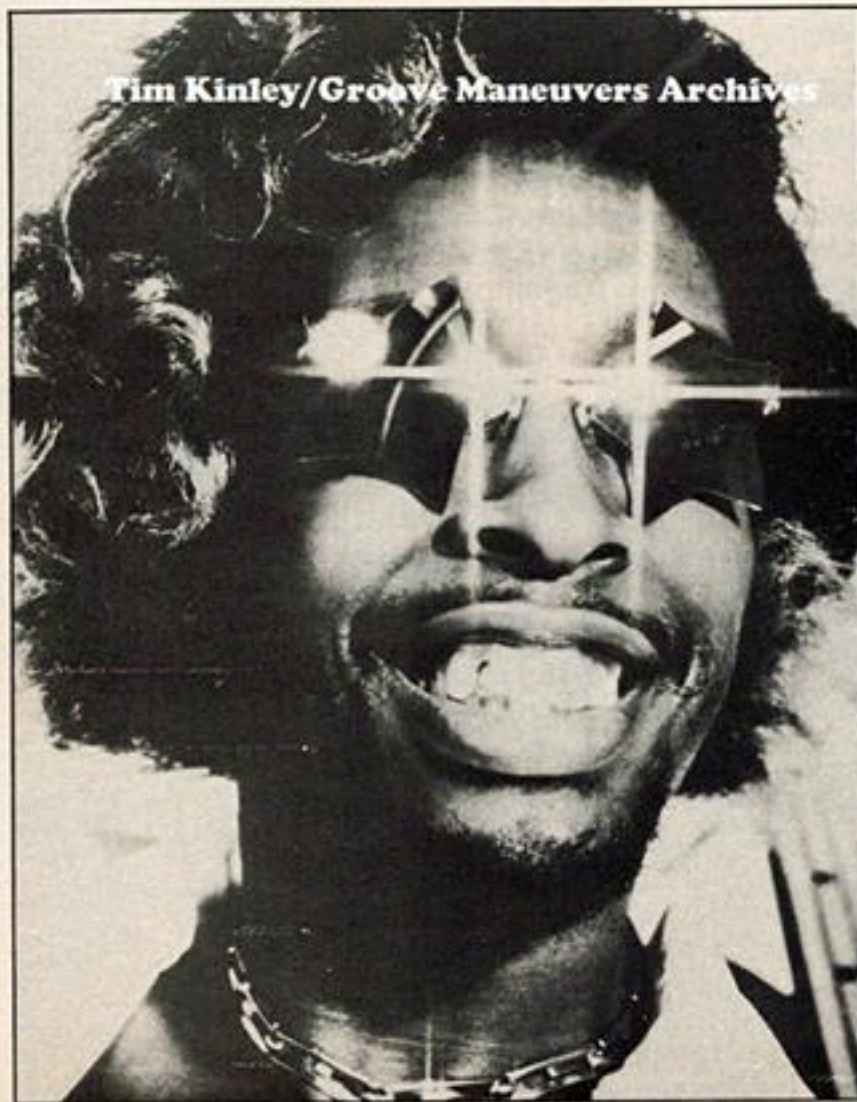
"Actually, we were originally going to call it Bootsy's Early Sunn but when we decided on "Stretchin' Out" being the lead track, we thought we'd change the name. George Clinton and I were in New York and the name just suddenly came to him. Yes, I'm satisfied with the first album — for a first album, anyway! It was all a bit of a rush and we'll be taking a lot more time over the next one."

The Rubber Band consists of Bootsy on bass; Phelps Collins on guitar; Frankie Kash on drums; Fred 'Flintstone' Allen on keyboards; Fred Wesley, Maceo Parker and Rick Gardner on horns; and with vocal assistance from Gary 'Mudbone' Cooper (he does the high parts whilst Bootsy takes the vocal part of Casper!), Leslyn Bailey and Robert 'Peanut' Johnson.

The "Stretchin' Out" album is a natural continuation of what producer George Clinton has been doing via his own Parliament and Funkadelic projects. Side one is raw disco-flavoured funk whilst side two shows a different, more contained sound from the band. It's certainly a positive and progressively directed album and it's no wonder at all that America has backed it so strongly.

It was of particular note that Bootsy — in common with George Clinton, who I interviewed the previous day — feels that his forthcoming British tour will be a red-letter period for the ever-expanding Rubber Band. (JA)

"Say man, do you think these shades make me look just a little like Bootsy Collins? Eh?"



Well, they ought to. Yep, you guessed it kids, it's Bootsy himself — he of incredible Rubber Band fame. Our man's been around some and in his time he's worked with the JB's and Parliament. Recently, he's also been on sessions for Johnnie Taylor and the Soul Children. But with the Rubber Band he's stretchin' out an' doin' his own thing. John Abbey investigates...

SOUL ON CAMERA



(Above): "Stretchin' Out" are Trombonist Fred Wesley, formerly of the J.B.'s, and Bassist Bootsy Collins while performing at Leviticus, a New York Disco. This was the first New York appearance of Bootsy and

his new group ("The Rubber Band") since his leaving Funkadelic. (Below): After the performance Bootsy and Mr. Wesley were joined backstage by concert promoter Sparky Martin, George

Clinton of Funkadelic, fellow band members: saxman Maceo Parker, also a former J.B., and drummer Frankie Kash. Everyone is smiling because their show was received well. (Photos: Billy Pierce.)



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