

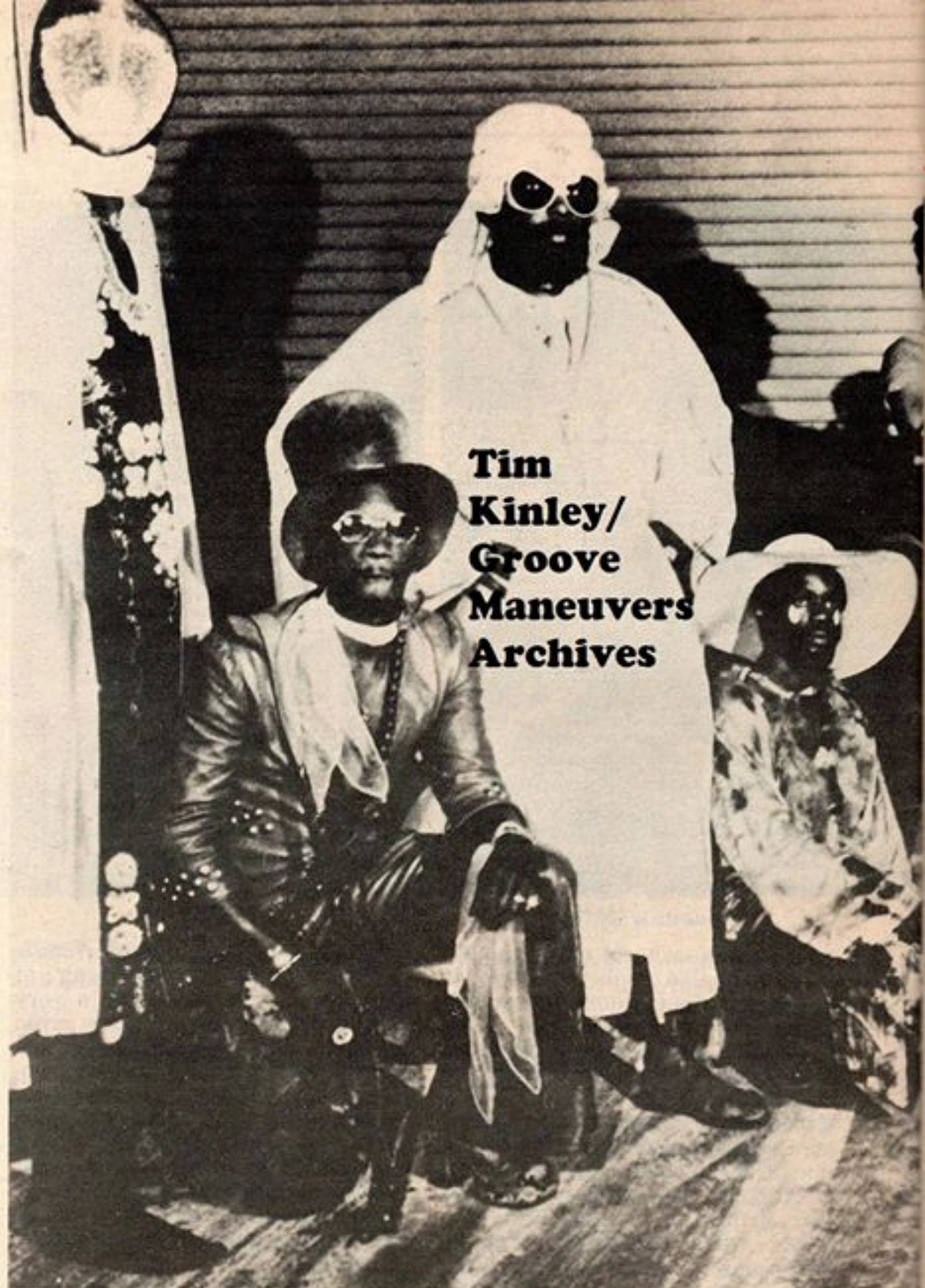
WILL THERE BE FUNK AFTER 1977?

While most of us have shunned the theatrical stage concept as being passe, P/Funk has taken the idea to heart. Their current success is based on the Clinton-conceived Mothership Connection, a funk opera based on the idea of extraterrestrials returning to Earth in search of the P/Funk they had left here.

"Funk upon a time, in the days of the Funkapus, the concept of socially designed Afronauts—capable of funkating galaxies was first laid upon mankind, but was later repossessed and placed among the secrets of the Pyramids until a more positive attitude towards this most sacred phenomenon-clone funk could be acquired. There it would wait . . . along with its cohabitants, like sleeping beauties for the kiss that would release them to multiply in the image of the chosen one . . . DR. FUNK-ENSTEIN.

—Casablanca Records

"WE love to funk you Funkenstein, your funk is the best. Take my body and give it the mind to funk with the rest," chant the near 45,000 "rubber fans" and "funkateers" packed into the Los Angeles Coliseum to witness Parliament/Funkadelic's landing of the "mothership." Undoubtedly, the funk opera's climax and main attraction of the funk extravaganza. Underlying, of course, is the loot George Clinton and his P/Funk mob will pocket having opened up a whole era of "funk" to rhythm and blues/rock listeners. Proof of which are two certified gold albums, *The Clones Of Dr. Funkenstein* and *Mothership Connection* (the latter awarded "Album of the Year" honors by NATRA-'76) and out of it all was borne the phenomenal Bootsy Col-



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lins—Clinton's bassist, songwriting pal and partner who has fast proved himself as hottest among Warner Brothers illustrious roster. P/Funk's own current chart topper is the live version of earlier segments of P/Funk's Earth Tour (taped in Los Angeles and Oakland) taking funk to heaven throughout 1977.

The production itself, a quarter of a million dollar investment designed by Jules Fisher (KISS, Alice Cooper), boasts the "mothership," "Funkapus," and a "cosmic Cadillac" among its five tons of equipment. One observer remarked, "it looks like Barnum and Bailey Circus when they move in." At least 119 people are necessary to set up the show. "There's well

over a million dollars in expenses during the course of the tour," says Casablanca spokesman Renny Roker. "The act themselves invested a great portion and the company backed it . . . George Clinton had tired of black acts getting up on stage do-wopping and that's it. When P/Funk walk away, you feel it's worth it. People are spellbound."

*Make my funk the P-Funk
I want to get funk'd up.*

"If you ain't gonna get it on, take your dead self home," screams the 36-year-old father of three teen-agers, while heading the Parliament/Funk contingency in captivating an already mesmerized crowd that spontaneously resounds the funky rhymes and rhythms.



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Labeled "sometimes terrific theater," George Clinton once remarked of it, "being freaky is my defense against the world being so scary." Moments later, as "Star-child," he deboards the "mother-ship"—a massive spaceship replica that's descended down onto the stage. In mock disguise of something extra-terrestrial he dons a glittering, white, maxi-length fur coat that is accentuated by furtails, sunglasses, 9-inch platform boots and a blond wig that comes near to knee length. "After I come off-stage, I don't take myself seriously, but on-stage I'm serious as cancer," he was to say later.

Every collision with a star is an adventure in outer space, but never more accurately so. Other worldly,

these privileged ones can be hospitable and gracious or remain cynical and aloof. Now how would you feel if you were to meet Dr. Funkenstein—alias "Starchild" or even "Lollipop-the-long-haired sucker"—the fast stepping George Clinton himself, in the flesh. If you were given a time and date and just had to show up. BLACK STARS did it recently. The result?

Offstage, it's evident that he doesn't take his appearance too seriously either, as clad in a flashy, way-out jean ensemble, he settles onto the couch at his manager's Los Angeles home. Though responding rather slow and sluggishly, the interview began with the establishment of why the same group of guys recorded under two

different names for two different record companies. "Two different monies," he smiles. "One is easy to count, two takes longer to spend. No—accidentally we couldn't use one name because of legal contracts some years ago. Parliament had a hit record *Testify* and the name was tied up when the record company got into some trouble and went out of business. We were hungry so we took the backup musicians and put them up front. We became the backup singers and Funkadelic was established. In the meantime, the company's problems became resolved and we got our own name back, but we found that it works better this way.

"There's two different groups and basically two different kinds

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of music. While one is horn-dominated (Parliament), the other is guitar-dominated (Funkadelic). (Incidentally, it's Parliament's rhythm section is responsible for the gyrating rhythm on Johnnie Taylor's *Disco Lady*.) Funkadelic is more kin to jazz, with a long term cult following. It lasts without hit records. We're a little more loose with Funkadelic and perhaps a little more bizarre. With Parliament, I plan out a little more. They help each other. While Casablanca is the one with the hits—Parliament, Funkadelic (on Warner Brothers) is the one that sustained us until we got the hit."

Clinton, the group's self-proclaimed "referee" explains, "we have a basic structure. If someone is doing anything really good, we all get behind him. I just kind of referee it, but we change up all the time." Though Clinton has not limited his scope to just Parliament-Funkadelic, but has taken under his wings, "Bootsy's Rubber Band," "The Horny Horns"—(consisting of Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker, formerly of the J.B.'s), and "The Brides Of Dr. Funkenstein" to name a few. P/Funk's own current lineup consists of Clinton, Calvin Simon, Fuzzy Haskins, Ray Davis, Grady Thomas, Gary Shider, Glen Goins, Cordell (Bootsy) Mosson, Michael Hampton, Jerome Bailey and Bernie Worrell.

As far as theatrics, Clinton adds, "I didn't feel it was worth doing, unless we could equal Alice Cooper, The Stones, or KISS. We'd always been popular as an underground group, now I felt it was time for blacks to get that kind of show—a big production. The mothership?—Well, I always believed that we had extra-terrestrial visitors, extra-terrestrial people. I read about it a lot, and I believe it." Their phenomenal success he somewhat understates is due to the fact that they're with the right record company. And ironically enough, it's taken a decade for them to surface as trend setters. A decade, and some hard dues.

Born and reared in Newark, New Jersey, Clinton was the eldest of eleven children. "I was a referee back then too," he grins. For a while I was a gangleader and I was kind of a mediator between the devil and the church. Then I'd come back and hit the streets," he chuckles. At the very impressionable age of thirteen, he saw Frankie Lime and the Superstars and said to himself, "I can do that." From that point on, he did—on street corners, at parties—



George Clinton

wherever he could. In 1955 he started the Parliament, though most of the existing members actually joined in 1958. Meanwhile, they took up another craft—barbers. Reacting to the surprise the disclosure almost always brings, he goes on, "In fact, most of the fellows in the group worked in the barbershop for years with processed hair—'superflies.' That's why we can be funky with confidence. We created that s—. We made a lot of money, and then spent it all making records. Nothing really came out of it, though. We gave up the barbershop after *Testify*. I said, 'this is it.' Plus, the afros were coming in. We were getting proud and messing up business. I saw it coming and had to leave them 'roots' alone."

They were stalled after the company went bankrupt, but as George Clinton puts it, "we had tasted it and couldn't stop." That's when they changed to Funkadelic

and kept stepping. It was also during that period that they hooked up with Motown. They wrote hits for a number of Motown acts in the 60's, among them The Supremes and the Jackson Five.

Their big commercial break ironically enough just came in 1976 with the release of *Mothership Connection*, "but to me," Clinton says, "it started paying off from the first Funkadelic album." However, as he is quick to add Funkadelic was always a bit ahead of its times and audiences up until a few years ago thought it to be a bit much. "Yeah," he agrees, "ten crazy niggers running around the stage acting crazy. We got every conceivable emotion—some were happy, others scared. It affected people all kinds of ways. We tried to touch on every conceivable feeling there was. We always deliberately do that, only it confused a lot of people. But then it was a confused time and we were like a mirror reflecting those times.

"I'm home everywhere I go," he says in regards to his personal life, and is quick to add, "I'm going to leave that statement alone." Still home for his wife, Caroline, and their three teen-aged children, is the house he maintains in New Jersey. While their busy road schedule and recording sessions take up most of the time, oftentimes they get back to their families or even take in some fishing. Clinton, himself, doesn't want to be noticed offstage and oftentimes he doesn't even want to be noted for that which he does onstage. Recently, in Los Angeles when he donated some of his proceeds to underprivileged school kids, he quipped, "look at this, the maggot minister, out here giving up toys."

What's next for Parliament/Funk? What else but the "Motor Booty Affair." Bionic bump-a-thon people with bombs in their behinds. "It's a continuation of the concept. The whole concept is definitely the stage, theatrics . . . the whole media—comic books—the whole shaft. We're doing a film this summer that we hope to release in the fall. We're even going to take the "mothership" to the Broadway stage. When everyone is tired and the marathon ends, the bombs are designed to explode on the dance floor.

"By the end of '77, we'll have taken funk to heaven," he states, and perhaps even a lot more as he contends "funk has its own rewards. Meanwhile, Los Angeles is just one of the many cities 'kissing him on his ego.'" ★