

# GIVING UP THE FUNK

Kinley-McCoy/Groove Maneuvers Archives

ALMOST 50 YEARS AFTER George Clinton STARTED GATHERING ONE NATION UNDER A GROOVE, HE'S HANGING UP HIS TOUR SHOES FOR GOOD. ON THE ROAD IN ATLANTA, DR. FUNKENSTEIN LOOKS BACK.

By Rodney Carmichael

**T**HE FUNK HAS LEFT THE BUILDING. Well, technically, the Funk has only retired to a room adjacent to the stage where his masseuse awaits. "I need my massage," says George Clinton, founder of Parliament-Funkadelic. The musical pioneer is one of the most influential artists in history, with everyone from Prince—who inducted Clinton & Co. into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1997—to generations of hip-hop artists, who've sampled his songs, giving props to the always colorful bandleader. Having wrestled with his share of demons, at 77, he is now in a good place. Though this summer's tour is his last, Clinton fully expects the band to keep performing, and waving the funk flag.

**EW** You always danced around genre, even when creating Parliament and Funkadelic as separate groups with the same members. Was it as simple as putting the guitars on the rock stuff and horns on the R&B stuff?  
**GEORGE CLINTON** Most of the time. Every once in a while, I could do something weird

enough with the horns that it could go with the rock stuff—it could be like Sun Ra, but it would have to be way out there. Or a guitar might end up on a Parliament song. But basically that's the way we did it. The loud guitars was on the Funkadelic. And the horns was on Parliament.

**EW** Were you purposely trying to genre-hop and not be bound by racial stereotypes?

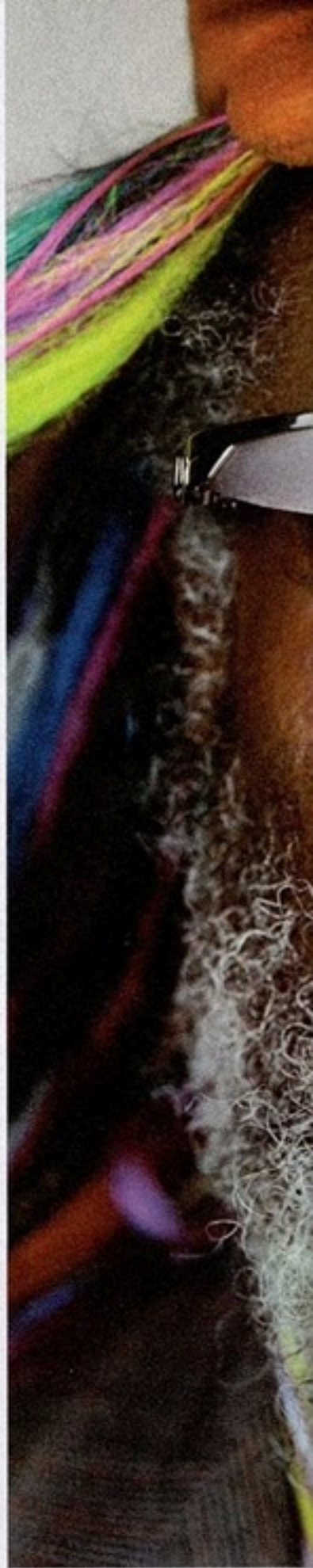
**CLINTON** Well, not be bound by no one particular thing. You have to survive because people just get tired of the name. In three years the kids grow up.... You have to reinvent for the younger ones to actually relate to.

**EW** You recently became sober. What made you realize you had to clean up?

**CLINTON** I was 70 years old when I started to clean it up. You ain't got that much energy and that much time, and the drugs weren't working no more. Matter of fact, it was getting in the way—had been in the way and I didn't know it. Then there's my wife, and she's going to remind me. It just came to a natural [conclusion].

**EW** Fans tend to worship artists now like religious figures, particularly ones who have died. Are you comfortable with that?

**CLINTON** Aw, hell, naw [laughs]. They say, "Do you want to be a role model?" Only for what not to do. You can't follow all the s--- I've done. I feel lucky and blessed I got away with the things that I did do. But there's got to be an easier way.





## ON THE ROAD



### POP CULTURE FAVORITE

#### New artists with the funk

*"Thundercat, Flying Lotus—that whole crew out there on the West Coast have a thing going that's pretty funky."*

Parliament-Funkadelic]. And I can see that's getting ready to light up everything. I might have to stay with [the band] another six to nine months.... The group is pretty hot right now anyway, so it's at a good time to transition it to those young kids in the group.

**EW** How hard has the legal fight been to get ownership of your music rights returned?

**CLINTON** That's really hard. We had to slow down and approach it another way. You can get caught up and they'll keep...draining you of cash.

**EW** Why do you think that is, with the history of black music and the industry finding ways to basically steal from artists?

**CLINTON** They've made so much money off of us since it started in the '40s and '50s that they ain't trying to let it get away. It's a business. But [young artists are] doing a lot better than what we did. Now, whether they know what to do about intellectual properties and all that—we're just learning that. So they've really got to put their head to the grind, because I know a lot of [lawyers] want it to be work for hire. That's the new thing that they've got to deal with.... And if you're new and young and trying to get into the business, you'll go for anything. I did it. But I had a bigger plan.

**EW** What was the bigger plan?  
**CLINTON** Give me a spaceship, I can outfly this s---. And once we got a hit record, that's what I did.

**EW** How hard was it staying grounded after being on the famous Mothership, which floated above the stage on the P-Funk Earth Tour in the 1970s?  
**CLINTON** I felt lucky being up on that spaceship. That s--- was two feet wide and it shook like hell. I was high as hell. My

boots was nine inches tall. That's 25 feet up there. I had every reason in the world to fall off. One dude ran up there one time. He hit me on the feet in front of, like, 20,000 people. I was holding on to that rail so tight. When the smoke went down, he fell down and cracked

his head open. I was thankful every time I didn't fall.

**EW** So this is your last tour?  
**CLINTON** It's through the end of the year. I might have to extend it a little bit after that. [The Grammys are] doing this lifetime achievement [for

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