

# BLUES & SOUL

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**AL**  
Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives

**WILSON**

**PARLIAMENT**

**BOOTSY  
COLLINS**

**REAL  
THING  
POSTER**

PHOTO: GEORGE CLINTON (PARLIAMENT)

## Countdown on Parliament, from launchpad to mothership connection . . .

I VIVIDLY remember that in the second year of B&S' existence, one of my favourite records was "I Wanna Testify" by the then-unknown Parliaments. It was a typically Detroit group record with no frills — just a good, solid vocal performance on a strong, melodic song.

It also came at a time when other companies were starting to cash in on the success that Motown had brought to the city and Parliament gave the Revilot label another slab of success to add to that which had launched the label a year earlier via Darrell Banks' classic "Open The Door To Your Heart".

Well, it's taken almost a full decade for that same amiable bunch of guys to progress into being one of today's trend setters. Their Casablanca album of "Mothership Connection" is still in America's top ten — and having been there for more than three months, it's the longest stayer in this week's top ten. And they are also sitting atop the singles listing with the quaintly titled "Tear The Roof Off The Sucker".

To try and make a comparison between "Testify" and "Tear The Roof Off The Sucker" would be impossible — they are poles apart and the only common denominator is that George Clinton and the guys recorded both of them.

During that ten year span, the same guys have also lived a double life because they are also known the world over as Funkadelic. That was a role that started out as their way of freaking out (musically speaking!) without losing the sober image that the Parliaments had.

In fact, to their eternal credit, Parliament were perhaps the first black group to make the transition into rock music — via their Funkadelic image on the then newly formed Westbound label in Detroit.

It was in 1969 that the name of Funkadelic first appeared on the charts and I vividly recall their one and only trip to Britain shortly afterwards. During the ensuing seven years, several groups have seemingly overtaken Parliament/Funkadelic in the Rock-funk stakes so one wonders why it has taken them so long to really hit the big-time. Over to the talkative but knowledgeable George Clinton.

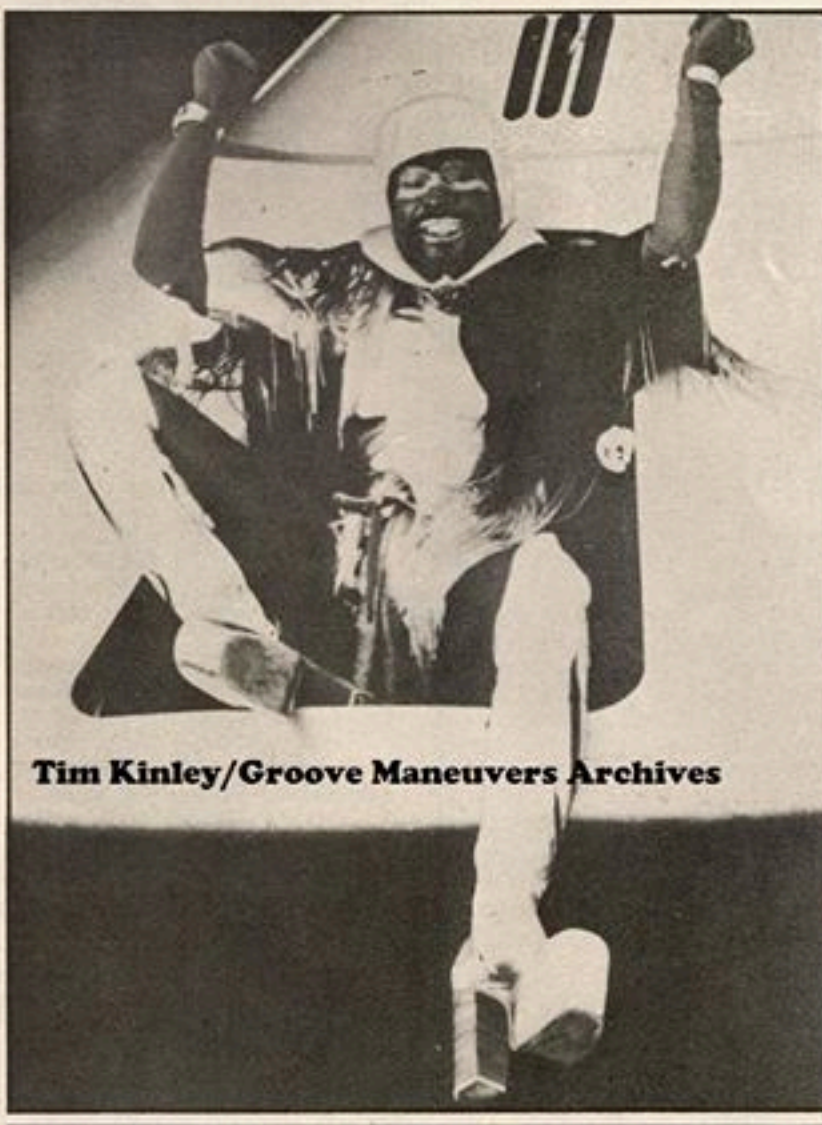
"I don't really know why it's taken so long for the public to accept us. Really, we have never changed so it must be the public that's making the change. After all, they were quick to accept us in the 'Testify' days.

"If I had to come up with one singularly important reason, I guess I'd say it's that we are finally with the right record company."

Looking back to the days when the initial transition took place, was there anything special that enforced the move?

"No," George is quick to stress. "We were always a group for the future — which I guess could also explain why it took so long, too. But we felt that we were simply a

# We have lift-off!



Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives

## An intergalactic communication from Space Commander George Clinton aboard the starship Parliafunkadelicment . . .

product of the times we live in and that we're not that different, really.

"Yes, we have shocked a lot of people over the years but anyone who has seen our show went away having learned something. To us, our music is more than just music, it's a way of life."

Because of their early willingness to switch to Rock music, there seemed an almost R&B backlash against the group in their early days.

"I guess that on looking back, there was a bit of that where the radio stations were concerned.

"I guess we were so different and apart at the time that the jocks

weren't too sure if we were going to make it through. So, if they had gone with us individually — because it was just a little revolutionary in the musical sense at the time — they could have died with us if we didn't make it. They felt it would bounce back on them and their jobs could have been in jeopardy.

"And we were the first to come up with strange titles for our songs — in those days, songs like "I Call My Baby Pussycat" or even "Get Off Your Ass And Dance" were far from the norm.

"Funk was for the future but it

started to catch on because it was a total rejection of the smooth and slick Motown type sound. Black people had become fed up with the dress-alike, dance-routine type of group. Sure, as the Parliaments we had been one of those groups and we had been successful. We tried it but found we didn't really like it — it made us feel very uncomfortable and so we set about looking for a new image.

"The early days of Funkadelic were deliberately planned for three years in advance — we deliberately avoided the fancy dance routine stuff because there was no opportunity for improvisation.

"Don't get me wrong — I have every respect for what Motown achieved and I'd be the first to stress that without them, there would be no black music as we know it today. And what they did for the city of Detroit was nothing short of fantastic. Certainly, if we had emerged from any city other than Detroit and at that time, we wouldn't be the group we are today.

"Maybe we wouldn't be as good, either, because we learned a great deal from the first-hand knowledge we had of Motown."

But in being the first to break down the musical colour barrier — that of a black group playing white music — there was a price to pay.

"I certainly think we would have been bigger sooner," George admits, although he'd be the first to point out that it wasn't a racial barrier that held them back. "But there was a change in the air.

"I would say that one of the biggest influences was the British rock boom that hit the States. That really was the first step for us and a lot of the black groups who have since made it in the Rock market. People were already looking for something new and we were able to provide it for them — two years earlier or two years later would have probably been no good.

"Even the trip to Britain was built around timing. No, looking back on it, it wasn't a particularly happy trip but the experience was invaluable. Because of our respect for English rock bands, we so badly wanted to make it big on that trip. But I guess we were a little too outrageous for the Albert Hall, right? But it's something I'd do over again if I had my life to live over."

On listening, though, to the "Mothership Connection" gold album, the listener could be forgiven for asking what difference there is today between Parliament and Funkadelic.

"Oh, there's still a helluva difference," George laughs. "But, now that you bring it up, I guess the gap has closed some, hasn't it? I guess you could call us a schizophrenic group. But Funkadelic is still in the future whereas Parliament is for today.

"The style that we adopt for Parliament is Top 40 music today.

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# Parliament

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I'd say it was Sly who first cracked that barrier. He was slick!

"Jimi Hendrix could have been the first but he was too way out for the masses. Sly was clever because he bridged the gap between Jimi and the Temptations."

But with Parliament there are things happening within that few people even realise are going on. For example, did you know that it was the Parliament rhythm section who are responsible for that cooking rhythm on Johnnie Taylor's two-million selling "Disco Lady" single and "Eargasm" elpee?

And, of course, George and the guys are also behind the Warner Brothers project on former Funkadelic bass player, Bootsy Collins.

"Funkadelic have actually joined Warner Brothers too," George points out. "We've got one more album to finish for Westbound but there should be two new sets by the end of the year on Funkadelic."

"Yes, people have always said that if we concentrated all of our efforts on one group or one name, we'd have been a supergroup long before now. I know that there has always been jealousy between whichever two companies we were with."

"When Funkadelic was on top, Invictus were always crying out for a Parliament album that had the Funkadelic flavour. And more recently, because of the success of "Chocolate City" and "Mothership Connection", Westbound have been jealous of what we have achieved at Casablanca, and they see "Mothership" becoming a Platinum album whereas Funkadelic have never even had a Gold one. But their album — which is going to be called "Takes Of Kid Funkadelic" — is going to be a



Time warp: the Parliaments, as were . . .

stone winner. It's certainly the best Funkadelic album of them all.

"The next Parliament album will again have Fred Wesley, Maceo Parker on horns — and probably Bootsy on bass, as always. At present, Bootsy's Rubber Band — which includes all three of them — are the opening act for our shows but it's only a matter of time before he's ready to go out on his own."

The inclusion of Wesley and Parker raised a few eyebrows when their names were spotted in small print on the "Mothership Connection" album. Until that stage of their careers, they had been acknowledged as James Brown devotees.

"I guess they tired of working with James," George suggests. "I know they tried to convince him that he needed a change but he resisted it. But he's starting to come round now and once he makes that change, he'll bounce back with another big, big hit. But we've all got a lot of respect for him because

he has been the trendsetter for many years."

"We call him the Grandfather of Soul — only as a joke but it holds him back just the fact we even say it as a joke. He really should go just a little contemporary, that's all. In fact, there is every chance that all of us — Bootsy, who started his career as a J.B., Fred, Maceo and myself — will hook up with him for his next album."

"Look at it this way — there is nothing more powerful than the James Brown beat, right? If we can impress upon him our technical developments, then he'll be unstoppable again. I must admit that the idea of pooling together the talents of such great musicians frightens me to death!"

Over all of those years between, though, has George ever seriously thought about packing it all in?

"Lord, no!" he quickly affirms. "We all started out together at fourteen and fifteen and we've always known we'd make it. We started out

singing in a barber shop so we started right at the bottom. I guess it's because we came from so many directions that we were able to offer so many different styles. All we now want to achieve is to come to England and win over what we missed last time."

"Even to today, American audiences don't really appreciate Parliament in the way that I think the English audiences do. They respond so much better and they somehow stay one step ahead of the American audiences at all times."

According to reliable sources, George and the other members of Parliament may get that opportunity before the year ends.

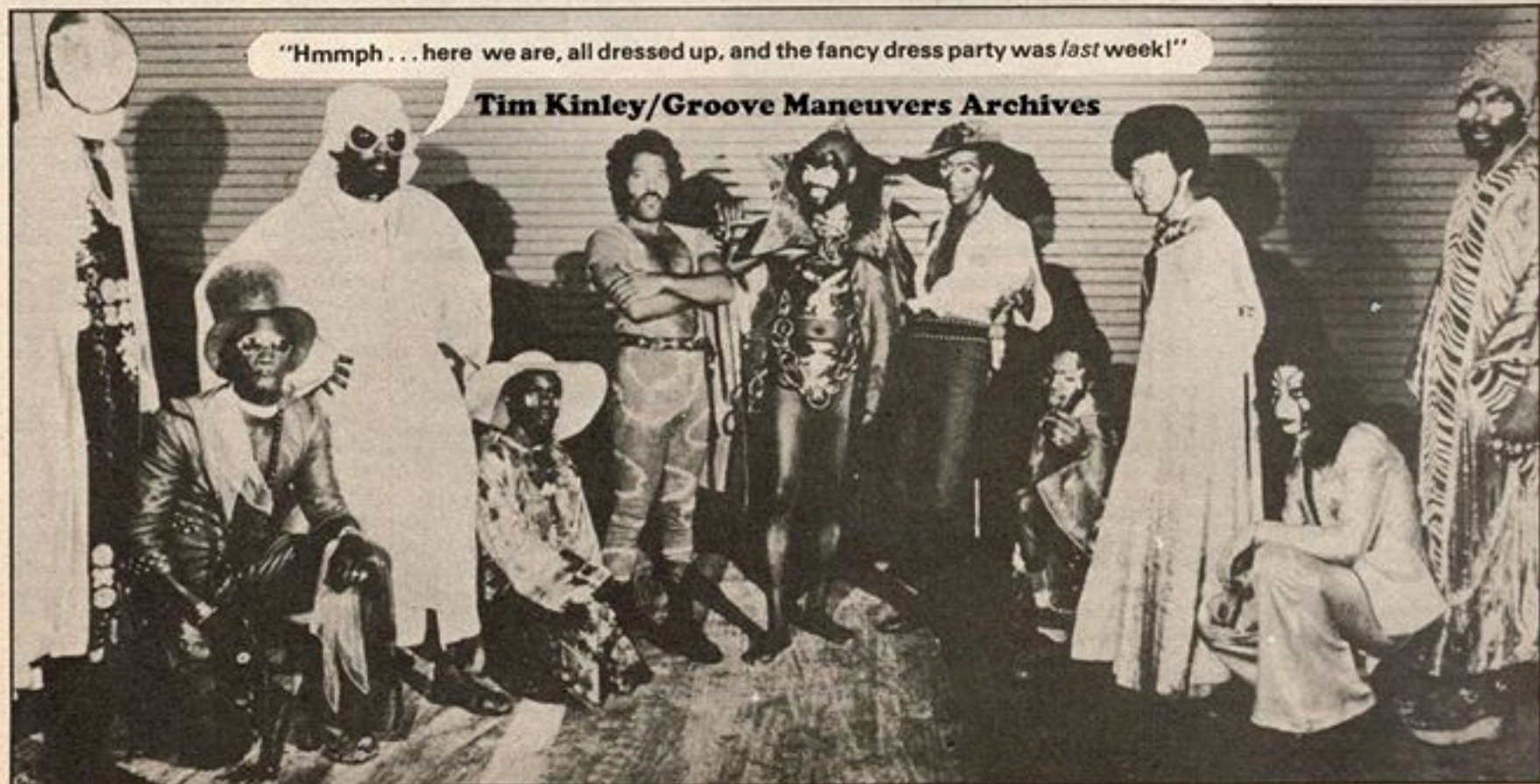
For the fact finders, the current line-up consists of George Clinton, Calvin Simon, Clarence Fuzzy Haskins, Grady Thomas and Ray Davis. They are the same original vocal quintet who started out back in the mid-60's and who sang on "Testify".

The music comes from what can loosely be termed the line-up of Funkadelic — they are Bootsy Collins (or Cordell 'Boogie' Mosson) on bass; Jerome Bailey on drums; Mike Hampton on guitar — he is affectionately referred to as King Funkadelic; Gary Shider on second guitar and Glen Goins on third guitar. Bernie Worrell is the keyboard maestro and is also responsible for a lot of the arrangement chores.

The brass — tagged the Horny Horns by George! — comes courtesy of Fred Wesley, Maceo Parker and the "Mothership" album includes guest spots from the Brecker Brothers and Joe Farrell.

With such a wealth of talent, it really is a wonder that this extraterrestrial group of guys haven't hit the high spots sooner — but you can rest assured that now they are where they want to be, they'll be staying there.

(JA)



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