

Bouncin' with Bootsy Collins

Vulcaners Rival Kiss for Spacebound Funk Fans

by Brad Balfour

William—Bootsy—Collins doesn't just get-down-and-boogie like the average R&B star. In star-shaped glasses, playing one of his three custom silver-and-white, five-pointed bass guitars, Bootsy styles himself a musical super-hero, an image fueled by the songs on his third Warner Brothers album, *Bootsy! Player Of The Year*.

"The funk is the force," Bootsy chuckles. "That's why I did a song on this album called 'May the Force Be with You.' In *Star Wars* they were really saying, 'may the funk be with you.'" And just as the science-fiction reference indicates, Bootsy's Rubber Band plays on the imagination of his young audience, with outrageous red-and-white, silver-studded leather outfits, flash bombs, and a five-minute Bootzilla monster cartoon in concert.

"The white's for purity," deadpans the scrappy-bearded Collins. "And the red is for the blood we sweat on stage. But, we don't have no blue, 'cause we ain't into the blues."

His slap-and-pluck sound is the cornerstone of a musical philosophy of silly fun. The bass powers his music—a pastiche of every progressive soul move from James Brown to Sly Stone—the same way Kiss' guitars propel their archetypal heavy-metal songs.

Bootsy even has his own teenage army, "the geepees." "The word comes from hippies," he rhapsodizes. "The kids aren't trying to get spaced out on drugs, they're trying to find out where's the funk at. They're the new hippies. They like to party."

The geepees party to Bootsy's absurd characters created in his songs such as "Stretchin' Out (In a Rubber Band)," with Casper the Friendly Ghost—the spirit of partying—from his first album, *Stretchin' Out In Bootsy's Rubber Band*. On the new album, there's "Bootzilla." "He's the monster of funk," Bootsy declares.

Bootsy continually cooks up new characters. "I'm working on Paul Reverse. We've had him on stage before, and he's on this album, in the song, 'Bootsy? What's the Name of This Town.' He's like that guy who played

drums and the flag holder in that famous painting [*The Spirit Of '76*]. Well, Paul Reverse is the dude who plays drums, but rather than warning you, he sneaks up on you."

This craziness grew naturally out of Bootsy's membership in the Parliament-Funkadelic aggregation. Formed nearly 20 years ago by mastermind singer and songwriter George Clinton, the P-Funk is a collective of over 20 musicians which records under several different names and collaborate on each other's albums. Bootsy was the bassist for the Funkadelics from '72 to '74.

"I had my own group, the House-guests, after I stopped playing with James Brown in '71 [his earliest musical inspiration]. We were gigging around my hometown, Cincinnati, for about five or six months until we hooked up

with George.

"Everybody wanted to do their own thing rather than be a backup band. We were into acid rock, Hendrix and all that shit that soul bands didn't play. So in 1972, we became George's band."

That "we" includes Bootsy, his brother and guitarist Phelps "Catfish" Collins and drummer Frankie "Kash" Waddy, now all part of the Rubber Band. While in the Funkadelics, Bootsy fed on the energy of Clinton, who created a sound that was neither soul nor acid rock, but a weird combination.

Bootsy still relies on George as his producer and collaborates on other P-Funk projects such as former P-Funk keyboardist Bernie Worrell's solo album. "But from the start," Bootsy makes clear, "George knew I was going to go and do my own thing. We may hook up occasionally, but I'm on my own."

Bootsy has always been committed to stardom. "I used to idolize the whole comic book thing when I was a kid. Batman, Superman, the Hulk—I loved them all.

"I always knew I was the superhero type. And now I get that back from the rubber fans and funkateers—they see me as a hero and star.

"That's the only way I see it," he adds, "through my star glasses." ●

Bootsy Collins is a graduate of George Clinton's Parliament/Funkadelic collective and before that, a bassist with the Godfather of Funk, James Brown.

