

RIFFS

Bootsy Baby: Hip Is as Hip Does

By Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman

With the release of William "Bootsy" Collins's third solo LP, *Bootsy? Player of the Year!*, we now have a body of work us critics can pick apart. I mean, we can get downright analytical, bay-beah. That is, if anyone's dumb enough to fall into that trick bag. Like so-called punk, like all of rock, salsa, funk, or jazz e-vun, one can/should not apply the tools of analysis too heavily. For then it all comes tumbling down, you see, and the point gets lost in the resultant sauce.

... point being, funkateers, that which ol' witch doctor Clinton has noted time and again: "Don't take it so seriously, y'all." Party, bay-beah!

Now we can get down to the disc at hand, which not coincidentally is the best Casper (a/k/a the Player a/k/a Bootsy) has given us yet. Quite a blow after the high-grade dynamics of *Ahh . . . The Name Is Bootsy, Baby!* Till now, one way to tell how "serious" Bootsy was about the fun he laid on vinyl was to measure the filler per disc. On *Stretchin' Out in Bootsy's Rubber Band*, for example, five of the seven tracks were forgettable, all except "Stretchin' Out" and "Psychotic-bumpschool." A year later Bootsy knocked the cereal content down to two out of six main tracks, but the remaining four were so strong, who gave a damn?

That second album lifted Bootsy head and shoulders above the Black funk/rock horde, and not just because the funk was

so pure; on "What's a Telephone Bill?" and "Munchies for Your Love" he showed he could do more with a slow tune than fill space. Which is another, more subtle, indication of a funk band's depth: Can they sustain interest on the mid- or slow-tempo numbers or is it time to check out for some popcorn?

Speaking of popcorn, rest assured that Bootsy is indeed the (bass) player he claims to be, particularly on the workout tunes "Bootsy?" and "Bootzilla" (with the great lines "I come equipped with stereophonicfunkproducingdiscoinducin'twinmagneticrumpreceptors . . . oh, yeah, I'm programmable"). Not even EW&F's Verdine White can catch this kid, and small wonder. Bootsy's name first circulated on the grapevine back in, damn, '68, when he latched on as a wet-behind-the-ears bassist out of O-high-yo with the Godfather himself, James—Jagger/Stewart/Townsend/Rotten-can-kiss-his-ass—Brown. Give a listen once again to the live *Sex Machine* double LP (recently reissued) or the "Super Bad" single for a taste of Bootsy *then*. And solid as he was, the kid has since soared above the competition on his instrument.

Bootsy's playing, singing, and overall presence suggests a deluxe union of Sly and Jimi, with roots going obviously back to James, but also to Howlin' Wolf, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Cab Calloway. Outrageousness is the pass-word here. Bootsy and Clinton occupy that same space as hip prophets like Rev. Ike, Pryor, Malcolm, Ali, and Adam Clayton Powell, which is quite a mixed bag indeed.

But back to *Bootsy?*: damn near perfect funk with no filler, just one weak cut ("May the Force Be with You"—hey). On "Very Yes" and "As in 'I Love You'," Bootsy pulls a reverse and shows he can truly groove with ballads as well. "Very Yes" is the kind of mellow spaciness no funk band has pulled off since the Ohio Players' "Heaven Must Be like This" on the *Skin Tight* album and that was back in '74. "Hollywood Squares" and "Roto-Rooter" are two highly enjoyable mid-tempo (for Bootsy) rockers. When I hear these, for some reason I think of two Sly hits which at first threw listeners for a loop: "Hot Fun in the Summertime" and "Life," respectively. In Bootsy's voice, especially, you'll hear Hendrix at his *féy*, double-entendre, super-hip best.

Bootsy, Clinton, and the P-Funk gang have finally reached a point where radio stations *must* play their stuff or be considered passe. But why 'BLS picked "Flashlight" off Parliament's last LP instead of "Bop Gun" is beyond me. With *Bootsy?* they've been closer to home, as Casper is more (commercially) accessible for programmers than P-ure-Funk. Which is exactly Clinton's master plan. So far, 'BLS has gone with "Bootzilla," dynamite radio stuff; there's at least four others which can be hit singles.

Musically, funk haters and lovers will be surprised at the many breaks and changes of each track: it's not all thump-de-dump, sugar. Still, I s'pose there will always be those who prefer Otis to James, as they did in the '60s (guess who?), which is truly reversing the order of things. Convenient for them, I guess, only the same folks are repeating this crime today when they go apeshit over Al Green's *Belle Album* (a fine record, but certainly not the best in black music).

Right now the best funk/rock on disc is right here on *Bootsy?*. I won't be too upset if (again) the hip prophets are out-cast in their own land: as Cab Calloway showed on the Grammys, uncut funk has always been too much for some folks to handle. And that's *their* problem. ■



Casper (Bootzilla) (the Player): programmable **Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives**