

# The Bizarre World of George Clinton

## (Parliament/Funkadelic Drop The Funk-Bomb On America)

By JOENICK PATOSKI

NEW ORLEANS—Maintaining two separate personalities and record labels for his band Parliament/Funkadelic has been an act of schizophrenic genius on the part of Maggot Overlord, George Clinton. Combining the two entities for the P-Funk Earth Opera—the most lavish, outrageous black music touring show on the planet—is merely a stroke of brilliance. As far as Clinton is concerned though, it's just another step in the master plan in which the spectator becomes raw cloning material, ripe for programming into the new age of the Funk Bomb.

Twenty five proverbial screaming Negroes, attired in everything from moose antlers down to guitarist Gary Shider's next-to-nothing diapers should be enough to break down most doubters' resistance. But this is almost 1977, and pop music's growing technical sophistication as a live medium makes the competitive edge sharper. Thus, the insane asylum atmosphere is intensified with a \$275,000 stage designed by Jules Stein (who put together similar shows for Kiss, David Bowie, and Alice Cooper), pulled together in a two-hour epic that tells a loose-ended story about man's misuse of funk and the subsequent giving up of the tunk to Astronauts from the Mothership. If this sounds a little too extraterrestrial, then good, because P-Funk intentionally employs every psychedelic and spiritual cliché from the Sixties, and lets the audience in on the joke. It's all there—fog machines, strobe lights, 40-foot space people in stacked beels and tennis shoes, an inflatable pimpmobile climaxed by an actual flying saucer—the Mothership—that descends from a giant Big Apple cap dangling above the stage.

Admittedly, all of this sounds a bit too similar to the past extravaganzas by the likes of Kiss and Alice Cooper. Beneath the glitter and backdrop of this stage show is some meat. The psychotic sax player who walks around like a good clone with the stiffness of Robbie the Robot is Maceo Parker, formerly of James Brown's band. Next to him is JB's old arranger Fred Wesley. And the teenage idol whacking his star-shaped bass—that's Bootsy Collins, another Brown alumni. Either way you have it, JB's made it to the Seventies (without making a personal appearance), and glam-rock finally has a substantial beat to shake your booty to.

P-Funk may be the ultimate 70's riff. There are no requirements, no demands, no thinking, no nothing. This is entertainment—George Clinton's stupid liberation movement that in essence fuses the post-Beatles search for meaning

with neo-Disco party sensibilities. "Stupid is positive. Dumb is when you fucked up on the negative side. Funk is positive and negative," Clinton explains. "Dumb you can know something and see it through the wrong thing. Stupid is you don't know no better—positive ignorance."

Clinton spoke during a rare earthbound moment riding through the French Quarter of New Orleans, the scene of a Funk Bomb explosion the night before. George is wearing one of a closetful of spacesuits and his protegee next to him, Bootsy, looks tough in his star-shaped mirror shades. Even the temporary Mothership, in this case a horse-drawn carriage, gets in the act, the horse duded out in a safari helmet and diapers. Bootsy, as leader of Bootsy's Rubber Band, the opening act of the P-Funk show, is George's third phase of his Total Funk plan to convert all earth to the Mothership. Bootsy's crowd includes the pretenses, or what the Booted One calls "the geepees."

"You can bet there was at least 1000 converts last night," George is saying, and Bootsy nods. "The young ones analyze. They got to figure out if it's all right. I mean there's this weird one up there with a diaper on."

If they're with their parents they don't know how to act. What it seems like is they're coming to school to learn. They be lookin' for it. They're heavy. They wanna know about the A to Z. Glory be, the funk's on me!"

The seed for all this legal insanity was the actual sighting of the Mothership by George and Bootsy a couple of years ago, conveniently just after Parliament finished recording *Mothership Connection* for Casablanca, now a platinum album. The Overlord and his sidekick were driving in their car one night and

"we were seeing this light for about a half mile away and neither of us said anything. But as we approached the spot where it happened, we looked around like we knew what the other had seen." Three times in a row light hit the car. "We thought the Mothership was mad at us for giving up the funk without permission. And then it hit the car again head on, we accepted that as proof and said, 'Let's go funk in.' We had been endowed. Bootsy emphasized the magnitude of the sighting on his life. 'Yeah, we're superheroes here and now but when that happened, we had to run.'"

### Tim Kinley/ Groove Maneuvers Archives

