

The Funk Mob Rallies Round the Master Game Plan

Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman

George Clinton is probably the most subversive popular artist in America today. A center of controversy from critics on the one side who charge his music is nothing but mindless bump and boogie rot to fans who counter that the critics are too shallow to see the message imbedded in the groove: "You might as well pay attention, you can't afford free speech." "Think! It ain't illegal yet!" "Mind your wants cause someone wants your mind." "The bigger the headache, the bigger the pill." "When you're taking every kind of pill, nothing will ever cure your ail." and the classic, "Free your ass and your mind will follow."

Right now, the U.S. Funk Mob, a crazed army referred

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George Clinton: "Free your ass and your mind will follow"

by Clinton, which surfaces in the guise of various bands, is on the verge of breaking through to Pop Heaven. North America has been softened up these past three years by a massive escalation of P-Funk's ten year war against the Syndrome. Since 1968 Parliament-Funkadelic — P-Funk, core of the Funk Mob — had built up a large underground following in the country's "Chocolate Cities" and areas covered by freaky college stations. Steady touring by a premier, if "undiscovered," kick-ass band with material like "Chocolate City," "Up for the Down Stroke," "Standin' on the Verge of Gettin' It On," "Pussy," "Cosmic Slop," "Maggot Brain," "Loose Booty," and "Take Your Dead Ass Home" cultivated a fanatical devotion.

Supporters roared in triumph when Parliament breached the Gold wall in 1975 with *Motherhip Connection*. Clinton toured for a year in secondary markets, perfecting a \$100,000 "space opera" complete with elaborate stage effects, choreography, and above all, rhythm, building *Motherhip's* momentum. Once he had a live audience captive, Clinton tried whetting their appetite with Parliament before whipping Funkadelic on 'em. Parliament is more or less within the contemporary R&B tradition; but Funkadelic is something else. Musically, it's the Funk's essence: heavy metal rock at its loudest harnessed to a polyrhythmic, danceable groove. Even in 1976, it would be too much for the mass concert-going audience. What followed Parliament's lead instead turned out to be Bootsy, the bassist who joined the Mob in 1972. That year, all of 17, he ended a two year relationship anchoring James Brown's "J.B.'s" (check him out on "Super Bad," or the amazing *Sex Machine Live* album, available in better cut-out bins around town). His Rubber Band sound was lighter, more playful, teenybopper natural yet superbly stylish, and made for a wider audience. Bootsy's stage presence rivals Clinton's.

No matter, the Funk was gettin' through. Bootsy signed with Warners, still under George's direction. The brass section, buttressed around two more Brown refugees, Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker, landed a deal with Atlantic as the Horny Horns. Guitarist/vocalist Glen Goines, who died this year at 24 of Hodgkin's disease, never lived to see last month's release of *Quazar*, the funk band he produced, independent of the Mob but rich in its values. Last year three of the women vocalists appeared as *Parlet* on Casablanca and recently the other two women in the coro were revealed as the Brides of Funkenstein, on Atlantic. Now Funkadelic, firmly on Warners, has released its best-selling album, *One Nation Under a Groove*. On the way, on Lord knows which label, are albums from keyboard marvel Bernie Worrell and guitar wiz Mike Hampton. And the future looks bright for drummer Tyrone Lamkin, guitarist/vocalist Garry Shider, James Wesley Jackson, percussionist Larry Fratangelo, and keyboardist/vocalist Jamie Morrison, among others.

Such successful multi-corporate activity has put George and the Mob on the verge: last week WABC put "One Nation Under a Groove" at Number Eleven on its rotation. Fans now are torn between hoping this means Funk will drown muzak, whether dressed as disco, country, rock, or whatever, in favor of heavily rhythmic, spontaneous, nasty, joyful, refreshing music; or if success

means dilution, cooption, or collapse as has hit so many others.

Dr. Funkenstein (George Clinton): You're askin' if, now that we're up, is down the only way to go, that it?

SWN: Not necessarily... in your case it's obvious that some master game plan is at work. How do you coordinate it all and take it to the next level?

DF: Well, like now we doin' the Anti-Tour, it's to get the Brides before an audience. We ain't makin' no money, but we don't ever want to appear as tho' we "made it" cause people get bored with you and move on to the next group. So we had to get that idea out of people's heads before we automatically self-destructed in their minds.

SWN: How else does the Anti-Tour help?

DF: We can play in smaller halls, we can play longer... we can play the way we wanna play. It lets us get our chops off and it cools us out from bein' "superstars," two years on our spaceship, motherfuckers tend to think they stars for real... Once you get to 20,000 seats... platinum records, it's hard to get your feet back on the ground. So we said "Let's park the spaceship an' hike it!"

SWN: Keeping your feet on the ground is key but the need for it seems to have slipped by so many who've flipped... What's your self-preservation code?

DF: Don't believe none of the shit.

SWN: Today bein' Happy Election Day —

DF: —and the winner is Funk!

SWN: — there's been all this attention paid to the fact that two out of every three eligible voters won't vote. And in the main that's not due to apathy; seems like more folks are coming around to realizing, "Fuck it! This is shit!" Do you see this attitude in your audience?

DF: Yeah, I can see that...

SWN: Who do you think P-Funk freaks are?

DF: Probably the ones that think they're a little strange themselves; the people who know that this (waves at some establishment around and outside us) ain't shit. So when they see us they say, "I'm right! There's some motherfuckers who agree!"

SWN: We got a thing in us, that Malcolm and Rapp and Pryor spoke to, that makes us stand off and laugh in the face of much of the foolishness that passes itself off as seriousness around here.

DF: It's the only self-protection you got. You don't know quite what to do. But you know you supposed to be a creative nuisance... you don't wanna be discolored, muzzled... It's so easy for Them to control our tempo now, that you don't wanna take a chance, take that creative step... They got us by the instincts.

SWN: What about clones of the Funk? America will try and sell anything back to you.

DF: Right, but the one thing Funk won't do is conform. It's that part within us that makes us evolve and laugh straight up. No matter how involved the situation, we take it so lightly and funny —

SWN: — that it's cool; *el Gufeo*.

DF: Exactly. We have to be able to look at any situation and find out how to get over that hump... we actually create it on stage... I'll jump in the middle and fuck up the arrangement just so we have to get back to The One. If they're good everybody'll get back to it without missing a beat... we can even stay outside and be really adibin' and everybody's still relatin' to each other knowin' we're not right together but we are together, knowin' where The One is at. And on signal, when everybody hits The One, the people, they figure, "Well damn, them niggers knew what they was doin'!"

SWN: Is punk rock a positive growth?

DF: Punk rock... man, that's a frenzy tryin' to break out of Syndrome... that's why they do that Pogo dance... stab somebody and in that scene it's hip. I mean, some people *lah!* it! They're a culture that *lah!* it!

SWN: What about the coming generation, which you've nourished and inspired to a large degree, of black kids trying our rhythm to rock power?

DF: Pover has the same intensity as rhythm; together, it busts shit wide open. That's the day's cry: "I can't come!" I don't believe in mental illness; it's tempo-tamperin'. Son of Sam... people come to a concert these days *platinin'* to have a bad time. You got to help them enjoy themselves.

SWN: You heard that all-disco station?

DF: One kind of music repeated indefinitely is insensitive. You have a responsibility to treat the senses to all that's out there, at least all that's on The One. Free your ass and your mind will follow.

SWN: When do you return to New York?

DF: Beginning of next year with the Underwater show.

Funk's next stage is signaled by the next Parliament LP, scheduled for late November release. Titled *Motor Booty Affair*, test copies which have circulated reveal a sub-oceanic theme; the single is called "Aqua Boogie" and Bootsy has been overheard talking of "skin diving music." Clinton calls it "music for the deep." Visions of Garden hoses decked out in day-glo scuba gear bogole the imagination.