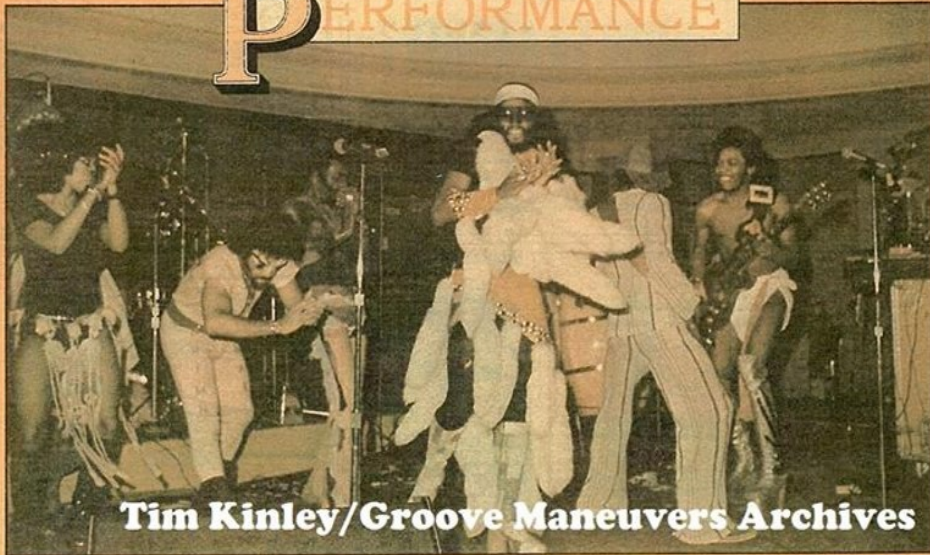


PERFORMANCE



Tim Kinley/Groove Maneuvers Archives

Halloween Mutants Invade Louisiana

Parliament/Funkadelic Municipal Auditorium New Orleans, Louisiana October 27th, 1976

By Wayne Robins

A GOLD PYRAMID glitters onstage. Light beams, like giant mutant insect eyes, stare down at the audience. Musicians dressed for Halloween party in some Alpha Centauri Harlem blast out a beat. A chocolate Clarabelle who calls himself Dr. Funkenstein emerges from the pyramid. The only question is: do you believe in the fothership?

Believing in the Mothership equires a certain suspension of critical judgment, but the effort is worthwhile. The brainchild of George Clinton, who is spiritual, musical and economic leader of Parliament/Funkadelic's "Funk Mob," this elaborate stage show has been described as a "funk pera." The three overlapping acts deal with "funk" as a kind of Holy Grit which has been sed and abused by earthlings. It is the job of Clinton, as Dr. Funkenstein, to restore "funk" to its rightful place in the heart and, er, out of "munchid."

It's all quite amusing. And

thanks to the \$260,000 stage and set, designed by Jules Fisher (who has performed a similar service for Bowie, the Stones and Kiss), it is sometimes terrific theater. The highlight occurs when a UFO rides a wire from the back of the hall and perches behind a mammoth replica of a denim hat above the stage. From below the hat descends an even larger spaceship, which lands on an elevated platform. The band picks up the beat, and out steps Clinton, dressed from head to toe in white fur. The crowd goes wild.

It's a swell moment, but it's not perfect. Clinton makes a strategic error here. The song the band is laying down appears to be "Give Up the Funk (Tear the Roof off the Sucker)," Parliament's most lasting contribution to the genre of parentheses rock. But rather than peaking with the song, Dr. Funkenstein goes into a balladlike incantation, which drains off much of the emotional energy. Instead, . . . (Tear the Roof off the Sucker)" is saved for the finale. It's still effective, though a little too late.

If stagemanship were all there was to the Parliament/Funkadelic Thang, it would be an ac-

ceptable entertainment. It's more than that because the band is one of the strongest in rock & roll. The horn section, which is at the heart of Parliament's sound, is led by Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker, who together led James Brown's once-great J.B.'s. With Clinton's bizarre song-raps based on ghetto sci-fi jargon—"funk" and "clones" and "sucker"—the cumulative effect of watching the show is like experiencing Richard Pryor leading the Sixties' James Brown band.

Calendar

- Aerosmiths: Hartford, CT (12/14), NYC (12/16-17).
- Charlie Daniels Band: Edmondston, Ala. (12/14), Vancouver, B.C. (12/16), Calgary, Alta. (12/17).
- Earth, Wind & Fire: Montgomery, AL (12/28), Mobile, AL (12/29), Birmingham, AL (12/31).
- Foghat: Pittsburgh, PA (12/15-17), Philadelphia, PA (12/18), Baltimore, MD (12/19), Detroit, MI (12/27-28), Chicago, IL (12/29-30).
- Herbie Hancock: Santa Barbara, CA (12/14), Berkeley, CA (12/17), Seattle, WA (12/30).
- Sly & the Family Stone: Largo, MD (12/26), Philadelphia, PA (12/27), Nashville, TN (12/29), Atlanta, GA (12/30).

Ralph MacDonald and Friends Avery Fisher Hall New York City November 7th, 1976

By Michael Rozek

AS NEW YORK'S MOST in-demand studio percussionist, Ralph MacDonald plays congas, as well as tinier instruments that make tiny noises. And in collaboration with William Salter, MacDonald is also a successful writer of highly melodic pop-soul tunes that have relatively advanced changes and quality lyrics (his hits include "Where Is the Love," "Trade Winds" and "No Tears in the End"). For his first concert, he joined a large orchestra of his session friends, played a program of his songs and rapped engagingly with the audience. At least three hours long, the show was such a special case that it left me thinking less about the music than about the music business.

See, the relatively unknown MacDonald filled this country's premier music hall; ten years ago, studio players may have been rich, but they were also invisible. Course, when I consider that the evening consisted of

Something funky: George Clinton (center) spaces out

grooves and melodies that so much of their energy to be played mistake-free, the reason for the change becomes clear: pop music (am I telling you something you don't know?) is technician's ball game more than ever, because it's become more business than ever. At the concert, I finally understood a producer's fly MacDonald, California for half-hour of dubs. The guy was hovering sentient onstage making "bonks" and "bings," and y he should have been that serio because—listen to any pop record—tunes would sound, w flaccid without what he does.

When MacDonald got carried offstage, for a finale, by 30 Jamaican dancers, I sensed more in his grin than island-st exhilaration; he also seemed livid to have finished a cage professional show that left people entertained. He had me singing, too, a reaction Mahler & Archie Shepp don't always gender in my jaded brain.