

**STANDING ON THE
VERGE OF GETTING
IT ON**

Funkadelic

Westbound WB 1001

**UP FOR
THE DOWN STROKE**

Parliament

Casablanca NB 9003

KMGMA

George Clinton has emerged as one of Rhythm and Blues' few visionaries. As a dance music, R&B must meet the practical demands of its black audience who need a stack of the latest 45's for purposes of socializing and partying. Accordingly, most producers and musicians veer away from the abstract and aim for the sure buck via canned arrangements and slick studio work. Within these limits, genius does exist, but primarily it is the genius of the craftsman (writers Gamble-Huff, corporate exec Smokey Robinson, progressives War and Ohio Players, etc.) and not the dreamer.

Clinton functions as both visionary and craftsman having managed to combine his dream with the sense of craft demanded by the R&B public. Clinton learned his craft as staff writer for Motown and leader of the Parliaments, a fine doo-wop vocal group. The vision came during 1967's Summer of Love when the Parliaments tripped out and, newly arisen as Parliament, hooked up with a talented local band named Funkadelic. While merging as one totality, Parliament-Funkadelic have continued to espouse their separate



identities by recording both groups on different labels.

This schizophrenic state of affairs allows Clinton to take grand advantage of his visionary-craftsman dichotomy. After a stay at Invictus, their first for Casablanca, *Up For The Down Stroke*, is perhaps the best progressive soul Lp of the year. The four Parliament vocalists, ranging from falsetto to bass, are all excellent and Clinton's integration of '50's and '60's doo-wop harmonies with '70's sensibilities is nothing short of superb.

Elements of old and new are continually fused with impeccable craft. The straight ballad "Whatever Makes Baby Feel Good" features Eddie Hazel's Hendrix-influenced lead guitar. "Just Got Back From The Fantasy, etc." has the vocalist indulging in a few bars of soulful whistling. Equally impressive are the re-done versions of earlier Parliament(s) material. The big hit, "I



Wanna Testify!" reappears as "Testify." "All Your Goodies Are Gone" (containing the classic line, "let hurt put you in the loser's seat") features an emotive, stretching vocal and fine four-part background harmonizing. But also to be singled out are Clinton's usual spate of astonishing lyrics — crazy patchworks of advertising slogans and witty punning.

Contrasted with the neo-classic beauty of *Up For The Down Stroke*, *Standing On The Verge Of Getting It On* is pure prophetic vision. Here the instrumentalists receive priority. Funkadelic takes a Hendrixish heavy metal approach and, rare among soul bands, uses no horns. Clinton abandons his commercial poise to pen tunes that are uncompromisingly frank, even nightmarish, in describing inner city life. He has an art for communicating the passionate and desperate actions of goals, are left only with their emotions to people who, stripped of possessions and

react with. And in Murder City, U.S.A. they *do* get emotional. (Funkadelic still uses the grotesque images of the maggot and the death's-head as its symbols.)

Funkadelic seems to envision a sort of salvation after the apocalypse through the healthy (to put it mildly) surrender to the flesh's pleasures. As prophet of the flesh, Clinton has been misogynist and messiah, heel and hero, victim and victor. The last Lp was immersed in the misogynist-heel-victim aspect making it a horrific gem.

Standing On The Verge, etc. takes a more positive approach. Two hard rockers, "Red Hot Mamas" and "Sexy Ways" even manage to glorify (gaspl) the voluptuous power of those well-developed sisters. "I'll Stay," a heavy metal doo-wop, puts its positiveness in ballad form. The only touch of meanness is the deliciously snide "Jimmy's Got A Little Bit Of Bitch In Him" dealing with the subject of impotence. As Clinton advises: "Why frown/even the sun goes down/ we'll just call it mixed emotions for now."

Funkadelic has reached the point of maturity where they offer more than grossout after grossout to impress the listener. (Warning! Their stage act remains outrageous still, ending in an orgy of multiple strip-teases.) After their initial vague explorations of psychedelic funk, Funkadelic has finally formulated a worthwhile synthesis of heavy metal and R&B. Clinton's vision and craft should be in service long after the "black bubblegum" Copa acts pass on. Long live that "Panafunkadelicement Thang." —
VERNON DAIS