

# BOP ART

## ARTIST QUINTON LLOYD TURNED P-FUNK MYTHOLOGY INTO FINE ART

by Richard Edson and Edward Hill

Did you draw when you were a kid?

What really got me started with art was: my dad was a jazz musician; he had a bass drum that had this [hand-drawn] pinup girl on it. That's my earliest memory of a drawing. I remember staring at this pinup girl—and I must have been three or four years old—and I kept waiting for her to move. Later, when I was in school, one thing that I did not know [was] that I was nearsighted. I couldn't see past the paper on my desk. But what I could do was focus on what was directly in front of me, which was usually some girl's booty that I ended up drawing on my paper instead of the math. So I can't add, but I can draw a booty. Never thought it would amount to anything though.

When did you first hear George Clinton and Funkadelic?

I remember hearing "Testify" on the radio [around 1967]. In Detroit, at that time, everything was Motown, Motown, Motown. I just remember growing up listening to all these Motown sounds, and it seemed like they were made just for me, just for my generation. We were really into the Marvelettes, the Supremes, you know; we really felt these people, probably the way the hip-hop age feels Snoop Dogg. And we didn't think anybody could outdo the Temptations. They were the kings. So when Parliament came out with "Testify," we saw it as a lame challenge. I was in junior high school, and I remember being in the lunchroom and there being a debate about "Who are these guys?" They sounded like the Temptations drunk on alcohol. We didn't know from marijuana. Some of the more radical kids would come in blasting "Testify" on a radio and kids would go bananas. By that point it was apparent that, okay, these Parliaments were here to stay. They definitely usurped the Temptations. At one point, I found myself at a concert, an outdoor concert, and I remember seeing these guys. They first came out with the suits on, and I remember hearing a Motown beat. Like, *dum dum dee dum*. Then it would break into *boom, boom, boom*, and they got real nasty. I do vividly recall somebody jumping off of the stage and seeing the audience



AND IN A FLASH OF LIGHT, SIR NOSE GIVES UP THE FUNK.....

freaking out at the front and running from this person who was probably George Clinton, you know, doing his voodoo stuff. All I knew was that something in front was scaring the daylight out of people. And then we would see Parliament popping up on a show called *The Robin Seymour Show*. It was a show out of Toronto, I think, that was shown in Detroit, and Parliament would come on this show looking crazy. I remember George had stars and moons and crazy crap cut into his head, pre-punk, and they would sit around a hookah and smoke marijuana. George confirmed to me later that it was not a prop. They had that much audacity in those days; they were smoking it on TV.

At that time, what were you doing in terms of your artwork?

I was trying to figure out, "What does it take to break into art history as an African American artist?" In '72, I did a painting of the Black Moses in oil. I think somebody who worked with Isaac Hayes saw me sketching in a cafe and somehow they got me to present Isaac Hayes with this

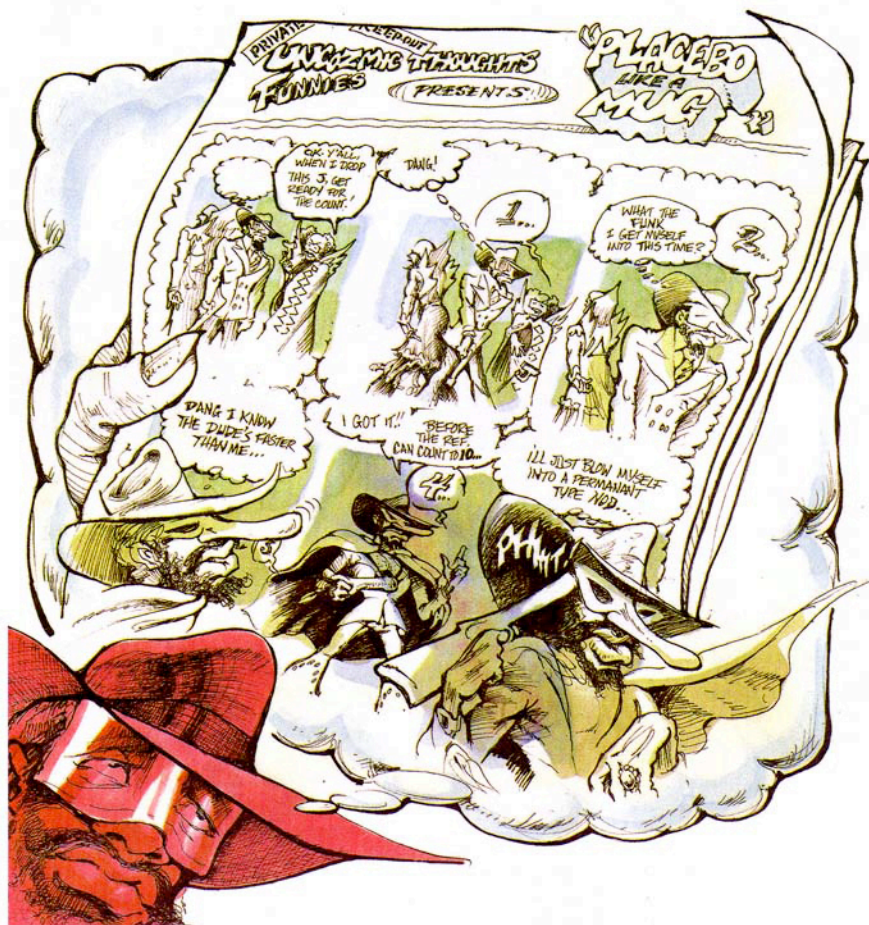
painting [of] himself as the Black Moses. I had little women sitting around his shoulders and on his chains and things. Anyway, I remember being at his birthday party, a big line going around the block, and I was able to get in with this painting and get up to this room where Isaac was holed up, gave him the painting, and a week later I saw a picture of him in *Ebony* magazine, with the painting behind him. And that was thrilling for a kid, you understand? I didn't have a clue of how to break into the fine-art world, but I started seeing some possibilities with records. And I was into Funkadelic in part by virtue of Pedro Bell. Because, outside of the artist Corky McCoy, who did the *On the Corner* artwork for Miles Davis, Pedro Bell was the only other African American artist that I could really find out there in the medium. I [had] learned how to draw White folks pretty good, but I couldn't figure out how to draw Black folks.

The examples didn't exist.

Right, and the ones that existed were the stereotypes from the '40s with the inner-tube lips. So the only way to learn how to draw them was to draw my friends. So, when I saw Corky McCoy's work, that was like, *wow!* I got another interpretation of what we look like. Pedro Bell just took it over the top. As far as I'm concerned, Pedro Bell is one of the early pioneers of hip-hop. The bottom line is Pedro Bell presented me with something that I could relate to, [that] African Americans could relate to. And that was a first for my generation.

How did you start collaborating on comics and art with George Clinton?

Okay, I must have been in high school, because I was on a bus going to the library when I came across a club called 20 Grand. The 20 Grand was mythic in my high school,



TINY DID HE REALIZE—THE STAR CHILD INDEED HAD EYES IN THE BACK OF HIS HEAD, AND COULD READ THOUGHT CLOUDS, WITH AN ALMOST ACUTE TYPE ACCURACY...



because we would hear rumors of these insane events that would happen when Funkadelic was there. But I was too young to even think about going to the 20 Grand, so I must have been sixteen or seventeen. Now I don't want to sound corny, but something actually told me to get off the bus, right then, to at least look at the 20 Grand as I was riding past. I must not have had my glasses on, because I remember seeing this fuzzy stuff in the parking lot, and I couldn't even make it out. I just noticed, like, a bunch of colors. I gathered that it must have been the band outside of the club. I remember thinking, "Well why would they wear these weird alien-looking costumes if they're not onstage?" I think I had on me a book called *Soul Is* that I had done with a puppeteer in Detroit. So I gave them my book and some sketches, and Archie [Ivy] took my number. I figured I never would hear from them again, and I didn't. But I would see them at Coball Hall and get backstage. I would meet George every now and then and he would never

remember me. Now you have to fast-forward to when I'm about eighteen or nineteen and living in New York. I didn't care about P-Funk anymore. I was into it when I was in Detroit, but when I moved from Detroit, they were over. It was at this point that I was doing caricatures in the street to survive, and I got a call from a friend of mine named Joey Zallerbach saying that the P-Funk was doing a wrap party for *Clones of Dr. Funkenstein*. Joey was an engineer with George at one point and we knew each other in Detroit. So I got to this party and someone introduced me and George, and I said, "Hey, I'm the guy that you never remember." He said, "Oh no, you look familiar." And he said, "Come sit down next to me." And he says, "So you draw?" I say, "Yeah." Then he asked me if I could draw a spaceman, so I drew a little sketch. And he asked me if I could make the spaceman a pimp. I asked how would I do it, and he said to put a cape on him. I put a cape on him. He says put diamonds on the cape and at that point he lost

me, because I was too new school to know about old school pimps and diamonds. So he's giving me pimp lessons, putting diamonds all over this space guy. It was like an instant audition. I drew the picture, he loved it, passed it around to everybody. So I'm being reintroduced to his world, and he's telling me that he's been getting colonics. He asked me if it was possible to draw an expression somewhere between pain and pleasure, and he wanted me to draw a nurse giving somebody an enema and put an expression on the guy's face right in between pain and pleasure. He was really interested in that moment between those two emotions.

But, bottom line, after this party was over and I ended up back at my place, I figured I would never hear from these guys again, because I broke every rule in the book. I gave away free artwork without a contract, without payment, without anything. I just gave it away. But I got a call from Archie Ivy saying that they loved the stuff, so I found myself traveling with them while they were doing interviews. I figured George would be just insanely drugged up and drunk and everything. But someone offered him a beer and he wouldn't even drink it because he said it's better to sound crazy and act crazy, than to be crazy for real while doing these interviews. So that took me aback. I watched him do all these interviews sounding crazy and high as hell. But he didn't indulge in anything until we got back to the hotel. Anyway, one day in the hotel I'm sitting there, and the door burst open and this guy comes through the door with a box of rubber noses. They had been looking for these rubber noses for weeks to promote Bootsy's [single] "The Pinocchio Theory" [from the album *Ahh...The Name Is Bootsy, Baby!*]. So they finally had these noses and they were so excited about it, and George started playing with the noses and putting them on and getting his woo on. And that really freaked me out, because here's this older guy acting ten years younger than me. So I decided what I wanted to do was sketch him in the act of being super childish. So I'm doing this sketch of him playing with the rubber nose and he catches me. I'm thinking he's going to throw me out. Instead he says, "Oh that's neat, put this hat on me." The next thing I know, George is trying to name the guy right there on the spot, and everybody was trying to name this guy and someone said Cyrano de Bergerac. George liked the rhythm of that and he says "Cyrano de Bergerac, Cyrano de Bergerac, Cyrano Minus the Groove." It was Tom Vickers who changed it from "Minus the Groove" to "D'Voidoffunk." So Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk—that's the name of the character. About one week later, I was in Detroit and I picked up a *Jet* magazine, and they were interviewing George and he was talking about this new album, *Funkentelechy vs. the Placebo Syndrome*, starring the old ghetto legend Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk. I was like, *wow*. And so, when I got back to New York, I found myself doing the comic for that album. Archie tells me the story of the Placebo Syndrome, explains the whole thing, you know. And, basically, between Archie and George, I got the story that it was an analogy for the kind of stuff that was going on with *Star Wars*. So it was Starchild playing the Luke Skywalker role, I guess Dr. Funkenstein was being Yoda, and of course Sir Nose

was being the Darth Vader. And the only thing is, George wanted to do all of this with no words, which I thought was ridiculous, because it was the craziest story I had ever heard in my life. Plus it had something to do with placebos, which who the hell knew what that was? So I decided to just write it as cryptically as possible. See, George wanted it mysterious like a puzzle, because he thinks that Black people are supersmart and once they catch on to something, they're done with it. So he wanted to give them something that they would never quite figure out even twenty or thirty years later, and I think he's kind of achieved that.

He's like a cross between Disney and Rod Serling and Malcolm X, probably. He takes it all way-out. I always thought of myself as the guy who just made it backstage, and I was documenting for all the people who didn't make it behind the scenes: "Look, guys, look what I'm actually seeing." And I did see it as an opportunity to give some dignity to Afrocentric art. I'm one of these artists who, although it might look good to you, to me it never looks good. I'm a perfectionist. I never thought I was nailing it. So, a lot of what George gave me was the freedom to screw up. Because George wanted to see the rough sketches, you understand, the scribbles. He said the same thing with his musicians. He doesn't want to have Bernie or Black Bird or anybody have to prove that they can make music. He wants their afterthoughts. And so that gave the freedom of failure from my perspective, gave me the freedom to, like he said, do the best I can and funk it!

**Looking at the reverence in which P-Funk is held by the hip-hop community, do you feel like you were successful in your contribution to Afrocentric art?**

I remember hearing one of the Beatles asked, "How did you enjoy the Beatles era?" And he said, "We missed the whole thing. We were too busy working." That's kind of how I feel. I kind of missed all the contributions, because I was too busy trying to get away with it, trying to make it work, and trying to communicate, you know, and not really being sure if it happened, and feeling like I'm sort of in a vacuum, even at the peak where we got big audiences and people are going nuts. So I says, okay, this is only happening because George promotes it. He makes people believe that we're legit, you understand? But I never took personal credit for it. It wasn't until years after the thing was over—this must have been the mid-'80s or something like that—and I remember I was at Venice Beach, broke again, doing caricatures, and I see this hip-hop kid walking on the beach and he had a jacket with the *Gloryhallastoopid* character painted on the back. And I am like, "Wow, man, where did you get that jacket?" He said, "I painted it. It's copyrighted and you'd better not steal it!" That was my dream come true right there! That's when I first got that my biggest complaint was that I couldn't copy other African American artists, but I became that artist that kids thought they could copy to learn how to draw. ●

*RICHARD EDSON and EDWARD HILL have together interviewed Charles Wright and James Gadsen for Wax Poetics.*