



From P-funk to Schubert, concerts a study in contrast

April 8, 2006

By *DIANE LEIGH DAVISON*,
Special to *The Daily Record*

George Clinton is often called the godfather of funk. His bands, Parliament and Funkadelic (hence P-Funk) were a revolution in sound with an ever-evolving cast of characters, including the infamous Bootsy Collins and Bernie Worrell, during their appearance at Ram's Head Live on March 10.

Their music, life, and appearance all represent living funky and fresh. Clinton just last year won back the rights to his Parliament recordings, now profiting from the longevity in the music and its licensing and sampling revenues.



Clinton travels and performs with a veritable menagerie — or circus — of characters with Clinton as the ringleader. Not singing much at all anymore, he not only has guest performers vocalizing on stage, but disappointingly also had a vocalist perched quietly at the sound board in the rear of the hall, augmenting his singing.

But do not assume that this in fact detracted in any way from the show. The show was explosive and kinetic: a bomb dropped on the audience. And the audience was a mass, undulating in unison to the beat and the sound. Every word was sung in unison, not just by the mass of performers on the stage (at one time I counted 19) but accompanied by everyone in the audience. There was a funky vibe and a particularly pervasive smell. The audience was the United Colors of Benetton, and the age demographic was also as varied, truly evidencing Baltimore's eclectic mix, many dressed in tribute to the band.

The band members' wacky outfits further enhanced the ambience: you got your pimps and your "hos"; original member Gary Shider buck naked except for his diaper (a strange sight indeed on a middle-aged man especially when casually walking around the hall before the show); men dressed as kings with cape-and-crown; women dressed as geishas, all of them drifting on and off the stage throughout the night, a revolving door of characters. And then you have Clinton front and center dressed down in his sweats and hoodie, psychedelic colored dreadlocks flowing down.

The music was a diary of the 70s' soul and funk sound which gave way to rap and hip hop. One song just morphed into the next, snippets of one song inserted into the other,

improvising on pieces for 25 minute jams. The seminal anthems "One Nation Unto A Groove" and "Flashlight" were the show-stoppers — Clinton at his best and the hall in a seeming slo-mo of movement and song. It was exhilarating.

The other Parliament/Funkadelic songs like "Mothership," "Turn This Mother Out" and "Give Up the Funk" were balanced by two new songs, and Clinton's granddaughter Shonda Clinton — whose stage name is Sativa — singing lead was a welcome surprise as her voice does her granddaddy proud. Some of P-Funk's shows top out at three hours plus, and Baltimore's show hovered at around two-and-a-half hours, ending at 12:30 a.m. — but it seemed like it shot by much quicker than that.

However fun, this concert was not for the prude. One "pimp" dressed down in feathers and abs cut out of stone gyrated, with some theatrical crotch-grabbing to boot. Musicians on stage, including Clinton, performed literal interpretations of the lyrics, "dirty dancing" on stage with ready and willing females from the audience who were constantly jumping up on stage. By the end of the show, nearly two dozen women were all over the stage — and the performers. It was pure musical shock and awe.

Following the closer, Clinton's only chart topper "Atomic Dog," nearly one-third of the audience left, missing out on the funky encore rendition of Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On."

Check out George Clinton's website: www.georgeclinton.com

Diane Leigh Davison is a Baltimore-based entertainment attorney, University of Baltimore School of Law adjunct professor teaching entertainment law, and founder of the MSBA Sports & Entertainment Law Committee. Ms. Davison welcomes comments at 410.486.0900 or [via email](#). The opinions expressed here are her own.

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