

The *real* funk, soul brother – The return of Bootzilla  
By: Stewart Dalley

William Collins, Bootsy, Bootzilla call him what you will but one thing you've got to recognise is that he's the *real* funk soul brother. What would funk music be without the bouncing bass of Bootsy Collins? Without his hip grindingly good grooves there would, for many, be no house. And legions of hip hoppers would never have made it to household notoriety if it hadn't been for his rubbery basslines.

With Santana 'Supernatural' comparisons abound his latest album 'Play with Bootsy – A Tribute to Funk', emphasises this point perfectly. Enlisting artists from across the musical spectrum, such as, Bobby Womack, Macy Gray, George Clinton, Fat Boy Slim and Snoop Dogg - all overseen by Mr 'Horny' himself, Mousse T. It's what you might call a stew and a funky one at that!

Speaking to him at his Bootzilla Rehab studio in his hometown of Cincinnati, Bootsy is wildly excited about the new album and what he hopes to achieve with it. "Working with new people gives you inspiration, it helps me to keep reaching for new things. I want to evolve with the world; I don't just want to say I only do P-Funk 'cause I don't know what I can do until I try."

For many this album signals a real return to form and has garnered him a new-found respect from music critics, fans and industry big-wigs alike. As the star spectacled, sequined suited, Snagglepuss sound-alike bassist of P-Funk there was a while in the not too distant past when Bootsy was in danger of turning into a caricature of himself.

And that's when Bootsy chose to go AWOL, shying away from the spotlight, refocusing on what made him tick as an individual without music industry interference; resurfacing briefly with Deee-lite's 'Groove is in the Heart' in 1991, as he explains. "There is no way around it, you just need to go through it and hope that you make it to the other side. And I'm glad to say I came through that."

'Weapon of Choice' was what Bootsy Collins chose to previously launch a comeback with in the mid-nineties, when he hooked-up with Fat Boy Slim. And with it came the recognition that had eluded P-Funk, in the shape of a Grammy Award - something he's eternally grateful to Norman Cook A.K.A Fat Boy Slim for. "Working with people like Fat Boy Slim helped show the world that I could do other things. He's a mad scientist; he's the maddest cat I've met yet. Working with him is like working with myself or George {Clinton}, it's like we've known each other for years. He looks at this whole hi-tech thing the same way I do. He's got all the old samplers and computers making all this hi-tech music. He's got all these records in his studio that he used as reference points to help remind me of what I'd done in the past to show me what he was looking for me to do. He's not only a good DJ, he's a great musician, director and he's got a good vibe - and that's the kind of people I like working with. We think in the same terms like its cool to do what you do, but it's good to try something else."

Before world recognition as one of the world's funkier bassists and drugs took hold of his creative will Bootsy learned his chops as a kid growing up in a single parent family in a bleak and segregated America. It was his brother Phelps 'Catfish' Collins that acted as his surrogate father - a role James Brown would later go on to fill - and it was Catfish who instilled in Bootsy the love of the guitar. Not that there were any cosy family scenes with Catfish sitting down teaching young Bootsy the cords - he had to sneak his lessons on Cat's guitar when his brother went on his paper round. Eventually the two brothers started to play in a band at local dives and at the age of fifteen the necessary break happened - becoming the rhythm section for the local record label, King Records. James Brown was the big name act on King's roster and the boys often hung around after hours to catch the Godfather in session. But the role of voyeur was never suited to Bootsy and it wasn't long before he was in the middle of things.

'Get Up, I Feel Like Being a Sex Machine' is arguably James Brown's most recognised hit and it's astonishing to learn that Bootsy, aged fifteen, helped write the track as well as providing the bass - although as he'll tell you there was no monetary gain in it. "We never got paid, especially where James Brown was concerned. We thought we had to pay him! We were kids off the street and our inspiration was the music."

After laying down the funk on one of the world's most played singles (damn imagine all the year's of royalty cheques) Bootsy, his brother and the rest of his combo became enlisted into James's band or 'the JB military academy', as Bootsy and other past band members refer to it. James took Bootsy under his wing, allowing him to travel in his private Learjet as the rest of the band roughed it out on the coach. The position of teacher's pet wasn't held for long though, and when Bootsy started to experiment with LSD/Acid on stage it was only a matter of time before he hooked up with George Clinton to kick-start the whole P-Funk era with the group Funkadelic, then with his own Rubber Band. "I had to watch myself with James because we had already exclaimed ourselves to be the tightest band in the universe so you couldn't be that tight if you were on the stage so loaded that you didn't know what you was doing. He was using reverse psychology on us to make us play better, telling us we weren't nothing. I remember when we played out and we knew we'd killed it, he'd call us in and (doing an impression of James) 'you ain't nothin' - y'all weren't on it, you weren't on the one'. We never understood it, he always cut us down. It was just his way of making us work harder. 'Cause when he used to say that to us I'd get the band together and we would practice more and tighten the songs. I understood later on that it was his way of making us work harder, but at the time I just thought he was being a dickhead."

Following his departure from the James Brown camp it wasn't long before he was to find a kindred spirit in George Clinton, from which came the entire P-Funk movement. "Before Funk became a musical term it was a way of life for us. If you got into a situation you'd say 'funk it'. If the bill collectors came and you didn't have the money to pay you'd just throw your hands up and say 'funk it, what you gonna do to me?' And living that way on the streets it just drifted on over into the music. And the music was saying 'funk it, this is what we do, this is what we feel you either like it or you don't; whatever way we don't give a funk because funk don't give a funk. You know, when I got with George Clinton everything was a go, it was like how high can you get? And it was all a part of the music. It was like 'free your mind and your ass will follow' and we kinda stuck to that.'

While riding high on the successes of P-Funk and Funkadelic, Mr Collins was also riding high on every narcotic substance that mother earth had to throw at him. Today his studio is called Bootzilla Rehab, due to his now clean and sober existence. "The name came about because of the studio parties that we used to do all the time. Instead of using the studio as a place to have a good time and make music it became a place just to get high. We forgot about the most important thing - the music. In time I figured out what happened - we were too busy getting high and having fun. So with Bootzilla Rehab I wanted to re-emphasise on the music, so I called it that because musicians can come here and dedicate themselves to the music. Once you get caught up in that {drug taking} you start to think that you can't make music unless you are high. And I had to turn that around for myself first, and realise that I managed to make music before I started to get high. And once it worked for me I wanted to share it with my friends."

Clean and sober and completely rejuvenated, the ever grinning Bootsy is almost gushing with excitement about the new album. Enlisting noted house music producer Mouse T to direct 'a tribute to funk' may seem like a strange choice to some but to Bootzilla no questions remain about their partnership once people have listened to the album. "He wanted to do something, take it in a new direction that would get this record played on the radio, something P-Funk could never achieve. A lot of the album was done here {Bootzilla Rehab} and then the computer stuff - I sent it over to Mousse T to do the computer stuff, which is a whole new way of recording that I haven't quite caught up with yet. But I'm around it so much that it's definitely my next move, so that I can do my stuff live then manipulate it on the computer."

When we did it back in the day it was take one, two and three. Today, there is so much programming that there is no way you can make a mistake. For me though, getting the opportunity to do this album is really special, people don't get chances like that. I want people to put on the album and feel the good times and the positive messages. Let's have some fun with this. People are too serious these days."

***Play with Bootsy – A Tribute to Funk is out on 21<sup>st</sup> October on East West Records.***