

Bootsy's Rope-a-Dope: Fanny Fatigue

By David Breskin

"And one of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you," cautioned Nancy Sinatra, smiling and safely sexless, on the tube of my youth. On the radio too. White vinyl I think they were. After Nancy did such a job on the subject, the boot fell from the ranks of desirable pop song fodder and the radio became bootless. But now comes *This Boot Is Made for Funk-N*, the latest big funk attack from The Player.

As y'all should know from last year's *Bootsy? Player of the Year* record, The Player is one Bootsy Collins—also known as Casper, Bootzilla (the Rock Star Doll), Starr-Mon, Captain P-Mo, and Gadgitmon. Educated at (James) Brown University while still a precocious kid, Bootsy did post-grad work with the renowned Dr. Funkenstein, a.k.a. George Clinton, at the Institute for Advanced Study, Funkentelechy division. Under the Dr.'s careful guidance, Bootsy and his associates, the Rubber Band, busted loose in the buycentennial with *Stretchin' Out with Bootsy's Rubber Band*, a thin yet promising first attempt. Next came *Ahh . . . The Name Is Bootsy, Baby!* an almost-but-not-quite there-yet funk festival splashed with horn hooks, Bootsy jive vocals (somewhere 'tween Cab Calloway and Jimi Hendrix), and sex ballads like "Munchies for Your Love."

"There" was all there on *Bootsy? Player of the Year*. Right there. Right in the old primal center; this was music that funkyed you 'tween the hips, set those feet a-movin', and even managed to fill that gap 'tween your earholes with funny, inventive vocals, muscular melodies, and arrangements that could T.K.O. Maurice White. As The Player would say, it was nice and nasty: N-I-C-E-T-Y, nicety baybeh! Bootsy had finally gotten serious about the silliness he waxed; this was uncut, untenderized, accessible, damn near universal funk. This was funk for the whole family: from the pre-teen geepees of the Boot Camp to the jazz fan needin' a physical connection to the hard-core funkateer to my old man, raised on swing, who thought it swung enough—in a new way, he said—to buy the eight-track for his 'mobile.

As every player knows, staying on top is a tougher gig than getting there. Which brings us to the disc at hand: not a bad record, really, and just as certainly not a bad one. Kinda just sits there on your table goin' thump-de-thump-de-thump-bop-bop—the United Studios sound holdin' down the bottom and the Horny Horns chuggin' along up top. Bootsy mugs and postures and interjects as always, but his outlandish vocals don't pack the same punch as they did a few ticks ago. Whereas *Bootsy?* floated and stung like Ali's butterfly and bee, this one is pure rope-a-dope: amusing, calculated and a bit sluggish.

The title of the first track—"Under the Influence of a Groove"—tells the whole story: Bootsy has given us solid dance grooves, but not strong songs with the sort of rhythmic variation and melodic development that made *Bootsy?* so stellar. Two cuts, "Jam Fan (Hot)" and "Shejam (Almost Bootsy Show)," at least partly redeem the effort. The first is rocking, gritty funk that contains the record's number-one riff refrain—"Hot, burnin' up the charts, blowdrymebaby/You want me to be cool—but I'm not"—and on the second the Rubber Band goes the other way and bundles up some light, tight funk that'll make ya sing as well as make ya dance. But on the whole, the music here is the kind of programmed stuff the P-Funk lab should be above.

Vocally speaking, Bootsy continues to pun around. He takes the scatological leanings of the P-Funk mob—first announced on *Free Your Ass and Your Mind Will Follow* and last heard on "Promentalshitbackwaspsychosisenema squad (The Doo-Doo Chasers)" from *One Nation Under a Groove*—and tones them down to just wanting some more rump to bump. Here, Bootsy wins the End-Ter-Tainer-of-the-Rear Award, warns that the Surgeon General has determined that listening to this album may cause "High Butt Pleasures," and on "Chug-A-Lug (The Bun Patrol)," announces in that sweaty, semi sweet voice: "Be on the floor by Bun Down or be out of town by sundown/I am the Bun Dance Kid, and I quote, "Go for your buns, this is wipe out music, baby!" Funny stuff, but he croons enough clunkers to even things out. Bootsy's in trouble when he starts quoting his own records and resortin' to "I'm one wild and crazy guy!"

Best new axiom on *This Boot Is Made for Funk-N* is a funkified fusion of Harry S. Truman and Jesus H. Christ: "If the funk gets too hot for your rump, turn the other cheek." Problem with the record is that it'll warm your buns but not cook 'em.