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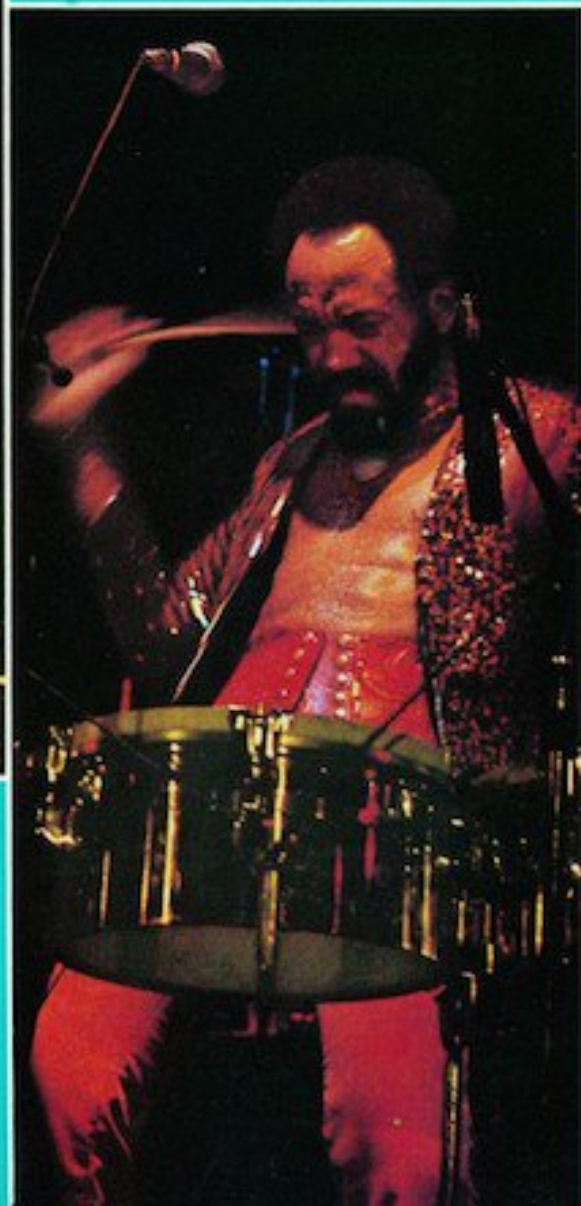
PANAMA:
It's More Than
Just A Canal



CHAKA KHAN
Rufus And Chaka Khan

HOTTEST OF THE HOT GROUPS

MAURICE WHITE
Earth, Wind & Fire



BOOTSY COLLINS
Bootsy's Rubber Band

CLONING:
Can Science Make A
Carbon Copy Of You?



THE HOTTEST OF



Swinging on stage, Chaka Khan (above), lead singer of Rufus Featuring Chaka Khan, belts out a scorching rendition of the group's hit, *Once You Get Started (It's So Hard To Stop)*. Flamboyant Bootsy Collins (above, right) of Bootsy's Rubber Band assaults the senses of music lovers with his brand of Space Age funky music.



Five super acts use funk, showmanship and talent to stand above other musical teams

BY BILL BERRY

THE SUPER GROUPS of the 1970s are like the minstrels of the Middle Ages. The modern troubadours live out of suitcases, too, much like the medieval minstrels who traveled wearily from hamlet to town in order to play, sing and dance before kings and peasants. ("The road" has been rough for a long time.) Just as the medieval musicians adopted gimmicky names—like "Little String" and "Ladies Praisers"—today's electronic minstrels also choose odd sounding and catchy names—such as "Bootsy's Rubber Band", "Earth, Wind & Fire", "Rufus Featuring Chaka Khan", "The Commodores" and "Parliament/Funkadelic."

THE HOT GROUPS



The minstrels of the Middle Ages dressed themselves in flashy colors and plumes for special effects. Similarly, the minstrels of the electronic age, exploit the gimmickry of bizarre clothes. The troubadours of old were often hated by the Catholic Church, the Establishment of the Dark Ages. The Church, vehemently accused musicians of polluting the laity's morals by seducing God's children into wicked and satanic revelry. Today, many critics accuse the Super Groups—the electronic troubadours—of corrupting the morality of the young by promoting explicit sexuality, narcissism and individualism in popular

music. Medieval minstrels once leap-frogged, somersaulted and tumbled their way into the hearts of both royalty and serfdom. Today's minstrels—discotized and amplified—twirl in mid-air above the heads of all, dangle on invisible strings, descend from space ships in close encounters of the funky kind, and bump-and-grind in clouds of cosmic smoke and in kaleidoscopic bursts of light—all to intensify the magic of theatrical effect. Some of the musicians of the Dark Ages, like "Rainbow" and "Jumping Hare," became quite famous. Today, the Super Groups are, likewise, known by millions of strangers worldwide. The Super

Vocalist Maurice White of Earth, Wind & Fire whips an audience into a frenzy (above) during a sellout performance in the Chicago Stadium. Similar crowds across the U.S. turned out to hear the group during its 80-stop tour that outgrossed even pop artist Elton John in some halls before 20,000 fans.



Flashy and funky, members of the outrageously theatrical group Parliament/Funkadelic, who wear flowing wigs, nine-inch platform boots, batwing costumes and leather outfits dripping with foxtails, celebrate the landing of the "Mother Ship" (above), whose passenger is the mysterious Dr. Funkenstein (right), the group's leader, George Clinton. "Our music is supergroovalisticprosifunkstication," he says.



Hottest of the Hot Groups *Continued*

Groups also know the ego gratification of the spotlight; they know the constant physical danger of the stage. So did the medieval minstrels, who were often pelted with stones and smashed with rotten eggs and tomatoes—even when they performed well! Many electronic minstrels have attained the Good Life of Material Things, and, like many medieval musicians—who managed to strike it rich—the Super Groups soon discover that "million sellers" do not automatically bring peace of mind in "Hollywood".

But whoever and whatever these talented Super Groups are, these minstrels of the Moog synthesizer and echo chamber are a reflection of the 1970s. They are an integral part of the daily lives of millions of young "spanking" and "worming" Americans plugged

into radios, tapes and record players.

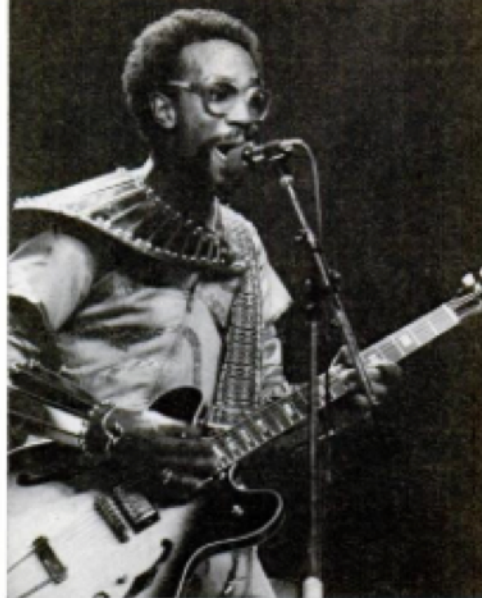
Who are these boogie minstrels of the electronic age?

Who are these sweaty poet-musicians who strut their soulful stuff with erotic gyrations, who penetrate the spine with unrelenting African rhythms, who tease the eye with "spaced-out" costumes, who sing apolitical messages of good times, sexuality, universality and love? Who are they?

The minstrels of the electronic age are the product of the poet, the musician and the electrician. Together, this trinity popularized a new beat, a new groove, a new sound—a sound that shocked the Kate Smiths and the Mitch Millers, for electronic music devours. It transforms everything it touches. As a result of the technological marriage among the poet, the musician and the electrician, the Super

Group was born. And they have been burning up the top 10 charts with infectious, platinum sound—loud, funky, electric and breaking every social and musical taboo. Musically, the Super Groups assault the Puritannical suppression of earthiness, passion, sex and abandon. Often, they sing with razors in their voice and, at other times, they wrap a melody in pure silk. The Super Groups have forced tradition to redefine the very meaning of music itself.

With the marriage of the poet, the musician and the electrician, "noise" and "loudness," suddenly, became acceptable to an eager audience of an unbelievable size. Suddenly, weird sounds from the twilight zone—surreal sounds never before heard by human ears—electrified the nervous system and "booty" of the young, hooked on disco, party lights and sensuality. Suddenly, the solo blues singer like Bessie



With a string of "gold" and "platinum" records in their coffers, the Commodores have begun to branch off into other areas of the entertainment industry, already appearing in the disco movie *Thank God It's Friday*. Group members are (top, l. to r.) lead singer Lionel Richie, lead guitarist Thomas McClary, drummer Walter (Clyde) Orange and (bottom, l. to r.) trumpet player William King, bassist Ronald LaPreau and keyboard player Milan Williams. The members met 11 years ago when they were students at Tuskegee (Ala.) Institute. They sold \$25 million worth of records last year and broke The Beatles' attendance record in the Philippines while touring the Far East.

Hottest of the Hot Groups Continued

Smith and the solo rock 'n roll screamer like Chuck Berry became *tradition*. Today, the new Super Group, rooted in rhythm and blues, has become the archetype of the self-contained, corporate, electronic age of technology. Suddenly, music became more than mere singing and playing; it became the total theatrical experience in which the "beat" played a major role. Suddenly, the new music of the 1970s shoved the performer into the blazing spotlight in a way never known before; the performer became the Creator and the Destroyer, the Angel and the Devil, the Singer and the Instrumentalist, the Composer and the Poet. Suddenly, the new electronic music—full of gospel fervor, full of rhythm, slide and glide—

glorified improvisation and spontaneity, two musical traits inherited from jazz. The new electronic minstrels have even deleted some of the "blues" in the blues. Suddenly, the minstrels of the electronic age captured the imagination of the new generation of listeners, quite casual about such technological marvels as space flight, TV, radio, and film. Some folks even call the young audiences of the electronic minstrels "the electronic babies." These modern day troubadours, plugged into their amplifiers and synthesizers, have committed their lyrics and music to the *sound* understood by "the electronic babies." It is the sound of the 1970s. It is the sound of technology.

Who are these boogie minstrels of the electronic age? Who are they and why are they playing such surreal music?

"It's not the same as it used to be. Audiences

will sit down and listen to something different, but they're bored with the older sounds. Music 10 years ago had a certain flavor to it and a certain continuity. People dressed the same, the tunes were simpler, people tried to be the same. But with us, we recognize that you can't be stagnant, you have to grow." This was Kevin Murphy talking—he is the keyboard player and co-founder of the hot group Rufus Featuring Chaka Khan. Now Murphy was sipping on a gin and tonic as he sat at a small table in a dimly lit bar in Columbia, S.C. Less than four hours later, however, Murphy and Chaka—and guitarist Tony Maiden, bass player Bobby Watson, drummer Richard Calhoun and keyboard player David Wolinski along with two supporting acts—would pack 12,000 fans into the city's spacious Coliseum, grossing at least \$60,000. Yes, at least \$60,000 in just one night. "The margin of profit isn't

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Humorous and high strung, Bootsy combines bizarre costumes and pyrotechnics with the skill he acquired as a bassist with James Brown to give fans a roistering show that is as dazzling as Liberace's keyboard antics.

Hottest of the Hot Groups *Continued*

that great when you consider the expenses, the overhead, and the percentages that go to different people," Murphy explains; however, his explanation is sidetracked when one considers that less than one year prior to the Coliseum performance, Rufus top-lined a show at the Capital Centre in Landover, Md., grossing \$130,847—in just one night. Wolinski points out that "the big accountants and lawyers who don't know (sugar) about music" are the "fat cats" who take in a sizeable chunk of most groups' earnings. The situation is even worse for Black musicians who, Wolinski says, don't get the breaks that Whites do because of racism. "Obscure White groups can make \$75,000 to \$100,000 a night easily, but even the best Black groups find it difficult to earn that much," he adds. Murphy says that he eagerly awaits the day when "there is just music, not Black or White audiences." He orders another gin and tonic and mulls over tonight's performance.

Meanwhile, more than 750 miles away in Detroit, William (Bootsy) Collins, bassist and star of Bootsy's Rubber Band, was making a sound check at the Olympic Stadium where four hours later he, too, would headline a show before some 18,000 spaced-out fans. Bootsy, who got his start in music as bass player with the charismatic James Brown—Bootsy is the bassist on Brown's *Say it Loud I'm Black and I'm Proud*—would do more than just sing, though; he would: open his 90-minute set with an animated cartoon, have six dozen balloons dropped from the arena's 200-foot ceiling, strut back and forth on stage in dazzling jewelry and a sashaying cape reminiscent of Brown and, outdoing his mentor, Bootsy did strip himself to just a pair of tight-fitting pants that were pulled down far enough to reveal more than enough of his

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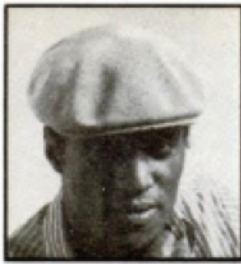
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Hottest of the Hot Groups *Continued*

brown nylon underwear. And the screaming fans loved every moment of Bootsy hits such as *Bootzilla*, *Munchies for Your Love*, *What's a Telephone Bill?* and a psychotic progressive funk tune *Stretchin' Out*. "Everything is funk. Funk is my roots. I say 'funk or forever hold your peace,' and you'll never find me holding my peace," Bootsy roars. "I'm going to the deep. I'm going to get skindiving suits for everyone and cut my next record underwater. Everybody wants to get deep, so I'm gonna get deep first." And what will the man who is dedicated to the indoctrination of geepies—six to 12 year olds into bump music—into the houndagalistic curriculum of psychoticbumpschool, Level II, do next? "I want to make movies for the blind. That's my next project," Bootsy says. "You won't come to see the movies, you'll come to feel them. By feeling you'll soon see what the funk is going on. The rhythm of life is f-u-n-k and that's my life. People live off funk because in every funking relationship it takes two to funk. I am the pleasure-dent, not the president."

Is Bootsy serious? "He's silly-serious," responds George Clinton, leader of Parliament/Funkadelic, the polyrhythmic, polytechnological space age band whose live performance antics include everything from a guitarist who wears only a diaper to the landing of "the Mothership," a giant silver spaceship. Bootsy is an alumnus of Parliament/Funkadelic as well as James Brown. Clinton, the "Dr. Funkenstein" of P-Funk, advises, "All you got to do is acknowledge funk and it frees you instantly, right there and then. Funk can open you up to new experiences. We don't tell people what to think, we just encourage them to think for themselves. You can't abandon your instincts. Some people place too much emphasis on intellect and say instinct is unimportant. But if you don't have instinct you won't be able to make love, and that's what life is all about, releasing yourself. You can do it by just saying something nasty or something bad or just screaming, or just saying (sugar) and popping your fingers. Funk is an outlet." When the P-Funk conglomerate goes on tour, its show is a \$275,000 production, generally regarded as the most spectacular and one of the first super productions ever executed by a Black group. In addition to the spaceship there is a flame-spitting UFO, a striped gold pyramid, a 40-foot apple hat and a 20-foot pair of sunglasses. An entourage of semis, buses and vans are required to haul the equipment and 80 persons who comprise Clinton's "travelling university of funk." And high-strung fans in cities across the U.S. swoon at chances to join in Clinton's raunchy chant-lyrics that startled the record industry: "Sh --, goddam/ Get off your a -- and jam."

Despite Bootsy's and Clinton's philosophical explanations of their zany music, though, one can not help but associate their creations with the heavy metal acid rock of White musicians in the late 1960s. Perhaps because of the musical cross-pollination that has taken place during the last few years categories such as R & B, rock 'n' roll, acid rock and so forth are becoming increasingly amorphous and diffused. Records by so-called "White" groups have begun to find themselves being played on juke boxes in Black neighborhoods, and radio stations seem to be following suit. The hot groups of the 1970s, writing and producing and performing their own music, have apparently embraced this cross-idiomatic pollination, using a funky base and rhythms that are almost entirely devoid of the tight sounds of Motown, Philadelphia and Memphis. Earth, Wind & Fire are perhaps the foremost representative of this new trend, drawing from the best of all musical styles, including jazz. Forsaking the "drill team" style of earlier Black groups like the Temptations, an EW&F live performance combines the spotlights and flashing strobes and theatrical props of the 1970s with warm and catchy melodies. "We're always trying to do something unusual, but we don't want to change minds. We want to raise the consciousness of our audience," EW&F's leader, Maurice White, told a writer for JET magazine. "We have a message to give but we don't think we have to preach to air it. We want to change traditional concepts, negative thoughts about life, God and cosmic forces within the universe. We can't reach everyone but those we do reach can



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Fiery and forceful Maurice White, leader of Earth, Wind & Fire, reaches to transcend a world of toil with song. "I'm not into selfish music. I don't play instruments to get off personally. Music is love," he says.

Hottest of the Hot Groups Continued

be seeds to plant flowers that bloom for others to pick." Millions of fans have spent millions of dollars to keep the EW&F dream alive. The stage show, a million dollar production, travels from city to town in six large diesel trucks that haul the equipment, and the members travel by plane. The payroll is staggering, but as White puts it, money is no consideration when the result is a superior sound that fuses all the diverse elements of blues, R & B funk, jazz, African influences and progressive rock.

Still, millions of parents, Black and White alike, find it difficult to understand, let alone appreciate, the funky music that many sons and daughters play very loudly on stereo sets in their bedrooms. "Turn that racket down or off" is the refrain often voiced by moms and dads who themselves grew up on "family" groups such as The Platters, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, The Impressions, The Supremes, etc. After all, the groups of yesterday sang sweet songs about love and happiness—with no explicit reference to sex.

One hot group that has somehow managed to bring together the sweet harmony of yesterday and the dissonance of today is The Commodores, a group which is consciously attempting to establish itself as an across-the-board musical entity, free of racial boundaries. The six-man aggregation which appeared before more than 900,000 fans last year and expects to top that number this year, is equally at home with a country-funk song—*Easy* (the single, went platinum)—as it is with the disco-funk *Brickhouse*, which met with similar success. These feats explain why the group was named Top Male Group and Top Album Group by Record World magazine. They could have received similar acclaim from Billboard magazine, but settled for number two, behind Stevie Wonder. "Today you have to use electronics to better but not to overwhelm your music," William King, trumpeter with The Commodores, says. "We like to use the synthesizer because you can get any sound that you can come up with in your head out of a synthesizer. It's creating new ideas in music. The thing is, it's time for a change in music. When you wear your hair long for four or five years, one day you say to yourself, 'I'm tired of wearing my hair long, I just want to change.' It's the same with music. People grow tired of hearing the same thing the same way year after year." And why the spectacular garb? "If a person pays eight or nine dollars he wants to see *something*. We like glitter because glitter attracts a person's eye, but we do not overdo it."

The euphoria triggered by these hottest of the hot groups has changed the content of popular music. Every generation has its own music, and members of the "funk generation" savor the syncopated, stream-of-consciousness sounds of the 1970s. And these modern minstrels are taking their following to a new level of primal enthusiasm. These musicians take themselves and their work seriously. Perhaps they are serious and dignified in a new-fashioned way.