

I'm Lauren Halsey: a heavyweight Funkateer/afronaut throwin' down the science friction, and good-time hand-clapper for the bomb squad—Parliament Funkadelic. PFunk is praxis; PFunk is lyfe. GFunk and my father gifted me Dr. Funkenstein when I was 7 or 8 & I've been pledgin' allegiance to The Holy Funk ever since. The mothership landed in my home in downtown South Central to shape n empower my imagination as a yung black girl Funk Cadet getting into her Funketelechy almost daily. They blew the cobwebs out of my mind by the time I was 13. Early on I was deep into the PFunk spacemaking that was happening seamlessly on the many scales of their infinity worlds (outerspace, ancient Egypt, time, myth, blackness, queerness, etc). The band beamed me up and into portals of Chocolate City where I was kiccin it with cro-nasalsapiens/pharaohs and duckin' sir-nose n tha UnFunky Ufos of tha nose zone—all of this without ever having to leave my bedroom. How 'bout that? Their technicolor cosmology left me totally transformed. As a visual artist, I'm inspired by George's gorgeous assemblages of geography; his remixes and samples of place, space, texture, form and time. Parliament Funkadelic's complex analogies made between earth and their fantastical outerspace and aqua worlds challenged my perceptions of possibility and futurity as it relates to creating empowering black spaces in my art practice. I sat down with

WE HAVE RETURNED TO

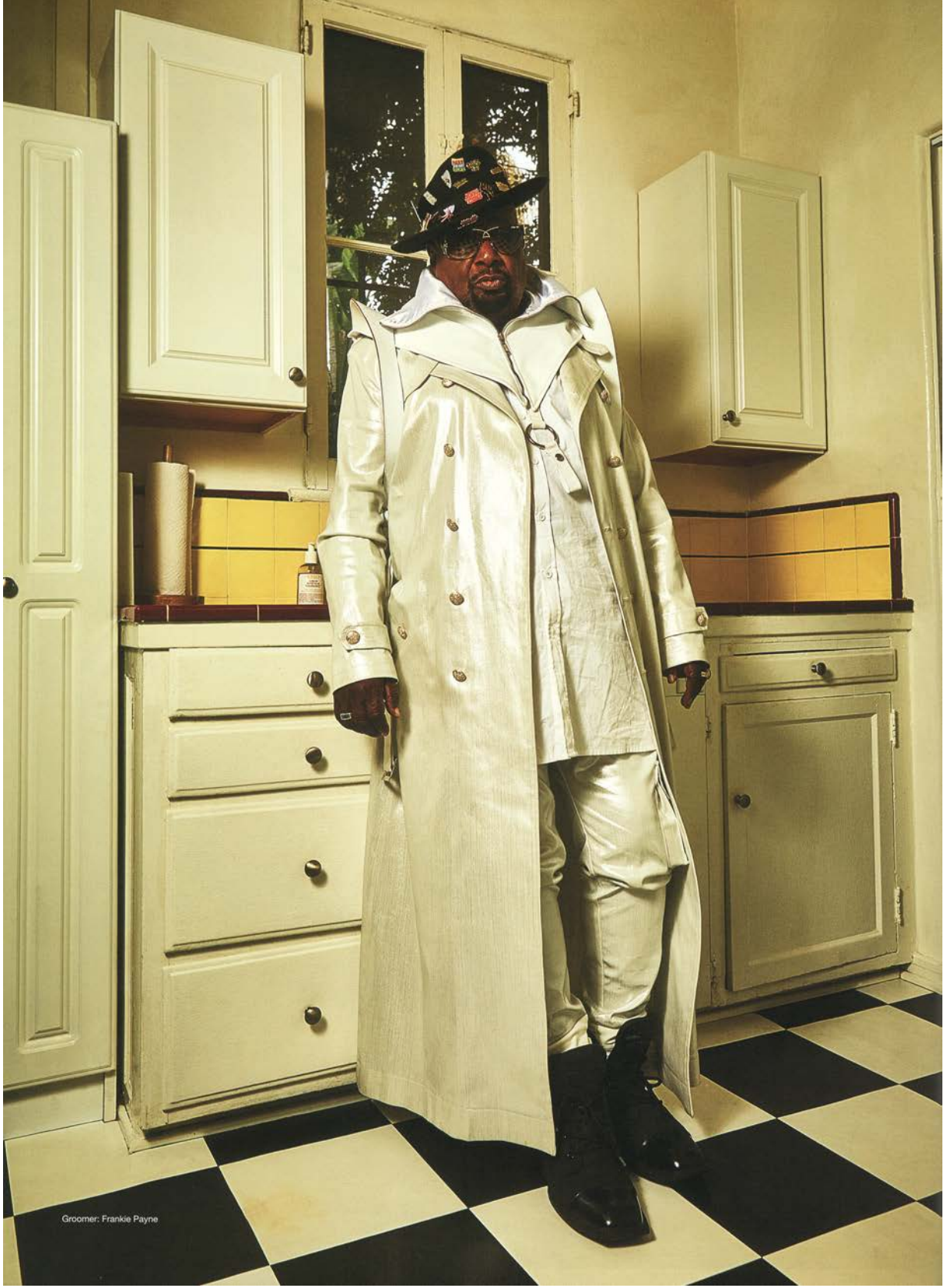
Doctor Funk himself, George Clinton, ahead of his One Nation Under a Groove Tour (which he says will be his last) to chat about summaeverything. Here it is:

A close-up photograph of George Clinton. He is wearing a large, intricate headdress made of white, beaded, and feathered elements, with silver chains hanging from it. He is wearing dark sunglasses and a white zip-up jacket. He is holding a cigar in his mouth, and a plume of smoke is visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing some greenery and a building.

GEORGE CLINTON

CLAIM THE PYRAMIDS

*Interview and Introduction by Lauren Halsey
Photographed by Max Montgomery*



So, funk...

My dad would buy mix CDs from the dude at the bank 'round the corner. He always had P-Funk. I think about funk and what it means—and it means so much. Through you it's destination; it's outer space; it's underwater; it's paint the White House black; it's pyramids; it's outfits; it's freedom.

It's social, you know? Metaphorically, just freedom from all of it. It's anything it needs to be, you know, to help you live. To get over the hump. It's a rhythm. They say dance on the water and not get wet. You seen these people, they could maneuver through the ghetto and not even been seen, don't get in no trouble. Even if they don't live there, certain people just know how to mingle with flow-through and get a good vibe with everybody. Then you got the funk. You can actually "use the force Luke" kinda-type-thing. And people party. When there's music everybody join in that pocket.

When it's social they just hang loose and relate to each other and don't fear each other. You know, and trying to respect. It comes natural. You don't think of defending yourself first. Lot of places you go can make you say, "I gotta watch my back." But when you're not threatened you can also keep a lot of threatening things away from you—when you know how to be non-threatening, you know? And usually a happy face is non-threatening.

I also think of how you guys were aesthetic game-changers in so many ways. Obviously I wasn't there, but I've watched as much as I can on YouTube; I hear stories from people that saw your Funk operas, in '77 at the Coliseum for example. My dad tells this great story of you guys and all the, like, P-Funk Dignitaries coming out and waving the flag. You know, all of this stuff.

The one nation flag! We had our little brothers play in the band, which was Funkadelic. Then Bootsy [Collins, guitarist] pops up. So they got they own band. So it's like ten of us and ten of them. So there was twenty of us now. So it becomes a *thang*. It's no longer just a group singing. It was a show. And we had to put on a show.

You know, we saw Pink Floyd do *The Wall*. And we saw the Beatles do *Sgt. Pepper*. They were like pop operas, rock operas. We said we were going to do a funk opera. 'Cause we knew everybody in *Hair*. They copied us when they did *Hair*. They copied the way we dressed. You know, we was already funky black kids, dudes in a tight band from Motown. So they pretty much did the same kind of look. And after that, I said—when I changed from Parliament to Funkadelic, with the sheets and diapers—when it was time to change again, I had to go back to glitter. I wasn't going back to the suits. I had to get the spaceship and all the leather and those costumes. Like a Broadway play. We get Larry LeGaspi, who did the costumes for Kiss and all those Broadway plays. He made our costumes. He made Patti LaBelle's.

Wow. And so in the universe of all that, with like 90 million of you guys and all this beautiful energy, how do you write a song? How do you come up with characters? Are you guys just freestyling off of it?

Yeah, freestyling. They come up with a track or a groove. Then we just design shit around it. You know, sometimes I'll have a song already that I did a *capella*, like "(More Than) Knee Deep": [sings] *She's a freak. Never miss a love beat. Not just knee deep. She was totally deep when she did the freak with me.*

I used to sing that fishing. I never thought about recording. Because it went there, "Round and round the floor we danced," as a waltz. So I figured you can't put that on no record. And one of the guys in the band say, "You need to record that, man." I said, but it's ¾ time, you know. He said, "It can be arranged, man." He had me do it a *capella* on a tape, and then he come back with the music all finished. And all I had to do was sing it, just like I was singing before.

How did you come up with the characters? There are so many...

When we get a concept like *Motor Booty Affair*—underwater boogie, all the different fish-related jokes—once you start it, everybody's got a joke. You throw a concept up in the air and people just, *ping*, throw shit at it. The stupider it gets, the funnier it gets. How far can you make it outlandish and still relate to what we talking about? So, you know, metaphors and puns. Just hang loose. You have to be sharp. Sometimes we go way out there and make it relate—and dumb at the same time.

So, *Trombipulation... why did you go to Egypt? I think I know, but I just want to hear you say it.*

Well, that was Sir Nose. Sir Nose was trying to trace his family roots back to longer than Dr. Funkenstein. Dr. Funkenstein cloned him, he don't even know.

Yeah, the Cro-Nasal Sapient?

The Cro-Nasal Sapient. You know what I'm saying? I feel like that was a nice little concept. I was dealing with DNA. In '76 nobody knew what that was... cloning or DNA, they didn't know nothing about DNA until O.J. [Simpson]'s trial. That's the first time that became a subject, where people wanted to know what's a DNA. It became like the new fingerprint. Prior to that, *The Clones of Dr. Funkenstein* was the only place you would have heard of that. And I just found the book on a train, and I just read the story, and just adapted it to something Dr. Funkenstein would do. He would create people in his image...

And so, for this new tour, your last tour—how does it feel?

Man it's getting wild. They're trying to tell me I can't quit. You know, it's so much fun. Getting ready to go to Australia with the Chili Peppers, coming back here to go out with Dumpster Funk, Fishbone. Ah, man. Ah, damn. Galactica. The *One Nation Under a Groove* tour!

So the legacy is going to continue?

They got an album out... *Medicated Fraud Dogg*.

Oh, that's crazy. So, what is the day-to-day going to be like for you now that you're going to be off the road after this tour?

What are you excited to do? I know you love fishing.

We're doing a cartoon thing, *Dope Dogs*. It's about these dogs and they all have a different relationship to dope. One is a police, one works with the dope dealer, one is the laboratory dog where they test drugs on him. So you got all these dogs and when they get together they try to change society.

When does that come out?

Well, we just got done talking to the different companies about it, you know? We got the police dog, U.S. Customs Dope Dog, nicknamed Buster. Like most dope sniffing dogs he has a habit, trained to have a habit because they track them like a rabbit up the coastline. K9 dope dog retriever, receiver of the golden nose award. Cashing in on the cash, never do he do a line on the line of duty. He's a dope dog. A U.S. Customs dope dog. Tracking the smells and tacking and tracking down the cartel. Big dope. Never a gram, o-z or kilo too low key. Got to be tons of people below, bells of lumber. Other dogs don't have to smell. Big Banks, banking all the dirty money, but not stinky. As the wind blows he gets a sniff and just follows his nose.

Well, thank you. You are one of my biggest inspirations. I didn't watch cartoons, I listened to Funkadelic. It made me want to make Art and sculptures and black mermaids and waterfalls, ya know?

Damn.

I know you get that all the time, but thank you. Thank you.