

In 1975, while in LA with the Brothers, Brailey got a message that George Clinton wanted to see him. The drummer asked for time to think about it, but he was tracked down by Dr Funkenstein himself – when he was at the hospital where his wife was about to give birth to his youngest daughter. “My daughter was born on 20 August 1975 and I was supposed to witness the birth. I had the robe on and everything when the nurse came and said, ‘Mr Brailey, you have an important call,’ so I went to get the phone and it was George, calling to see if I wanted to do the gig. He told me what he would pay and I was, like, ‘That’s not actually as much as I make with The Chambers Brothers, but I want to get in this group.’ So I said, ‘OK, I’ll do it.’ I went back and my daughter had been born. I’d missed her birth!”

Two weeks later, the drummer was walking on stage in Ohio with P-Funk, hot from scoring with Parliament’s *Chocolate*

## “I’ve never rehearsed with P-Funk for a day in my life”

*City* and Funkadelic’s *Let’s Take It To The Stage*. Since appearing at the turn of the decade, the group had built its name as the stellar funk-rock collision boosted by Clinton’s ever-expanding concepts and band line-ups. “I just went straight on and did the show and that was it... I never rehearsed with them a day in my life.”

Within weeks, Brailey found himself in Detroit’s United Sound studio, recording tracks which would comprise *Mothership Connection*, the album that catapulted the crew into the stratosphere with lifelong stage anthems such as P-Funk (Wants To Get Funked Up), Unfuncky UFO and Give Up The Funk (Tear The Roof Off The Sucker), the latter earning him a co-writing credit and acceptance among the ranks.

From this album onwards, Bigfoot set a new template for lyrical funk drumming, combining his ingrained mastery of The One’s lifeblood rhythm with Bonham’s juggernaut power, deftly punctuating and embellishing the changes in the often complex arrangements, utilising space as frequently as snare rolls.

The album, which explored Clinton’s latest concept of placing black people in space, took funk to the stadiums, the *Mothership* landing every night on stage to disgorge Dr Funkenstein in his space-pimp finery. That had an advantage for the hard-working, overheated king of the kit. “I got cooled off because all the foam and everything landed on top of me; so it was shhhhh – relief! When the thing landed,

you couldn’t see me for five minutes!”

Parliament’s success opened the door to Clinton’s ever-growing stable of acts – the same core personnel signed under different names on different record labels. Bigfoot just remembers being ensconced in either Detroit’s United Sound or LA’s Hollywood Sound studios churning out grooves with Garry Shider, Bootsy, ‘Boogie’ Mosson, Bernie Worrell or whoever else was around at the time; having to endure sleeping four or five to a room in a “fleapit hotel across the street from the studio... but it brought out The Funk!

“We’d just go in the studio and start a groove. I’d just start locking into something. Instead of playing the beat all the way through, I always liked to see if there was a change I could work around, try and play a lick that was different from what I started with; try to compose on the tune instead of just playing straight through. That came from doo-wop.

“We just went in and recorded tracks and they’d end up a Parliament album, a Funkadelic album, a Bootsy album or a Horny Horns album, all from us just tracking and tracking.”

P-related albums which Bigfoot graced with his monolithic stealth-funk include Parliament’s *Clones Of Dr Funkenstein*, *Funkentelley Vs The Placebo Syndrome*, Funkadelic’s *Tales Of Kidd Funkadelic*, *Hardcore Jollies* and *One Nation Under A Groove* (though he’d already left by then), plus off-shoot albums by Eddie Hazel, Fuzzy Haskins, The Horny Horns,

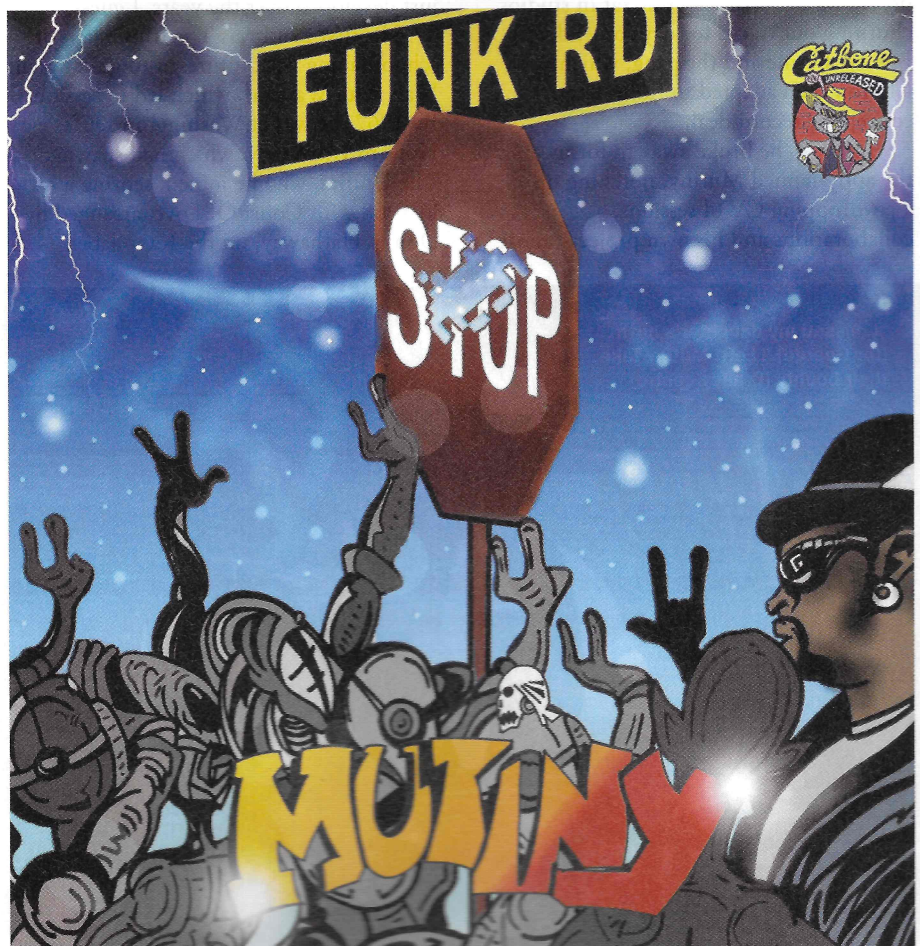
Bernie Worrell and Bootsy. He also recalls tracks that he did in 1975 appearing on later albums, such as 1979’s *Uncle Jam Wants You*).

Bigfoot eschewed the hard drugs which infiltrated the P-Funk ranks, a problem so serious that he recalls members being paid in powders, rather than cash. “I had never got into the drugs scene. I was married at the time, had my little house, plus I had worked with other people. Over the years, I had seen older groups and how they kept falling by the wayside thanks to doing drugs. The stuff that I did, I *couldn’t* have been high!”

Playing packed stadiums while knowing Parliament albums were shifting thousands prompted some of the musicians to protest about non-payment, resulting in the departure of the original Parliaments singers, followed by some members going on strike during 1977’s *Flashlight* tour, which led to the departure of Brailey and the charismatic singer Glen Goins.

Goins is another lost P-Funk titan who, according to Brailey, could have gone on to global fame. “Glen was the bomb. He could have replaced George. He knew how to do that whole personality and stage thing; he could be just as wild. We went to LA and Frank Zappa was trying to take him away. He was told he could make \$500 a week.”

But after being fired, Goins went to Detroit, recording a band called Eclipse for Westbound, at the same time clinching them a deal with Clive Davis at Arista



under the name Quazar. Brailey joined Goins to work on the project after the tour, but found they couldn't use all the tracks because his friend had been apprehended with the tapes at the airport. Tragedy struck when Goins was taken ill, dying within days of being rushed to hospital, doctors later discovering that the cancer he had beaten as a kid had returned.

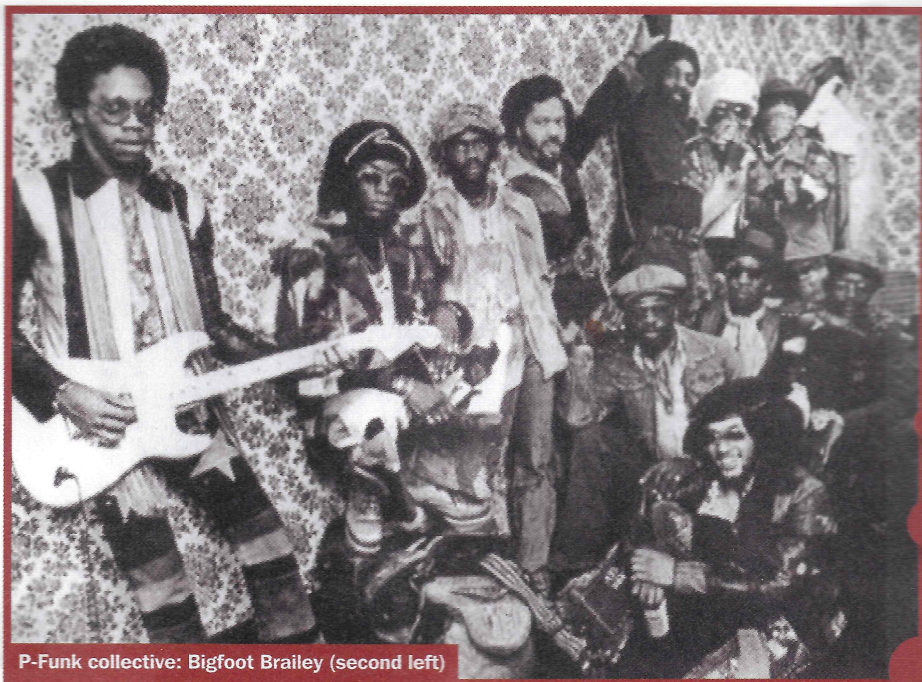
Brailey decided to finish the album himself, resulting in the recently reissued *Quazar*, a masterful slice of P-related funk, mixing complex groove workouts with sinuous ballads, boosted by Bigfoot's drums on several tracks. "I didn't think where it was gonna go. I just finished it up. Then, after it was finished, (my manager) Robert Mittleman was like, 'What do you want to do?'. I said, 'I guess put some group together and do the Mutiny thing.'"

So he carried on with the band he was planning with Goins, also including guitarists Lenny Holmes and Skitch Lovett, bassist Raymond Carter, keyboardist Nat Lee and a horn section led by fellow P-Funk evictee Darryl Dixon. *Mutiny On The Mamaship* unleashed a new brand of rocked-up heavyweight funk, Brailey's lyrics taking pot shots at his old boss, noticeably on the track Lump. Though well-received, Brailey didn't know the rules of payola then ruling R&B (and CBS), thus stifling the album's promotion and sales, though its hybrid style also foxed the record company.

While *Mutiny* released sporadic albums, including *Funk Plus The One*, *A Night With The Boys* and *Aftershock 2005*, Brailey returned to sessions which had already seen him play with countless soul and funk legends, now playing with names including Keith Richards, Snoop Dogg, Lucky Peterson and Dave Stewart. He became a favourite of Bill Laswell, projects including acclaimed fusion outing *Blues In The East*, Jah Wobble's *Heaven And Earth* with Pharoah Sanders, and Axiom Funk's *Funkronomicon*, along with being introduced to James Blood Ulmer and Buckethead (appearing on the latter's *Giant Robots* album).

Intriguingly, Brailey also played on original Funkadelic member Tawl Ross' first album since a traumatic acid trip drove him out of the band in the early 70s, 1995's other-worldly recording under the Detrimental Vasoline guise, *Giant Shirley*. "They'd already done the whole record, then he called me and said, 'Can you play on the record, we got to finish it?' It's kind of strange. When I heard it, I'm, like, 'Where's the time on this joint?' He said, 'That's what we got.' I said I'd see what I can do. He's still kind of crazy. He's not all the way back yet."

Released on Catbone Music, *Funk Road* is Bigfoot's highest-profile album yet, reviving the Mutiny name for a diverse set ranging from incendiary funk-



P-Funk collective: Bigfoot Brailey (second left)

rock (including revisiting Lump), blistering JB funk (What? Yeah!!!, Thee Funky Prezz and Ouch, featuring late P-bassist Cordell 'Boogie' Mosson) and spiritual ballads (Sweet Blessings, one of the last things recorded by P-Funk mainstay Gary Shider before he succumbed to cancer in 2010). The screaming Diggy Don Dolta and Delta Dog fire up scathing blues guitar riffs. "Delta Dog is the *Funk Road* theme song. I wanted to take people down the *Funk Road* at different angles. At a certain age, you start doing something for people who seriously enjoy music and stuff. We call it 'Neo Funk' now. You got 'Neo Soul'. I'm calling it 'Neo Funk'."

The album also includes fully-formed

songs, such as sleazy casting couch vamp Lights Camera Action, and defiant single We're Keeping Our Thang. "You know how the world is now? You just got people crying everywhere and people being killed on the street. The world is crazy now. I wanted to let them know that we're keeping our thang."

"People recognise Mutiny. I just put together a concept of what I wanted to do. I'd been working with a singer friend of mine called Buddah down in Miami. I've always wanted to crack that Latin market with some funk. It's starting to blow up in the US. From that angle, I just wanted to break out in different vibes and keep it funky."

While the P-connection continues with Bernie Worrell appearing on rap outing, Something Better To Do, and societal lament, Prayer For The Living, Rome Dog Roaming is just a thunderous Bigfoot groove and a likely gift to the samplers. "Exactly!" says Brailey. "That's why I did it!"

Though his behemoth beats have fuelled several movements, including G-Funk, it's to Bigfoot's credit he's still out there trying to do something different with the funk form; one of the few to build his own sound beyond the Mothership.

"I was playing like that before I got with P-Funk, like with The Chambers Brothers. George was always saying Bootsy brought The One and Bootsy was always, 'James Brown gave me The One'. James Brown didn't give me no confounded One. I already knew what The One was!"

"I've managed to keep my sound distinct from P-Funk even though that's where I come from. You know it's from P-Funk, but it's got a whole 'nother sound to it."

The time has now come to hit the *Funk Road*. **RC**



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