

CAMOLOGY

The Message Within The Music

HANGIN' WITH OUR FUNKY ROOTS



I love all kinds of music, but the recent passing of singer Bobby Tolbert, who shared the stage with me in our twenties as a member of a local N.Y. funk group, prompted me to reflect on our love of funk, the concept of the funk genre and a song that is currently on my current “Freedom Of Expression” album.

“James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, Sly Stone, George Clinton and Prince — that’s who we’re hanging with!” That chant came to mind when Rick Hodge first sent me a track that would eventually become the song, “Roots.” The tribute song to five gentlemen that I think are responsible for the development of modern funk and most of its hybrid spin-offs. Why these five? And what about Michael Jackson and all the other artists who recorded memorable funky tracks? Yes, they’re all important, but in the annals of funky music, Brown, etc. would be my starting five be-

cause while MJ was one of the greatest performers of all time, these were the greatest “creators” of funk -- and they each took me on a personal journey.

Nineteen sixty-six was the year I was picking through my aunt Elsie’s collection of 45s before coming across a James Brown song entitled, “Let Yourself Go.” It’s syncopated rhythm was hard to dance to, hard to clap to and sounded like something from outer space. However, before the song ended, the complicated groove changed into another more danceable groove, which would become the basis for the live hit song, “There Was A Time.” As I kept playing the song, I knew dance music was about to evolve and the James Brown funk era was about to begin. The 1967 songs that followed: “Cold Sweat,” “Licking Stick” and “Give It Up Or Turn It Loose” were instant classics.

“I Got The Feelin,” which Michael

Jackson would use as the 1968 audition song for himself and his brothers as Motown President Berry Gordy watched in awe, still makes me dance against my will.

Four years later I was on the Long Island railroad, the first leg of a solitary trip to the Apollo Theater. At that point I “had” to see the James Brown show like actor Richard Dreyfus’ character had to meet the aliens in “Close Encounters of the Third Kind.” The James Brown groove was that infectious, mesmerizing and spellbinding.

In 1967, my friend Larry Mays, who years later would return from college with me to start the band named the Long Island Funk Exchange, showed me a Jimi Hendrix album cover. Hendrix looked so wild and unusual it was almost frightening. But he did things with a guitar that no one ever heard before.

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Was it funky music? No, it was blues and rock, but his lead guitar sound was so awesome that it would become an element of funk music that all future funk bands would adopt as part of their musical formula.

San Francisco prodigy Sylvester "Sly" Stewart would use his knowledge of music theory to create the sound of Sly and the Family Stone. Sly refined James Brown's raw funk and added a layer of intellectual lyrics. Songs like "Stand" "Everyday People" and "Thank You" had me heading for Madison Square Garden this time, where I "had" to hear bass player Larry Graham and guitarist Freddy Stone take their "Dance To The Music" groove to another level, the same way they had done when they turned out the concert of the decade — Woodstock.



Hodge playing funk with his teeth.

In 1967, Plainfield, N.J. singer George Clinton aspired to make his singing group, the Parliaments bigger than Motown's Temptations. They even scored a hit with the song, "I Wanna Testify." But those aspirations would soon change. As Clinton watched what Brown, Hendrix and Stone had created, he decided to move from soul to funk and from Earth to planets high above our atmosphere and beyond. Clinton gave funk a philosophy and made it a way of life. Yes, and I "had" to go to Madison Square Garden again, where Mays and I actually did hang out with Clinton and Bootsy Collins while producing a P-Funk documentary for N.Y.'s WBAI radio.

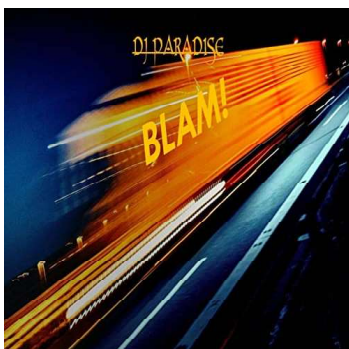
A couple of years later, another child prodigy named Prince Rogers Nelson would take the elements of all the aforementioned artists and create the sound of the 1980's in his own image for a whole generation. And Once again, I "had" to be at New York's Radio City Music Hall for a concert following the debut of his "Controversy" album. We need to ensure that younger folks know about these gentlemen, as well as and artists from other genres. Check out the song, "Roots" on my "Freedom Of Expression" album and the songs of these "G.O.A.T.s" who the song "Roots" honors, wherever online music is available. Can I be more specific? No! You're just gonna have to get on that "train" to the Apollo like I did. If you want it bad enough — you'll definitely find it all!



Robert "Bobby" Tolbert

Artist Profile: The Many Talents Of Bobby Tolbert

I can't remember the first time I met the late Robert "Bobby" Tolbert but I do have many memories about his gifted singing voice, songwriting ability, sense of humor and positive attitude. We shared duties as frontmen for the Long Island Funk Exchange. We both had other interests but L.I.F.E. allowed us to express our wild side, dressing in outrageous outfits and turning our performances into one big party. When he sang with his other group, an acapella quintet named "Yesterday's Today", he wore a tux and was more reserved. However, his high falsetto rendition of "Gloria" is a performance his fans will never forget. His work with Y.T., as well as the Motown Review and the Vintage Soul Band took him to stages at Radio City Music Hall, The Beacon Theater and Resorts Casino, to name a few. When he hit the stage with us, he'd shout, "I am not of your world!" And as his many talents proved, he really wasn't.



***The Future of
"Chill" House Music Has Arrived
-- and His Name Is...***

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*Both the single, "Blam!" and the album, "Workin,"
are available at: iTunes - Amazon Music - YouTube Music -
Pandora - Deezer - iHeartRadio - Napster - Tencent -
Tik Tok and many other online outlets.*

Instrumental, Contagious and Totally "Chill!"

