



Bootsy Collins, a funk icon, will perform at the Varsity Theatre on Oct. 24. DIG gave him a call to ask for some fashion tips. Photo courtesy of artist

## FUNKY FASHION ADVICE

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**BY LESLIE D. ROSE**

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Bootsy Collins has made a career out of fun music and exciting costumes. He was a pivotal member of the funk culture in the 1970s with the band Parliament-Funkadelic, a collective known for characters, costumes and outer space themes, which gave way for Collins' childhood sketch-inspired star costume and bass guitar design.

Throughout the years, he has continued to be a representative of the funk, taking just three years away from the stage during his entire career. This week, he returns to the road, embarking on the yearlong #iGiveaFunk Tour. And he's completely sober.

Bootsy Collins & The Funk Unity Band will stop in Baton Rouge Oct. 24 at the Varsity Theatre.

The #iGiveaFunk tour is wrapped around the Bootsy Collins Foundation, which began three years ago with the mission of a music instrument for every child. During the tour, patrons are encouraged to bring used instruments to be donated to a selected school in each tour city. A Baton Rouge beneficiary has yet to be determined. As a part of the campaign, a live album and concert DVD are being recorded along the tour, as well as a documentary.

**DIG: How do the costumes represent you, your music, and the funk?**

**BC:** It expresses how music is a self-expression, and so are costumes and the way you present yourself. Everything represents the funk and who you are. Everything is different and indifferent and does not separate itself – that’s left up to the person that’s observing – but it represents everything.

**DIG: Do you find the need to wear costumes to enhance your show, or has it just become ritualistic and audience-expected?**

**BC:** I do it because it’s fun. For me, it’s like a part of the body – the body of music. It’s like I can’t do one without the other - they are married. In my era, the entertainers entertained and the way they looked was a part of that. It was reaching out and to see how wild and crazy you can go, and there’s no limit to that. That, to me, just kind of gives a person an opportunity to go wherever his mind wants to take him.

**DIG: Tell me about the stars adorned on your outfits and in the design of the “space bass”.**

**BC:** That’s what I used to do in school, besides the schoolwork. I would draw stickmen with star glasses on and a star guitar. But I never thought of it being a part of me playing in a band, it was just something that was just in my head. And when George Clinton gave me the opportunity to be out front, I decided that this was time to be that star man and to find somebody to make them for me. I thought it would be different and that’s the way I always wanted to be.

**DIG: Every Halloween, someone dresses as Bootsy Collins. Of all the celebrities who have paid homage to your style, who wore it best?**

**BC:** [laughing] J. Anthony Brown wore a Bootsy outfit and I saw it in Jet Magazine. People were telling me I was in Jet and I was like wow! And then I found out it was him, and he was killing it. He was dead on it.

**DIG: What do you dress up as for Halloween?**

**BC:** That’s something I never think about because people probably think I’m in Halloween every day. I just go as I am and people expect it to be wild and crazy, and usually that’s what it is. One Halloween I didn’t want to be myself, so I dressed up as Batman and nobody really knew it was me. It was funny. I got a kick outta it.

**DIG: James Brown and Sly Stone are considered original architects of funk music, but focused on social commentary. How did you come about to add humor to the style?**

**BC:** My brother and I were always pretty silly anyway; I guess we could’ve been comedians if the music thing didn’t work. Coming up, not having things like other people and having to dress out of the Goodwill, and having to bring the welfare bags home in front of all of the other kids and getting laughed at - I mean, how can you not crack jokes about that? So I found that humor helped me to escape reality. While everyone else was laughing at me because I had different colored clothes on or whatever, it was because my mother couldn’t afford stuff. So that stuff was real for me. But everybody around me was on welfare, so I don’t why they were laughing. But once I learned how to laugh at it, that was my antidote, my way of releasing all of the pent up anger and fear and insecurity. Humor allowed me to get over the hump. And when George [Clinton] and I hooked up, he was kind of a closet joker and I brought it out all the way out of him. It became a thing and people started relating to it. And it was like, “let’s have a little fun while we’re penniless”.

**DIG: What was the most influential statement made by the funk movement?**

**BC:** *One Nation Under a Groove*, because that’s what the funk is and that’s what we are as a family: we are one nation under a groove. And to look beyond that, that’s what we should be trying to achieve, as opposed to separating people because they don’t have this or have that. Then you fake ‘em out, and that’s not the way of the funk.

**DIG: Why make that statement through costuming, characters and outer space themes?**

**BC:** It expressed that it doesn't matter where you come from, what you look like, what you dress like. Come as you are, and you will be accepted by the funk. You just come and get baptized by the funk. People felt good about that and about themselves, and they were able to smile for hours.

**DIG:** So, you're now sober?

**BC:** I'm now what?

**DIG:** Sober.

**BC:** I'm now what?

**DIG:** Sober?

**BC:** [Laughing] No, no, seriously, I am. Serious moment. You see how I can joke with you? You know what I'm saying?

**DIG:** How long were you using and how did you overcome the addiction?

**BC:** I was getting loaded even before I started playing. I hate to count the years, but yeah, I made it through that. And I had to go through a lot of things to make up my mind that I didn't need it to be who I am, and represent a people I love. I wouldn't change none of that. I'm glad God had his hands on me to make it through that, because that's a heck of a thing for anybody to go through - not just a person on the street, but people who are supposed to be icons. That's a heck of a thing to go through and come out on the other side. I don't know how I did it, other than my mother praying for me while I was out acting a fool. Somehow God had his hands on me and I made it through that and I'm not looking forward to living through that one again. So it's about "next". I'm into this next generation thing.

**DIG:** You're about to embark on a yearlong tour do you have anxiety about touring sober?

**BC:** Oh no, not at all; I'm a people-person, so I'm not afraid of that at all. In fact, I think I'm probably better at relating to people than everything, because of what my mother instilled in me; my upbringing and where I grew up. I've already been to the lowest spot you can get and I've been to the highest spot. So all of the in-between stuff - like going back out sober - I can do that. That's not the challenging part. It's just me getting back out here and getting people exposed to the funk. Because the funk is making something out of nothing, and I'm a representative of the funk, I was completely nothing and I had to do something with that. That is what we as black people had to do: make something out of nothing all the time. I was just a representative who was able to get up on a pedestal and say I made something out of nothing and you can do it too, so come on - let's do this. And so, when I got a second chance to do this, I can't throw that away.

**Bootsy Collins & The Funk Unity Band**

W/ DJ Marquis

Varsity Theatre

Oct. 24

8:00 p.m.

\$25

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