

PROLOGUE



I'M ONSTAGE, CROUCHED DOWN BEHIND A WALL OF HUGE SPEAKER CABINETS

at Woodstock '99 and wondering, what's with Bootsy? He's been hiding behind that stage prop for twenty minutes, still fiddling with his rig. C'mon Bootsy. Get the fuck out there. The orange warning light just went on which means there's only ten minutes left of Parliament-Funkadelic's set. There are 180,000 people out there, and George Clinton has worked them into a frenzy. Bootsy, you're going to miss the moment.

And just when I'm about to completely lose it and scream, "Bootsy! What the fuck?" He looks my way, winks at me, then turns and nods to his tech guy. Seconds later, Bootsy kicks the stage prop out of the way, and there he is. The huge raucous crowd gives out a deafening roar. With Parliament-Funkadelic laying down the funkier of grooves, as only "P-Funk" can, Bootsy Collins stands motionless for a moment, looks around, looks at the audience, gives them that huge toothy smile and then, with lighting and sound systems melding together with the intensity of a supernova, he funkwalks his way to the front of the enormous stage. The spotlights reflect off his gem-encrusted Spacebass and famous star-shaped sunglasses, sending hundreds of beams of light in every direction.

Pretending to be completely oblivious to the enormity of the moment, Bootsy casually leans his six-and-a-half-foot tall frame into the mic, “Uhhhh.... What’s happening, y’all?” The crowd goes absolutely berserk. My God. What an entrance. What was I worried about?

I’m not even sure that every single member of Parliament-Funkadelic is onstage to relish this incredible moment. I think a couple of them overslept at the hotel. Or were recuperating from the festivities the night before. But when your band has six guitarists, three bass players, and two drummers, a missing guy or two is of little to no musical consequence. It’s not like Keith didn’t show up, so Mick had to cancel the gig.

Standing on the side of the stage, I feel like I’m witnessing a slice of time and space itself where the best music on earth is being played. I know that something this special doesn’t happen by accident. It’s certainly no accident that one of my closest friends is one of the most powerful booking agents alive.

Six months earlier, Jonny Podell had picked up the phone and called John Scher, the promoter of Woodstock ‘99. He “asked” for an obscene amount of money for his new client, Parliament-Funkadelic, and “asked” if they could be added to the list of headliners, which included Sheryl Crow, Rage Against the Machine, Limp Bizkit, and Red Hot Chili Peppers. Not that George Clinton and company didn’t deserve to be included with such an august lineup of superstar acts. They certainly did. But it also takes a superstar agent with a roster that includes Alice Cooper, George Harrison, and Crosby, Stills & Nash to pull it off.

When you get a call from the guy responsible for helping you evolve from promoting 1,000-seat shows in Passaic, New Jersey, to becoming the exclusive promoter for both the 20,000-seat Meadowlands Arena and the adjacent 80,000-seat Giants Stadium... well, favors are asked, and favors are granted.

George Clinton rules his kingdom through the sheer force of his will. Jonny instead plays a brilliant game of chess, albeit with people, instead of with pawns, bishops, and kings. And if you're Jonny Podell, the entire world is your chess board. Bootsy Collins may not have received the same outrageous guarantee that Podell had "asked" for—and got—for P-Funk; but when you consider Bootsy only played for nine minutes, his per minute fee could rival that of the CEO of a Fortune 500 corporation.

Since George and Bootsy were both clients of Available Entertainment, my very own management company, it wasn't a bad payday for me either. Even the backstage perks were impressive. Total access to the artists' backstage hospitality area also included the festival sponsors' courtesy tent, the equivalent of a swag bag on steroids. Companies like Nike, Levi's, Adidas, Converse, and a few dozen other name brands, had their own booths inside that tent, for the sole purpose of giving away their goods to the artists and their respective management companies. I could have easily opened my own clothing store stocked with all the booty that was literally thrown at me.

Which begs the question, how did I get here? How did all this happen? Hard work? Dedication? Sure. But the world is full of hardworking, dedicated people who never come anywhere near achieving such lofty heights. Is it luck? Yes. Great mentors like Shep Gordon? Jonny Podell? Of course. It all contributes. But if my mother hadn't insisted that I continue with my piano lessons, it's doubtful that any of this would have ever happened. Without those lessons, I very well might have ended up being the assistant manager of household appliances at Walmart.