

Review

Bootsy Collins and Contemporary Youth Orchestra in “Rock the Orchestra” at CSU (May 17)

by Mike Telin



Since 2001, the Contemporary Youth Orchestra under the direction of its always-creative founder and music director Liza Grossman, have presented an end-of-season *Rock the Orchestra* concert. Past concerts have given CYO members the chance to work with some of the greats from the world of Rock including the likes of Graham Nash, Jon Anderson, Pat Benatar, Donnie Iris and Jefferson Starship. On Friday, May 17 in Cleveland State University’s Waetjen Auditorium, legendary funk bassist Bootsy Collins joined forces with CYO in an electrifying concert titled *Psychotic Bump School*.

But this concert amounted to far more than a celebrated artist playing his or her beloved tunes backed up by an orchestra; this performance was all about the collaborative nature of music. Collins, the CYO, the 57-member Campus International School Bootsy Choir under the direction of Janice Fields Pohl, and his own band — Keith Cheatham, guitar, “Monster” Mike Cobb, bass, Ken “BAM” Smith, drums, Zac Adams, Candice Cheatham and Lauren Mallory, vocals — plus some cool dance steps by Patti Collins, all added up to one gigantic music-making and dancing machine.

Born in Cincinnati, William Earl (Bootsy) Collins first gained international attention in his late teens when he began touring with James Brown. He later teamed with George Clinton and Parliament- Funkadelic, with whom he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997. But in an interview with this publication Collins reflected on the role that music education played in his formative years. “I started playing the clarinet in school, and for me, music drew upon my heart to make me even [go to] school. So [music] is what made all the hard work pay off. Being in music class was like a reward.” Throughout the evening Collins seemed to relish every moment of being onstage with the talented CYO, telling the audience repeatedly that the evening was “all about the kids.” And impressively, he didn’t give himself an extended solo until after intermission.

Drawing from Bootsy’s own discography, aside from the Parliament classic *Flashlight*, the concert featured 13 songs in arrangements based on the recorded versions. Given the fact that the original recordings of these tunes were highly improvised, orchestrators and

arrangers Paul Leary, Stefan Podell, Eden Rayz and Derek Snyder deserve a round of applause for their excellent job of transferring them from disc to page. Each song sounded collaborative and retained that important improvised feel. And no tune overstayed its welcome.

In addition to a solid bass line, this music requires top-notch brass playing, and from the opening *AHH...The Name is Bootsy Baby*, (1977) to the concert's conclusion, the CYO trombone section (Rachel Waterbury, Anna Seballos, Elizabeth Henry, Oliver Richman, Johnathan Spilker, Gabe Rothman and Paul Stroud) proved they had not only mastered the style but the dance steps as well. The section was simply amazing and the Bootsy Chorus rocked during *Bootzilla* (1978).

Trumpeters Luis Clebsch, Shoshanna Grossman, Jordan Isenberg, Benjamin Poe, David Wagner, Jimmy Zhu and Ann Zicari along with horn players Max Cowan, Alex Friedman, Ben Hottensmith, Andrew Horvath, Andrew Quandt and Evan Seballos sounded like seasoned backup players all evening, adding just the right punch and accented spark to their licks. Percussionists Graham Atherton, Adam Friedman, Michael Miller and Eric Poe were truly in the groove during *Body Slam* (1982). Zac Adam's vocals during *Don't Take My Funk Away* (2011) was a concert highlight and Anna Seballos, leaving her trombone on stage, proved herself an admirably fine backup singer.

It was fun to see the entire orchestra getting into the swing of things — the bassoon section donning Bootsy hats, for example. And traps player Mike Miller was clearly enjoying the opportunity to sit along side of drummer Ken “BAM” Smith. This was a concert fueled by inspiration. Bootsy and his wife Patti, through the work of the [Bootsy Collins Foundation](#), are true ambassadors of music education, and hopefully CYO will bring them back soon.

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