

## Editor's Introduction

**Tony Bolden**

Funk music contributed to three global forms of music: hip-hop, Afrobeat, and jazz. Funk is also closely related to go-go music, which is the brainchild of the late Chuck Brown. And the popular singer Janelle Monae reconstructs notions of funk and femininity in her music. Even the SF Jazz Collective, an all-star jazz ensemble, has recorded an album of Stevie Wonder's music. Yet relatively few scholars have examined funk music. The cumulative work that has been written about funk pales in comparison to scholarship on blues, jazz, and hip-hop, notwithstanding such recent studies as Francesca Royster's book *Sounding Like a No-No: Queer Sounds and Eccentric Acts in the Post-Soul Era* (2012) and Natalie Hopkinson's *Go-Go Live!: The Life and Death of a Chocolate City* (2012).

"The Funk Issue" therefore addresses a lacuna in critical writing on black music. The scholars herein examine the artistry and ethos of funk music as well as its impact on related black musical forms and black expressive culture generally. Yet no single cultural theory, methodology or ideology dominates this collection. Like funk music itself, "The Funk Issue" is marked by contrasting points of view and varied methodologies. This collection is decidedly multi-disciplinary. The essays on the singer Betty Davis serve as perfect examples. In her article on Davis, Cheryl L. Keyes employs her training as an ethnomusicologist in her analysis, while art historian Nikki A. Greene demonstrates how Davis's aesthetic informs the visual art of Renée Stout. Likewise, the historian Scot Brown includes

## 8 Tony Bolden

a seminal essay on the singer and multi-instrumentalist Roger Troutman. Three musicologists, Alex Stewart, Tammy Kernodle, and Steve Pond, have contributed essays on Fela Kuti, Meshell Ndegeocello, and the nationally syndicated television show *Soul Train*, respectively. American Studies scholar Amy Wright examines the album covers of Parliament-Funkadelic. And four literary scholars, including the aforementioned Royster, Aldon Lynn Nielsen, Howard Ramsby, and Daylanne English have authored and/or co-authored essays. Royster examines funk and feminism in the women's group Labelle. Nielsen's creative essay demonstrates how the singer and guitarist Curtis Mayfield's music influenced jazz, and Ramsby and English demonstrate how funk contributed to the burgeoning interest in Afrofuturism in popular culture and scholarship.

However, "The Funk Issue" is also multi-dimensional. Just as funk musicians instantiated an epistemology wherein ideas are expressed creatively, the poets and visual artists in this issue illustrate how the funk principle is reflected in other forms of creative expression. Among the emerging poets represented in this issue are DaMaris Hill, whose poem "Grace" is devoted to the all-female go-go band Be'la Dona, and avery r. young, who situates his writings within photography and graphic design. Veteran poets include Tracie Morris and her tongue-twisting rhymes and syncopation; Duriel Harris, who also employs graphic design; Glenn North, who evokes the spirit of Funkadelic; and Thomas Sayers Ellis, who interfaces his poetry and photographs to create a narrative of go-go culture. Also notable are visual artists Krista Franklin and Harold Smith, who have remixed images of the Ohio Players and Parliament-Funkadelic, respectively, while examining the funk principle historically.

On behalf of *AMSJ* co-editors Sherrie Tucker and Randal Jelks, I want to thank our contributors for sharing their works. I also want to express our sincere gratitude to the readers who devoted their time and energy to offer their invaluable corrections and cogent suggestions for the revisions the writers made. We hope that you will enjoy this unique blend of scholarship and art!

Tony Bolden,  
Guest Editor