

# THE CLOWN PRINCE

Prince Paul wants you to get his jokes.

WORDS: JESSE SERWER

TITLE ILLUSTRATION: EVAQ

PHOTOS: PETER AGOSTON

It's easy to rattle off Prince Paul's resume—boy wonder DJ for Stetsasonic, producer of the first three De La Soul albums, inventor of the hip-hop skit, sound bwoy for Chris Rock, one half of the category-killing Handsome Boy Modeling School. Where the Long Island native has truly come into his own is in the series of unique albums he's done under his own name: 1997's *Psychoanalysis*, 1999's *Prince Among Thieves*, 2003's *Politics of the Business*, and this year's *itsTRUmental*—all misunderstood treatises that show a restless but rich imagination. Despite a fruitful year that has seen the emergence of The Dix—an allegedly legendary but forgotten unit with doo-wop roots and an arsenal of dick jokes (actually a hilarious gag consisting of Prince Paul crew members like Mr. Len and Paul Barman)—Paul says he's giving up making albums of his own. In a series of recent conversations, Paul told *XLR8R* he might have better things in store.

**Hey Paul. What are you doing right now?**

Mostly kid stuff. I've been away so much this year so I have all these domestic things I have to do. I'm starting this Bernie Worrell project, making music with my man Newkirk. Me and Hank Shocklee are supposed to be doing a record together so we've been sitting around, just analyzing music. We are trying to create something totally different so it has to have a blueprint.

**How did this project with [Parliament/Funkadelic keyboardist] Bernie Worrell come about? I know he's a hero of yours...**

I met him in the early '90s and we talked for a bit. Last year I was asked to be in a documentary about

Bernie and I was re-introduced to him. His wife suggested we do a record together, and he was up for it. My man Newkirk is working on it with me, and I have a feeling if everything goes as we envision it, it should be a good album. There is a lot of trust, which makes it easy in one sense but difficult in another. There's a lot of pressure to create something good but it's good because I'll have to rise to the occasion.

**Last time I talked to you, you told me *itsTRUmental* was going to be the last Prince Paul record. Is that still the case?**

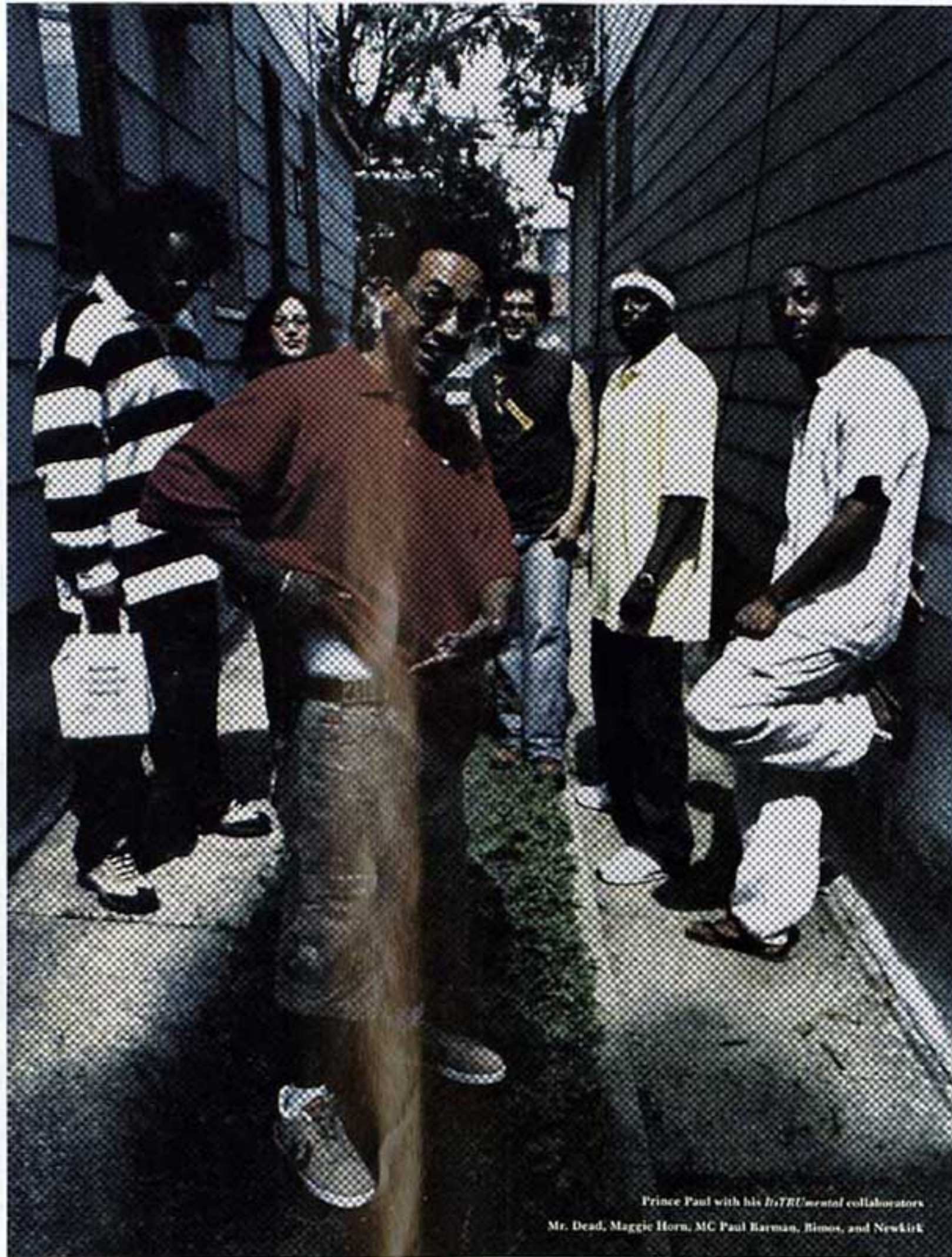
The next Prince Paul record I do will be the last. If I felt I was more relevant or necessary I would probably make more records. I might make a children's record, or another Dix record. The next year is going to be the beginning of a few eras for me, and the end of a few eras, and that is definitely one of them. I am going to start putting myself in the background more.

**So what was the idea behind *itsTRUmental*? You got a lot of random things going on. I love that dance-hall song about donuts.**

Peter Agoston, who runs Female Fun, asked me to do an instrumental album. It has beats from a couple different periods of my work. Some of it I did on the 808, one song is from a four-track, some of it is ADAT. It's kind of like an advanced instrumental album—there are some vocals where it fits. "The Boston Top," that's based on a true story of Newkirk buying a Boston cream donut where the icing came off like a magic shell in one piece. It was rather odd, so we made a song about it.



**"I act upon the craziness of what I think."**



Prince Paul with his *itsTRUmental* collaborators  
Mr. Dead, Maggie Horn, MC Paul Barman, Rimos, and Newkirk

**“Hip-hop is not about wearing a bulletproof vest.”**

**What about something like the Dix record? How did you wind up connecting doo-wop, dick jokes and picking up women?**

I don't know where these ideas come from. I guess just from being bored and silly. I haven't really grown up. People rarely act on the ideas that pop into their heads because they think it is stupid or farfetched or they don't want to put in the effort. I act upon the craziness of what I think. Each idea I come up with I wonder how many record labels I will get dropped from with it, and then I just go for it (laughs). If nobody else cares I made myself happy. Nothing I do is ever really intentional—even with (3rd Bass) "Gas Face," which was one of the only hits I have had, the drum programming was a mistake I kept. I'm the guy who, if I don't have to be anywhere at a specific time, I will just sit there and daydream. I drive my old lady crazy 'cause I'll daydream when she talks to me. I know how to amuse myself. I don't know if that's good or bad because it prevents me from making normal, accessible music that people like.

Talk about the cast of characters that turns up on your records. People who have been following your career since *Three Feet* might know Newkirk, and Mr. Dead was in *Metabolics*.

My crew of friends are like a comedy troupe but we use music. There are no black comedy troupes that are bizarre like that. That's basically who The Dix are. Mr. Dead—who is Peter O'Tool, the frontman for the Dix—is an untapped talent. You will see him in a lot of things that I do in the next few years. He is one of those guys that gets it. It is important to have people that work with you who, if you bring up an idea, they can expound upon it as opposed to saying it's stupid. With the right opportunity, he has the potential of being a superstar because he goes places where black people don't go. He goes to the limit on everything the way someone like Jim Carrey does.

**Yeah, hip-hop has gotten so far away from the vibe you tap into that it seems like comedy might be the best venue for someone like you. But if you're offbeat in hip-hop your audience is limited to college-age white kids.**

Musically there is only so far that I can go. More and more the creative and experimental doors of exposure are closing. You got the internet, but who hears that? There is so much crap to filter through and no promotion behind it. At least when I was on Tommy Boy and I made *Psychoanalysis*, Bambaataa played some of it on his *Zulu Nation* show. *Prince Among Thieves* got played on the major stations at night. Now you will never get played on the radio.

**What would you do if you weren't making music?**

I was known as a writer for a hot second. Nickelodeon approached me a while back after I was involved with the *Chris Rock Show* but then Viacom laid off the whole department. I am going to start writing again. Come up with something real stupid and see if anybody likes it.

**Are you working on anything right now?**

I developed a show to pitch to BET. Their writing is bad and the shows are horrible. I thought they needed something fresh so I put together a talk show like a black Conan O'Brien. After working with Chris Rock and Chappelle, I think I have an edge, though I'm not as funny as those guys. I don't think BET sees the brilliance. They want to piggyback on what everyone is doing but poorly. Have you seen *College Hill*? Oh my god. And I can't get a show? You got to be kidding! That's my life story, I don't stress it too much. People always point out the stuff I have done but I still don't feel like I have gotten that big break. Yeah I had a few records buzz up but I've never gotten to the point where I'm comfortable. I doubt I'll get to that point but, really, I'm not even close. Keeping it real doesn't concern me—what concerns me is that people freak out when they hear what I'm doing. I get criticized for that but I know hip-hop is not about wearing a bulletproof vest.

Prince Paul's *itsTRUmental* is out now on Female Fun Records.

The Dix's *The Art of Picking Up Women/The Rise and Fall of the Dix EP/DVD* is out now on Smacks Records.

[www.culturama.org/femalefun](http://www.culturama.org/femalefun), [www.dummysmacks.com](http://www.dummysmacks.com)