

# The Ocean Band

couch dictators

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art by [unreadable]



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## couch dictators

Yaniv 'Neve' Chen - vocals, guitar • Angshu Chatterjee - guitars & more guitars  
Uwe Vogel - keyboards • Dave D'aranjo - kitchen sink • Sammy Arvis - drums, percussion, guitar, vocals

*with special guests*

D.A. (Dave Aaron), Akshay Anantapadmanabhan, Chua Siong Loo, Nicole Duffell, Guy Eliyahou, Alemay Fernandez, Jeanne French, Willy Gathright, Jr., Sharanpal Singh Gill, Giovanna (Juan Carlos Moreno), Curtis King, Friso Kluit, George Leong Shin Khuen, Leonardo Mendoza, Denise Mininfield, Markus Mueller, Siddesh Mukundan, Joe Murray, Sean Nerney, Gayle Nerva, Trevor Nerva, Jonathan Peeris, Preachermann (Ed Holley), Isaac Chris Robinson, Nivedita ShivRaj, Christy Smith, Darren Theseira, Veit Uhlmann, Christine Vogel, Lucas Vogel, and Won Hee Chang.

Produced & Mixed by Dave D'aranjo on the Interbang Records™ Label

Mastered by Fred Kevorkian, Kevorkian Mastering, NYC

Cover Art by Chris Duffy (duffydotcom.com)

Elements Recorded By:

Nikk Eu, Insound Studio, Singapore

Dave D'aranjo, Sonicuts Media Industries, Singapore & NYC

Gavin Cheong & Lawrence Tay, FOCAL Pro Audio Solutions, Singapore

Sean Nerney, Jade Palace Records, Singapore & NYC

Georgios Pesios, Sonic Arts Center @ the City College of New York

Kamal Mahtani & Peter Hendricks, Sound Advice Rec. Studio, Singapore

and at home by Uwe, Angshu, Sammy & Neve!

Additional Photography by Stan Wong (magiclasso.com)

This album was fueled by Tiger Beer™

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If you've roamed Singapore long enough, and if glitz isn't your trip, you might've wandered into the Mitre Hotel at some point - and most likely after closing time everywhere else. I've never been there myself, to be honest, but some very credible people tell me it's the next best thing to one of those seriously dodgy opium dens that that part of the world used to do so well before it decided to get a grip, wash its hair, and show 'em all how good country ought to behave.

It's not hard, then, to picture the squalid "lounges", probably with a ceiling fan, yet equally probably one that does nothing to actually bother the thick air. It doesn't cost much to get yourself wasted at the bar on the ground floor, which is logical seeing that the place looks as it does. And this means you get all manner of human flotsam converging upon it, along with assorted students, Asia-heads, thrill-seekers etc., a sort of obvious first port of call for the bewildered, stupid, destitute and manic of the world who see the place and decide they must join in.

After all this, it would be almost disappointing if the beer weren't warm, so it is.

A bloke called Tony Kern did a very good film on this establishment last year called "The Mitre Spell", which shows it up as a place of colour and character, a dignified Colonial flip-off to urban steel-and-glass. The Mitre in my head, however, the one that I've been on about so far, is a place entirely of fiction, a sort of Basement Tape of midgets, insomniacs and misfits, gone to seed for long enough to be mistaken for having charm.

And people still live in there, even if they won't go on living there for long. We've a cheeky bastard for a bassplayer, who strung together bits and bobs 'off sixties' Singaporean TV - that's Midnight at the Mitre, which opens the record - and if you are susceptible to these things, you might imagine one such resident, a bit far gone, too late at night, flipping channels and staring at not much, till we all realise it's about bloody time now and to hell with this bloke and all his troubles, and let's just kick the door down with some proper rock 'n' roll.

The rest of the record follows quite naturally.

In the making of this album, great amounts of beer were sunk (Tiger, cold, unlike at the Mitre), a guitar was smashed to bits (on Wheels, if you must know), a certain very kind Mrs. Vogel had her hospitality routinely abused (bairy men arguing in the living room at all hours etc.), fellow musicians were met (or not, like in Come On where some of us have never set eyes on the both players), sleep was lost, and years spent, mostly bickering about details.

At the end of this, this set now contains such gems as Tie Your Hands, which sounds to me like someone chucking a bomb into a marketplace and doing it a world of good, the haunting Equal - a last minute (i.e., two years ago) addition that sounds shaggy in comparison with the rest of the record, but which might still be the most lovable moment on it, a cultural high-water mark in Spiriting Lady, several songs about not being able to go to bed on time, social commentary and lifestyle endorsement in the gorgeous, choral Sixteen Cans - a modern prayer if there ever was one - and, on at least one song, the line, "For whom does the yellow hyacinth bloom?", which is a question I ask myself each day.

Listening to it now, I'm surprised how muscular it sounds. Unlike a lot of the studio-bound indie bands of our time, The Ocean Band grew up playing on stage, and some of that is evident in the fact that we still tend to do big endings and lots of breaks, stuff to get the punters wriggling. The studio, in theory, is supposed to free us from all that, but habits like that don't die easily. What we have here is, in spite of all the meticulous production work, basically a live set, meant to start here and end there, and flow in a certain way. We've always done long shows, and, following from that, this is a long record.

There are bits which still sound ropey to me and always will, but there are many more which stick better than I ever thought they would, in spite of my fundamental cynicism about something which I know for a fact was put together by a bunch of irreverent, obstinate pub-crawling home-wreckers.

Everyone in the Ocean Band does hard-headedness with the best of them, so I'm just very happy now that this album is actually being released and that no real blood was shed in the process. At the time, it was a giant step up for us in terms of playing and recording, and, naturally enough, we've each had our own ideas about practically everything in it. Finally, it's nucleated into something that's a complete record from start to finish, and now I think it is time to foist it upon the unsuspecting masses and wash our collective hands of it once and for all.

We're like the guy in the Mitre in his late-night TV induced stupor sometimes, flipping through channels, picking up bits and pieces and putting together what we can find, kicking up huge fusses when we don't like what we've done, loving the results anyway, fighting all the time and getting drunk and making up, each with an opinion and no two the same, wanting to put out a hell of a record more than anything else in the whole world and willing to stand our ground about it at all times, proper little couch dictators, every last one of us.

I hope it's been worth the wait.

- Anshu Chatterjee, October 2009

Dedicated to the memory of Jacky Weistroffer (1910-2008)



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1. Midnight at the Mitre Hotel
  2. Come On
  3. Eskimo Sun
  4. Tie Your Hands
  5. Much Too Alarmed
  6. Change
  7. Waiting
  8. Travelling Artist or Salesman
  9. Hyacinth
  10. Sixteen Cans
  11. Equal
  12. The Sembawang Incident
  13. Wheels
  14. Made Up My Mind
  15. Outside the High Times Saloon
  16. Spinning Lady
  17. Sooner
  18. Now That You Came
  19. Image of You
  20. The Sermon
  21. High Shutter Speed
  22. Insomnia

'Couch Dictators' © & © 2009 The Ocean Band  
Produced & Mixed by Dave Daranjo  
on the Interrobang Records™ Label

NTRO - 20091031

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