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IT'S YOUR CITY. IT'S YOUR LIFE.

Ocean Ghosts

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LOCALSONLY



ANTI-Political party

BY JOHN ROSS
PHOTO BY WILL SHILLING

"If it ain't fun, it ain't gettin' done."

I have asked J. Rhodes, one half of local hip-hop duo Ocean Ghosts, for Life Guidance, which he offers on his website alongside an e-mail link, and he has suggested only this mantra channeling Confucius and Larry the Cable Guy.

It is, he tells me on the quiet patio of German Village coffee shop, in his slightly lilted South-west Ohio drawl, Rule No. 1.

"Me and Scott have seen a lot of shows, and to see people on stage—whether they're good or bad—if they're not having a good time, how's anybody gonna rock 'n' roll tonight?"

Scott "Boombbox" Shelton, a more pensive counterpart to the hearty and happily unkempt Rhodes, sits nearby and occasionally chimes into Rhodes' abstract ramblings and political spiels with factual asides embedded in shocked laughter.

"He usually comes through with twice as many lyrics as we need," Shelton says of the recording of the duo's debut, *Stars and Stripes Forever*. "Someone's got to filter J. a little bit."

Recorded and produced in Shelton's house, the 16-song disc to be released Friday night at Carabar is a sometimes crude, sometimes lewd tribute to this nation and a citizen's right to make a complete mockery of it.

Lyrics discuss nuclear war, God and President Bush alongside sex and getting piss drunk. The result is a passive-aggressive critique that uses hedonism as a subversive force.

A few of the songs are just plain juvenile—two guys creating a series of electronic beats with ideas as deep as a mud puddle. But even in tracks such as "King Cobra and Box Wine" and "Yellow Cocaine" is a fascinating, blurry-eyed stare straight back at a country that can seem confusing and unfamiliar.

"We love America, but I think you always want things to be better than they are," Shelton says. "If you're not unhappy on some level, you're not paying attention."

As Rhodes continues that sentiment, he begins to describe America using several harsh metaphors (including feces and the birthing process),

causing several middle-aged patrons to leave, their coffees half-finished.

He's a bit excited now, rocking back and forth in his chair, shaking his head.

"It's a dichotomy: America's awesome, but at the same time it sucks. If we can add a little sweet violin to the background music of this horror story that we're all living through, we can make it a little bit better."

His comparisons here are as strange as those that cascade between the record's catchy funk beats, eclectic vocal samples and tasteful scratchwork. The record works as a critique of American weirdness because the songs are largely a celebration of it.

"We kind of leave it open to interpretation," says Rhodes, "so we walk that fine line of stupidity and brilliance."

**OCEAN GHOSTS
CD RELEASE PARTY**
WHERE: Carabar, Downtown
WHEN: Friday, June 30
WEB: oceanghosts.com