

# The Boston Globe

## Music

### 'An exciting time' for Deer Tick

By James Sullivan | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 05, 2017



Believe it or not, all four members of Deer Tick are now married. Singer-guitarist John McCauley was the first to have a baby — his daughter recently turned 2 — and he suspects the others aren't far behind in parenthood.

"That's a funny thing to picture for me," he says. It wasn't long ago that this band from Providence was known almost as much for its carousing as it was for its consistently top-notch songwriting.

Things are changing for Deer Tick. For a while there it seemed like things might change drastically. It's been four years since the band's last album, "Negativity," and McCauley admits there were days they all assumed the band was getting ready to collapse under its own weight.



But then they started writing some new songs, and then some more. The result, recently announced, is a pair of rejuvenating new releases, "Deer Tick Vol. 1" and "Deer Tick Vol. 2," both due on the same day in mid-September. After a long cool-down period, the band is filling up the calendar, anticipating the release of a concert documentary and booking an extensive fall tour that will feature nightly acoustic and electric sets. As a warmup, they'll play the Prescott Park Arts Festival in Portsmouth, N.H., on Friday [July 7] and the first day of the Levitate Music and Arts Festival at the Marshfield Fairgrounds on Saturday.

"It's an exciting time for us," says McCauley, who follows everything he utters that sounds even remotely like self-promotion with a cynical chuckle. "I think we all secretly contemplated maybe ending the band. I don't know, we just made this commitment. Everyone kind of came back around."

If that sounds half-hearted, it's nonetheless pretty clear that he's proud of the band's ability to continue to make good (if typically wry) music together.

The last song McCauley brought to the band's extended sessions at Memphis's historic Ardent Studios, the unabashedly lovely "Sea of Clouds," was a kind of confirmation, he says.

"It just really sounded like Deer Tick when we played it back," he says. "Maybe we were a little proud of ourselves, like: Man, I think we still got it."

The documentary, named after the band's song "Straight Into a Storm," began as a record of Deer Tick's 10th anniversary celebrations in Brooklyn around the 2014 holidays. Over a six-day residency, they devoted a set each night to a classic album covered in full, from "Meet the Beatles" to "Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!"



They also reworked "Tiddlywinks," the 1980 album by NRBQ, one of the more natural reference points for Deer Tick's ragged-but-righteous garage folk-pop-rock. Another is the Replacements, whose epic self-abuse and extraordinary songcraft McCauley and his bandmates have openly aspired to in equal measure.

In fact, one reason the band wanted to record at Ardent is because that's where the Replacements made their classic album "Pleased to Meet Me," with its timeless tribute to Big Star's Alex Chilton. But there were plenty of other inspirational gold records on the walls at the studio, McCauley says, citing ZZ Top and Led Zeppelin as two more bands that set up shop there.

"It was really fun, great staff, and it just sounds so cool," he recalls. "It was the right place. Now we're all like: We gotta do another record there."

A handful of the new songs were written by Ian O'Neil, McCauley's counterpart on guitar and vocals. (The brothers Dennis and Chris Ryan, on drums and bass respectively, round out the current lineup.) O'Neil, who joined the band in 2009 after leaving Titus Andronicus, is still the relative "new guy," though his role seems to be expanding some. He wrote "The Dream's in the Ditch," one of the standout tracks on "Negativity," and he wrote or co-wrote four of the 20 new songs.

McCauley says he always envisioned Deer Tick as more of a collaborative project than a platform for his own songs.

"I always liked bands with multiple singers and songwriters," he says. "I really welcomed that aspect of Ian into the band with open arms.

"He's got the Deer Tick pedigree — Irish-American. It's like we're all the same guy," he adds with a laugh.

McCauley moved to Nashville a few years ago with his wife, the singer Vanessa Carlton. On the phone during a visit to his native Rhode Island, he says he's starting to consider moving back.

When he settled in Nashville, his bandmates were spread over several cities — O'Neil in New York, Dennis Ryan in Rhode Island, Chris Ryan in Philadelphia, keyboardist Robbie Cromwell (who played on the new records but has since left the band) in Halifax. "We were touring so much it didn't matter where we lived — we were never home," McCauley says.

“Now that I have a kid and all that, I’m realizing that a lot of my old friends [in Nashville] weren’t really much more than drinking buddies. I kinda want to move back here so my daughter can be around more family – grandparents, aunts and uncles, all that. I grew up in a pretty big family, and I look at my daughter’s situation and think: This is kind of weird.”

Later this month [the band will play their customary after-shows in Newport, R.I., during the Folk Festival weekend. Though they have several Providence gigs set around Thanksgiving, for now the upcoming schedule includes no Boston date. McCauley says an announcement is coming.

In the meantime, they’ll play Levitate and a few other festivals, in Oregon and Tennessee, before the headlining tour begins. There’s an amusing song on “Vol. 2” called “S.M.F.” It’s about the awkward ritual of playing summer festivals with bands that are supposed to be your peers.

“It’s just kind of a funny world you get sucked into,” says McCauley, “like: How’d I end up here?”

When you think about it, that’s sort of the underlying theme of Deer Tick: How did I end up here?

### **DEER TICK**

At Prescott Park Arts Festival in Portsmouth, N.H., Friday at 7 p.m. [www.prescottpark.org](http://www.prescottpark.org).

At the Levitate Music and Arts Festival in Marshfield, Saturday at 3:05 p.m.  
[www.levitatemusicfestival.com](http://www.levitatemusicfestival.com).