

Behind the Scenes: Q&A with The Maine's John O'Callaghan

Written by Christina Tetreault



On March 31, Arizona born band The Maine, will release its highly anticipated fifth full-length album, *American Candy*. After remaining withdrawn from their usual high presence in social media, the American rock band dropped a new single, album release date, and tour schedule, much to fan's excitement. With their past two albums being darker and more serious, the band has adopted a lighter and brighter approach for their fifth one. Starting the tour off in their hometown of Tempe, the band is excited to jump back on the road and experience their loyal fan's reactions. Humble lead singer and eloquently spoken, John O'Callaghan sat down with us to talk about the new upbeat album, what he loves to drink, and how Arizona has always served as an inspiration.

AFM: I know you guys had a lot of social media silence leading up to the announcement. Were you guys trying to build anticipation for your fans or was it more for you guys?

John: As far as the slow release kind of stuff, most of that just kind of coincided with our personality. I think a lot of it also contributed to us growing up and anticipating records of stuff that we dug on. Especially nowadays the accessibility of information and how connected we all are, I think for us it's important to balance giving too much information all at once and not enough. So we felt like this was a cool way of building a little bit of hype and a little bit of anticipation and we were excited with the way it all turned out a couple days ago.

AFM: Do you think that the silence accomplished everything that you intended it to?

John: I think there are always things that you can learn that you could have done differently. What I think as far as engaging the people that are attentive and care what we're up to, I think it did its job.

AFM: I listened to the new single English girls, which I loved. Do you think it's a good representation of the rest of the album, and of what people can expect to hear?

John: Yeah, I think it is. I think that's predominately why we chose to release it first as well. I think people can kind of expect a similar vibe. It doesn't necessarily represent the record semantically or lyrically. But I think sonically everything kind of has a certain balance to it. We kind of set out to make a more lighter, more poppy-ier, that sounds kind of like I'm trying to make a beer, but we tried to kind of create a more lighter atmosphere sonically. I think the last record was dressed up darker and this one we're just trying to take a different approach.

AFM: Do you think it's closer to your first couple of albums?

John: I think people will associate it with those. I think obviously I'm speaking from a different perspective but I'd like to think that my lyrical content and what I'm talking about is leaps and bounds beyond the earlier stuff, I'd hope it would be. Eight years have surpassed but there's serious material on the record and then there's just kind of easy to follow along with stuff. And I think that's where I was mentally when we first started and I'd wanted to kind of revisit that because things have been really serious the past two releases. I wanted to kind of lighten up and just to feel better myself. Because I think you get into a rut of saying the same things and I think that eventually that will kind of just seep into how you're feeling. But I'm trying to be positive and I'm trying to be upbeat. I think that's kind of worked itself into my routine as of now and who I am and how I feel. Hopefully it remains.

AFM: I know you guys are obviously from Arizona; does Arizona ever serve as an inspiration for you guys lyrically or musically?

John: Absolutely. Just even being outdoors right now talking to you there's not a cloud in the sky. It's sunny, it's 80 degrees, and it's beautiful. It's all about perception and how you are in your head I guess at any given time. But I've always lived in Arizona and so I think naturally just growing up here as a kid makes its way into a lot of my songs and I'd like to think that it continues to do so and continues to shape who I am and just the environment and the people and the community I think that everything kind of attributes to the inspiration and writing from what I know. That's the most important thing; writing from an authentic and earnest place. This is all I really know.

AFM: Do you guys ever use real people and situations in your life for your songs?

John: Yeah not all the time and I don't want to get into specifics because I don't want anyone to know but yeah absolutely. And you know it doesn't work that way for everybody that writes songs, but I think it's important to kind of develop your own song writing technique and for me I definitely used personal experiences. I definitely used a lot more on the last record and even "English Girls" is a very specific incident that happened in my life.

AFM: So you still live in Arizona then?

John: I do, yeah.

AFM: Do all of you or is it just mainly you?

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John: Everybody lives in Arizona. We're all kind of spread out over the Valley. I'm here at Garrett's house here in Phoenix. He lives downtown and I live in Chandler and we actually have a couple guys that live in Chandler and one in Tempe. And one way out in Gilbert. So we're here but we're not right by each other.

AFM: What is a typical night off? What do you guys do and where do you guys go?

John: Well when we're on the road that obviously varies depending on which state we're in and how familiar we are with the area. Down here we go out a lot downtown. Like last weekend we were out at First Friday and did that whole thing. I'm 26 now so when I was 19, 20, 21, we would go out down towards the college. Now I just feel old. I'm only 26 but I feel like I'm out of place. I feel like people are looking at me like the old dude. I mean occasionally you can find us there but I think we like to stick more so to downtown. We're not like the 'we strictly drink red wine and talk about literature' guys. We're still a few years off but we're getting there.

AFM: So I know you start touring in Tempe almost immediately after the album's released. What is different about performing in Tempe as opposed to anywhere else?

John: We started playing shows here, I mean other than that first summer. We could book shows at venues that I don't think are open anymore, but we could book shows and not have to go on a full tour to play here. Which it's always been great here because you can get your friends and family to come out and that's always a good time. But I think what's really great and what's really cool to be apart of is that the people that are coming to the shows we've known them for a long time and there's always new faces which is really exciting as well. It doesn't feel like less people are coming every time. I know there's a heap of tickets already sold for the show and I know it's going to be a great opening show. It's always a little bit chaotic because of the friends and family but I think we've been doing it for so long so we know and they know what to expect. I think everybody has a good time.

AFM: Is there any anticipation or excitement the night before your album is released? Do you guys ever feel that or not really?

John: Oh yeah. We were in control of putting up the site just a couple days ago and actually I live with our manager. And he was kind of just running the whole show and getting excited. Pat, our drummer, was right there with us and they were freaking out over you know when are we going to post it. I mean they live for this stuff and I don't necessarily don't live for it, I'm just not really familiar with that whole online world so it was just kind of cool to be a fly on the wall and just sit back and watch them manically orchestrate this whole thing. They were freaking out about just releasing the song and artwork and there's always that same kind of buzz, but even amplified, when we put out the album. It will be crazy.

AFM: How have all of your families shaped how far you guys have come and where you are today?

John: I think it's an interesting position for them all to be in because unless you're really a part of it, and by a part of it I mean actually involved in it on a daily basis, then you might just naturally have a different perception. Especially early on when we first were signed and then moving to the major label, I think not only from our perspective but from theirs there was a lot of expectation and I think that you just think things because you see them in movies and you see them on TV, and you read about them in Rolling Stone or whatever, and I think once you start living it you realize that there is some truth to the stuff but it's all kind of sensationalized and they kind of romanticize the whole thing. All I know is that the greatest part about it all is that everybody's family has been super supportive and very, very in our corner. In that regard we couldn't ask for anything else. And they're very good about keeping out of it all to be honest. And that's got to be pretty hard for a parent. Going from coaching the little league team where it's like 'why is my kid not playing?' But this is a dynamic that they have zero knowledge about and I think it's really great that they've kind of kept their distance. I think we've proved ourselves to them and I think they don't really question or try to interfere too much, which is nice.

AFM: What's your favorite song on the new album?

John: Actually someone asked me that yesterday. It's kind of weird talking about songs without anyone having heard them but there's a song called "I Am Pretty" that was a song that was on the fence for me. Prior to recording it I didn't know how I felt about it. I didn't know if what I was saying was actually going to translate once we laid it down, but it actually turned out to be one of my favorites.

AFM: You say it's hard to talk about ones that fans don't know, but what about on your past albums? What's your favorite one that you've ever done?

John: I think a lot of it is dictated by what we're playing live. I think a lot of the time you'll just love playing a certain song live. But I think strictly song writing, like speaking from that side of thing, on the last album I would say it's the more stripped down one on the album, it's called "These Four Words." I felt like I went into it not really thinking about writing a song but, I guess as clichéd as it is, just speaking from the heart and actually saying what I felt like saying. I felt like it wasn't really a song where I was like 'okay I got to write a song.' It was more so something that kind of wrote itself because of where I was at the time and what I wanted to say. I think that one for me on the last record really stands out.

AFM: I know one of the main reasons I love you guys is for your lyrics. What other band do you are you super into in that way?

John: Now I think of songs in a little different light because I write in songs. Writing songs has kind of shaped the way I digest songs. And in that regard, I started to really dissect a lot of Tom Petty stuff. And I've heard him quoted saying, "a great song records in the truth." I don't even know if it's his quote, he might have been quoting someone else but he really does a phenomenal job at taking something that seems so broad, a concept or a theme, and making it and twisting it in a way that sounds so specific to his life and pertinent to who he is as a person and I really respect that. There's guys like Tom Petty and Neil Young obviously. Something fresh would be a band called Beach Slang out of Philadelphia I believe. They're just a very young band or a new band and there are a couple lyrics of theirs that I just love. I love that 'I wish I wrote that.' I

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love when I have 'I wish I wrote that' kind of moments. Death cab for cutie has always been that way for me. I think I love songwriting and I love music so much that it's like I don't really discriminate at this point you know? I've heard great pop songs as of recent that I'm just as envious about. It really ranges all across the board.

AFM: What, for this album, are you most excited for fans to hear or know about it?

John: I think just knowing our approach going into it. Even after just the little response that we got from "English Girls", I'm excited to release the rest. Just knowing that our intentions for the album was to create something a little more light and a little more not as serious as what we've done in the past. I think there are undoubtedly, serious moments on the record and you know there's still going to be hints of everything. But it's still a combination of everything that we've ever done so I'm excited to hear kind of people's reactions, and not so much online. I can't wait to talk to people after shows because that's really how I gauge the whole thing. I think that's great and that's very much a part of society and what we have to do and be apart of to be a band and I think it's a really beneficial tool but on the same token I think there's such a lack of personality via text message or a YouTube comment. You can kind of hide behind your computer and say whatever you might think you want to say at the time, whereas a handshake and a hi-five, for me, goes a hell of a long ways so I'm just excited for people to hear the album and hear what they have to say about it.

AFM: Is it hard touring for you guys or do you enjoy it?

John: It's such a part of who we are at this point that it's just what we do. But I'd be lying if I said it was all easy. It's not easy being away from the people that you love. It's not easy being in a different city and not sleeping in your bed every night. But on the same token, we appreciate the opportunity to the moon and back. It's incredible that we get to travel, and not only travel the United States, but travel the world and go places we wouldn't have dreamed of going if it'd hadn't been for music. It's just a part of who we are. There's the studio and there's the road, and I think that's what we're really looking forward to is the latter.

AFM: Do you guys mesh pretty well? I know traveling with friends, after awhile you can kind of get on each other's nerves. Does that ever happen?

John: I mean absolutely it happens. I mean haven't you seen the Real World? Fortunately we're still all very close and times like this at home is when we can kind of take a break from one another. I think that just like anything, any friendship, it's important to have those times where you're not just surrounded by them and you can break away and kind of do your own thing. To be honest, we also get to bring out really good friends. The people that help put on the shows are not just part of the work staff. They're actual friends that believe in what we're doing and want to be apart of this whole thing and I think that's what also keep us so close knit.

AFM: Which one of you sleeps the most when you're on the road?

John: That's a great question actually. I have trouble sleeping on the road. Something about the bus and not being in control, it kind of freaks me out. Garrett usually gets up pretty early, and Patrick gets up pretty early. I'd say depending on how much we've had to drink it's either Kennedy or I.

AFM: What was your last argument about between you guys?

John: They're usually like small things. It's usually how we're going to go about releasing something. I think all the elephants that could have been in the room; I think they're all extinct. Hopefully at this point, we've already kind of tackled the big issue kind of stuff, which is really cool and really great that we were able to do so early on. Now it's just who's hogging the mirror I guess.

Interview by Suzanne Koch