

Here We Go! For Walk Off The Earth, the only way out is through

By **Murjani Rawls** - Oct 24, 2019



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Losing a friend is never easy. Even if time passes, that part of you will always feel like a shadow. On December 30th, 2018, Mike “Beard Guy” Taylor, tragically passed away. If you’ve ever seen a Walk Off The Earth show or listened to a record, you understand that the band is a very close unit. They’re a family that welcomes people of all musical tastes and backgrounds to be a part of their experience.

Here We Go, the band’s first album in four years, is not only a tribute to their friend and band member, but it’s also a testament to the undying spirit of the band itself. It’s contemplative, it’s honest in its depiction of grief, but it’s also celebratory. If there’s anything that Walk Off The Earth strives to teach, it’s to be positive in the most painful of circumstances and get through all of it together. I spoke to drummer Joel Cassady about the process in which the band made it through in the recording of this album. Here we go, indeed! Walk Off The Earth is stronger than ever.

I know it's been a few emotional years with the band losing Mike. Not only losing a band member but a dear friend. It's been about four years since you guys released a new album of work. This is a two-part question. How was it hearing those parts that you recorded with Mike before he passed and how special is *Here We Go* going into this next chapter for Walk Off The Earth?

It's a lot. It's a lot to have on the conscious and have on to have in us and a part of us. We entered the process of narrowing the demo pile down for this new record and obviously, we thought of all the wonderful moments that we've had with Mike over the years and his involvement in that last album. As you mentioned, it has been four years since we released a proper studio LP. However, we did the single thing for a while. We released "Nomad," "Fire My Soul," and "Fifth Avenue." We didn't want to completely drop off the knob when it came to releasing original songs, but we did sort of try and go the more singles route. Just in the interest of not long locking ourselves away in the studio.

We wanted to break away from the usual sort of approach that a lot of bands who just kind of cycle between touring and recording do. That's never really been our move anyway. So, we sort of tried to double down on that and just kind of drop a single every half year or so. We also wanted to keep our YouTube thing happening. It's this sort of two-prong attack of ours that we've been doing since day one.

The original recorded stuff, especially when it comes to an album, did sort of take a backseat for a while there. So, even though we have kept it rolling, we needed to get a chance to really sit with that pile. We had amassed to about between 30 and 50 promising demos before we really started to dig into this record. Getting back into the studio and of course, listening back to stuff that Mike did record with us before he passed that hadn't been released. We worked with piano parts of his that he layed down, recovered them, and used them on this new album.

It's been a very heavy process, but a rewarding one as well. I mean, to take that as far as it could go, of course, with the creation of "Mike's Song," when we first all got the news. At first, beyond a couple of weeks, it was kind of getting over it as the body and the mind needs with such heavy views. We're all artists first and foremost and that's the reason why we're all glad we're all together doing this thing. The best way through it for us always in the face of hardship is to get

in a room and write and sing it out, literally. Just having a chance to do that song for him just was a total no brainer for us and it came together so naturally.

We're very proud of that one and it's really given both ourselves and our fans and a chance to really celebrate the man that he was. Also, a great musician, father, friend, everything. To know that his spirit and legacy is going to live on and on music and continue to inspire generations to come is something that we definitely get a lot of comfort from because it's otherwise it's a pretty tough situation, you know?

"Mike's Song" is a very beautiful song. I've seen a lot of fans, whether it in YouTube or Twitter comments say that song helps them with their grief process. I want to segue into "I'll Be There" because I thought that's a very inspiring song. To persevere and get through the tough things together.

I mean, if you don't have your support system or the tight-knit unit that you can just go to, and have there with you through thick and thin, what do you really have, right? What better moment than to realize that and to go through such a sudden and heavy loss to realize that the people around you, your friends and family are the most important people. That's really all that really matters at the end of the day.

To have songs like "Mike's Song," the ones that are obviously inspired by something that is objectively rather negative, to just spin that around and focus on songs like "I'll Be There" that are so positive is also another no brainer for us. That's what this band is and has always been about. Positivity over all else beyond any sort of political agenda or any sort of other hidden messages here and there. It's about positivity, togetherness, feeling good celebrating life, really.

I've seen that the song initially had like a hip hop piece to it and the band had changed the composition around.

It sort of came to us in pieces, and we were able to kind of stay with it, rearrange, and rework it in a way that we love to do. We were pretty stoked with how it turned out. The fans seem to be really enjoying it and it's given us a real opportunity to get back on radio down in the states and also up here in Canada. It's all really going really well and being received very well. We just wrapped shooting on the official music video for it. That was another opportunity there for us to

really sit down and write something with some real substance. Something that really that we really think a lot of people can identify with and will resonate with a lot of people

I don't want to give too much away yet but the video kind of deals with two siblings to take very different life paths and that are brought together in a very special way. We really are excited to give back to the world and allow people to kind of find their connection with that as well.

Despite all the heaviness surrounding the making of this album, I love that *Here We Go* still is very upbeat. Especially with songs like "Addicted" and the title track.

That's encouraging in here because it gets a bit crazy and bizarro at a certain point. We had a lot of fun with that one. With that being the title track of the album, it's really going to turn into the theme of the record and of the new live show in a lot of ways. Back with the *Sing It All Away* album, we started this thing live where we would tease it. That song is sort of built around this "back and forth" call and answer chant. On that album cycle tour, we would tease that back and forth throughout our set to the point where it finally culminates in performing the whole song last.

We're actually thinking about doing a similar thing this summer with the "Here We Go" chorus chant. It just seemed like such an obvious move. The 'Here We Go' spirit and energy, we think really encapsulates the whole album what we want to do with this new set of touring. The whole thing. Like you just mentioned as well, even though there's been hardship, it's just in our nature to want to take that and turn it into something positive. To always be looking towards the future with as much positivity in our heads as possible. There's no other way. What is there beyond trying to find that positivity and move forward for those who are not able to join you? It's the only way we know and the only way we want to do it.

Absolutely! Like you mentioned earlier that you all had a stack of demos, but were able to build a concise 10 track journey for *Here We Go*. It takes you on a journey. How did the band whittle it down to just those 10? Also, as you said with the singles, do you plan to do something with the demos down the line?

For sure. Nothing that doesn't actually see a release at any given time isn't off the radar for good. There have been lots of opportunities with other past demos to repurpose them down the line

or get them to another artist. So many options, right?. Actually, at one point, we all had our favorites. Google docs have been kind of saving our lives these days. We got them together and allowing people within the group and our core team to vote on them. Each of us was also able to get a list of five or 10 friends together as well. Whose musical opinions we really trust, whether they were a musician or not.

Sometimes, you actually find a lot more value in the opinions of those who are big music lovers, but don't necessarily know about the inner workings of music. It's kind of better in a sense because they're just sort of reacting to the songs at a more natural level. Rather than someone who's kind of big music head who would dissect the harmony and go more the corporate route. We were able to send some of the demos out to a private SoundCloud link and allowed those friends to cast a vote based on their top three to five picks. We used that along with our own personal favorites and wilded things down from there.

I want to touch on your drumming because I'm a fan. You are able to change tempos on a whim like reggae of song that you get to get into that groove. For you specifically, how did you engineer your instrumentals with the composition of this album? Drummers are usually the glue.

Ever I joined from day one, we've kind of been known to be this wildly eclectic group, right? I remember the first jam I had with Gianni and [Ryan] Marshall, going through the rock songs, the reggae songs, and everything in between. Obviously, over the years, we've gotten more into kind of the pop thing and of course, some of the EDM stuff as well. It's been that sort of eclectic mix from day one. That's also become solidified amongst our fan base and everything.

To that end, it's just a matter of just kind of rising to the occasion. Sometimes, a song is going to wind up being that reggae groove like you said. Or when it comes to a song like "Here We Go," there are so many elements coming together and in a song like that. It's just kind of stepping up to the plate and and and being super down with the direction we want to take things. Then just jumping in and letting the parts happen naturally.

There's a huge benefit of being in this thing for as long as we all have been. A lot of this stuff isn't really overthought. It just comes naturally. It's something to be said about that when it comes to listening to the album and how it feels smooth and congruent, even though it's it is kind of hitting a lot of things in the musical radar. It's fun, man. We're having a ton of fun this year. We

want to continue to dip our beaks in a bunch of different ponds. Also, continue to have comments like, “you know, I’m a metal fan. For some reason, I really connected to your group.” Or “I haven’t been to a concert in 50 years and for some reason, you guys brought that out of me.” That’s a huge privilege for us. It’s crazy.

I went to a Walk Off the Earth show a few years ago at The Bowery Ballroom in New York and it’s so interactive. So many different tastes and genres and somehow, you make it all work. I know that has to be hard.

Take a group of buddies that are 16-17 years old that went to school together and they all came up listening to Nirvana or whatever the case. Take a band like us where we all came in when we first got together from different musical backgrounds. I had just dropped out of jazz school because I realized that I hated the conventional music education approach. I was getting more into electronic music, while Johnny is a guy that was big into Frank Zappa and sort of prog-rock. Alongside bands like Sublime, so there’s a reggae element as well.

With Mike, he was into show tunes and a lot of classic rock. Marshall comes from a lot of kind of like folky, Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash-type background. Sarah [Blackwood] is completely different. She comes from a more punk rock back background. She was in a band called The Creepshow. It’s by virtue of the variety of backgrounds that we’re all bringing into this. I think it’s sort of makes a little more sense if you think about it the wide variety of sonics and genres we are able to tap into based on what everyone is bringing to the table.

So my last question is about ‘Dreamers.’ I love that the album ends with that song. Especially when it comes to the lyrics, “lock me up with the dreamers/throw me in with the rebels and future leaders. It’s an amazing sign not only as a tribute to a fallen friend, but a testament to the band. We’re going to stick together through this. Is the band going to play this live? I think that fans are going to love this song.

It’s funny that you draw upon the lyrics there. It actually makes a lot of sense. It’s not that hasn’t crossed my mind, but we made the choice to put that in the last song of the album for more aesthetic reasons than anything. It was the “black sheep” in the sense that it’s a more forceful EDM record by compared to the rest of the the the album. It just felt right to kind of have it as the bookend.

Also, that was started as a song of Ryan's that he actually at one point had intended to release through the channel of his solo project. When it came time to look at all these demos, we thought about the idea of putting it on the album. DVBBBS is a featured artist on that as well, so we had a clever idea to have it as the last song, include the featured artist, and list Ryan as a featured artist just to give a nod to his solo projects.

It's sort of a song truthfully, that we didn't even know was going to kind of have a home on the record. Hearing your feedback there and thinking more about the lyrical content in a way that sort of leaves the listener as a final hurrah the record, makes you think about it another way. I think we have to get deeper and as a group deeper into the chats about what we want to play live. I agree that it's such a high energy track. EDM is just more mainstream by the day these days, right? It becomes so on the menu for all ages. I think that's a great thing to start to think about. To bring that song out live and really give people the moment with that one because it is a great song.

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