

# August Burns Red, 'Guardians,' and the Strength of Togetherness

By **Murjani Rawls** - Mar 31, 2020



Photo Credit: Spotify

At the beginning of the song 'Paramount,' singer Jake Lurhs sings, "*Are you walking through fire/You have a friend.*" In current times where many of us are sheltered away from friends and loved ones due to the COV-19 pandemic, those lyrics hit closer to home. Throughout their 17 year history, metalcore band, August Burns Red has always been the aggressive version of musical therapy. At times, their music is celebratory. Sometimes, it's contemplative. It all comes together for the greater good and to show that we aren't alone – whether that be in celebration or struggle.

What does it mean to be a guardian? For one, it's to stand up for someone who can't. It's the type of empathy that we should exude as we realize we are all connected somehow. A simple kind gesture could save a life. August Burns Red's eight studio album, *Guardians*, due out April 3rd on Fearless Records explores this theme. The intricate musicianship that many fans would

come to realize is still prevalent. However, as this album provided more time for the band to record, many will hear that the veteran band still has more tricks up their sleeve.

I spoke to guitarist J.B. Brubaker on the process of making *Guardians*, how the band became closer throughout the recording process, and the message of the album as a whole.

**In 2019, Jake stated in an [interview on \*Wired In The Empire\*](#) that the new music would be easier to listen to. There's a progression in every August Burns Red album, I feel. With *Guardians*, it toes the line of both being straightforward and having the musical intricacies one would expect from previous efforts. Take me through how this recording process was.**

There was definitely a thought in the back of my mind writing material for *Guardians*, that I wanted to write some songs that were a little bit more concise. Especially in the early stages of how many parts songs had. Just stuff that was a little bit more structured than we typically have done. August Burns Red has done a lot of albums with pretty linear song structures with seldom a chorus. Often, there wouldn't be any parts that repeated. While I think that's cool as an artist, I also recognize that that can be difficult for fans and our listeners to digest.

The first two songs I wrote in particular, which happened to be 'Defender' and 'Bones,' were coincidentally our first two singles that we've released for the record. Those songs were me making an effort to write concisely, not have so many different parts of the songs, and go off on all these tangents. Thus far, based on the reactions we've gotten, people seem stoked on that direction. Our bass player Dustin [Davidson] and I wrote all the music for the record. We basically split in half.

As we got deeper into the writing, I think the songs started to get a little bit more complex as we typically have done in the past. That was simply a result of sort of scratching the itch of writing some more simplistic stuff. Also, wanting to still fulfill ourselves as artists and people creating music. We like writing complex music, clean interludes, and progressive song structures. So, I think early on in the writing process, our songs are a little bit more simple in terms of their structure and easier to get. As we got deeper, we sort of let ourselves go down more creative paths.

**With *Guardians*, the band had more time to record more than any other album.**

Well, I'm glad that you feel that way because there were certainly some nerves within myself, personally. I felt that people were gonna be like, "wow, like, Why? Why is this so simple?" Or "where's the shred?" That type of stuff. So I'm glad that you as someone who's listened to us for a long time feels like this is an August Burns Red record.

The reason for that was that we recorded the album in two different sessions. Dustin and I recorded for a month or so in April of 2019. We just recorded the eight songs that we had written up until that point. Then, we had to do a bunch of touring related to *Constellations* and the 10 year anniversary around that record. So, when we finished the North American leg of that tour, we had like two weeks off and then went back into the studio from August 20 till the end of September. We worked on recording five more songs on strings; then Matt [Greiner] did all the drums and Jake did all of the vocals.

All in all, I feel like we spent a little over two months on the record which is more than we've ever spent collectively. Breaking it up into two different sessions just felt a little bit more manageable. Just spending two straight months in the studio, you kind of can start to get burnt out on the process. We were able to break it up and also have a long time to sit on the eight songs that we had done in April. It helped us to realize what we had in those eight songs and see what holes we wanted to fill sonically.

**You mentioned *Constellations* and going out on that tenth-anniversary tour. This was right within developing songs for *Guardians*. With playing that album front-to-back, did the band maybe learn some things going back in time and think about in recording the new tracks?**

People asked me something similar about what about doing 10-year stuff with regards to writing when we did *Messengers* in 2017. It wouldn't be fair to say that we were influenced by *Constellations* and playing that material again. I don't think that has any influence on what we wrote for *Guardians*, but what it did do was put the pressure on us to get our songs written and get them done.

We knew we didn't have a lot of time to work with between the different legs of the *Constellations* world tour. We had a very specific point in time that everything needs to be written because if we didn't, everything would have gotten pushed back. So, *Constellations*

didn't influence the sound, but it definitely motivated us in terms of working hard and getting it done when we needed to get it done.

So, usually, when we're on tour, we don't do a lot of writing. It's not the most ideal atmosphere to write. There's a lot of people around and not a lot of quiet places to get into a creative space. Dustin and I were forced to define the time of the places to write while we're on the road. We were actually holed up in the back lounge of the bus a lot which we typically wouldn't do. We knew we had this deadline and wanted to get songs written, so we made it work.

**As you've eluded to, yourself and Dustin have worked together closer than on any album prior. The band itself has grown closer together; especially in the songwriter process. Everybody was involved and throwing ideas around. How did the process of making Guardians make the band a tighter unit? I listen to this album and I still get the sense of the spark that you all had when you started.**

Well, for one, I think at this point in our career, we've been through a lot. The five of us in the band have gone through a lot of ups and downs. We've experienced a lot together. It's been the same lineup since 2006 and basically, all the success we've had as a band has taken place with the same lineup. We were kind of nothing before Dustin and Jake joined the band after our first full-length came out.

So at this point in our lives, we're older, a little bit more mature, and able to understand each other very well. It's to the point where we're able to take criticism much better. In the past, there would have been times where someone would have said to me, "I don't like this guitar part or this section. We need to change it." That would ruin my day, set me off, and put me in a bad place. The same could have happened for Dustin or Jake with a vocal part. After doing this over and over for all these years and all these records, we don't take constructive criticism personally anymore. We know that it's coming from a place of working towards the best possible product. Not only just our own personal achievements within the songs themselves.

It doesn't matter if I or Dustin wrote the guitar solo. It doesn't matter if Dustin or Matt wrote the drum part. Or if Brent [Rambler] or Jake wrote the vocal part. We don't care who in the band is contributing creatively. We care about how what the final song sounds like or what the album is like as a whole. That was something that we had to learn just through experiences and having

those tips in the studio and living with each other on the road for months at a time. All that stuff just brought us together and helped us overcome those challenges as a band.

**If you listen to an August Burns Red album, there's the motif that runs through that it will have a hard-hitting intro. Think of songs like 'Thirty and Seven' and 'Empire'. 'The Narrative' definitely continues that trend. 'Bloodletter' is one of the heaviest songs that the band has ever done. As the band was exploring musical themes, how important was it to keep that aggressive tone as a calling card?**

With that I was saying earlier about how we did those eight songs in April, we had those songs and had time to sit on them. I was talking to Jake while we were on tour one day, and he said, "yeah, these songs are cool. I like them. This album is not as heavy as *Phantom Anthem* or as heavy as the last couple records have been." I was thinking to myself, "okay, I thought it was heavy, but my singer telling me that it's not as aggressive."

So, we got to write some heavy songs because I want the record to be heavy. I mean, we're a metal band and we're known for being a heavy band. So, Dustin and I took that to heart and consciously tried to write some heavy bangers towards the back end of the writing process. I think as a result of that, we had like some really heavy songs like 'Bloodletter'. That was the last song we wrote and it's the heaviest song on the record. 'Dismembered Memory' was also one of the heaviest songs and that was the second-to-last song that was written.

Basically, we tried really hard to write some heavy stuff to close the album out in terms of writing. We recorded 13 songs, so we had to cut two of them. The two songs we cut definitely aren't heavy songs compared to most of the record. What was left with the 11 songs that you have on *Guardians* and that's the heaviest stuff we wrote all together. When you hear the album as a whole it's the heaviest thing we've done maybe ever. Certainly in a long time.

**The overall theme of *Guardians* is one of being there for each other. Just being a guardian. Standing for someone who perhaps can't do it for themselves. In a world that's a lot more polarized, that may be a thing that's missing. When going back through the album, what does being a guardian mean to you?**

To me, it's important that August Burns Red continues, for the most part, to have a positive message. With what you were saying about being there for others and being someone's guardian, that's important to me. I want August Burns Red to be a positive light in a generally

negative music scene. That's not to say that people in the metal world aren't capable of being positive people, but the messages are often dark. I think it's cool that August Burns Red has always been a more upbeat, positive band from a lyrical perspective.

I'd like to continue to be that way because that's who we are as people. We're not a dark people, you know? We don't have a lot of rage within us. We've been saying August Burns Red is 'angry music for happy people.' We've been saying that for a long time now and that's true.

**Speaking about 'Three Pounds,' it's both the last and longest song on the album. As the back half of Guardians is more aggressive, this song ends on a more atmospheric and layered note. Within multiple listens, there's something new that you can hear from this song.**

My attempt as I started on that song was that it going to be the 'slow jam' for the record. I suppose it is compared to the album as a whole but it's not 'flow and show' the whole way through as like a 'Meridian' or 'Carpe Diem'. Just some of our slower songs we've done in the past. It was definitely the song where I let myself kind of just go creatively. I didn't worry about how long the song was, how long parts were, or how many parts there were. structure. I wrote it completely just to scratch my creative itch.

It was a lot of fun to write and it was a lot of fun to demo out at home. There's a lot of stuff going on in 'Three Pounds'. Just texturally and in the background. The whole song has these additional ethereal guitar parts that just give the song some atmosphere. A lot of the material on the record doesn't have and it was really fun for me. Just speaking as a musician and playing around with different sounds in the studio.

It's funny. We'll spend 90 minutes working on this reverb doubt guitar sound that's kept way in the back of a mix. People will feel that more than they even hear. That's one of my favorite things about making a record like those. Those little easter eggs, if you will. 'Three Pounds' is definitely littered with that kind of thing.

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