James Durbin in words and music

JAMES DURBIN, IN CONVERSATION WITH WALLACE BAINE
When: Saturday, 7:30 p.m.
Where: Cabrillo Samper Recital Hall, on the campus of Cabrillo College
Tickets: $15 general; $12 non-Cabrillo students and seniors; $10 Cabrillo students
Details: cabrillovapa.com

James Durbin talks about his life and music Saturday at Cabrillo College.

The biggest difference between broadcasting and newspapering is that, in the latter, being a reporter is not a performance art.

For someone like Terry Gross, Charlie Rose or Stephen Colbert, the interview is a performance.

But for us print-media wretches, our interviews, often more enlightening and compelling than anything Larry King ever attempted, take place without an audience.

I've always found that frustrating, given the hundreds of interviews I've conducted over the years with many of the greatest names in popular culture (and a lot more of the less exalted names). Telling someone of a great interview after the fact is like relaying a dream you had last night. Neither is very satisfying.

Saturday night, though, I'll be in the unaccustomed spot of interviewing for an audience when I sit down with singer-songwriter James Durbin to chat about his amazing journey.

As life stories go, Durbin's is amazing. His youth in Santa Cruz was turbulent and often painful. As a boy, he was on the receiving end of a rare double whammy, having been diagnosed for Tourette's and Asperger's syndrome at the same time. Such a thing doesn't exactly make you the most popular kid in class.

But James had a secret weapon, a singing voice of singular power in which he poured his considerable emotions. He discovered musical theater and a new world opened up.

of favorites on season 10 of "Idol," James filling up the role of rock singer in the most spectacularly charismatic way.

That spring, Santa Cruz got swept up in the drama in a feverish way, particularly as word spread that the top three finalists would be granted a hometown concert to be broadcast on Fox. We all know that James was one of the final four, that he, his fans and all of Santa Cruz County were supremely confident he would breeze into the top three.

That didn't happen. But the hometown concert did. "Durbin Day" may have been the largest free public spectacle in Santa Cruz history as thousands crowded the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk to see James jam with his buddies from the White Album Ensemble.

James Durbin has put out two albums since "Idol," and, though the spotlight is not as intense as it was when he was performing for Tyler, Jennifer Lopez and an audience of millions, he's beginning to come into his own as a professional musician.

I don't claim to be part of Durbin's inner circle. On the contrary, I feel I barely know the young man. So, Saturday's event at Cabrillo gives me a chance to find out a little bit about how it feels to blossom into one's destiny in such a public way.

I've been an interviewer long enough to know that some crush and some soar.

Most of the time, I find myself reflecting back on a great interview and wishing I had not experienced a great conversation alone, that someone could have experienced with me.

This time, I'll have that chance. Join us Saturday and see what happens.