

James Durbin Finds Life After Prime Time

THE AMERICAN IDOL ROCKER CHANNELS HALFORD AND DIO ON HIS DEBUT RELEASE. By Mikael Wood

▶ ANYONE WHO DOUBTED that a true metalhead would ever turn up on *American Idol* was surely surprised when Judas Priest joined James Durbin for the show's Season 10 finale earlier this year. Months after he finished his stint on the show, though, this 22-year-old California native is quick to defuse skepticism over his headbanger bona fides. "I'm not gonna go out there and say, 'This is a metal record,'" Durbin remarks of his just-released debut, *Memories of a Beautiful Disaster*. "It's a hard-rock record. But I did bring in aspects of the metal I listen to, like the soaring vocals of Rob Halford and Ronnie James Dio." He laughs. "There's a lot of long notes on this thing."

He can say that again. Produced by Howard Benson—who also helmed *Idol* alum Chris Daughtry's hit 2006 debut—*Memories* proves

Durbin's sky-high vocals were no made-for-TV creation. "As far as chops go, James had it all," Benson says. "And nobody works harder than he does. For us, making this record was really about finding the best songs." The fact that some of those tunes came from the pen of pro songwriter Marti Frederiksen (Aerosmith, Mötley Crüe) still blows Durbin's mind, as did his recent experience auditioning musicians for his new touring band.

"That morning I was drinking my Throat Coat tea from my Kiss Army mug and something told me to put on my *Dressed to Kill* T-shirt," he remembers. "So I walk into SIR [rehearsal studios] in Hollywood and somebody goes, 'Hey, nice shirt. You know Kiss were rehearsing in this space right before you?' I was like, 'No way!'" Durbin shakes his head. "Paul Stanley's sweat was in the air. You could feel it."

What's on My iPod?



PLAYLIST



JON SCHAFER OF ICED EARTH

1

"A MOMENT FOREVER" Volbeat

"You can hear all of [guitarist] Michael Poulsen's influences, though he manages to make his own sound out of it."

2

"HIGHWAYMAN" The Highwaymen

"This song features four music legends—Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson. The lyrics contain a very powerful message."

3

"TO TAME A LAND" Iron Maiden

"This is a song that I've always wanted to cover in Iced Earth. One cool riff follows another. It's one of [bassist] Steve Harris' best compositions."

4

"THEN CAME THE LAST DAYS OF MAY" Blue Öyster Cult

"BÖC are a really important band in the heavy rock world. They were a big influence on me in my early years."

5

"SKY BLUE" Peter Gabriel

"This was the soundtrack to the most important vacation I ever took, to Central America in 2009. I love his voice and the haunting music he comes up with."

Iced Earth's 10th studio album, Dystopia, is available now.