

Kobe will benefit from Eugene folk concert

Tony Lystra

For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Folk singer James Durnst contemplatively stroked his silvering beard and considered what he does for a living during an interview two weeks ago while visiting Eugene.

"I make songs," Durnst said. "I make songs and use them as a medium to communicate ideas, observations, reflections, feelings and social concerns."

The California-based folk singer will play at Eugene's Hult Center on March 4 at 3:00 and 7:30 p.m. to benefit earthquake victims in Kobe, Japan.

Durnst has taken his folk tour to 36 countries, sometimes using the proceeds from his shows to benefit victims of natural disasters. He lived in Kobe for just under a year.

"I'm moved and concerned about the devastation in that charming and beautiful city which now will be forever different," he said. "Personally, I've been greatly relieved to find that my friends answered the phone right away. I've been able to get through to everyone," Kobe said.

"Kobe was the first [Japanese] port in which foreigners were allowed to live," Durnst said. "So it has developed as quite an international cosmopolitan center."

Durnst began singing folk music in high school.

"You've probably read about the '60s. In the late '50s and early '60s, there was a huge interest in folk music and acoustic music. Back then there was a resurgence and awareness of traditional music."

"Back then I was very impressionable like so many of us were.



Courtesy Photo

James Durnst, a California-based folk singer, will perform a benefit concert at the Hult Center on March 4 to aid earthquake victims in Kobe, Japan.

This intimate music really spoke to me," Durnst said. "And I think this has been cyclical. There has been a resurgence once again in the more intimate, personal styles of music."

Durnst said he learned a few tunes and bounced them off his high school classmates. They encouraged him to stick with music.

"I think we tend to respond to people's approval," he said. "Since then I've learned that this style of music is really very old. There have been minstrels for thousands of years. In fact there was a huge confab of minstrels in the spring, during Lent, in the year 1000 in the province

of Burgundy" — something that resembled, Durnst said, Minstrel Woodstock. "It was an opportunity for them to exchange songs and ideas," he said. "I've always felt a kinship with the tradition of the millennium of minstrels."

Durnst graduated from Cal State Long Beach where he studied radio, television and film with Steve Martin and Steven Spielberg.

He launched his first folk tour in 1965. Since then, Durnst has learned folk songs in 15 different languages — including Icelandic, Greek and Russian.

But as he travels between cities and countries, Durnst is perfect-

ly grounded in the present.

"The on-going lesson," he said "is to be where I am. There's no real payoff to being in the next place before you get there, or the last place after you've left. The opportunity for me has been to learn to be in the present and do what I can to experience the now that is. In my way of thinking, there is no such thing as the future."

The future, Durnst said, "is a way for us to communicate our dreams and our goals for what is yet to come. But all we really know is what is. It's part of our jobs to find a balance between that that we know... and that that we hope for.

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