



British singer Will Young performs near Buckingham Palace in London on Aug. 24. On the last day of the Beijing Olympic Games, London hosted a free concert to celebrate the moment when the English capital became the official host city for the next summer Olympic Games. PHOTO: EPA

Will Young raises his eyebrows conspiratorially. He's talking about his new album and he knows he isn't supposed to say this sort of thing. "I was dreading doing it," he says. "I've had a few dark nights. I'm a bit worried about the title, too. You know, *Let It Go*. It sounds a bit like a self-help book. With me, Dr Young!" He laughs, tucking his tight trousers under himself as his mood quickly changes. "But what's in it — I love it. I know it sounds ridiculous, but I've finally got comfortable with what I do really well." He takes a sip from a lime-spiked bottle of lager.

Young turns 30 in January and, despite his current cheer, it's obvious that the odd coming-of-age crisis has nipped at his heels. His new album is a master class in grown-up soul-pop, delivered in a vocal full of heart and personality, but songs called *Tell Me the Worst* and *If Love Equals Nothing* hint at other, less joyful stories. And then there's the chorus from *Changes*, the album's melancholy first single: "Been out of luck/For so long/And I don't get much/So there's nothing much to lose."

These songs do have some personal resonance, Young admits. There is his breakup with a long-term boyfriend (the two are now on good terms), but there is also the sense that Young is growing up, reflecting on the peculiar beginnings of his career and realizing how he can transcend them and become an artist in his own right. "Yes, that's pretty spot-on," he agrees. "Although *Pop Idol* was wonderful for me. I could never knock it."

Young was always an unusual talent-show winner. He turned 23 during *Pop Idol*, famously sparred with Simon Cowell, and looked like a worldly-wise adult next to the other finalist, the baby-faced teenager Gareth Gates. Everyone expected Gates to win. He was conventionally cute and had overcome a stutter; his was a great tabloid story. When Young won, it was a shock.

"Looking back, it's all quite weird," says Young. "When I started at the auditions, I just thought of it as another way in." He had already worked for Sony Music Publishing to try to get his foot in the door. And when *Pop Idol* started, he had just begun a three-year musical theater scholarship at London's Arts Educational School, straight after getting his 2.2 in politics from Exeter University.

"Then everything changed," he says. "I was a 23-year-old student with £20,000 [US\$38,000] worth of loans, who suddenly got a wodge of cash, a record contract and a business. I had to get to grips with a machine and take control of it." Other people would have left the business concerns to the management, wouldn't they? Young's eyes fix me keenly. "Not me. I knew *Pop Idol* was a means to an end and I had to take the reins. I was determined to have a career, and that kept me going."

Young knew, too, that success did not mean that every door was suddenly open. The Glastonbury festival [the venerable music festival with hippy beginnings held in southwest England] was a case in point: "I couldn't just expect to waltz into a festival back then and go, 'Oh, hello, it's me from the telly,' could I? You've got to work. You've got to earn it." And earn it he did, finally playing Glastonbury this summer, as well as T in the Park [a music festival held in Perth and Kinross, Scotland]. It was clearly quite a landmark for him and he was delighted to see fields of "drunk, blokey men" singing along to songs like his 2003 No. 1, *Leave Right Now*.

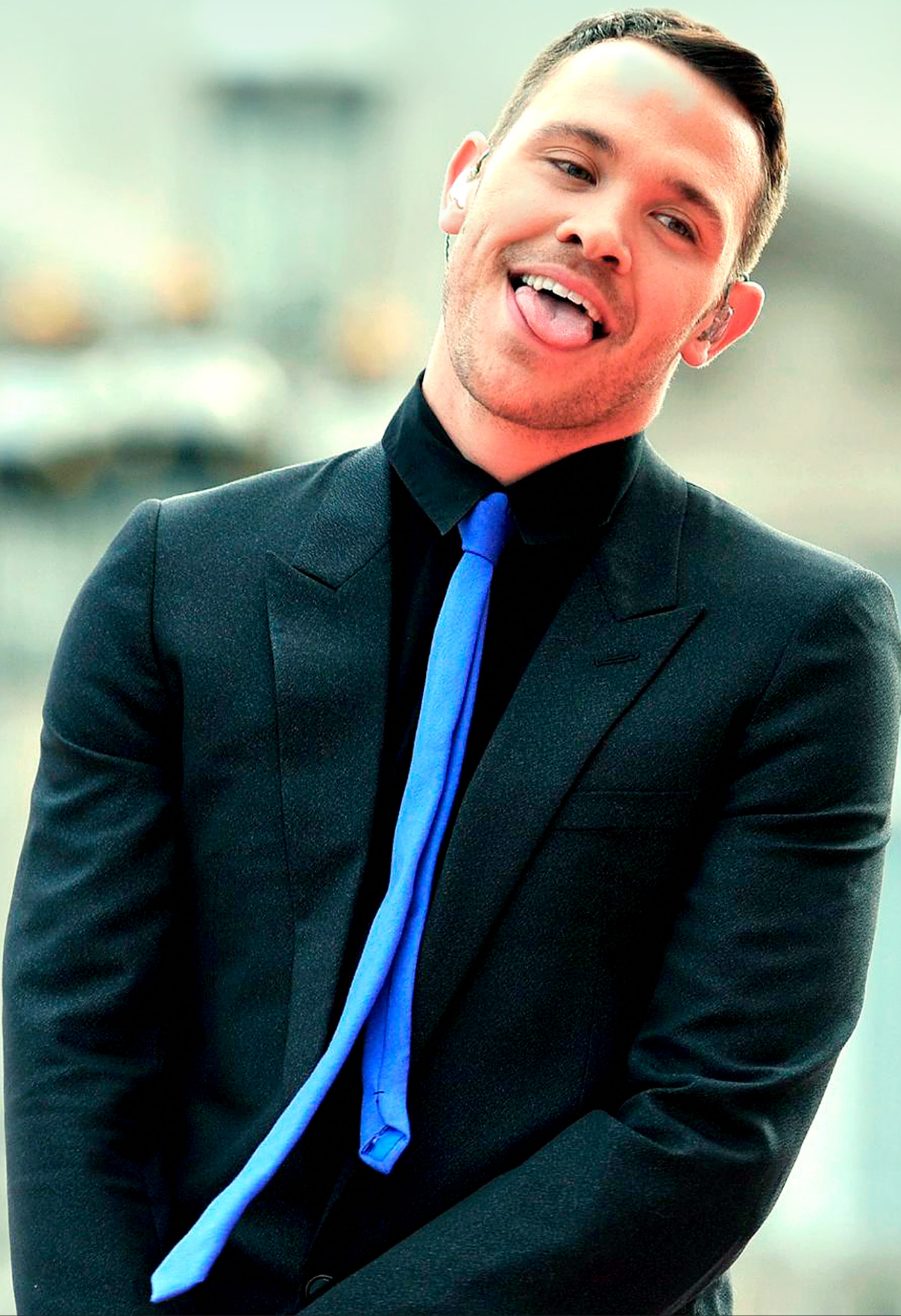
Barely a month after his double A-side debut single, *Evergreen/Anything Is Possible*, hit No. 1 in the British charts, Young also came out publicly. At the time, he said: "For me it's normal and nothing to be ashamed about. I'm gay and I'm comfortable with that." Given the sanitized genre in which he operated — and his core audience of teenage girls and their mothers — it was a bold move, but, thankfully, one that had no effect on his career. Coming six months after the openly gay Brian Dowling won the second series of *Big Brother*, it also suggested the general public are no longer terribly troubled by their reality heroes' sexual preferences.

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No apologies

For Will Young, 'Pop Idol' is a distant memory. He talks about his acting career, coming out, his guilt over his twin and his Nashville ambitions

BY JUDE ROGERS
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON



[TECHNOLOGY REVIEW]



TV'S FUTURE TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE NOW IN TINY SIZE

OLED TVs are the promise of the future, offering a startlingly vivid picture while consuming little energy (but at the moment a lot of money). You can, however, have the same kind of technology (organic light-emitting diodes) in a pocket-size picture viewer right now without taking out a second mortgage. Digital Foci has produced a 2.8-inch OLED-screen photo viewer. The player uses modest power, playing for up to five hours from its built-in lithium-polymer battery, the company says.

The player holds about 4,000 pictures on its 128-megabyte memory. Pictures are resized by the included software. That software isn't the smoothest — downloading required a

few tries — but the device eventually displayed bright, colorful photos that can be set to play in a customized slide show. The OLED screen is viewable from oblique angles, so a few friends can see the show at the same time. The company says the player will be available online from Digital Foci, B&H, Amazon and Wal-Mart by the end of this month. Affordable OLED TVs will take a little longer.



A REALLY BIG NOTEBOOK TO REPLACE THE DESKTOP (IT'S ALMOST TOO BIG FOR YOUR LAP)

A number of notebooks on the market style themselves as desktop replacements, but the Sony Vaio AW series is being positioned to replace the home theater — sort of.

The new Vaio starts with a mammoth 18.4-inch widescreen display, pumped up with display technology to rival many flat-panel TVs. Its resolution is 1080 dots per inch (dpi) — one of the

higher high-definition standards. It is also the resolution of Sony's Blu-ray DVD technology, and a Blu-ray drive is included. (One could ask how much resolution one really needs at 18.4 inches, but why spoil the display arms race?)

Though the emphasis is on the display, the Vaio AW is also a high-end computer aimed at those who want to edit photos and videos in HD. It has an Intel Core 2 Duo processor, up to a terabyte of storage and 4 gigabytes of RAM memory.

The AW comes in three models. The Vaio AW can also be connected to your TV via an HDMI connection, which supports not only HD, but also 5.1 surround sound.

And at nearly 4kg, it may spend more time tethered to something at home than out on the road.



A SPARE, MORE RUGGED DESIGN FOR THE LATEST VERSION OF THE ORBIT-MP3 SPEAKER

Altec Lansing's new Orbit-MP3 is different from many external speaker systems

for portable music players. It looks as if there's just one speaker in there, not two. But sitting next to one, you get the full stereo experience.

For a product that costs about US\$40, the Orbit's sound quality is quite good. And it runs on three AAA batteries, which the company claims will last for 24 hours of continuous play). This is important because that means the Orbit has no AC adapter, a device that adds weight when you toss the unit in a briefcase or backpack.

This second version of the Orbit comes with two big improvements: an on/off switch and a battery life indicator.

The earlier version had a clever power switch — you rotated the top of the unit to turn it on and off. While it was an interesting idea, it was easy to forget that the unit was

on, meaning that the old Orbit went through batteries the way gas goes through a Hummer. Sacrificing a little form for function's sake is a marked improvement.

A STAND-ALONE VIDEOPHONE FOR COMPUTER-FREE HOUSEHOLDS

Computer users are familiar with Web cams, but for those who are more tech-averse but still want some basic two-way video capabilities, there's the Asus AiGuru SV1.

A stand-alone Web cam and display, the SV1 connects to an existing Wi-Fi or Ethernet network in your home, no PC required. It is also a Skype-certified videophone (it uses the free service to provide video connections) and comes equipped with a 7-inch LCD monitor that uses a large, easy-to-read icon-based interface.

The videophone has a built-in 640 by 480 pixel Web cam, an integrated speakerphone and 20 minutes of talk time and 30 standby minutes. Alternatively, the SV1 can be plugged into an outlet. Also included are a USB port and 3.5mm headphone and microphone jack.

The US\$300 AiGuru is to be available next month — just in time to let grandparents check out the grandchildren's costumes before trick-or-treating.

LASER PRECISION IN A MOUSE FOR GAMERS



A regular mouse is good for navigating Web pages and handling other document-based work. But when it comes to meeting gamers' needs, regular specifications can fall short, especially where sensitivity is concerned (you want to make sure you hit the two-headed monster in just the right spot, after all).

Hewlett-Packard's Laser Gaming Mouse with VooDoo DNA technology offers up to five levels of on-the-fly sensitivity, which means a gamer can adjust its settings up to a hypersensitive 3,200dpi (compared with a standard 400dpi or 800dpi mouse).

The Laser Gaming Mouse also includes a four-way scroll wheel, Teflon gaming feet for smoother movement and a laser-based sensor. The 153g right-handed model will be available in mid-next month. Somewhere, a Razer is trembling.

—NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE