

# DEREK LEE RAGIN

COUNTERTENOR

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## **Rebel faithful to Baroque's enchanting style**

By JOSEPH DALTON, Staff writer, Tuesday, April 5, 2005

TROY -- The Troy Chromatics concluded their 108th season on Monday night with a concert of the New York-based Baroque ensemble Rebel in the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. Though there were only six instrumentalists on stage -- string quartet, bass and harpsichord -- they gave the feel of a chamber orchestra. This was partly the result of the repertoire, which included a number of excerpts from operas, with Derek Lee Ragin, a counter tenor and guest artist.

Ragin was a riveting performer. His expressive face is crowned by eyebrows that can rise halfway up his forehead, and he has an agile but lyrical voice.

"Cara sposa," an aria from Handel's "Rinaldo," closed the concert's first half with a gorgeous mix of melancholy, yearning and willfulness. Near the end, when the strings reprised a fugue and the voice entered again, Ragin was no longer so much a soloist as an integral part of a tight-knit ensemble evoking great feeling and intent.

With no texts or translations included in the program for any of the arias, listeners were a bit adrift, at least at first. But the meaning of the songs usually came through loud and clear.

"Cessate, Omai Cessate," a short cantata by Vivaldi featuring a pair of recitatives and arias, wrestled with time as a concept as well as a musical component. Pizzicatos in the strings resembled a ticking clock, while the counter tenor's line -- punctuated by sudden swooping high notes -- was a constant stop and go.

The entire evening alternated between short varied pieces for the ensemble and sets of arias. Just when it began to feel as if a Handel suite or a sinfonia by Albinoni had exhausted the devices of the Baroque style, Ragin would enter again and a whole new world of sound unfolded.

Listening to early music performance requires some adjustments to the ear. The music's emotional content can be more subtle and the techniques of performance can seem quirky.

Rebel certainly did not fall into the early music trap of being overly restrained -- there was plenty of life on stage.

Something that was obvious and impressive was team work. With little drama or showiness, first violinist Jorg-Michael Schwarz generally kept the players in a keen sense of ensemble throughout the satisfying program.

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