

# DEREK LEE RAGIN

## COUNTERTENOR

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**THE**   
**INDEPENDENT**

L'Infedelta Delusa/Teseo, Hackney Empire, London

Reviewed by Michael Church Thursday, 18 October 2007

English Touring Opera have hit the road again. First offering: Handel's Teseo. The plot is conventionally labyrinthine, turning on mistaken identity, jealousy and revenge. It's full of youthful exuberance – Handel was still in his twenties – and if it lacks an aria of heart-stopping beauty, it's still a delight.

It's all about characters and voices, and that's how James Conway presents it, on a rudimentary set, with the aid of Handel's original "wordbook" in the form of electronic surtitles in an 18th-century typeface. No literal translations, just phrases to convey a mood: "He again puts her in mind of his passion." **But that is enough: with this excellent cast of five women and one man (the counter-tenor Derek Lee Ragin), singing and body-language convey all we need to know.**

**Ragin has three voices – falsetto sweetness, tenor low notes and a baritone laugh – and a whimsical manner that makes his King Egeo an ironic focus for the drama.** Backed by a first-rate period band, the women negotiate their coloratura flights with nimble ease.

The mezzos in trouser roles, in particular, are outstanding. Valerie Komar makes her entrance as Teseo, heralded by a community choir: tall, debonair, and exuding authority, she delivers a wonderfully polished sound. Lina Markeby plays the oppressed lover Arcane with such rapt intensity, and such refined vocal artistry, that she commands total attention. Listen out for these names.

Clad in Adam Wiltshire's inventive designs, ETO's second offering – Haydn's L'infedelta delusa, here translated as "Country Matters" – was a knockout. As befits a satire on the social system of Austria-Hungary, this is stuffed with send-ups and stereotypes that ETO's five singer-actors played to perfection.

Deftly supported by Justin Doyle in the pit, Jonathan Gunthorpe, Lorina Gore and Huw Rhys-Evans delivered their arias and trios with flawless comic timing, while Charlotte Ellet and Andrew Staples pulled off extraordinary feats of vocal and physical agility. **Hard to imagine this fizzing piece ever being better done.**

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