



■ Sky Ingram as Dido with ETO

sacred and secular pieces loosely constructed around the murderous composer's lurid private life and his questionable relationship with his God. These were warm-ups for Purcell's masterly *Dido and Aeneas*, which was of course sung in English.

The company's artistic director, James Conway, made a speciality of Handel in his previous job at Dublin's Opera Theatre Company and has programmed a considerable number of Handel's finest operas, plus the odd rarity (*Teseo, Tolomeo*), since taking over ETO 15 years ago. Whatever one's reservations about his production of *Radamisto*—simply and handsomely designed by Adam Wiltshire, who was also responsible for the visuals of the triple bill—his decision to take this masterpiece, even in truncated form, to the

extremities of England (the tour travels from London to Durham, Ulverston, Exeter, Snape and elsewhere) can only be applauded. A complete *Radamisto*, which Handel himself cut and tinkered with at its several later revivals, was wisely not considered after the dubious 'success' of last year's two-part *Giulio Cesare*; instead the edition, zestily conducted by Peter Whelan, was based on Handel's revised score of 1720, when his star castrato Senesino arrived in London to oust his compatriot Margherita Durastanti from the title role.

Handel's score is packed with vocal plums—of which the highlight is undoubtedly the hero's rapt lament 'Ombra cara', written for Durastanti but clearly relished by Senesino—and most of them were delivered with aplomb here, especially by Ellie Laugharne as Radamisto's sister and Tiridate's neglected wife Polissena, Katie Bray as the put-upon Zenobia and William Towers as the placid, sweet-voiced hero. Both Laugharne and Bray were vivid actors in these spitfire roles, more than compensating for Towers's somewhat phlegmatic persona. The two women wore their sumptuous period costumes with elan, but Towers looked embarrassed by his. Conway's staging didn't spring any big surprises but nor did it strain to make *Radamisto* relevant. This is one of Handel's most consistently serious operas, heroic and lofty in tone, and the production broadly respected that, especially in Part 2 (as is becoming standard practice the opera was split in the middle of the central act) where hanging Turkish lamps