

6 Part V/Saturday, April 13, 1985

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## GREGG SMITH SINGERS AT THE COUNTY MUSEUM

**T**here are many choral groups in this country, but only a few are fully professional. Thus the Gregg Smith Singers, who have been performing since 1958, occupy a particular position in the musical world.

Smith has long been associated with new music, but his program Thursday evening at the County Museum of Art seemed conservative. Nonetheless, the 16-voice ensemble introduced William Hawley's recent Two Motets to Los Angeles listeners.

The New York composer's work, an *a cappella* setting of two secular Latin texts, proceeds from Medieval textures and sonorities and moves exquisitely to mildly dissonant 20th-Century harmonies. Smith divided the group into quartets placed on four sides of the audience; Hawley's music fully exploits the antiphonal arrangement.

The choir also encircled the audience to perform canonic works by Dufay and Gregg Smith, as well as an anonymous canon. In every case the singers performed with solid precision and a good deal of energy.

Both Mel Powell's "Six Love Songs on Anonymous 17th-Century Texts" and William Schuman's

"Five Rounds on Famous Themes" are pleasant, accessible and skillfully written. The singers performed handsomely in both sets.

The program also included works by Victoria, Billings, Schubert, Berg and Barber. In each, the ensemble demonstrated fine balance and blend, superb dynamic control and, above all, extraordinary rhythmic tautness and text articulation. Rarely does one find words so easy to understand.

—TERRY McQUILKIN

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