

REVIEWS AND NEWS

MUSIC REVIEW

12 Voices Celebrate 25 Years Of Harmony

By PAUL GRIFFITHS

The 12 singing men of Chanticleer smartly introduced themselves on Friday evening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where they are scheduled to return frequently. They will be welcome. Performing without a conductor, they gave performances of fine rhythmic precision and squeaky-clean tuning. They also showed off the bell-like clarity of their ensemble sound and the extraordinary range and purity of their top voices, justly billed as sopranos. These men are phenomenal: as fresh as a blade of grass, tightly focused and keenly expressive.

For this first occasion, also celebrating 25 years of singing together, the team offered "Our American Journey," a program made up in increasing parts of older sacred music, pieces written for these singers and popular music across a spectrum from Stephen Foster to George Gershwin.

The balance should have gone the other way, for the latter part of the

evening sounded like six encore items in a row, whereas the selections from the Mexican Baroque and the New England Naïve were too soon over. Juan de Lienas's double-choir setting of Psalm 115 was a strong opener, with opportunities right away to hear full harmony beautifully sounded by the altos and sopranos: you have to imagine the Beach Boys singing Lassus. "David's Lamentation" by William Billings was holiness yelled.

Of the newer works, William Hawley's Tasso settings and Steven Stucky's "Whispers" dallied in sophisticated fashion with older music, Gesualdo and Monteverdi coming to Broadway in Mr. Hawley's music, Byrd breaking through in Mr. Stucky's. Jackson Hill's "Voices of Autumn" was all glowing harmony; Brent Michael Davids's "Un-covered Wagon," a whooping romp.



Hiroiyuki Ito for The New York Times

Members of Chanticleer singing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.