

# Chanticleer scores with modern pieces in traditional style

By Richard Pontziou

EXAMINER MUSIC CRITIC

**C**HANTICLEER is a marvelous vocal ensemble. That's a given. For seven years, Louis Botto and company have traveled the globe singing songs and Masses as old as the 16th

***'To hear them is to come face to face with inspiration and freshness'***

century and as new as today.

At their best, the 12 men of Chanticleer create sounds that are so richly colored and filled with a joy of singing, that to hear them is to come face to face with inspiration and freshness.

Such was the case last night at the Herbst Theater, where the ensemble closed out its 1985-86 San Francisco season. The Seven Madrigals of William Hawley were sung with a sensitivity that conveyed the deepest meaning of Tasso's poetry.

"Hours, cease your flight in the lucid East," they sang, and it was as though someone had spread flowers in the path of the tones as they made their way to the ear.

Hawley, 36, wrote the love songs

especially for Chanticleer, and it suits them perfectly. He is a composer who speaks with a cultured voice that is keenly aware of the Renaissance classics.

A second American composer, Steven Sametz, 32, also provided Chanticleer with music for last night's program. Though the musical language was similar to Hawley's, Sametz' subject was much more serious. "A Mystical Vision of St. John of the Cross" is a setting of poems written by a Reformed Carmelite priest who was imprisoned in 1577 by members of the traditional sect.

It is a moving setting, one that captures the feelings of the priest as he struggles for freedom and comes face-to-face with the Blessed Virgin. Sametz' use of chant and early music technique is skilled, and cannot be faulted. But one wishes that Sametz and Hawley had stretched themselves and taken advantage of appropriate 20th century techniques.

Surrounding the contemporary pieces were two major works by William Byrd: "On the Assumption of the Virgin Mary" to open, and the Easter Mass to close. Both suffered at this performance.

The men of Chanticleer offered little of themselves to either of these works. They sang them without spirit, without commitment and without personality.