



Eduard Franck: String Quartets

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[Fanfare](#) (Martin Anderson - 01.01.2002)

Eduard Franck was born in Breslau in 1817, studied with Mendelssohn in Leipzig between 1834 and 1838, moved from Berlin to Cologne, from there to Bern, and on to Berlin in 1867 as head of piano at the Stern Conservatoire. His last post was as professor in his hometown, and he died in Berlin in 1893. He was the father of the pianist and composer Richard Franck. Even in his lifetime, Eduard Franck's music hardly made an impact: Six symphonies, three quartets, two concertos each for piano and violin, much chamber music, and works for piano—all largely forgotten by the time he died.

The music of these two quartets is confidently and expertly crafted—and just a tad anonymous at times. But Franck has a ready stream of melody into which he taps for some gorgeous tunes, and even if he doesn't readily establish a harmonic identity, he is always resourceful and inventive. The op. 54 quartet, probably the second of the three he produced, was written in 1847, when Brahms was 14—and again and again it's Brahms whom the music prefigures. Take the second subject of the first movement—who but Brahms could have written that melody? The same with the exquisite second movement, though here there's an admixture of Schubert, too. The lusty scherzo looks even further into the future: It directly pre-echoes the scherzo of Franz Schmidt's A-Major String Quartet of 1925. Michael Struck-Schloen's notes call on Beethoven and Haydn as influences on the E♭ Quartet, op. 55 (date unknown—it was published only in 1899): a slow introduction, in the late Beethoven's searching manner, and a concertante role for the first violin à la Haydn. The deeply expressive slow movement evokes Bach, both in manner and with a direct quote from the St. John Passion. This is something special: It brought tears to my ears when I first heard it. A buoyant minuet brushes such cares aside. And for the finale—11 variations on a monophonic song—he takes Beethoven's op. 74, the "Harp" Quartet, as his model, as Struck-Schloen points out. And now the pre-echoes are more surprising still: There are passages here that point forward to Robert Simpson's Ninth Quartet of 1982.

The Edinger Quartet performs both works with passion and commitment—not always perfectly in tune (the leader, Christiane Edinger, in particular), but not so far out that it mars your enjoyment. Good sound from Audite, and a helpful essay from Struck-Schloen.

This is, in fact, the sixth CD that the Detmold label Audite has dedicated to Eduard and Richard Franck. A cello sonata from each gentleman appears on Audite 20021, as does more music for cello and piano on 20.031; each of two Eduard Franck symphonies shares its disc with one of his violin concertos on 20.025 and 20.034; and his op. 49 String Quartet and Piano Quintet, op. 45, can be found on 20.033. I haven't had a chance to hear these discs yet, but you can be sure I am going to

chase them down. In the meantime, this one is strongly recommended—here's another Franck you really ought to know.

