



Eduard Franck: Orchestral Works

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RECORD REVIEW
 Born into a prosperous, intellectually endowed Silesian family in 1817, Eduard Franck lived until 1893. His chamber works enjoyed reasonable currency during his lifetime, though Franck remains an obscure and underrepresented figure within the pantheon of early Germanic romanticism. Renewed interest in his music today owes much to the endeavours of sibling musicologists Paul and Andreas Feuchte, whose joint study *Die Komponisten Eduard Franck und Richard Franck – Leben und Werk, Dokumente, Quellen*, was published in its revised second edition in 2010. Franck's output is being published in new critical editions by Pfefferkorn Musik, Leipzig, and Audite is continuing to survey his music (together with that of his composer son Richard, 1858-1938) on disc, with a series of distinguished and authoritative new recordings, of which the latest is considered here.

As the critic Wilhelm Altmann observed, 'This excellent composer does not deserve the neglect with which he has been treated. He had a mastery of form and a lively imagination which is clearly reflected in the fine and attractive ideas one finds in his works.' That conclusion is certainly vindicated by several of the works heard here, all of which are receiving their first commercial recordings. However, it would be idle to pretend that the derivative element is not present in substantial measure, not that this greatly diminishes the listening pleasure this music undoubtedly affords. Nor will it come as any great surprise to discover that Franck, with his bourgeois and conservative background, became a disciple of Mendelssohn at an early age, studying privately with him in Düsseldorf and Leipzig. Other key influences included Robert Schumann and Ferdinand Hiller, though Franck's style remains personal and distinctive enough to justify adding at least some of his music to any collection.

Previous releases in Audite's series have included Franck's Symphonies (the B flat, Op. 52 of 1856 is well worth getting to know, and is more thematically concise than the A major work, Op. 47, which followed a few years later), but it is his committed and expert performances of the violin concertos which have impressed the most thus far. Both concertos reveal a virtuosity and lyricism that would scarcely shame even Mendelssohn himself, and Edinger's advocacy of these works, in E minor, Op. 30 (1855) and D, Op. 57 (1860), is strongly compelling. It is good to hear her once again on this new CD, playing with flair and evident accomplishment the *Konzertstück in A* for violin and orchestra, a demanding and virtuosic work composed in Rome in 1844.

The other Roman work here is the overture *Der römische Carneval*, Op. 21, written in 1854. As the critic Franz Brendel concluded, 'Bold, if not novel, is the idea after Berlioz, of wanting to immortalize the Roman Carnival once again with an instrumental work.' Certainly there is little here to compete with the dazzle and verve of the eponymous Berlioz work, but despite the pompously fabricated opening

trumpet fanfare, this attractive piece is worth hearing. It reveals Franck's skill as an orchestrator to good effect, even if the thematic material is somewhat less memorable, and this performance, from Ola Rudner and the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen is spirited and vigorous, setting out a case for this brief work that one imagines would be hard to state much more convincingly.

The Concert Overture, Op. 12 (1848) with which this recording ends, however, is a weaker affair, cast in three distinct sections preceded by a stately Adagio introduction which offers much the finest music the work has to offer. The style is demonstrably Schumannesque, with strong echoes of Schumann's far more concisely argued Overture, Scherzo and Finale, Op. 52, written seven years earlier.

Conversely, the Fantasie for orchestra in G major, Op. 16 is essentially a three-movement symphony in all but name, and a powerfully argued and skilfully constructed one at that. Only the self-consciously old-fashioned central minuet movement is slightly weaker in melodic terms, but this substantial work, lasting fractionally over half an hour, is certainly another demonstration of the impressive quality of Franck's music at its considerable best.

To sum up, here is another welcome addition to a series which continues to gain in stature and significance with each successive issue. Performances and engineering are of high calibre, though Wolfgang Rathert's booklet essay might have focused more helpfully on the music itself, rather than offering a nevertheless cogently argued depiction of the zeitgeist that nurtured it. This is an impressive offering, fully up to the standards one has grown to expect from this label.