Eduard Franck: Orchestral Works II

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Rewarding music in very fine performances

Eduard Franck (1817-1893) was a German composer of some note in his day (no relation to Cesar Franck), and on the evidence of the music here, a rather unfairly neglected one. Fortunately Audite has done an impressive job of recording his music. The violin concerto in D major op. 57 was composed in 1860 and is apparently his second work in the genre. It is an ambitious, inventive and thoroughly engaging work; it may not be the most stylistically original concerto composed in the Romantic era, but Franck's writing for the instrument (and the orchestra) is impressive and much of the music here is deeply rewarding and even memorable. The first movement appears to be very influenced by Beethoven, but Franck clearly knew how to live up to the ambitious scheme. The somewhat Brahmsian slow movement, on the other hand, is a masterpiece on its own – the kind that will haunt the listener for a long time afterwards. The finale is delightful, if light, with plenty of fiery fireworks in the solo part. Overall, this is a magnificent work that would surely warrant a life in the concert hall.

The symphony in B major op. 52 dates from 1856 and is, apparently, Franck's second or third (it is a little unclear, and not all of his works in the genre seems to have survived). Although it may not be quite in the league of the violin concerto it is still an impressive work, this time clearly inhabiting the sound world of Schumann though with a certain personal streak – the composer that my mind was most frequently drawn toward was Robert Volkmann. It is a confident, often atmospheric work; the thematic material is generally strong and Franck certainly knew what to do with it – the format is taut and the argument cogent.

Two easily recommended works, then, and particular praise should go to the violin concerto. The performances by the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra under Hans-Peter Frank may not exhibit the last touch of finesse, but they are far more than merely serviceable, conjuring up plenty of spirit, color, panache and exuberance. Christiane Edinger produces affectionate playing in the concerto, and while some details may be a little fuzzy her ability to sustain a singing line is consistently impressive, in particular in the second movement. Overall, this is a very rewarding release, recommended with some enthusiasm.

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