



Richard Franck: Piano Quartets & Fantasies

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In November 2003 Musicweb posted reviews of four CDs of music Eduard Franck (see below). Since then the total recorded by Audite has increased to nine (including two violin concertos, two symphonies and a fair amount of chamber music) including this one of music by his son Richard for piano quartet and solo piano. The driving force behind this both worthy and worthwhile project has been another father and son pairing, Paul and Andreas Feuchte, who are respectively grandson and great-grandson of Richard through his daughter Toni Feuchte to whom the family's musical legacy was left.

The musical language of Franck Vater and Sohn, despite the change of generation and all that usually implies, remains unashamedly that of Mendelssohn and Schumann; for proof listen no further than the piano quartet in one movement with its virtually note-for-note quotation from the finale of Mendelssohn's violin concerto in the opening and closing Allegri. Franck's musical language consists of engagingly pleasant melodies in the context of the traditionally diatonic harmonic vocabulary he inherited via his father from those two mid-19th century composers. They are cast in the mould of Max Bruch, who also continued to write in 1920 as he had in 1865. Time stood still, the New German School headed by Liszt and Wagner was not for them, and one has to listen to and accept the works of such composers on that basis. Nonetheless Richard Franck writes well for the piano quartet combination. There is lucid clarity in the lines given to the three stringed instruments as well as powerful sonorities and rich textures in the piano writing. It is curious that, given the apparent skill and confidence he displays and which comes across when listening to his music, he did not write for string quartet (a Spanish Serenade is his only foray into that area), but on the other hand his masterly piano writing in the Three Fantasies (he was an outstanding pianist) confirms the territory occupied by that instrument as his natural habitat. Both quartets are certainly worthy of a place in the piano quartet repertory.

Performances here are excellent, with muscular virtuosity from the pianist and richly vibrant tone from all three string players, the recording ambience first class. They clearly enjoyed discovering and passing on to us these highly enjoyable works. It's a must for those who want to explore the musical byways of the 19th and early 20th centuries.