



Eduard Franck: Orchestral Works

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amazon Volume three of Franck's orchestral works proves as rewarding and enjoyable as its predecessors

Music lovers who have been following Audite's ongoing and rewarding survey of Eduard Franck's music will hardly need second bidding to investigate this latest volume of his orchestral works nor are they likely to be disappointed with its contents. All the works here apparently date from the 1840s and stand firmly in the Early Romantic tradition. The influence of his friend and one-time teacher, Mendelssohn, is apparent but some pieces – the Symphonic Fantasy, op.16, for example – show his own distinctive lyrical personality beginning to come to the fore.

The programme opens with his breezy, brightly scored 'Roman Carnival' overture, a choice of subject matter that apparently engendered some raised eyebrows among German critics given Berlioz's own recent overture on the same subject: "Bold, if not novel, is the idea, after Berlioz, of wanting to immortalise the Roman Carnival once again..." wrote one. Franck could hardly be further in temperament or, indeed, in originality from the French composer but at a century and a half's distance from the artistic debates of Franck's time such comparisons hardly matter and the work strikes me as a real delight when listened to on its own terms.

The centrepiece of this collection is the half-hour long 'Symphonic Fantasy', effectively a symphony without a slow movement – perhaps Franck was inspired to this modest structural innovation by Schumann's 'Overture, Scherzo and Finale', though his own work is conceived on a broader scale and replaces the scherzo with a minuet, albeit a sometimes energetic one. The absence of a slow movement makes sense when one listens to the opening movement, which is marked 'Allegro moderato' and contains extended 'andante' passages; the mood is really not far removed from Franck's A major symphony, lyrical and beautifully (though not ostentatiously) scored – there is some lovely writing for the woodwind throughout and a delectable passage for solo violin in the opening movement. A vivacious finale concludes proceedings in high spirits, the sparkling and fizzing strings bolstered by some weighty brass underpinning – another, brief violin solo returns against tremolando strings to provide a poetic and (surprisingly) quiet coda. Anyone who regrets the loss of two of the composer's four symphonies will, I think, find some ample compensation here.

Of the remaining two works, the one movement 'Konzertstück' for violin and

orchestra is a conventional but charming piece of its kind – in its concluding 'Allegro' section the mood is rather lighter than in his violin concertos, the solo part more concerned with virtuoso display than lyricism or Romantic atmosphere but it makes its points well and there are no longeurs. The concert overture, op. 12, like the overture that opened the disc, also drew some adverse comments from the critics, here on account of the composer's reintroduction of its 'Adagio' opening material near the work's conclusion – it's an enjoyable piece that strikingly pits the woodwind against the full orchestra during its 'Presto' sections but perhaps, if I am honest, not quite as cohesive as the 'Roman Carnival' overture overall. It certainly makes for enjoyable listening, however, though I think I would have placed it before the 'Symphonic Fantasy' simply because the finale of that work is rather more striking in terms of material and structure and would have closed the programme in a more noteworthy way.

In a departure from the previous issues of Franck's orchestral works, Ola Rudner replaces Hans-Peter Franck as conductor and the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen provide the orchestral playing – there is, however, no loss of quality or artistry and the performers seem just as much in tune to the composer's idiom as their predecessors had been. Christine Edinger, a staunch advocate of Franck's music on disc and in the concert hall, brings a good deal of warmth and style to the solo violin part in the Konzertstück. Sound quality, as with all Audite original recordings I have heard, is very good.

If you aren't already familiar with the works of Eduard Franck and you are looking for Romantic era music that storms the heavens or plumbs great emotional depths, I'd hazard that this disc might not be for you; but if you respond to music with a distinctive lyrical voice of its own, a conservative rather than radical Early Romantic sensibility and impeccable craftsmanship then you will find all those qualities in abundance here. This is a series of releases that seems to me to go from strength to strength and this latest issue has proved to be a real joy to listen to.

Warmly recommended.