



Eduard Franck: Orchestral Works II

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More warm hearted orchestral works from Eduard Franck

Audite's previous disc of orchestral works – like this one, a violin concerto and a symphony – was a real winner, sympathetically recorded and performed. This follow up album is also a rewarding and interesting release.

The D major violin concerto strives for a loftier tone than the E minor work on the previous disc and while it may seem a little more impersonal in mood during the first movement, it still mines Franck's rich seam of melody and harmonic resource. Repeated listenings have shown that, like in his previous concerto, he is capable of stirring emotion without resource to gimmicks or flashiness. The second movement reflects the serious tone of the first movement, eschewing the variation format of the previous work in favour of an 'adagio molto espressivo' that one might expect from a Romantic concerto of this era; it is in a relatively uncomplicated ABA form, with the traditional 'dramatic' episode at the centre of the movement. For me, this central part misses fire somewhat, but I am willing to concede that it might sound differently with alternative performers – without knowledge of the score, it is difficult to ascertain whether the slightly stilted and awkward moments are a result of Edinger and the conductor or the composer himself; it might indeed be both; it is but a minor cavil, though. The finale is a rustic sounding dance, with an opening theme that initially threatens to turn into Bruch but immediately carries on to form an ingratiatingly memorable melody that lingers in the mind long after the piece has finished.

My partner feels that Edinger, in this and the E minor concerto on Audite's other disc, is a little over-emphatic as a performer at times, to the detriment of Franck's music; for myself, although I can see how a more historically aware performance might also reap dividends, I am generally quite happy with her warmth and rich emotion. It is a matter of taste therefore and I would have room in my collection for both this and an alternate performance on 'authentic' instruments should any adventurous period band decide to take up the scores.

I awarded the previous disc an unequivocal five stars, but this disc I have given four stars only. This is because I don't feel the symphony in B flat is as well balanced or distinctive as its A major counterpart. Although contemporary critics had reservations about the slow movement and finale, I feel it is the two outer movements that let the work down.

The first movement is as one expects from Franck the symphonist, a relatively untroubled and flowing piece, the development section moving along quite naturally and elegantly – indeed the whole movement has an easy grace about it and is finely orchestrated. The problem is that the material lacks a certain definition and memorability.

The scherzo, a type of movement for which Franck seems to have had a definite flair, certainly doesn't disappoint; and while the slow movement cries out for a strong melody to really pull it together, it has no lack of atmosphere, at times the twilight shades becoming quite dark. It is a shame that it is followed by an amiable but not particularly memorable finale and one which is far too short and inconsequential to round off a symphony from this period, even a conservative and modest one.

The result then is a fine concerto and a pleasant, curate's egg of a symphony. Given that the minor keys produced some of the composer's most interesting chamber music, it is lamentable that the two early minor key symphonies appear to have disappeared without a trace – we can only hope that copies of the manuscripts or parts turn up somewhere so that Audite can continue with their enterprising and valuable service to this neglected composer.