



Eduard Franck: Orchestral Works

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[Fanfare](#) (Jerry Dubins - 2012.12.01)

From its inception, I've been following Audite's slow but dedicated exploration of the music of Eduard Franck. No relation to the Belgian-French composer of the same surname, Breslau-born Eduard Franck (1817–93) was of pure German pedigree and studied with Mendelssohn, first in Dusseldorf and then in Leipzig from 1834 to 1838. Thus far, most of what Audite has made available to us of Franck's music are the composer's chamber works, though previously released have also been two symphonies and two violin concertos.

Unfortunately, the scope of Franck's output is not yet fully known. Leipzig music publisher Pfefferkorn has yet to complete a critical edition of the composer's complete works which, if one counts just those with opus number, total 60. It's likely, though, that there are many more, for Franck is said to have been a perfectionist and his own worst critic, refusing to allow publication of works he deemed unworthy. If you prefer not to read the rest of this, it can be summed up as follows: Franck marches in step with the mainstream parade of German Romantics, passing the reviewing stand somewhere between Mendelssohn and Schumann. That should give you a good idea of what Franck's music sounds like and whether you're apt to like it. What one learns from reading Wolfgang Rathert's essay on the social and cultural climate of Franck's world is that the composer's cautious personality and bourgeois sensibilities caused him to reject the progressive wing of the Romantic movement, namely Berlioz, Chopin, Liszt, and Wagner. But you needn't read the album note to know that; listening to the pieces on this disc—indeed to all of Franck's works Audite has thus far recorded—will tell you everything you need to know.

Earliest of the four works here is the Concert Piece in A Major for Violin and Orchestra, dating from approximately 1844. If you're diabetic, keep your insulin handy, because the piece begins with an Andante so sugary it should come with a warning label. If you're not comatose after seven minutes of this overly sentimental salon music, the second half is an Allegro that can't seem to make up its mind whether it wants to be a virtuosic gambol for the violin or a rehash of the Andante played at a faster tempo. I suppose it's really not much different from similar works by a number of famous French violinist-composers of the period, such as Rodolphe Kreutzer, Pierre Rode, and Charles de Bériot—think the latter's *Scène de ballet*. Next in chronological order is the Concert Overture, dated 1848. Mendelssohn's spirit hovers over the Adagio's opening pages in the chorale-like intoning of the brass, but with the arrival of the Presto, the style takes a distinct turn toward Beethoven. The oddity of this overture is its form. Midway through, it returns to the opening Adagio and then a reprise of the Presto.

Next up chronologically is the Fantasy for Orchestra, composed in 1851. In all but name, this three-movement, 30-minute work is a symphony, with a fully developed sonata-allegro first movement; only missing is a slow movement. Even though by this time Mendelssohn had been dead for four years, Franck seems reluctant to leave his

former teacher's graveside. There's still more Mendelssohn in Franck's Fantasy than there is Schumann, a bit surprising when you consider that Schumann had had his miracle chamber-music year (1842) nine years earlier and that he had completed the revision of his last symphony in the same year that Franck wrote his Fantasy. Finally, we come to the Roman Carnival Overture, dated 1854. Don't expect Berlioz, and don't be too shocked if here and there you hear fragments that sound like they were lifted from Beethoven's Fidelio Overture. It seems as if Franck is going backward in time instead of forward.

None of this is to say that these are not well-made scores by an expert musical craftsman, or that they can't be appreciated and enjoyed. It does explain, however, why Eduard Franck never achieved much recognition in his lifetime and was already a forgotten name well before the turn of the 20th century. I doubt that Audite's efforts on his behalf will revive him. I will say this, though: Having collected all of Audite's CDs of Franck's chamber works, my sense is that the composer's special métier was for chamber music. The second of his two string sextets, in particular, the one in D Major, may be his crowning achievement and as near to an authentic masterpiece as he ever came.

Meanwhile, Ola Rudner and the Württemberg Philharmonic make the best case possible for Franck's orchestral works, and violinist Christiane Edinger spins the Concert Piece's sugar into a fine, fluffy, pink bouffant of cotton candy.