

E. FRANCK *Roman Carnival Overture*. Concert Piece in A for Violin and Orchestra. Fantasy for Orchestra. Concert Overture • Ola Rudner, cond; Christiane Edinger (vn); Württemberg PO • AUDITE 97686 (61:09)

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. **Jerry Dubins**

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Amazon Review - J.A. Peacock

5.0 out of 5 stars

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

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on May 10, 2012

Format: Audio CD **Verified Purchase**

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.