

E. FRANCK Piano Trios: in E; in E^b, op. 22; in D, op. 53 • Swiss Pn Tr •
AUDITE 97690 (74:21)

By now, readers should be somewhat familiar with Eduard Franck (1817–1893), following half-a-dozen or so appearances he has made here on recordings mainly of his chamber works. The Audite label, in particular, though not exclusively, has taken up the dual causes of Eduard and his son Richard with 15 or so discs devoted in large part to the two composers' chamber music output; and, being the compulsive collector of 19th-century chamber music that I am, I'm proud to say I've acquired every last one of them. But there's more to Eduard Franck than quartets, quintets, sextets, trios, and duo sonatas; among Audite's offerings have been two violin concertos, a disc of concert overtures, and two symphonies. This latest release, containing three of Eduard's piano trios, holds no surprises if you've already acquainted yourself with one or another previous Eduard Franck release, but like those that have preceded it, this disc of piano trios does hold in store just as many musical felicities.

I use the word "felicity" with intent; for Eduard studied privately with the "Felix" of Mendelssohn fame, and mostly Mendelssohn is what you get with these three trios. It's really hard to describe how brimming over this music is with sheer contentment in untroubled, joyful song. The nonstop rippling piano parts are shot through with Mendelssohn's nimble keyboard work, and even Franck's melodies are consistently constructed from intervals and phrases that are dead ringers for Mendelssohn's melodic invention. If you find Felix's two piano trios irresistible, you will be thrilled to know that Eduard Franck composed at least four piano trios just like them.

In fact, this is Audite's second volume of Franck's piano trios. The first (92567), on SACD, contained the trios in E Minor, op. 11, and D Major, op. 58, performed by a different ensemble of players than the Swiss Piano Trio on the current disc, which, for some reason, did not come to me on SACD. Also, be aware that if you purchased the Naxos CD containing Franck's sonatas for cello and violin, plus the E^b-Major Piano Trio I recommended in 36:5, the trio is duplicated on this Audite disc. No matter, though; it's worth the one duplication to get the two additional trios included on the present CD.

This is now my third or fourth encounter with the Swiss Piano Trio on record, and each one has elicited from me the highest praise. The ensemble's recent Audite release on SACD of Clara Schumann's Piano Trio led me to declare the Swiss Piano Trio one of the top ensembles on today's stage in 36:6; and in a 35:1 review of Robert Schumann's piano trios, Steven Ritter declared the Swiss Piano Trio's

Audite SACD an essential recording.

It seems only fitting that the Swiss Piano Trio, having already committed Mendelssohn's two piano trios to disc on another Audite SACD—to which I gave an urgent recommendation in 34: 6—should now turn its attention to Mendelssohn's musical *doppelgänger*, Eduard Franck. You cannot love 19th-century piano trios in general, and Mendelssohn's piano trios in particular, and not love these trios by Franck. Considering Franck's dates, the skewing of his catalog towards chamber works (though he did pen symphonies and orchestral scores), and his strong leaning towards a Mendelssohnian style, he bears comparison, I think, to his very close "French-though-I-prefer-to-be-German" contemporary, Theodor Gouvy (1819–1898).

I just don't understand why previous Audite releases have been SACDs and this one isn't. Perhaps there is a parallel SACD version, and I just happened to receive the standard two-channel stereo CD one. Anyway, with the music, performances, and recording being so beguiling, it would be churlish of me to complain. This is a must-buy recommendation. **Jerry Dubins**

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