



E. Franck: Piano Trios

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If you have been following and enjoying Audite's invaluable survey of Eduard Franck's work, you'll have been looking forward to this new release as much as I have. And I can confirm that it doesn't disappoint.

Franck seems to have composed in pretty much the same vein throughout his life and both these works contain his signature qualities - an abundance of attractive melody, occasional rustic overtones, bitter-sweet melancholy and a sure sense of structure. The music is conventional and content to work within an Early Romantic sense of classical form. As in his other recorded pieces, the scherzos are infectious and buoyant and the slow movements lyrical and, while not plumbing any great depth, often quite touching and tender.

The trio in E minor has an expansive opening 'allegro', which the artists play at a relatively leisurely pace - they obviously placed due emphasis on the 'moderato con espressione' markings; I would perhaps have preferred a little less indulgence, but there is much lovely music here, to linger over which isn't much of a problem. The finale opens strikingly with some florid solo violin writing and this sets the tone for an energetic and memorable finish to the work.

The D major trio opens with an allegro that feels more concisely argued and there is a fine development section that sets the seal on this satisfying movement. The scherzo is particularly delightful; as it trips merrily along, you might feel the composer's memory of a country dance is not far away. The 'andante con moto' alternates two of Franck's loveliest melodic inspirations and the finale, with further rustic echoes (this time with a distinct reminiscence for modern day listeners of Haydn's Symphony No. 82 and its bear-dance finale), rounds off this later piece that - for all the charm of the earlier trio - is, I think, one of the composer's most accomplished chamber works.

The recording and the performances are generally very fine. There were a couple of occasions where I felt the violin was a touch acidic in tone, but I notice this less as I play through the disc - I don't know whether this is because the problem is limited to the first movement of the E minor trio or whether my ear simply becomes accustomed to it. In any case, it is certainly not issue enough to spoil this lovely music or for anyone to be concerned about acquiring this highly recommended disc.