Eduard Franck: Piano Trios II

aud 97.690

EAN: 4022143976901

4 0 2 2 1 4 3 9 7 6 9 0 1

www.amazon.co.uk (J. A. Peacock - 19.02.2014)

Audite's rewarding survey of Eduard Franck's piano trios completed

With this latest release from German label Audite we now have all of Eduard Franck's extant piano trios available on disc and what a rewarding experience it has been getting to know this unduly neglected music. Violinist Christine Edinger – who has been a stalwart of the Franck revival throughout Audite's recordings of both the composer's chamber music and some of his orchestral music – Is absent here, the music being performed by the Swiss Piano Trio, a relatively young group which has already distinguished itself in recordings of Mendelssohn and the Schumanns (Robert and Clara): happily, the high standards of musicianship that have marked Audite's survey of Franck's oeuvre are maintained in this new release.

There are three trios here, all of them more concise than the two already recorded by Audite, and to all intents and purposes they hail from across his career – the earliest in E major (1835) was only recently published for the first time, the second (also in E major) was published in 1859, while the final work in D major is dated 1886 on its manuscript, though the booklet writer warns us that the high opus number (Op.53) was assigned by Franck's son, Richard, after the composer's death and that the trio cannot definitively be confirmed as "a late work" (there is a hiatus of two decades during which Eduard Franck seemingly lost interest in publishing any of his compositions). In a sense none of this is of great import – Franck seemingly found his personal voice early on in his creative career and took no interest in the more radical musical developments of the Romantic period.

Of the works here, only the trio of 1835 could possibly be said to stand out from the remainder of Franck's chamber music stylistically and then only in minor details: the piano part is a dominant presence, as in so much chamber music of the 1820s and 1830s, and the work's relatively small scale (it plays for around 20 minutes in total, half the duration of the trios Audite previously recorded by Franck*) is perhaps a sign of the young composer's inexperience at handling extended musical structures (the booklet surmises that this trio was written as a direct result of the lessons with Mendelssohn that commenced in 1834). In other respects, however, it already foreshadows many of the characteristics of his mature music – his melodic fecundity, such as in the uplifting primary theme of the opening 'Allegro' that plays an important role throughout the movement; his very personal warmth of expression, a marked harmonic bitter-sweet quality that is quite distinct from the respective idioms of

Schumann or Mendelssohn, for example, two composers who were surely formative influences on his style; and, of course, the verve and sense of forward momentum he brings to his faster movements – the persistently bubbling piano writing already mentioned contributes much to the graceful flow of the music here and the scherzo is typically vivacious and engaging (and, furthermore, remarkable for the economic use of thematic material in achieving this).

With the remaining two trios we have mature Franck – the slightly more extended opening movements of both trios and the greater emotional range they display are evidence surely of his increased experience and increased confidence in using what seems (on the evidence of his chamber output as a whole) to have been an innate gift for handling sonata form. That of the Op.22 trio is designated 'Allegro moderato con espressione', which accounts for the cantabile quality of the primary theme but he also introduces more animated – more light-hearted, perhaps? – material and it is testament to his talents that he melds these contrasting elements into a convincing whole. The 'Andante con moto' here and the 'Andante' of the D major trio, Op.53, are movements of considerable ardour (the heartfelt writing for the strings, for example, in that of Op.22 or the comparable lyricism in the 'Andante' of Op.53) and poetry – listen to his striking use of the piano's lower registers at the close of the D major's 'Andante' (and one might also draw attention in that respect to the haunting interplay of violin and cello in the trio-section of Op.22's scherzo).

With the E major trio, Op.22, we are in the unusual position of having a comparative recording for a major Eduard Franck work, this having been included on a Naxos disc of 2012 devoted to the composer's music**: I have to say that, much as I enjoyed getting to know the trio for the first time courtesy of the artists on that release – and there is no doubting their musicianship – the Swiss Piano Trio's performance will be the one I return to most often, as they seem to find more of the poetry in Franck's lyrical music without losing any momentum and have a lighter, more effervescent touch in the finale. I also have to say that I am inclined to agree with the reviewer of the Naxos release in that there is a slightly unpleasant, acid tone to Shmuel Ashkenasi's violin in that recording (though I should say that some other reviewers either don't seem to hear it or don't find it a problem).

The sound quality here, as I've come to expect from Audite, is impeccable – warm and natural and beautifully balanced. Combined with the polished and sympathetic musicianship on offer here from the Swiss Piano Trio, this disc is undoubtedly another feather in Audite's cap and yet another valuable addition to both the Eduard Franck discography and to our knowledge of German chamber music during the Romantic period.

Enthusiastically recommended – to confirmed admirers of the composer and general listener alike.

»audite« Ludger Böckenhoff • Tel.: +49 (0)5231-870320 • Fax: +49 (0)5231-870321 • info@audite.de • www.audite.de