



Eduard Franck: String Quintets

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RECORD REVIEW
 If I were writing a two-word review, I'd simply say 'rather nice'. However, you may need to know that Eduard Franck was born in Breslau in 1817 and died in 1893. A highly regarded pianist and a respected teacher, Franck was the son of a cultureloving banker. Thanks to his father's wealth, Franck was exposed to the highest forms of art and he was also able to study in Leipzig with Mendelssohn, which is very apparent in these particular pieces. Schubert may also be thought another strong influence; and there's always Mozart in terms of Franck's clarity of composition.

Of Franck's string-based chamber music, there are two quintets (both with two violas and thus a further connection to Mozart). They are happily collected here. Each is roughly 35 minutes in duration, each has four movements in a conventional layout and both are well worth getting to know. Neither work quite reaches the genius of the aforementioned composers, yet each is very enjoyable, very listenable and with much to return to. The earlier of the works begins in wistful fashion and with a sense of purpose, the lively Allegro writing engaging through delightful rhythmic élan and lovely melodies. The scherzo includes unexpected use of pizzicato; the slow movement is song-like; and an exuberant finale caps a youthful opus of elegant craftsmanship.

The C major Quintet has darker seams and can be troubled in its emotion. The slow movement is rather anguished, to which the dance-like Minuet (rather than a scherzo) is a charming foil. The only cause for doubt is a rather strenuous set of variations that act as the finale; there isn't quite the level of inspiration here that enlightens the first three movements or indeed the whole of the earlier work.

The performances are excellent, notable for the musicians' individual excellence and their intelligent interaction. If the chosen acoustic is slightly too spacious and a little edgy, the players fill the space with well-prepared performances that leave no doubt as to their belief in this music. Indeed, these two pieces should find many friends.