



Eduard Franck: String Quartets

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amazon Another fine issue in Audite's Eduard Franck edition

As I have noted in other reviews of Franck's chamber music, works in the minor keys do not figure prominently in his compositional oeuvre; this perhaps reflects an essentially genial and optimistic musical disposition, though listeners familiar with the works recorded so far by Audite will know that he is capable of passages and movements of heartfelt expression too.

The C minor quartet, op 55, recorded here sounds a more Romantic strain than his F minor quartet had done - reviewed here, Franck E - String Quartet in F minor Op.49/Piano Quartet in D major Op.45 (Edinger Quartett). That earlier work seemed to strive for a more elevated mode of expression: its musical argument is constructed through motive work that was perhaps derived ultimately from Beethoven's quartets, albeit transmuted through Mendelssohn. The opening movement in the C minor quarter shares the same sense of driving rhythm that had dominated the finale of his quartet in F minor; in this piece, however, it is allied with more full-bloodedly melodic mode of expression. If there is still a 'tragic' tone to this music, it is a personal rather than a universal one. The 'allegretto' that follows offers a consolatory and contrastingly tender sound world, before the vigorous scherzo introduces some wildly dancing music; the finale is something of a tour-de-force in its energy and changes of mood. It certainly rounds off the work in style.

The quartet in E flat major is expansively conceived and opens with a touching, almost hymn-like 'adagio molto' introduction; you might perhaps expect the main body of this sonata form movement to be somewhat mellow, but the 'allegro' that follows is a high-spirited piece, rich in detail and displaying the composer's customary sure handling of form. The long 'adagio molto espressivo' is an eloquent and touching piece - one of those movements of 'heartfelt expression' I referred to in the opening paragraph. The scherzo and finale seem somewhat short compared to the earlier movements, both of which are individually longer than scherzo and finale combined. There is certainly no lack of energy or incident in them, though, with the last movement displaying an engaging and imaginative mastery of melodic variation.

This is another successful disc in Audite's ongoing series of recordings devoted to Eduard Franck. On the basis of the issues we have heard so far, long may Audite's advocacy of this fine composer continue. Highly recommended.