

The Other Franck: The Music of Eduard Franck **By Andrew Hartman**

If one were to mention to the typical classical music lover the name of Franck, it is almost certain that it would be Cesar Franck who would come to mind. This is hardly surprising as Cesar Franck's famous symphony, chamber music, and organ works have all entered the standard repertory. In addition, Cesar Franck's pedagogical activities in Paris influenced a generation of composers who emulated his love of cyclical forms. However, there was another major composer named Franck in the 19th century, and his name was Eduard Franck. While for a variety of reasons he never became as famous as Cesar (no relation), his compositions, virtuosity as a piano soloist, and pedagogical activities place him in at least as high a sphere as an overall musician as his namesake. The music of Eduard Franck is of the highest quality, and it is that music which will concern us here.

Eduard Franck was born in Breslau on 5 October, 1817, and lived till 1 December, 1893. This makes him a slightly younger contemporary of Schumann, Mendelssohn, Verdi, Wagner, and Liszt, yet he lived to see the music of Bruckner, Mahler, Brahms, Dvorak, and Tchaikovsky. The major source for information on Eduard Franck's life is the 1993 work "The Life and Works of Eduard & Richard Franck, by Andreas and Paul Feuchte, the composer's grandson and great-grandson. Unfortunately, this work has not been translated into English so far as I know. The revival of the music of Eduard Franck and of that of his son Richard, really began with the publication of this biography and has been enormously helped by the tireless advocacy of the Feuchtes. They have been the major force behind the CD's that have been published, and in publicizing these two fine composers who had been virtually forgotten.

Eduard Franck was the son of a prosperous banker and grew up in a privileged and cultured household. His older brothers Hermann and Albert were also culturally inclined and well-connected in artistic circles. Hermann wrote on musical topics and counted Heine, Goethe, and Wagner among his acquaintances. Albert was a bookseller in Paris and knew Chopin and Heller. The latter dedicated one of his piano works to Albert. From the age of seventeen to twenty-one, Eduard Franck was one of Mendelssohn's rare private pupils, and Franck's music owed a lifetime debt to his brilliant teacher. The two of them performed together in public on more than one occasion, including a memorable two piano version of Haydn's oratorio *The Seasons*. Franck dedicated his opus 1, a collection of twelve etudes, to Mendelssohn who raved about the masterly craftsmanship displayed in the work. Mendelssohn's astute praise would be taken up by other critics throughout Franck's career, who marveled at the craftsmanship of the composer. Craftsmanship in music is sometimes hard to describe but it is always easy to discern, and anyone listening to the music of Eduard Franck will immediately use the term to describe it. The man knew how to compose. Indeed one may be tempted to paraphrase Berlioz's famous quip about Saint-Saens, that as a composer, Franck lacked nothing but inexperience. Yet musical ideas without technical craftsmanship are worthless, and Franck had technical expertise in spades. One is reminded of another unsung master craftsman, Sergey Taneyev, when considering this aspect of Franck's music.

After returning to his native Breslau after his lessons with Mendelssohn, Franck moved around quite a bit, absorbing musical influences in London, Paris, and Rome, as well as Berlin. At the age of thirty-three, with his career as a piano soloist, teacher, and composer well established, Franck married the talented pianist Tony Thiedemann, a member of Fanny Mendelssohn's circle. The couple's son Richard Franck was born in 1858, and went on to become an excellent composer in his own right.

Eduard Franck went on to have prestigious teaching posts in Bern and Berlin, before winding up back in Breslau for his final pedagogical assignment. During this time he had an active career as a soloist, and composed prolifically, particularly for his own instrument. Why is Eduard Franck's music so little known today, despite its undeniable quality? His descendants Andreas and Paul Feuchte theorize that the major problem was that Franck was a perfectionist who hated to release any piece for publication unless he was completely satisfied with it. In fact, Franck at one point published no music for over two decades (late 1850's – 1880). When, late in his life, he did start publishing more of his works, many

had been composed decades earlier and often seemed out of step with current musical trends. Many additional works were only published posthumously by his son Richard. Throughout his life, Franck stayed true to the heritage of Mendelssohn and his circle, and concentrated on absolute instrumental music rather than the new forms being pioneered by Wagner, Liszt, and others. Like his younger French contemporary Camille Saint-Saens, Franck composed a remarkable number of superb works, but his style did not evolve radically over the decades and his music was gradually forgotten. It is only in recent decades, thanks to the efforts of the Audite label, and the advocacy of the Feuchtes who realize the treasures contained in their ancestor's manuscripts, that we have come to know any significant amount of Eduard Franck's music. We owe all involved in this effort a debt of gratitude.

Orchestral Music

Eduard Franck wrote several fine symphonies and concerted works. Unfortunately, some are lost and some were never published. One of his major works, the Piano Concerto # 1 in D Minor dedicated to Clara Schumann, which had been presumed lost, was rediscovered in a Rome archive a decade ago. The talented pianist James Tocco helped with its reconstruction and gave the US premiere of the work in Florida in 2012. A second piano concerto in C Major existed only in manuscript. Both concertos have recently been recorded. Other orchestral pieces that have been recorded include two large scale violin concertos, a Konzertstück for violin and orchestra, two symphonies, two concert overtures, and a Fantasie for orchestra.

The **Violin Concerto in D – op. 57** begins with a brief orchestral introduction of a descending motif in the strings. The violin answers, the orchestra restates the theme more forcefully, then the two enter into a dialogue. The tender world of Beethoven's pastoral violin concerto in the same key is not far away. A sprightly march tune ensues as the secondary theme. The music builds to a maestoso climax with the violin tenderly responding with the opening theme. There is a Scottish flavor to this episode (one wonders if Bruch knew this concerto) as the violin ruminates on the material. The march tune returns, then after a brief cadenza the two themes combine, bringing a satisfying conclusion to this sunny movement.

The Adagio begins with an expressive melody sung by the violin over a quiet orchestral background. The winds introduce a livelier second theme which is commented on by the soloist. After growing more agitated the music returns to the calm opening melody which concludes the movement. The Allegro finale starts off with a strutting theme filled with good humor. The violin has some virtuosic passages as it plays with the theme before briefly introducing a tenderer second subject. The opening melody returns for development and one can imagine a jaunty stroll through the countryside on a fine spring day. The violin restates the second theme as if the stroll was momentarily interrupted by a poignant memory, but it is quickly banished in high spirits as the violin races to the conclusion of this genial work.

The **Symphony in B flat – op. 52** commences with a melody with heroic overtones but stated quite gently. This theme dominates the movement as there is no distinct second subject. The material is developed at length with different combinations of instruments playing with different fragments of the theme. Finally, the full orchestra restates the heroic melody, bringing the movement to a forceful conclusion. The second movement acts as the Scherzo although it is not labeled as such. It is a lighthearted romp with delicate orchestration. Franck's skills in this area are on full display here. The flute leads us into the trio section's flowing interlude. The music becomes momentarily meditative, but the high spirits and filigree orchestration of the opening theme quickly resume. The main subject and the trio subject briefly alternate before the movement comes to a close. Franck's debt to his teacher Mendelssohn is obvious here.

A reflective Adagio follows with a tender, flowing melody, briefly interrupted by a more halting theme. The sequence is repeated twice, but with variations in the orchestral palette. The Allegro finale opens

with a hunting theme filled with high spirits. A beautiful quiet interlude follows, then both themes are restated gloriously by the full orchestra. However, it is the hunting theme which has the final word as the symphony ends joyfully.

The Symphony in B flat and the Violin Concerto in D are on an Audite disk that features on the booklet cover a fine painting of the composer's wife in old age.

The **Violin Concerto in E Minor – op. 30** is in the same key as Mendelssohn's famous work and owes much to Franck's teacher. It was composed in the early 1850's but astonishingly was not published until 1890, by which time it must have sounded quite old-fashioned. While there are virtuosic passages for the soloist, there are no pyrotechnics. Throughout the concerto the violin and orchestra are in a respectful dialogue, not the combat for dominance found in many late Romantic concertos. Indeed in all of Franck's concertos, the solo instrument is a first among equals, more Mozart than Tchaikovsky.

The concerto opens with a tender, yet melancholic theme which dominates the first movement. Throughout this fine Allegro the soloist and orchestra trade partial phrases and full restatements of the melody in delightful ways. As in Franck's D Major Concerto, there is a foreshadowing of Bruch about the treatment of the violin. A childlike melody spins out in the Andante second movement, sung by the violin over the orchestra. This is succeeded by a halting theme over pizzicato strings led by the woodwinds, before a return to the first subject. The second subject briefly returns but the childlike theme has the final say. The lively Finale begins attacca as the violin accelerates headlong into the bouncy first subject. A more meditative second theme follows in the violin over a quiet orchestral accompaniment. These two themes are developed and alternated till the first subject takes us to the exhilarating climax.

The **Symphony in A – op. 47** was published in 1882 but was undoubtedly written several years earlier. With Franck, opus numbers can be deceiving when it comes to date of composition, as earlier works may have higher opus numbers. This no doubt did not help the composer's cause with the public, which may have been confused about his creative trajectory. The symphony begins with an imposing, regal melody first stated by the horns, then picked up by the full orchestra. The subject is bandied about among the winds, with the bassoon having a prominent place, before being restated by the full orchestra. This theme has a flavor of Brahms about it, eschewing all bombast but weighty and dignified with understated eloquence.

The Adagio commences with the winds sorrowfully ruminating over hushed strings. After a brief pause, the major theme of the movement is developed in a somber, but not tragic mood. The Allegro third movement acts as the scherzo, with the opening theme almost sounding like a landler. The lilting trio tune is played by the oboe. An insistent, rhythmic theme opens the finale before giving way to a reflective second subject. The themes are repeated and the symphony builds to an impressive conclusion of stately power and nobility. Altogether I feel this is a stronger work than the Symphony in B Flat.

The Symphony in A and the Violin Concerto in E Minor are available on an Audite disk that has another painting of the composer's wife, this time as a young woman, on the cover.

The Audite label has one additional recording of orchestral works by Eduard Franck, all of them written in the late 1840's and early 1850's, and in some ways it is the most fascinating of the three. The disk contains two concert overtures, a Konzertstück for violin and orchestra, and a Fantasie for orchestra.

The Roman Carnival Overture – op. 21 starts with a brilliant solo trumpet call before the orchestra gallops off in a lively dance. The trumpet call repeats, then the orchestra returns, taking up the trumpet theme and developing it. A march tune then ensues which the full orchestra plays with cleverly, before the trumpet theme and the galloping dance return and combine for an exhilarating conclusion to this light hearted work. A contemporary critic sniffed that it was presumptuous for any composer to try to portray the Roman Carnival in music after Berlioz's definitive treatment. While Franck's version can in

no way compare to Berlioz's masterpiece, it is enjoyable and well-crafted and we'd be the poorer for being without this alternate impression.

The Violin Konzertstück consists of two movements, an Andante and an Allegro, and spans about fourteen minutes. The Andante wells up from the lower registers of the strings, then after a pause the violin joins in with a plaintive and beautiful melody sung over a hushed accompaniment. This song without words comes to a gentle conclusion midway through the piece and the Allegro begins with a lively and memorable tune that provides ample room for the soloist to display their virtuosity. A brief interjection from the clarinet heralds an andante second theme before the pyrotechnics return. The two themes alternate several times, providing the soloist the opportunity to show off their tender and virtuosic sides before the lively theme concludes this wonderful piece.

The three movement, thirty minute **Fantasia for orchestra – op. 16** is a symphony in all but name. Its unusual form consists of an opening movement Allegro-Andante, an old fashioned Menuetto as the second movement, and an Allegro Moderato finale. The opening Allegro theme is stately yet cheerful. After its initial statement, Franck playfully manipulates it displaying his skills at orchestration. A secondary theme commences in the strings which leads back to a restatement of the opening melody. After an episode for the woodwinds the strings return, eventually leading to a majestic recap of the opening theme in a slower tempo. The theme is echoed by the winds before coming to a dignified Andante conclusion. What Franck has done in this fascinating movement is to combine the Allegro and Andante movements of a symphony into one, using the same material in different tempos to explore the different effects the tempo has on the themes.

A lively Menuetto follows, reminiscent of those from Haydn's London symphonies. The Trio section presents an appropriately contrasting theme that sounds almost like a peasant dance. The Allegro Moderato finale opens with a slow introduction, a procedure usually reserved for a symphony's opening movement. It leads into a joyful romp for the orchestra with a high spirited theme that chases itself around for several minutes. Suddenly, a majestic restatement of the theme from the opening movement ensues, before the symphony comes to an unexpectedly quiet conclusion led by the violins. Altogether the Fantasia is a fascinating early example of cyclical form, a procedure later championed by Eduard Franck's namesake Cesar. This superb piece equals if not surpasses Franck's symphonies in quality and one wonders why he didn't call it a symphony. Perhaps he felt that the three-movement structure, old fashioned Menuetto, and novel experiments in form were more "fantastical" than "symphonic."

The **Piano Concerto # 1 in D Minor – op. 13** was written in 1846 and was Franck's first major orchestral work. With this concerto, the twenty-nine-year-old composer displays a confidence and technique that belies his youth and inexperience in larger forms. The opening Allegro begins with drumrolls and piano arpeggios which lead into a marshal, march-like main theme. Further arpeggios bring us to the lyrical second theme, a questing melody full of yearning, burnished by touches of woodwinds. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Franck's output is two fully developed and sharply contrasted themes in each movement. Franck rarely composed mono-thematic movements or included two themes in one movement that are similar in structure or mood. The orchestra and soloist become ever more impassioned until the piano returns us to the opening theme, but in a gentler guise. Brass fanfares herald a stormy chordal recapitulation of the theme by the piano, until soft trills return us to the gentle second theme, which is developed in beautiful, dreamy fashion. The piano brilliantly varies the lyrical theme before leading us to the cadenza. Here, the soloist ruminates thoughtfully on both themes, then builds the tension for a triumphant return of full orchestra with the march melody. As the piano cascades around the orchestral statement of the opening theme, the movement comes to a resounding conclusion.

In the Andantino con moto ed espressione second movement, Franck surprisingly allows the orchestra to play without the soloist for the first two minutes, a procedure more commonly adopted in concerted works in opening movements. Horns and bassoons intone a peaceful melody which is picked up by the rest of the ensemble. Eventually the piano enters, fleshing out the songful main theme, until the

orchestra returns to restate it fully. The piano then introduces the second theme with the help of the winds. The two themes are then ingeniously interwoven, with the orchestra carrying the melodies, and the piano beautifully garlanding around them. There is more than a hint of Beethoven in this slow movement, not unusual for Franck's work. A gradual increase in tension leads to a powerful climax which is then relaxed. A long series of trills set against winds and brass, followed by a series of scales on the piano brings the movement to a peaceful conclusion.

The Rondo Allegro finale brings us back to the drumrolls and fanfares that opened the concerto, before ushering in a dancing theme on the piano. The orchestra and soloist trade phrases in a high-spirited give and take showing Franck in one of his rare "unbuttoned" moods. The piano introduces a lyrical second theme and then varies it with a chordal restatement of the melody. The hijinks of the opening returns with orchestra and soloist trading humorous phrases of the dance theme. When the cadenza is reached, Franck surprises us with a restatement of the second movement's main theme. Swelling arpeggios then build to a dramatic conclusion with brass fanfares over the full orchestra. Franck's first piano concerto is an extremely self-assured, melodic, and finely crafted piece worthy of resurrection in the concert hall.

Eduard Franck's **Piano Concerto # 2 in C Major** was never published. Recently a manuscript copy from 1879 was found, but it is not known precisely when the work was composed. Some of the youthful exuberance of the first concerto is missing, but it is another finely crafted work of the composer's full maturity. The soloist opens the Allegro Maestoso first movement with a powerful theme full of grand gestures. The theme consists of a pair of descending two note phrases, continually repeated over several octaves. The orchestra responds in a rhythmic give and take with the piano, until a solo viola introduces a lyrical second theme which is developed by the piano. The flute picks up the melody, soon joined by the rest of the winds. Eventually the piano returns to the double note theme, joined by the orchestra in an obsessive recapitulation of escalating power. The lyrical second theme returns for a lengthy development before being overwhelmed by the main theme in a darker tone. A grand orchestral tutti statement of the melody is joined by the soloist, adding to the momentum. The lyrical theme makes a brief reappearance but is soon swept away by an ominous, foreboding statement of the main theme in the minor, before a surprising switch to the major ends the movement on an upbeat note.

The Adagio opens with a hushed chorale melody in the orchestra, which is picked up and embellished by the piano, then joined by the flute. The orchestra and soloist alternate in dream-like variations of the melody before the movement ends peacefully. This is one of Franck's rare mono-thematic movements. The Presto finale follows attacca with a jovial, exuberant main theme filled with quirky rhythms. Two secondary themes follow in quick succession, one a lyrical melody on the flute, the second a dance-like theme on the piano. The soloist brings us back to the main theme, then scurries across the keyboard in a cascade of notes before landing us back to the opening movement's lyrical second theme. After a brief cadenza, the piece ends in high spirits.

Eduard Franck's two piano concertos may be found on a marvelous CPO disk with the Wurttemberg Philharmonic of Reutlingen, conducted by Fawzi Haiman, with Georg Michael Grau as soloist.

Piano Music

Eduard Franck was a virtuoso pianist, and he was very comfortable writing for his chosen instrument. He wrote a huge number of works for solo piano including no less than nineteen sonatas, as well as several large collections of piano pieces. Unfortunately, as with other areas of his oeuvre, Franck failed to publish most of his piano works, thereby hindering their exposure and popularity. Only nine of the nineteen sonatas were published in his lifetime, along with a few collections of individual pieces. Fortunately for Franck devotees, the estimable John Kersey, who has done so much to acquaint us with unsung romantic piano literature through his Romantic Discoveries Recordings, has taken up Franck's

cause and recorded all of the published sonatas but one. Professor Kersey informed me that he was provided with the published scores by the Feuchtes, who also showed him the remaining sonatas in manuscript. Unfortunately, they need work to be put in performance editions, and Mr. Kersey and the Feuchtes did not have the resources to make this happen. One can only hope that an integral recording of Franck's works for solo piano will be taken up in the future by an enterprising label (CPO perhaps). Altogether Eduard Franck's piano compositions represent one of the most significant contributions to the piano literature of the mid- nineteenth century. The piano sonatas that Kersey did record consist of a set of three, opus 44, and the first five sonatas from the set of six, opus 40. For those interested in this music, the disks can be ordered directly from Mr. Kersey at <https://rdrecs.wordpress.com/> The playing throughout is very fine.

Both the opus 40 and opus 44 sonatas were published in the early 1880's, although they were likely written over a number of years. The **Piano Sonata op. 40 # 1 in F Major** opens with a childlike melody that could almost be taken for a lullaby. A second subject follows, much more serious, underpinned by somber bass figurations. A generous development section ensues featuring the two motifs but it is the childlike melody that concludes the movement. A piquant Allegretto is next with a staccato opening theme and a contrasting legato section. The staccato theme appears three times and the legato theme twice, reminiscent of many of Beethoven's scherzos. Like several of Franck's sonatas, the F Major lacks a slow movement, or even a slow section of a movement. The Allegro Vivace that concludes the work features two chord rich themes, the first noble and clarion, the second more episodic. The themes are developed richly, showing off Franck's prodigious pianistic talent and his compositional craft. This is a big, twenty minute work that satisfies the listener on many levels.

The **Piano Sonata op. 40 # 2 in C** begins with an Allegro Risoluto movement filled with incident. Themes come and go with lightning speed as Franck playfully teases the listener with sudden shifts in dynamics and tempo. Unlike sonata # 1 in this set, sonata # 2 features a full-fledged slow movement, a series of beautiful variations on a heartfelt theme. The finale showcases Franck's dexterity with a plethora of runs, chords, trills and general acrobatics surrounding themes which are more vehicles for display than particularly memorable.

The **Piano Sonata in G Minor, op. 40 # 3** is a darker work than its predecessors. The opening Allegro takes us to a somber place bereft of light or joy. This is the Sturm Und Drang side of Eduard Franck. After this powerful movement, Franck once again foregoes a slow movement and opts for an Allegretto. A brightening of the mood is evident in the two serious, but not tragic themes heard here. The Allegretto finale moves further from the tragic opening movement in its staccato first subject, but features a more meditative second theme. The two themes alternate and combine in ingenious ways as Franck shows off his compositional prowess.

The **Piano Sonata in E flat, op. 40 # 4** presents us with a sunny, noble theme in its opening Allegro con Brio. It is followed by a tender melody as a second subject. The two themes are restated, then developed in this generously proportioned sonata form movement. A questing, poignant theme dominates the Adagio movement, which like the opening movement is on a large scale. Franck impresses here with his ability to sustain interest with subtle shifts in mood and tone. The Allegro Vivace reminds one somewhat of late Haydn in its lightness of touch, theme, and mood, though it is unmistakably of the romantic era.

The **Piano Sonata in F, op. 40 # 5** is a more modest composition than its predecessor in both length and emotional reach, but it is no less fine for all that. The charming opening Allegro features happy go lucky tunes worked out in sonata form before a surprising slow and quiet ending. The Andante con Moto which follows is vaguely reminiscent of the Beethoven of the Pathétique and Moonlight Sonatas with its hypnotically flowing theme. A scurrying Presto movement concludes this sonata with a quicksilver opening theme and a more reflective second subject. The movement ends in a finger busting scamper to the finish.

Moving on to the opus 44 sonatas, we start with the **Piano Sonata in F Minor, op. 44 # 1**. The opening Presto starts with a passionate theme spilling over with cascades of notes. This is followed by a tender second subject. Franck repeats and develops the themes and adds a staccato theme as a bridge between the two. An exciting coda rounds off this inventive movement. The generously scaled slow movement offers a meditative beginning that reminds one of a hymn. A more flowing second theme follows over a rocking bass line. The movement has a religious gravitas that is most appealing. The finale is the longest movement of the three. As with the first movement it alternates between a passionate theme and a tenderer second subject before a satisfyingly dramatic conclusion.

The **Piano Sonata in E Minor, op. 44 # 2** opens with a heroic theme that leaps out at the listener. A slower theme follows reminding one of Schubert in one of his poetic fancies. A powerful transition section leads back to the chords of the opening theme. The contrast between these two powerful themes makes for a movement full of incident and emotion. In the coda the two themes combine in a thrilling manner. The scherzo middle movement acts as a lighter interlude between the weightier outer movements. The trio is an affecting, reverent interlude between the appearances of the jaunty melody. Franck surprises the listener with an inventive theme and variations finale on a slow melody that again reminds one of Schubert.

The **Piano Sonata in F Major, op. 44 # 3** is the longest and grandest of Franck's published sonatas, and the only one in four movements. One's attention is immediately captured in the opening Allegro by a noble and memorable four note theme which the composer develops quite thrillingly. Ingenious variations of the opening melody serve as contrast, but all of the material in this generously proportioned movement, lasting over ten minutes, is derived from the opening theme. An unexpectedly quiet ending is characteristic of the composer.

The Allegro second movement serves as a scherzo and the material is appropriately lighter in weight. A dramatic trio section turns the usual relationship between a scherzo melody and its trio on its head. Franck's compositional boldness in this sonata is very appealing. The Andante tranquillo third movement gives us a lovely theme and variations on a tender theme. One is reminded of Beethoven here in one of his ruminative moods. The Allegro finale opens with a bright theme of cascading notes somewhat reminiscent in style if not actual melody to the opening movement of the F Minor sonata. This is succeeded by a darker second theme. This is soon followed by a return of the opening material which carries us through to the end.

Altogether, the opus 44 sonatas reveal a marked development from the opus 40 set, in terms of scope, emotional range, and ambition. While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when these sonatas were written, it is probable that they were later creations than the opus 40 works. The quality of Franck's published piano sonatas makes one eager to hear the many sonatas still in manuscript. One would surmise there are many hidden treasures amongst them.

John Kersey has also recorded Franck's opus 62, which consists of eight Klavierstücke. These are among Franck's last piano compositions and were only published posthumously through the efforts of his son Richard Franck.

The opus 62 set opens with an **Allegretto** that has a main theme reminding one of the tolling of bells. Not a mournful tolling, but a joyous sound as if a whole village is celebrating a happy event. An **Allegro Molto** follows which sounds like a scherzo from one of Franck's sonatas. The third piece in the set is a calm **Andante** dominated by a three note motif hypnotically repeated in different guises. The happy go lucky **Presto** that follows reminds one of a tarantella. It rounds off the first half of opus 62 on a satisfying note. The fifth piece is an **Allegro Appassionato**, followed by a solemn **Andante**. A tender **Allegretto** comes next with a rocking, upwardly reaching theme. A dancing **Vivace** rounds off the opus 62 Klavierstücke on a cheerful note. Richard Franck obviously arranged the pieces in this set with care in regards to their relationship to each other. They could easily be considered two sonatas of four movements each, with the scherzo coming second in the first set of four movements, and coming third in the second set of movements.

Chamber Music

Along with Franck's solo piano music, I regard his chamber music works as his finest achievement. Fortunately, thanks to the Audite and Fermate labels, we have a more comprehensive picture of the composer's works in this area than in other genres.

The first of Franck's two sonatas for piano and cello, **the Sonata in D, opus 6** is an early work, published in 1846. It clearly shows the influence of Franck's teacher Mendelssohn, who wrote two cello sonatas himself. The first two cello sonatas of Beethoven, who is credited with bringing this combination of instruments into the mainstream, are also an obvious starting point. It is an ambitious work lasting well over half an hour. The generously scaled opening movement alone is over fourteen minutes in length. An ingratiating *Allegro* leads off with a charming seven note theme. The cello alternates between singing above the piano and supporting the piano's bass line. The interplay between the instruments is well done. Franck paid close attention to solving the problem of the piano dominating the cello. An *Adagio* follows, a Mendelssohnian song without words that had appeared separately as an Albumleaf for a patron. Franck opts for a Menuetto as the third movement, harkening back to early Beethoven. It is a gentle, childlike melody that is quite appealing. The piano takes the lead here with the cello underpinning or commenting on the piano's contribution. The cello is back as a full partner in the *Allegro assai* finale as the two instruments trade phrases throughout. This fine sonata appears on a Fermate disk that also includes Richard Franck's first cello sonata, and three pieces for cello and piano by Carl Reinecke.

Franck's **Cello Sonata in F, opus. 42** was only published in 1882 when the composer was releasing for publication numerous works composed much earlier. It was most likely composed contemporaneously with the opus 6 cello sonata. In the opening *Allegro* the cello sings a longing melody over the support of the piano. A lively *Scherzo* follows with the piano this time taking the melodic lead with the upwardly striving three note motif that dominates the movement. The trio section comes around twice, a device often used by Beethoven. An expressive and rather tragic *Adagio* theme and variations is the centerpiece of the sonata. The cello wells up from the depths of its range as the piano sings its heart out. In the later variations, the instruments switch roles and the cello takes the melodic lead. A *Presto* finale dispels the gloom with a high spirited romp. The sonata appears on a Fermate disk that also contains Richard Franck's second cello sonata. It features an adorable portrait of Richard Franck, aged eleven years, supplied to the label by the Feuchtes. Thomas Blees is the cellist in both Fermate recordings.

Eduard Franck composed four sonatas for violin and piano. The **Violin Sonata in C Minor, op. 19** is unique in his output for this combination in two ways. It has only three movements, and it is in a minor key. The opening *Allegro* with its "quasi fantasia" designation opens arrestingly with each instrument individually offering a cadenza like statement before combining and starting the movement proper. Experimental touches like this one, those in Franck's *Fantasie* for orchestra, and other works refute the notion that he was a conservative composer afraid to go beyond established forms and structures. Once the movement hits its stride it delivers a wealth of thematic and rhythmic ideas well deserving of its fantasia appellation. The *Andante* that follows is heartfelt in its hesitating theme which seems to be feeling its way, striving towards some distant goal. The passionate *Allegro* finale is a hard driving conclusion that has both violin and piano showing off their virtuoso sides. A slower middle section provides an effective contrast, and is followed by a brief fugal section. A quotation of the first movement's main theme rounds off this finely crafted work.

The **Violin Sonata in A, op. 23** begins with a noble theme stated with restraint and dignity. Indeed the entire opening *Allegro* has a magisterial air about it. The flowing *Andante* features two themes, a beautiful, soulful hymn, and a melody that reminds one of a river's ceaseless flow. The *Scherzo* is a jaunty affair with the piano contributing quicksilver scales in response to the violin's melody. The serious trio section is carried forward by the piano in the bass clef. A striding theme begins the *Finale*

as if a preoccupied individual is out for a stroll. A darker section provides contrast as if our stroller's thoughts take a negative turn, but eventually a brighter mood emerges as if our hero has decided that things are not so bad after all.

The **Violin Sonata in E, opus 60** was published posthumously, and it is a measure of Franck's perfectionism that such a fine work never saw the light of day during his lifetime. The opening Allegro's principle theme is a memorable and plaintive nine note motif that the entire movement is derived from. The brief Scherzo comes second this time and is a bouncy jeu d'esprit. A dainty Allegretto takes the place of a slow movement and features a gently rocking melody which is developed ingeniously by Franck. The violin announces the lively Presto finale with bold chords before the piano scampers off. The two instruments trade phrases in a playful manner. A meditative interlude follows but is quickly dispelled.

The **Violin Sonata in D**, which was also never published in the composer's lifetime, is without opus number. The piece opens with a dramatic theme which features a give and take between the instruments. A more relaxed second subject provides contrast in this sonata form Allegro. A Scherzo, marked Allegro Vivace comes second and features a motif with an offbeat rhythm. The Trio section is a songful interlude full of high spirits. The Adagio third movement is the centerpiece of the sonata. It is a lovely theme and variations, with a theme reminiscent of one of Mendelssohn's songs without words. The brief Presto that follows is more a coda to the sonata than an independent movement.

The four Violin Sonatas of Eduard Franck are available in a wonderful two CD set from Audite featuring Christiane Edinger and James Tocco, two champions of Franck's music.

Eduard Franck wrote five piano trios, cultivating this field over a period of several decades. The **Piano Trio in E Minor, op. 11** is the composer's most ambitious work in the genre, clocking in at nearly forty minutes. It was composed and published in the 1840's, a particularly fertile time for the composer. The broadly scaled Allegro begins with a slow introduction which gives way to a busy first theme which is emotionally muted but not sad. A standard sonata form movement ensues with Franck thoroughly developing his material and heightening the emotional temperature. The beautiful Adagio which follows has the violin singing the melody over the support of the piano and cello. An upwardly striving and lively theme brings in the Scherzo. The Trio section features a contrastingly slower tempo but interestingly maintains the upwardly striving melodic germ of the Scherzo proper. A cadenza for the violin opens the Finale which features two themes, one lively and one more meditative. The material is repeated, including the violin cadenza, then the main theme is developed at some length with violin and cello trading phrases as the piano supports them. A brief, tender remembrance of the slow opening of the sonata gives way to a scamper to the finish. This use of cyclical form to tie a piece thematically together was used often by Eduard Franck, long before it was popularized by Cesar Franck.

The **Piano Trio in D, op. 58** was published posthumously by Franck's son Richard. It is another large scale work, and judging by its content is a late work. A cheerful Allegro sonata form movement once again shows the impeccable craftsmanship of the composer as attractive material is developed in unexpected ways. A quirky Scherzo is placed second with unsettling trills and dark undertones. The Trio continues delving into the minor then the movement concludes with the return of the grotesque dance of the opening. One is vaguely reminded of Berlioz in one of his fantastic moods. The dark mood continues in the Andante, with a rather sinister theme which is underpinned by a hypnotically repeated four note motif. Solo passages for the piano are succeeded by the violin taking the lead while the piano obsessively maintains the four note bass line. The Allegro finale starts off with a drone bass and a Scottish theme. A downward spiraling second theme brings us back to the dark mood that has prevailed throughout much of the piece. The Scottish theme returns and has the last word. Overall this trio is one of Franck's darker works. His usual sunny optimism, upbeat themes, and playful development give way to a mood reflective of the pessimism and disillusionment of old age.

The opus 11 and opus 58 piano trios are on a marvelous Audite disk which features Renoir's famous "Two Young Girls at the Piano" on the cover.

The **Piano Trio in E Major, without opus** is Franck's first work in the genre. It dates from 1835 and is dedicated to the composer's mother. The eighteen year old Franck was studying with Mendelssohn at the time and this youthful work reflects the influence of his teacher, as well as Beethoven. The simple yet lyrical melodies of the opening Allegro are very appealing. An innocent Andante is next, maintaining the childlike mood of the opening. The development of the themes cannot match the complexity and inventiveness of the mature Franck but they are no less charming for that. The Scherzo shows Franck knew his Beethoven with its echoes of the scherzos from both the "Spring" Sonata and the "Eroica." A sprightly Presto rounds out this early work which must have delighted both his teacher Mendelssohn and the work's dedicatee.

The **Piano Trio in E-Flat, op. 22** was dedicated to the composer's friend Ferdinand Hiller and was published in 1859. It was one of the last pieces published by Franck before his more than two decade moratorium on publishing his music, and is a work of his full maturity. The opening Allegro is a sonata form movement. The first theme is an attractive eleven note motif that is intensively worked out. The second theme is an upwardly striving ten note motif also developed at some length. The two themes share a subtle relationship mostly veiled by rhythmic differences. Altogether this is an intellectually rigorous movement of impeccable craftsmanship. The Scherzo is placed second and features a bouncy theme of give and take offset by a darker trio section redolent of mystery. A noble Andante follows with the violin and cello as the leading melodic voices and the piano supporting. The entire movement evolves from the opening material which is looked at from numerous angles. A lively Finale featuring rapid passagework from all three instruments showcases a theme that scampers up and down the scale. At the end of the movement Franck shows off the relationship between the theme and the material from the opening movement. It is not a direct quotation, rather a demonstration of their kinship. This complex work has so much structurally going on that it only reveals its full worth after repeated hearings. It is Franck the mature craftsman showing what he can do intellectually with his material.

The **Piano Trio in D, op. 53** was published posthumously by the composer's son Richard Franck and was written in the 1880's. The sonata form opening movement's first theme is elegiac and reminds one of an older man's remembrances of things past, or perhaps of a melancholic look at things about to slip away. The more cheery second theme almost, but not quite, dispels the twilight mood. Once again Franck places the Scherzo movement second. It is a carefree Allegro vivace that flows on contentedly. A stomping peasant dance serves as the trio section. The solo piano plays a brief prelude to start the Andante before the violin picks up the melancholic main theme and carries it through the entire movement, with accents from the cello and the piano underpinning the dialogue. The piano is out front in the finale with its gypsy like theme filled with scurrying passagework commented on by the violin. A more dignified second theme briefly appears but is quickly banished by the livelier tune which drives us home to a cheerful conclusion.

The opus 22, opus 53, and youthful E Major trio are on a second Audite disk of Franck piano trios, also featuring a Renoir painting on the cover, "Two Girls Reading in the Garden." The Swiss Piano Trio's playing is first rate.

With his devotion to non-programmatic instrumental music, it is no surprise that Franck tackled the most popular chamber music genre, the string quartet. He left us three quartets, only two of which were published during his lifetime. The **String Quartet in C Minor, op. 55** was one of the many pieces published posthumously by the composer's son Richard. It opens with a pounding two note bass rhythm that dominates the movement. The first theme is a hypnotic motif sung by the violins, while the second theme in this sonata form movement is more lyrical. First, the cello sings the lead, then an upwardly surging "B" section concludes the theme. Franck substitutes an Allegretto for the slow movement and places it second in the quartet. The gentle theme is constantly varied as the movement progresses, not as a formal theme and variations but more as an evolution of the initial material. The Scherzo sounds like a wild gypsy dance underpinned by a throbbing rhythm. A whirlwind finale ensues

where rapid passagework and an exhilarating mood take precedence over thematic clarity. A breathless coda brings the work to a thrilling close.

The **String Quartet in E-flat, op. 54** opens with a beautiful hymn-like Adagio introduction to its first movement. After reaching a pitch of intensity it launches into a bright and cheery Allegro theme, but the reflective mood of the opening Adagio returns and is never far away as the movement progresses. The alternation between tempos and moods is quite striking, once again illustrating Franck's experimental side within conservative frameworks. A descending motif dominates the lengthy Adagio which is the emotional heart of the work. The quite tragic theme makes one wonder if Franck was expressing a particular sorrow here. It is altogether more emotional and personal than is typical of Franck who did not make a habit of such displays. After this heartfelt lament, the composer surprises again with an old fashioned Menuetto third movement reminiscent of Haydn. Instead of a sonata form finale, Franck continues with the unexpected by giving us a theme and variations. While the theme itself is not very memorable, Franck gets an amazing variety of moods and effects from it over eleven variations. An impressive coda closes Franck's longest and greatest string quartet.

The string quartets opus 54 and 55 can be found on an Audite disk featuring the Edinger Quartet and a charming portrait of Franck's young daughter Elsa on the cover.

The **String Quartet in F Minor, op. 49** opens with an Allegro Risoluto true to its name. The first theme can certainly be described as resolute, with its throbbing three note motif forcefully hammered home. A slightly gentler variation on the motif shows its softer side but not for long. Later in the movement, Franck briefly turns the theme into a fugue. Later in the development there is a passage that reminds one of his teacher Mendelssohn's famous Octet. Indeed the spirit of Mendelssohn hovers over the entire piece. The expressive Adagio that follows spins out a long lined melody which evolves into a give and take between violin and cello. Franck opts for a Menuetto third movement with an insistent two note theme that recalls the intense theme of the opening movement in its obsessive repetition. The trio section presents us with a lilting peasant dance. In the Allegro finale a brief introduction is interrupted by a cadenza for the violin before the movement proper takes off. A dark theme is followed by a more relaxed second subject, then everything is repeated, cadenza and all. After a spirited development, the work ends on a sunny note, dispelling the minor key gloom that pervaded much of it.

Eduard Franck, being a brilliant composer for the piano, as well as a virtuoso on the instrument, included it in many of his chamber works as well. Perhaps the greatest of these is the **Piano Quintet in D, op. 45**. In this genre, unlike others he worked in, there was not a long tradition to fall back on. Robert Schumann's masterpiece was really the major example when Franck penned this work. A relaxed, spacious theme opens the work, but even the slightly more concentrated second theme does not feel hurried or tense. One is reminded of the later works in this form by Dvorak, Faure, and Cesar Franck and wonders if any of those composers knew this work. A galloping Scherzo comes next as if a hunting party were riding over a grassy plain. It features quicksilver piano writing throughout and a stomping peasant dance in the Trio section. Franck treats us to one of his hymn-like slow movements next, with the piano and strings exchanging tender phrases. A Rondo finale concludes the work with the piano in perpetuum mobile mode as the strings carry the theme. This noble quintet lasting well over half an hour is one of Eduard Franck's outstanding achievements in the field of chamber music.

The quartet opus 49 and the quintet opus 45 are on a marvelous Audite disk featuring the Edinger Quartet, with James Tocco joining on piano. The disk also features an adorable portrait of the composer's young daughter Ida on the cover. Obviously Eduard Franck could afford to, and delighted in having beautiful portraits done of his whole family!

Eduard Franck followed his teacher Mendelssohn's example and also cultivated the string quintet genre. His first essay in this form is the **String Quintet in E Minor, op. 15** which most likely was composed during Franck's extremely productive period of the 1840's. It bears a strong resemblance to his teacher's style. The sonata form opening Allegro begins with a question and response theme which

is then developed more fully. A yearning second subject follows with the first violin taking the lead over the lower strings. After the themes are repeated, a lengthy development section explores various facets of the opening theme before a formal restatement of both themes leads to an *accelerando* conclusion. The Scherzo is placed second, which Franck does as often as not in his four movement works. A driving theme with obsessively repeated bass underpinnings gives way to a quirky pizzicato opening to the Trio section which then continues in a subdued tone. Franck repeats the Trio material before returning to the main Scherzo theme. He briefly brings back the Trio material before driving to a conclusion. A melancholic but noble theme dominates the expressive Andante. The theme is varied with great contrapuntal skill and ingenuity with the first violin singing over the violas and cello most of the time. The Prestissimo finale features a taut, striding minor key theme alternated with a more relaxed second subject. The opening theme is dissected into its constituent parts during the development, before the movement ends in the minor key it began in.

The **String Quintet in C**, in the same key as Schubert's unsurpassed masterpiece, is another fine work. The large scaled opening *Allegro*, lasting thirteen minutes, is in sonata form. Both the "A" and "B" sections of the movement each have sub-themes, making for an extremely rich thematic content. The first motif of the "A" section bears a resemblance to Beethoven's "Pathétique" sonata. The "B" section starts with a tender melody for the violin, then is followed by an episode where the theme chases its tail around in circles. The Andante second movement is one of Franck's most effective slow movements. The funereal theme flows from one permutation to the next in an unending river of grief. The movement reminds one of some of the slow movements of Beethoven's late quartets. The dark little Menuetto that follows is another surprise. However the composer is not through with his surprises. The finale turns out to be a theme and variations on a rather dour Andante theme. Through ten variations Franck examines multiple sides to the motif, showing possibilities not readily apparent upon the theme's first hearing. An *accelerando* coda lifts the mood and closes the piece on an upbeat note. Altogether, the Quintet in C illustrates many of Franck's most characteristic traits as a composer. It is thematically rich, rigorously intellectual, experimental within classic forms, and impeccably crafted.

Franck's two string quintets are on a superb Audite disk. The Renoir loving folks at Audite once again feature one of the painter's works, "The Lesson", on the cover.

Eduard Franck also cultivated the little known genre of the string sextet on two occasions. In this he was most likely influenced by Brahms's example. Both are late works. The opus 41 sextet was published in 1882, when Franck returned to publishing his works after a long absence. The opus 50 sextet was one of many of the composer's works published posthumously.

The warm hearted opening theme of the *Allegro* movement of the **String Sextet in E Flat, op. 41** reminds one somewhat of Dvorak's folk influenced themes. The secondary motif is darker, as if the composer is remembering some painful memory. Throughout this lengthy movement Franck applies thematic evolution, working out the themes in continuously flowing and ingenious ways, (including a brief fugato), that takes them apart and puts them together again. Listening to Franck develop his themes is to hear a master craftsman at work. His thematic evolution is intellectually more rigorous than the easy to follow theme and variations format, and demands great concentration from the listener to fully absorb. Franck wrote for connoisseurs, not the salon music crowd. The prayerful Andante that follows seems like a catharsis for the painful memory evoked by the opening movement's darker secondary theme. The Scherzo third movement employs a favorite device of Franck's, a contrasting "A" and "B" section in the scherzo proper, before the appearance of the Trio section. Interestingly, both sections are accompanied by dotted rhythms, with the melody changing only in the upper voices. The Trio brings us a gentle song-like theme which contrasts nicely with the skittish melodies of the main section. In the Presto finale the composer further demonstrates his intellectual brilliance with a dazzling display of counterpoint. After presenting his material, a nervous opening theme and a more lyrical one, the composer overlays the two themes in a tour de force that almost

reminds one of the finale of Mozart's "Jupiter" symphony. Thus ends this intensely serious, quite profound work.

The **String Sextet in D, op. 50** was most likely one of Franck's last works. The mood is retrospective, occasionally somber, the music of someone looking backward not of youth looking forward. The first theme of the opening Allegro is quite beautiful and is worked out at considerable length in the development. The secondary theme shares the twilight glow of the first, though it is less emotional. The big, tragic Andante lasting over ten minutes is the emotional heart of the work. Rarely has the composer worn his heart on his sleeve so transparently. The rather dark Scherzo, reminding one of a Mephistophelian waltz, is brightened by the Trio section's songful theme, but not for long. In the Finale, Franck again opts for a contrapuntal tour de force. Melodic fragments from the previous movements make an appearance and are mixed together in astounding ways. The string sextet genre, more than any other, seemed to bring out in Franck his contrapuntal brilliance.

The case of Eduard Franck is a microcosm of the larger issue of the disappearance from the repertory of countless composers and their works, often of superb quality, due to factors unrelated to the worth of the music. I find the music of Eduard Franck to be absolutely top drawer. It is beautiful, rich in melody, intellectually rigorous, impeccably crafted, yet accessible. No operas or romantic themes or heaven storming symphonic poems came from his pen. With the exception of some Lieder, he worked only in the field of instrumental music. His talent shone most brightly in the genres of chamber music and solo piano music, where he contributed countless wonderful works of pure, abstract music. On his own ground however, there are few composers of his era to match him. If you have not made the acquaintance of Eduard Franck's music, I heartily recommend that you rectify that forthwith. You will be very glad you did.

Andrew Hartman, March 2018, revised April 2021