

Eidsten Dahl's presentation – both in his playing and detailed programme notes – gives a good picture of the composer's output for the instrument. The only major pieces missing are the Three Preludes and Fugues, Op. 37, whose form is a reminder of Mendelssohn's pioneering engagement with Bach. The great master's spirit lingers elsewhere in many chorale-based structures, but less helpfully there is also the influence of the 19th-century English musical market, for which Mendelssohn intended most of these pieces. In an oft-quoted letter, he asked his English publisher to issue collections of his organ works as 'Sonatas' rather than 'Voluntaries', but many of these movements still sound like church-service postludes and show how Mendelssohn's encounters with Victorian religiosity brought forth some of his least inspiring music.

Just occasionally, Eidsten Dahl is too respectful of this, and some movements lack flair. But in the strongest pieces (including the First and Sixth Sonatas) the Norwegian organist makes the most of this material, playing with a feeling for the idiom that is authentically sober yet musically stirring. The organ of Oslo's Sofienberg Church may be more impressive (especially in the pedal department) than the instruments Mendelssohn encountered in England, but Eidsten Dahl uses its colours to reconnect this music to the German Romantic tradition. On the second CD, devoted to pieces without opus numbers, some of that brightness and bite is heard to exciting effect, as in the *Allegro, Choral and Fugue* in D major, the grandest of all Mendelssohn's organ works. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



**MONTGEROULT**

**Piano Sonata No. 9; 12 Etudes from Complete course for the instruction of the pianoforte**  
Edna Stern (piano)  
*Orchid Classics ORC100063 53:19 mins*

Hélène de Montgeroult was nothing if not resourceful. Imprisoned in revolutionary Paris, the aristocratic pianist-composer (1764-1836) improvised on La Marseillaise in front of the Committee of Public Safety and won back her freedom – at least that's how the story goes.

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What's certain is that Montgeroult went on to become the first female professor at the Paris Conservatory, and to publish nine sonatas and the influential *Complete course for the instruction of the pianoforte* (1816), featuring 114 etudes. When you listen to Edna Stern's moreish disc of Montgeroult's music, it's impossible not to wonder exactly why she's been so neglected.

Here is a richly imaginative creative mind, as steeped in the contrapuntal glories of JS Bach as, say, Mendelssohn yet anticipating Chopin, as researcher Jérôme Dorival points out in his booklet notes. Stern, playing an 1860 Pleyel trumps Bruno Robilliard and Nicolas Stavy's recordings for colour, style and panache. Textures shimmer in the Etude No. 37, the melody speaks eloquently in No. 26 and in the D minor Op. 107, the shades of Chopin's *Revolutionary Etude* are made obvious. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



**SCRIABIN**

**Piano Sonatas Nos 1-10; Fantasy in B minor**  
Garrick Ohlsson (piano)  
*Bridge BRIDGE9468A 146:46 mins (2 discs)*

**Piano Sonatas Nos 1-10; Vers la flamme**  
Peter Donohoe (piano)  
*Somm SOMMCD262-2 139:85 mins (2 discs)*

In 1915, the year of Scriabin's death, Rachmaninov performed the composer's Fifth Sonata in his memory. As Prokofiev recalled, when

Scriabin 'had played this sonata everything seemed to be flying upward; with Rachmaninov all the notes stood firmly planted on earth'. Peter Donohoe and Garrick Ohlsson take a similarly down-to-earth approach to Scriabin's rapturous music in their recordings of the complete sonatas – which is not to say they achieve comparable results.

Of the two, Ohlsson delivers the single best performance with his account of Sonata No. 9, *Black Mass*. Here he appears genuinely engaged with Scriabin's febrile world and follows specified tempos with relative conscientiousness. Consistent qualities throughout Ohlsson's set include his infallibly precise delineation of line and texture, any sense of rambling avoided by his clear articulation of each sonata's structure (though in the First Sonata he does not repeat the opening exposition). Yet he often disregards tempo markings, for instance turning the Fourth Sonata's *Prestissimo volando* into an easy swagger, all the more redolent of a music hall number for his over-emphasis of its swinging 12/8 metre. Indeed, he often appears insensitive to the music's essential character. When it comes to Scriabin's would-be transcendental sonatas (No. 6 onwards), fervid instructions such as 'avec une celeste volupté' are often toned down to something cooler-headed and more prosaic. The Tenth Sonata, rather than an ecstatic culmination, is a disappointing proliferation of dribbling trills.

Donohoe can sound rather ponderous, but throws a sympathetic light on the earliest sonatas. Revealing their debt to both Chopin and Grieg, he also finds a nobility in the First Sonata's closing 'Funebre', bringing a curious reflective quality to its 'Quasi niente' central section.

Alas, as Scriabin's style evolves and becomes more strange and otherworldly, Donohoe's playing can appear too careful and well-behaved, even enervated. His Tenth Sonata wavers between sounding pernickety and slightly fumbling. Altogether, this is far from Scriabin's own style, evident in the composer's few pianola rolls, or such interpreters as Marc-André Hamelin, whose complete sonatas on Hyperion – sure-fingered yet astonishingly fleet and mercurial – capture the music's airborne as well as its minatory qualities. *Daniel Jaffè*

PERFORMANCE  
OHLSSON ★★★★★  
DONOHOE ★★★★★  
RECORDING (BOTH ALBUMS) ★★★★★



**VOYAGES: Orgue de la Philharmonie de Paris**  
Works by Khachaturian, Falla, Mendelssohn, JS Bach, Liszt, Wagner, Chopin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, Fauré and Saint-Saëns  
Olivier Latry (organ)  
*Erato 9029588850 78:31 mins*

Its onstage console looks like something out of NASA Mission Control, which is appropriate really since the organ for the new Paris Philharmonie sounds positively out of this world. The hall entrusted the building of the instrument to the Austrian firm of Rieger – the result, nonetheless, is French-leaning in its seductive palette and conceived along broadly 'symphonic' lines.

Moreover it sits supremely comfortably in the acoustics of the auditorium. (Either that or Erato's recording engineers have played a blinder.) Olivier Latry's inaugural CD road test pushes its symphonic aspirations to the max in a programme dominated by orchestral transcriptions. Latry's characteristic integrity and virtuosic verve illuminate everything he touches – particularly in the lascivious glissando that ends his own arrangement of Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*, a magisterial realisation of Liszt's *St Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves*, and an unexpectedly convincingly reimagined Debussy *Cathédrale engloutie*. Perhaps Dupré's celebrated Bach transcription sounds a tad earnest, but it's a small quibble. When a master organist and instrument collide, what's not to love? *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★