

AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

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BRAHMS: *Clarinet Sonatas*

Jon Manasse; Jon Nakamatsu, p

Harmonia Mundi 907430—44 minutes

There are countless recordings of the Brahms clarinet sonatas, and although Jon Manasse will probably draw more attention than most, he certainly lives up to expectations. He brings his trademark musicianship and beautiful sound to the sonatas, infusing them with superb lyricism, seamless legato, and an appropriate touch of rubato. Not to be outdone, Nakamatsu is a wonderfully expressive partner, turning the difficult piano part into one of ease, clarity, and sensitivity.

The pair are at their best in the quiet moments, where the hushed atmosphere will make the listener stop whatever he or she is doing and just absorb it. To be sure, Brahms also calls for moments of force and angst, and while Nakamatsu dives right in, Manasse prefers to remain a step away, choosing beauty over edge. Still, whether you're looking for a model recording for a young clarinetist or simply some great romantic chamber music, you'll be hard-pressed to find better performances.

HANUDEL