

# Turbulent Brahms

**CALUM MACDONALD** *hails Novacek's new benchmark*



## BRAHMS

**Piano Sonata No. 2; Klavierstücke, Op. 76; Intermezzi, Op. 117**

Libor Novacek (piano)

Landor LAN 285 75:48 mins

**BBC Music Direct £11.99**

Brahms's official Piano Sonata No. 2 was largely composed before the official No. 1, and it's a fascinating revelation of the ultra-Romantic road that the young composer decided not to take. A kind of Fantasy-Sonata, its abrupt and extreme juxtapositions of emotion, dynamics and contrasted gesture are as daring as anything that Liszt's 'New German' followers could have produced.

Libor Novacek, who has already recorded an estimable Liszt recital, well understands this: if anything he accentuates the contrasts, with battering *fortissimos* giving way to silky, whispered *pianissimos* – but this is to enhance the turbulent nature of the piece, and Brahms's achievement of equivocal balance in the almost Schubertian main tune of the finale.

Novacek brings out, too, the awkward, uncompromising nature of the Op. 76 pieces, his wide range of accent and touch emphasising their strangely experimental nature as well as their lyric underlay. It's in the first two of the Op. 117 Intermezzi that his approach seems fairly conventional (if very slow) – but then in No. 3 (slower still!) he conjures an ambience of half-lights and emotional hesitancy that is much less comforting than the melodious nostalgia that lesser players weave from the notes.



**UNFETTERED:** Libor Novacek relishes Brahms's fiery style

The Sonata is among Brahms's least-recorded piano works, and though there are excellent versions available from, among others, Katchen and Richter (both on Decca), I feel Novacek may have set

a new benchmark here, while his Op. 76 stands out strongly from other accounts. Altogether an impressive release.

**PERFORMANCE**



**RECORDING**

