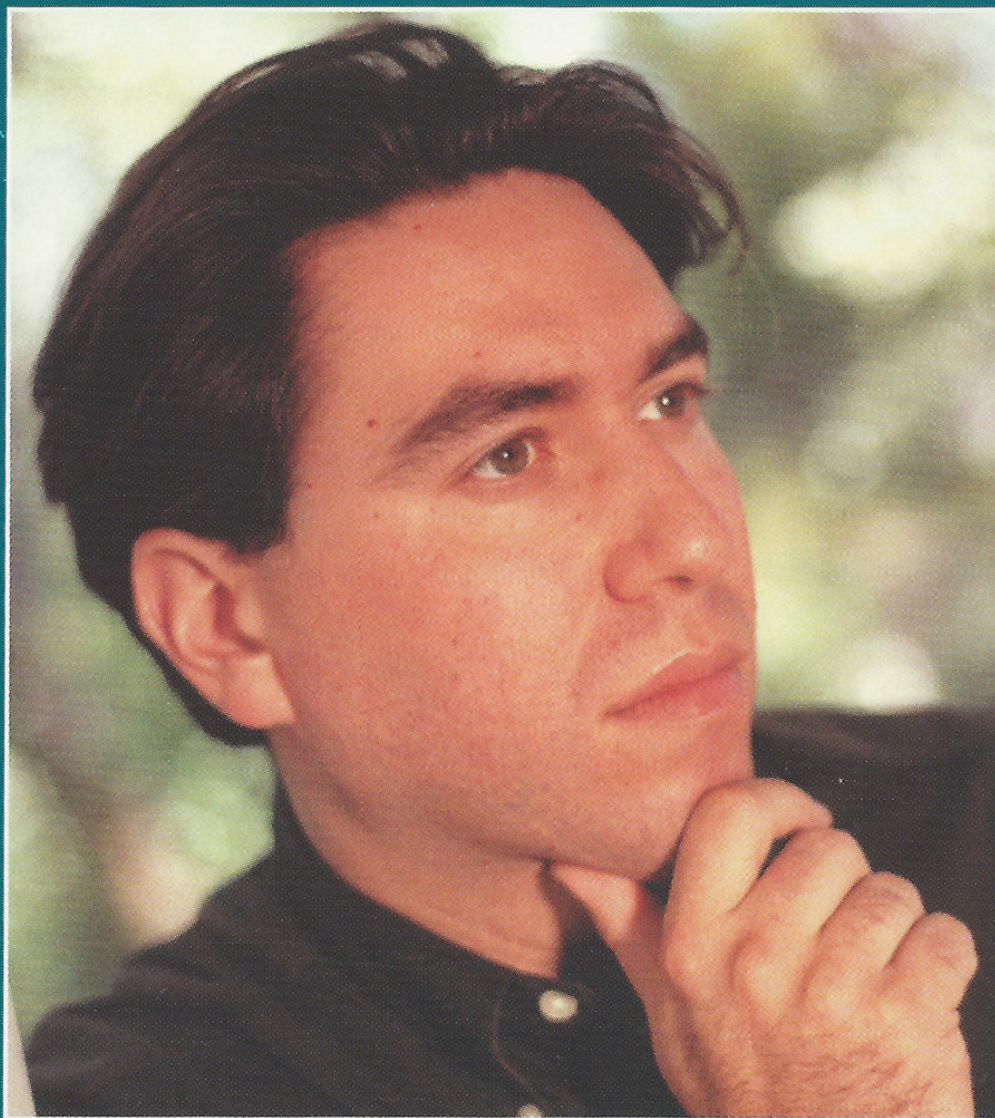


ARSIS

JULIAN WACHNER:  
SACRED MUSIC



THE  
BOSTON  
BACH  
ENSEMBLE

JULIAN  
WACHNER  
conductor



# JULIAN WACHNER: SACRED MUSIC

THE BOSTON BACH ENSEMBLE

Julian Wachner, conductor

1	<b><i>Alleluias, Intercessions and Remembrances</i></b>	8:19
	<b><i>Three Songs of Isaiah</i></b>	
2	<i>I. Surely it is God</i>	5:51
3	<i>II. Seek the Lord</i>	3:27
4	<i>III. Surge, Illuminare</i>	8:16
	<b><i>At the Lighting of the Lamps</i></b>	
5	<i>I. Inventor rutili...</i>	5:59
6	<i>II. Ne nesciret homo...</i>	2:47
7	<i>III. Vivax flamma viger...</i>	10:26
8	<b><i>Arise, My Love</i></b>	4:08
	<b><i>Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis St. Thomas Fifth Avenue</i></b>	
9	<i>Magnificat</i>	7:46
10	<i>Nunc dimittis</i>	4:40
11	<b><i>All Creatures of Our God and King</i></b>	7:43

Total CD time: 69:23

**Julian Wachner** is a highly gifted composer with a rapidly growing body of work, both sacred and secular. Boston audiences who have heard his music in the concert hall and particularly in Boston University's Marsh Chapel have recognized something unusual and profound: Wachner is as much theologian as composer.

Wachner's uncommon sensitivity to the theological nuances of sacred texts is evident throughout this recording. There is nothing formulaic about Wachner's theological self-expression; he defies traditional patterns of sacred choral music as often as he conforms to them. Nor are Wachner's theological insights merely random musings with no unified character. On the contrary, a distinctive theological point of view is discernible and it has far-reaching implications. It is this theological creativity as much as his musical style that has allowed Wachner to cultivate his unique compositional voice.

The theological perspective manifest in this recording is intensely practical, stressing the importance of the serious religious act. Wachner takes advantage of the dual character of sacred music, which is not only commentary and performance but also a practical vehicle for religious engagement and personal transformation. One senses that Wachner is attempting in his sacred works to respond to a felt obligation to create moments of spiritual inspiration in which the act of listening can also become a means of spiritual engagement. Yet he eschews superficial forms of inspiration in order to preserve the integrity of the serious religious act. As a result, Wachner's sacred music is always in some way an invitation to spiritual discovery, promising not the bright comfort of happy feelings but the hard-won spiritual comforts that demand a realistic appraisal of the perplexities and limitations of the human condition.

Wachner is sometimes quite experimental in the way he offers his listeners the challenge of heightened spiritual awareness. Consider, for example, the third of the "Three Songs of Isaiah." Set to the text of Isaiah 60, "Arise, shine, for your light has come," this song is a rapturous celebration of the divine presence, symbolized as light. Such moments, when truly significant, are not created easily. Rather, they require the preparation of a compositional foundation sturdy enough to bear the emotional weight of the invitation, which is issued only when the time is ripe. The climax of the first of

the three sections of this song occurs in the sunrise imagery of verse 2, "But over you the Lord will rise, and his glory will appear upon you." No sooner is this moment of glory achieved than it is immediately swamped in the second part by the rhythmically disruptive and dissonant setting of Isaiah's promises about the resolution of earthly conflicts. There is no end to earthly troubles and promises of victorious resolution serve merely to unsettle the soul searching for the everlasting light of the divine presence. Then the focus returns to divine light in the final section with the setting of verse 19, "The sun will no more be your light by day, by night you will not need the brightness of the moon. The Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory." Dwarfing the earlier sunrise climax of the first section and scattering the distracting promises of the second, this section is a surging wave of magnificent sound. Preparations having been made with scrupulous care, the invitation to be swept away in a moment of bliss has spiritual credibility. Only when the religious act is viewed as profoundly important does a composer go to such lengths to frame an invitation to spiritual communion with God; this is the very antithesis of musical cheap grace.

Wachner is also fascinated with the psychological complexity of religious life, which he uses to convey a theological vision of the divine-human relation. Consider the first of the "Three Songs of Isaiah". This setting of the text of Isaiah 12 includes the beloved line, "Surely it is God who saves me. I will trust in him and not be afraid." Wachner instinctively grasps the tentativeness of this line and astutely sets its fearful striving for confidence in a musical context that conveys distress, with overtones of grief. The plaintive theme struck by male voices at the beginning is repeated at the end of the first section of the song by a solo soprano voice. This conveys the sense that trusting in God is always also a steeling of our souls against fear in the context of a perilous world in which we so often feel alone. The theological point being made here concerns the conflicted, ambiguous relationship between the divine and the human. The longing for the comfort of divine protection is at least partly a flame of wistful hope, flickering in the darkness of pain and abandonment, thrust out against the night to repel unseen dangers. And all the while we sense the divine on both sides — both with us to comfort and protect yet also hovering in the darkness beyond the

reach of our control, untamable. The realism of this theological insight can seem severe but it is surely more palatable than the strident or simply joyful settings of this text that one often hears. It is also more truly comforting in the long run, precisely through being realistic.

At times Wachner will break with unspoken traditions of sacred music in order to express his theological interpretation of the divine-human relationship. In the first part of "Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis," he accepts one of the great challenges for the composer within this repertoire: setting the Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55). Though some ancient texts attribute the Magnificat to Mary's older relative, Elizabeth, traditionally it is held to be Mary's proclamation of praise. Mary is a virgin and a young girl, yet she is pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Unsurprisingly, the traditional handling of this passage highlights Mary's attitude of awed faithfulness, expressed in her eventual acceptance of the angelic message: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Wachner's setting varies dramatically from this established pattern. He focuses on the emotional and psychological contradictions of Mary's situation. Nowhere is this clearer than in the middle section of the "Magnificat" where Wachner sets two independent themes bluntly against one another. In one theme the bulk of the choir drives out a fugue-like "For behold all generations shall call me blessed," suggesting fearful resistance and perhaps even the youthful temptation to pride beneath the words. Meanwhile, a descant theme conveys Mary's serene acceptance of her role: "For He that is mighty has magnified me." Together, the juxtaposed themes capture the exhilaration of Mary's conflicted state of mind and invite the listeners to experience (and perhaps to understand) that our own struggles for righteousness and faithful obedience are not alien to her. Conjoined with a number of other compositional moves, including downward glissandos and the periodic fracturing of harmonic solidity, this musical expression of psychological conflict conveys Wachner's refreshingly realistic appraisal of the relation between human beings and the divine power in which we live and move and have their being.

In and through his unique theological-musical portrayal of the divine-human relationship, Wachner conveys his vision of the divine. This is a matter of great delicacy. As

the mystical instincts toward silence and indirection indicate, attempts to speak of God inevitably collapse under the weight of their pretensions. Sacred music is well positioned to avoid the dangers of theological speech to some extent, both because music itself is conceptually indirect and because sacred texts have a symbolic status within religious communities that prohibits their being interpreted in flatly literal ways, the more so when given a choral setting. Wachner makes use of these virtues of sacred music but, apparently finding the safeguards insufficient, he is scrupulously careful in his handling of theological content concerning the divine. For instance, there is no trace of edifying or instructional “preaching” in these choral works. On the contrary, Wachner typically tries to conjure his theological image of the divine in the periphery while the listener’s focus of attention is drawn to the ambiguous and conflicted character of the divine-human relationship. This is an intriguing intensification of the theological indirectness of sacred music. It enables Wachner to portray a vision of the divine yet bespeaks a caution that underlines the holy peril that human beings face when they attempt to characterize God.

If we were to speak in words what Wachner intimates about the divine in these choral works, what would we be driven to say? For Wachner, God is utterly untamed yet infinitely gracious. God is at once intensely immanent to the point of being barely manageable for frail humanity, supremely transcendent to the point of being morally indigestible for constrained human imaginations, truly comforting only through unmasking human pretensions, and the source of bliss for human beings on the unwavering condition of trusting surrender. Wachner’s vision of the divine-human relationship is both comforting and disturbing because the divine light is endlessly beautiful yet searing in its intensity. This is also why serious religious acts of engagement are so vital: a God of such untamed love can never be encountered in the abstract, nor can unpredictable divine wildness be introduced politely and safely to the self-protective soul. This vision of the divine is kaleidoscopically present throughout Wachner’s sacred music. The invitation he issues to his listeners is always to encounter *this* God rather than any pale, safe imitation.

— *Wesley J. Wildman*, Prof. of Theology, Boston University

## Texts

### 1 Alleluias, Intercessions, and Remembrances (1995)

Alleluia!

O Holy God, open unto me light for my darkness, courage for my fear, hope for my despair.

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.

O loving God, open unto me wisdom for my confusion, forgiveness for my sins, love for my hate.

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.

O God of peace, open unto me peace for my turmoil, strength for my weakness, joy for my sorrow.

O generous God, open my heart to receive all your gifts.

Alleluia! Amen.

— *Text adapted from prayers by Howard Thurman. Used with permission.*

### Three Songs of Isaiah

#### 2 I. Ecce, Deus (1997)

Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.

For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior.

Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation

And on that day you shall say, Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name;

Make his deeds known among the peoples;

see that they remember that his Name is exalted.

Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things,

and this is known in all the world.

Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy,

for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**3 II. Quaerite Dominum** (1998)

Seek the Lord while he wills to be found; call upon him when he draws near.  
Let the wicked forsake their ways and the evil ones their thoughts;  
And let them turn to the Lord, and he will have compassion,  
and to our God, for he will richly pardon.  
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your  
ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.  
For as rain and snow fall from the heavens and return not again,  
but water from the earth,  
Bringing forth life and giving growth, seed for sowing and bread for eating,  
So is my word that goes forth from my mouth; it will not return to me empty;  
But it will accomplish that which I have purposed,  
and prosper in that for which I sent it.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**4 III. Surge, illuminare** (1993)

Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you.  
For behold, darkness covers the land; deep gloom enshrouds the peoples.  
But over you the Lord will rise, and his glory will appear upon you.  
Nations will stream to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawning.  
Your gates will always open; by day or night they will never be shut.  
They will call you, The City of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.  
Violence will no more be heard in your land,  
ruin or destruction within your borders.  
You will call your walls, Salvation, and all your portals, Praise.  
The sun will no more be your light by day;  
by night you will not need the brightness of the moon.

The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost:  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen.

**At the Lighting of the Lamps** (1999)

**5 I.**  
Inventor rutili, dux bone, luminis,  
*Gracious Lord, Creator of the golden light,*  
Qui certis vicibus tempora dividis,  
*You establish the patterns of revolving time,*  
Merso sole chaos ingruit horridum,  
*And as the sun now sets, the gloom of night advances in.*  
Lucem redde tuis Christe fidelibus.  
*For all your faithful, Christ, restore the light.*  
Quamvis innumero sidere regiam  
*You have arrayed your heavenly court*  
Lunarique polum lampade pinxeris,  
*With all the countless stars, setting the moon there as a lamp,*  
Incussu silicis lumina nos tamen  
*Yet still have shown us how to seek*  
Monstras saxigeno semine quaerere:  
*Those lights whose seeds spring out whenever stony flint is struck.*

**6 II.**  
Ne nesciret homo spem sibi luminis  
*This was to teach mankind its hope,*  
In Christi solido corpore conditam,  
*That light bestowed on us when Christ came with his own flesh.*  
Qui dici stabilem se voluit petram,  
*For as he said, He is that steadfast rock,*



Nostris igniculis unde genus venit.  
*From which a fire sprang forth to all our race.*

Pinguis quos olei rore madentibus  
*This tiny flame we nurse in lamps*

Lychnis aut facibus pascimus aridis:  
*Brimming with rich and fragrant oil,*

Quin et fila favis scirpea floreis  
*Or on the dry timber or the torch, or on the rushlights we have made,*

Presso melle prius conlita fingimus.  
*Steeped in wax pressed from the comb.*

**7** **III.**

Vivax flamma viget, seu cava testula  
*The flickering light grows strong, as the hollow earthenware lamp*

Sucum linteolo suggerit ebrius,  
*Yields up its richness to the thirsty wick,*

Seu pinus piceam fert alimoniam,  
*As the pine branch drips its nourishing sap,*

Seu ceram teretem stупpa calens bibit.  
*And the fire drinks the warmth of waxen tapers down.*

Nectar de liquido vertice fervidum  
*Drop by drop in perfumed tears*

Guttatim lacrimis stillat olentibus,  
*The glowing liquid nectar falls.*

Splendent ergo tuis muneribus, Pater,  
*It is by your own gifts, Father,*

Flammis mobilibus scilicet atria,  
*Our halls gleam now with dancing lights that strive to emulate  
departed day,*

Absentemque diem lux agit aemula,  
*While conquered night withdraws in flight,*  
Quam nox cum lacero victa fugit peplo.  
*Rending her dark cloak as she goes.*

Inventor rutili, dux bone, luminis,  
*Gracious Lord, Creator of the golden light,*  
Qui certis vicibus tempora dividis,  
*You establish the patterns of revolving time,*  
Merse sole chaos ingruit horridum,  
*And as the sun now sets, the gloom of night advances in.*  
Lucem redde tuis Christe fidelibus.  
*For all your faithful, Christ, restore the light.*

— Adapted from Prudentius, 5th Century,  
English translation by John McGuckin

**8** **Arise, My Love** (1999)

Arise my Love and come away  
Arise my love, my fair one!

For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone,  
the flow'rs appear on the earth and the time of the singing birds is come.

Set me as a seal upon your heart  
as a seal upon your arm for love is strong as death.

Many waters cannot quench love  
neither can the floods drown it.

— from the *Song of Songs*

**Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis St. Thomas Fifth Avenue (1992)**

**9 Magnificat**

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.  
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.  
For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.  
For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his Name.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.  
He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the  
imagination of their hearts.  
He hath put down the mighty from their seat,  
and hath exalted the humble and the meek.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.  
He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel,  
as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed forever.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost:  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**10 Nunc dimittis**

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;  
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,  
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people,  
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of thy people Israel.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the  
beginning, is now, and shall be forever, world without end. Amen

**11 All Creatures of Our God and King (1992)**

All creatures of our God and King Lift up your voice and with us sing.  
O praise ye! Alleluia! O brother sun with golden beam,  
O sister moon with silver gleam, O praise ye! Alleluia!  
O brother wind, air, clouds and rain, By which all creatures ye sustain,  
O praise ye! Alleluia! Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice!  
Ye lights of evening, find a voice. O praise ye! Alleluia!  
O sister water flowing clear, Make music for thy Lord to hear.  
O praise ye! Alleluia! O brother fire who lights the night,  
Providing warmth enhancing sight. O praise ye! Alleluia!  
Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above ye heav'nly host,  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.  
— Hymntune "Lasst uns erfreuen"  
— text by Francis of Assisi, tr. William H. Draper

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Arsis Audio, Boston, MA

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## Julian Wachner

Since his debut with the *Boston Bach Ensemble* in 1995, conductor-composer **Julian Wachner** has become one of New England's leading musical personalities. Wachner is currently music director of *The Back Bay Chorale*, artistic director of *The Providence Singers*, and founding music director of the *Boston Bach Ensemble*, a period-instrument baroque orchestra and professional vocal ensemble. He has appeared as guest conductor with *The San Diego Symphony Orchestra*, the *Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra*, the *Handel and Haydn Society*, the *Brown University* and *Boston University Symphony Orchestras*, the *Young Artists' Orchestra* of the Tanglewood Music Center, the *Boston Academy of Music* and *ALEA III*. He is also music director of Boston University's Marsh Chapel, a post he was awarded at the age of twenty.

His original compositions have been praised for their "unabashed emotionalism and showy orchestration" by the *Boston Globe*. As a composer whose idiom clearly lies within the post modern school, Wachner's music manages to be accessible; and despite the kaleidoscopic quality of its tonality, the listener is always engaged by the narrative drive of the music and the rhetorical devices that sustain it. He has been commissioned and performed by numerous organizations throughout the United States and Europe and is the recipient of many awards and honors including grants from ASCAP and Meet the Composer Inc.

Wachner began his musical studies with Gerre Hancock at the Choir School of St. Thomas Church in New York City. He attended Boston University's School for the Arts where he earned the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition and orchestral conducting. His teachers included Theodore Antoniou, David Hoose, Marjorie Merryman, and Lukas Foss. Mr. Foss described him as a "champion of new music... an enormously talented composer... whose vision and talent will invigorate the musical world." He is also a concert organist, award-winning improvisateur, and Fellow of the American Guild of Organists. Mr. Wachner is assistant professor on the faculty of Boston University School of Theology and lecturer in composition at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## The Boston Bach Ensemble Julian Wachner, Music Director

### Soprano

Anne Harley  
Susan Bisson  
Karoun Demirjian  
Elisa Doughty  
Cathleen Ellis  
Kelly Anne Hopkins

### Alto

Elizabeth Anker  
Calvin Braxton  
Carolann Buff  
Jessica A. Hanf  
Dianna Daly  
Jennifer Lester

### Tenor

James DeSelms  
Craig Hanson  
William Hudson  
Sujoy Pathak  
David Thorne Scott

### Bass

Aaron Engebret  
Jacob A. Cooper  
Scott Allen Jarrett  
Eric Westby  
Adam Alexander  
Tim Macri

### Instrumentalists

Jeffrey Work, Trumpet  
Mary Lynne Bohn, Trumpet  
Greg Spiridopoulos, Trombone  
Whitacre Hill, French Horn  
Matthew Gaunt, Tuba  
Robert Schulz, Percussion  
Michael Kleinschmidt – Organ (Tracks 1, 9–11)  
Jennifer Lester – Organ (Tracks 2–8)

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*This recording is gratefully dedicated to Dr. Gerre Hancock, Organist and Master of the Choristers at St. Thomas Church, New York City, my mentor and colleague; and to the Rev. Robert Watts Thornburg, Dean of Marsh Chapel, Boston University, mentor and friend. Their constant care and inspiration provided me with all of the reasons and impetus to write this music.*

– Julian Wachner