

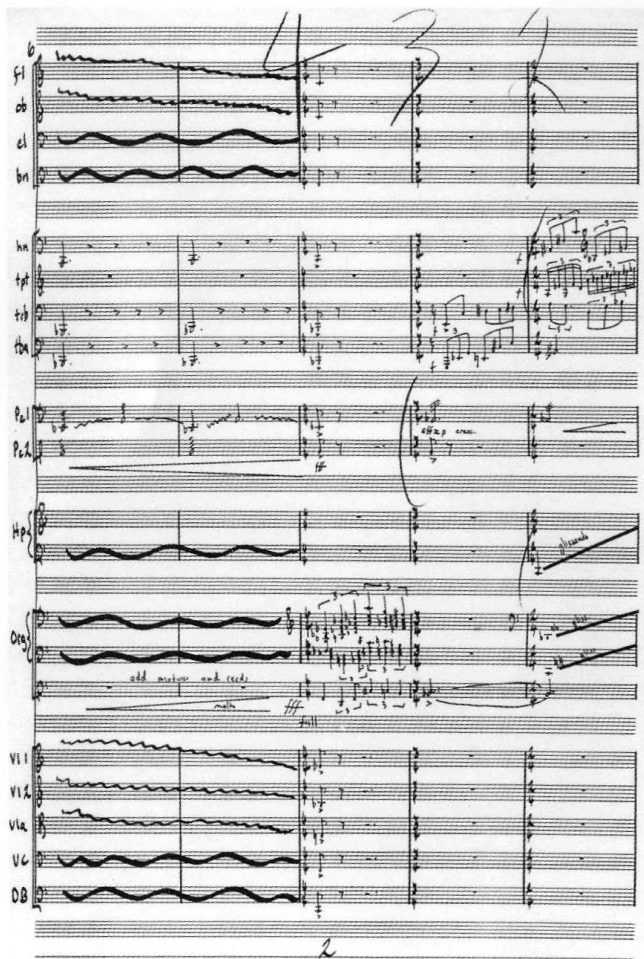
ARSIS

JULIAN
WACHNER

CHAMBER MUSIC



THE
BOSTON
SINFONIETTA



Page 2 of
original
manuscript,
Cymbale

JULIAN WACHNER CHAMBER MUSIC



JULIAN WACHNER: CHAMBER MUSIC

The Boston Sinfonietta, Julian Wachner, conductor

STRING QUARTET NO. 1 (1992)

- | | | |
|---|------------|------|
| 1 | 1. Chorale | 4:00 |
| 2 | 2. Scherzo | 2:55 |
| 3 | 3. Fugue | 7:20 |

Laura King, violin I; Polina Sedukh, violin II;
Mimi Reiger, viola; Terry King, cello

CYCLES (1997)

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------|
| 4 | I. Prologue | 5:18 |
| 5 | II. Lamentation | 3:35 |
| 6 | III. Molto allegro ed agitato | 4:18 |

Mark Margolies, clarinet; Linda Osborn-Blaschke, piano

LANDSCAPES (1992)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------|------|
| 7 | I. Molto adagio | 5:22 |
| 8 | II. Vocalise | 2:08 |
| 9 | III. Trio | 2:09 |
| 10 | IV. Recitative | 1:52 |
| 11 | V. Sur la neige | 3:05 |

Susan Gall Hampton, flute; Kenneth Radnovsky, alto saxophone;
Courtney McDonald, marimba; Emmanuel Feldman, cello;
Linda Osborn-Blaschke, piano; Julian Wachner, conductor

ENCHANTMENT (1999)

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|------|
| 12 | I. Introduction – Adagio | 2:49 |
| 13 | II. Enchantment | 8:00 |

Tim Macri, flute; Janet Underhill, bassoon;
Linda Osborn-Blaschke, piano

DANCES AND APPARITIONS (1991)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------|------|
| 14 | I. Introduction | 5:08 |
| 15 | II. Minuet | 8:54 |

Heidi Braun, violin; Anthony D'Amico, contrabass

Courtney McDonald, marimba; Linda Osborn-Blaschke, piano;
Julian Wachner, conductor

CYMBALE (1999)

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|-------|
| 16 | Peter Sykes, organ | 10:34 |
|----|--------------------|-------|

The Boston Sinfonietta:

Theresa Patton, flute; Jane Harrison, oboe;
Steven Jackson, clarinet; Janet Underhill, bassoon;
Ellen Michaud-Martins, horn; Jesse Levine, trumpet;
Denis Lambert, trombone; Charles Villarubia, tuba;
John Grimes, Robert Schulz, percussion, Hyunjung Choi, harp;
Danielle Maddon, Krista Buckland-Reisner, violin;
Jennifer J. Badger, viola; Rafael Popper-Keizer, cello;
Susan Hagen, contrabass.

Total CD Time: 77:32

Julian Wachner: Chamber Music

In attempting to construct such machines we should not be irreverently usurping His power of creating souls, any more than we are in the procreation of children: rather we are, in either case, instruments of His will providing mansions for the souls that He creates.

— Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,”
Mind, LIX No. 236 (October, 1950)

Thus Alan Turing, the inventor of the digital computer and the most celebrated cryptologist of the Second World War, impishly defended the quest for artificial intelligence at the mid-point of a century in which the temptation to regard machinery with a religious awe was only occasionally resisted. Turing’s elegant theology was but counterpoint to the prevailing nervous ontology, as human beings looked deep into every new technological advancement—the atomic bomb, the engineering of genes, the Internet—in hopes that a glimpse of themselves would be mirrored back. The cross-pollination between the hardware and software of our ability to increasingly reshape the world we occupy has fueled an artistic speciation—and extinction—of Cambrian proportions.

If one had to choose a composer to navigate this no-man’s-land between mind and machine, Julian Wachner would, as it were, spring to mind. Born to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, trained at St. Thomas Fifth Avenue, New York’s island of high Anglicanism, and graduated from worldly Boston University, Wachner moves between the varieties of sacred and secular experiences with a dexterous ease; composer, conductor, organist, teacher, he can fathom the clockwork of music from an unusually high number of angles and perspectives. The pieces on this disc betray a fascination with both the precision of musical craft and the sometimes messy emotions of musical experience—competing waves that might cancel each other out, but Wachner uses them, plays them off each other to create energy and drama. Wachner makes us feel the dynamo as a moral force.

The *String Quartet* opens the program: *Chorale*, *Scherzo*, and *Fugue*, a lineup strongly reminiscent of 19th-century French organ music. In those Gallic hands, the central movement would have likely been a splash of late-Romantic decadence tamed by its bookends, reverent tributes to Bach. Yet for Wachner it is the “secular” movement, the *Scherzo*, that seems boxed in and backward-glancing, a Bartokian set-piece that goes through its formal paces with grim energy, interrupted only by a brief burst of canonic frustration at its midpoint. The *Chorale* and *Fugue*, on the other hand, are freed through their labors: Wachner pays obeisance to the techniques of the traditional chorale and fugue, but then allows those techniques to run wild. The *Chorale* introduces a tune to be harmonized, but the tune is soon subsumed into the increasingly complex counterpoint, freeing the movement from its moorings and letting it soar. As music appreciation books always remind us, fugue is a process, not a form. Wachner’s fugue takes the books at their word: the process is turned not just on a theme, but on whole sections of music, and eventually on the very idea of a fugue, creating an intelligent machine that recursively pushes itself to new spiritual heights.

Enchantment in some ways reverses the emotional associations of the *String Quartet*, but is still driven by the need to find the ghost in the machine. The piano raises the curtain with a series of 12-tone ascents, striving upwards but limited by inherent design. The flute and bassoon enter, and the three instruments go their separate rhythmic ways, as if trying to find a path out of the maze (the piano working itself into a six-against-five-against-four crunch), but soon retreat to an ominous murmur; like Piranesi’s imaginary prisons, the music hints at great space, but remains sealed. The second movement would at first blush seem to be a counterpart to the *String Quartet*’s *Scherzo*—the driving rhythms, the strict formal boundaries, the repetition. But whereas the string instruments were locked together in struggle, here Wachner detaches the winds from the piano and, in effect, lets them appreciate the mechanism from without: at the return of the fast, Greek-influenced rhythms the piano simply clicks

into its former patterns, but the flute and bassoon parts are thoroughly recomposed, creating a new dance on the framework of the old.

Cycles adopts the general outline of *Enchantment*—organic lyricism giving way to a sort of cross-rhythmic bacchanal—and restricts it even further. Wachner bases the entire piece on a simple cell, a whole step followed by a half step, a seemingly harsh limitation that paradoxically allows for great flexibility. The avian opening, the clarinet's sinuous entrance, the angular mourning of the second movement, the brassy chords that open the third: all are evolved from divisions and multiplications of the original cell. Even the clarinet is intrigued by the imitation of life; while the finale borrows *Enchantment*'s idea of a layer of variation superimposed on an exact repeat, here the clarinet is unable to merely regard the machine as it hums and crackles, but instead seems to expand its range and vocabulary in a kind of Turing test for the piano, as if asking the right questions will determine if the machine has a soul.

If the previous three pieces are, in some sense, engineered, then *Landscapes* and *Dances and Apparitions* might best be described as reverse-engineered; each dismantles pre-existing musical ideas into their constituent parts, and then tries to put them back together. *Dances and Apparitions* works on venerable triple-time forms: a waltz, a minuet, a mazurka. The minuet is reworked into a sad *pas de deux* and an intricate marimba cadenza, while the mazurka moves precariously through a constant four-against-three rhythm, like a loose gear that doesn't quite mesh. As the apparitions and dances become more fragmentary, they begin to blur into one another. *Landscapes* shows the inner workings of a Debussy prelude, *Des pas sur la neige*. Debussy's "melancholy, snowbound landscape," when taken apart, becomes a quiet blizzard of d minor out of which the instruments emerge with increasingly insistent commentary. By the time the original prelude is reassembled, the parts are on equal footing with the whole.

Cymbale, scored for organ and small orchestra, just barely qualifies as chamber music, but the sound of the piece belies the size of its forces. In Wachner's

hands, the expanded palette yields not blocks of massed power, but a whirling orrery of instrumental color, buoyant and light. And unlike the rest of the program, this piece seems to emerge from a specific time: Turing's youth, say, between the wars, when the height of technological progress seemed to be the prospect of an automated kitchen or a flying car. The cheerfully dissonant harmony conjures up an enthusiastic babel, a multi-lingual chorus as in celebration of a World's Fair; with the help of the ensemble, the organ escapes the church and instead fills a movie palace with its industrial splendor. But the soul of the piece is its bright machinery—a cartoon factory, maybe, where four-fingered robotic hands perform workaday tasks with exaggerated precision in a gleaming spectacle, equal parts funny, menacing, and hopeful.

— Matthew Guerrieri

Matthew Guerrieri is a Boston-area composer, pianist, and writer.

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ALSO ON ARSIS :

CD 124 — JULIAN WACHNER: SACRED MUSIC performed by The Boston
Bach Ensemble conducted by the composer.

CD 134 — BENJAMIN BRITTEN: THE COMPANY OF HEAVEN, TE DEUM IN
C, and PRELUDE & FUGUE ON A THEME OF VITTORIA, the Back
Bay Chorale and Orchestra of Boston and the Marsh Chapel Choir
of Boston University, Julian Wachner, conductor.

JULIAN WACHNER was born in Hollywood, California, in 1969. He began his musical education at age four with cello lessons at the University of Southern California. He subsequently studied improvisation, composition, organ and theory under Dr. Gerre Hancock while a boy chorister at the St. Thomas Choir School in New York City. He attended Boston University's School for the Arts where, at the age of 20, he was appointed University Organist and Choirmaster. In 1996, he earned the doctor of musical arts degree in composition and orchestral conducting, having studied with Lukas Foss, Ann Howard Jones, Marjorie Merryman, and David Hoose.

Julian Wachner's music has been performed throughout the world, including performances at Lincoln Center, the Library of Congress, the Tanglewood Music Center, the Sandpoint Festival, June in Buffalo, and festivals in St. Petersburg, Russia, and Athens, Greece. He has received commissions from The St. Thomas Choir of Men and Boys, Empire Brass, the Newton (Mass.) Choral Society, the Seraphim Singers of Boston, Quincy Symphony, Idyllwild International Chamber Orchestra, ALEA III, Harvard University, Brown University, and Arcadian Winds. Among his many prizes and awards are grants from ASCAP and Meet the Composer.

As a conductor, Wachner has been engaged by numerous ensembles including the Handel and Haydn Society (Boston), Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra (Boston), San Diego Symphony, and the Spoleto Festival Orchestra. He has been the music director of The Boston Bach Ensemble, Back Bay Chorale (Boston), Marsh Chapel Choir of Boston University, the Providence (RI) Singers, and The Boston Sinfonietta.

Wachner has held faculty appointments at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Boston University's School for the Arts, Boston University's Tanglewood Institute and School of Theology. In the fall of 2001 he was appointed Associate Professor of Music and Chair of the Choral Area of McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada.

