

Fall 2007

# Ballet Review



**A Conversation with Raven Wilkinson  
from Ballet Review Fall 2007**

Cover photo from *In the Wings* by Kyle Froman:  
New York City Ballet rehearsing *Serenade*.

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Ballet Review 35.3  
Fall 2007

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- 4 London, Ontario – Gary Smith
- 5 Chicago – Joseph Houseal
- 7 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 8 Washington, DC – George Jackson
- 10 New York – Marilyn Hunt
- 11 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 12 London – Joseph Houseal
- 15 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 16 New York – David Vaughan
- 18 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 19 Philadelphia – Leigh Witchel

**Michael Langlois**

- 22 **A Conversation with  
Raven Wilkinson**

- 33 **By With To & From Lincoln  
Kirstein: Drawings, Prints,  
and Photographs**

Don Daniels

- 50 David LaMarche on  
Music for Dance

Camille Hardy

- 69 *Fille* in Paris

Ellen Bar

- 72 Behind the Scenes

Joseph Houseal

- 79 Ann Barzel (1905–2007)

Clement Crisp

- 81 London Reporter

- 91 Joseph Cornell – Debra Cash

- 92 Music on Disc – George Dorris

- 100 Check It Out

Cover photo from *In the Wings* by Kyle Froman:  
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*Les Sylphides*, Ballet Russe, 1957. (Photo: courtesy of Raven Wilkinson)

# A Conversation with Raven Wilkinson

Michael Langlois

Raven Wilkinson: I was born in New York City. My mother and father came from South Carolina, but they had lived in the north for years. My mother went to school in Chicago and my father, who was a dentist, went to school in New England.

Both my father and his brother went to Dartmouth and then Harvard Medical School. My uncle was a doctor and they opened a practice in Harlem on “Striver’s Row,” a beautiful block of brownstones. Eventually my father moved his office to 152nd Street and Amsterdam Avenue, across the street from the Dance Theatre of Harlem. He could look out his window and see Tanaquil Le Clercq arriving in her wheelchair to teach class.

When I became a dancer I would send my dance friends uptown to see my father. He always had both white and black patients. Of course many of them were not very rich, the dancers in particular, so he charged them less or let them pay over time, things like that.

BR: Where did you go to school?

Wilkinson: I went to Ethical Culture and then Fieldston in Riverdale. My parents were very uneasy about my desire to become a dancer because the possibilities were so limited, particularly for a black person. They didn’t want me to give up everything for something that, in most cases, wouldn’t work out. From a school like Fieldston, it was relatively easy to get into the best universities, so they did not want me to pass that up. As a result I started going to Columbia University’s School of General Studies and completed two years before leaving to join the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

BR: Where were you living at that time?

Wilkinson: We were living on 150th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues in this building that Rockefeller had given some

money for, a nice building where mostly middle-class black people lived. When I was about thirteen we moved up to Riverside Drive and 148th Street. In those days Harlem was a nice neighborhood, it wasn’t ominous or dangerous.

As I got older I wanted to go to the Professional Children’s School because it was downtown and more convenient for me to get to class. My parents, being very uncertain about this desire of mine, asked my teacher, Madame Swoboda, what she thought my potential was. Supposedly she replied, “Oh, Raven’s very talented. She will dance before kings and queens.”

Madame Swoboda was really living in another era, but years later I did dance before a queen, Queen Beatrix of Holland, so she was not that far off.

BR: Tell me how you got started studying ballet?

Wilkinson: My mother had studied ballet in Chicago and I always loved it. When I was a little girl my mother took me to see everything at the theater. I was fascinated with music and dancing and acting.

I was five when I started classes. The School of American Ballet said they couldn’t accept me until I was nine so my mother took me to Dalcroze, which came from Europe. It was basically eurhythmics and was all about music and tempi and meters. Sometimes you’d behave like animals, that kind of thing. It was based on a modern approach to dance, obviously.

On my ninth birthday my uncle gave me some money to take dance privately and I chose the Swoboda School. A husband and wife who were Russian émigrés ran it. Gertrude Tyven and her sister Sonja were pupils at the school. Sonja was the one who eventually married Bobby Lindgren. In those days, when the Ballet Russe first arrived in America, they Russianized a lot of the dancers names so the company would appear more Russian. Sonja’s stage name for a while was Sonja Taanila and Gertrude’s stage name was Gertrude Svobodina.

In any event, Sergei Denham, the director of the Ballet Russe company that I joined, bought the Swoboda School in 1951 and this was how I gained entrée into the company in 1955.

BR: What lessons did your parents teach you about race?

Wilkinson: My parents didn't bring up race a lot. They brought me up to think of myself as equal to everyone else and somehow that



Raven with her mother, father, and brother, Frost, 1958.  
(Photo: courtesy of Raven Wilkinson)

stuck. To this day when I have problems that have to do with race—and I do get them, they're more subtle but they're still there—I don't back down.

BR: When you look at the City Ballet today or at ABT, would you say we've come very far since 1955 in terms of racial integration in the ballet world?

Wilkinson: No. The stage today should be more representative of the society we live in. In the year 2007 we should not be insisting that a performance be wall-to-wall white carpeting, if you know what I mean. Yes, Ballet Theatre and City Ballet have very few blacks and New York City Opera had gotten like that.

When I first joined the City Opera in 1974

it was under the aegis of affirmative action and we had a lot diversity as a result of that. Then we slipped away from that gradually because nobody was insisting on it and it fell by the wayside.

This doesn't mean that I think someone should be hired because they're black. I don't. I think we should be chosen because we're qualified artists, but a balance has to come into it and it has to be considered. In City Ballet, you recognize a person as black when they first come on the stage and maybe your eye is drawn to them for a moment, but I think after a while you forget that and you see them simply as another dancer.

BR: You are very light-skinned. Are both of your parents African American?

Wilkinson: Yes, although my family was mixed very early on, as was typical in Southern history. White slave owners often took advantage of black female slaves and sired children of mixed blood. These children were sometimes granted their freedom and

educated, and they could even buy land and have slaves themselves.

In any event, my great-great-grandmother on my father's side, who was of mixed blood and what they called a "Free Negra," married a white gentleman by the name of Frost from a very prominent family in Charleston, South Carolina. She wasn't accepted in society, however, and as a result of this marriage her husband's family disinherited him.

BR: What were things like for you as the company's first black dancer?

Wilkinson: When I joined the Ballet Russe the Jim Crow laws were still very much in effect in the South; the so-called "separate but equal" laws. When I went on tour with the company in the South, you'd always see the

signs “Colored” and “White.” When you went to the movies blacks had to sit in the balcony. You couldn’t drink at the same water fountains. You couldn’t dance on the same stage and you couldn’t stay in the same hotel with whites.

BR: What were those tours like?

Wilkinson: From September through May of every year we traveled by bus from one small town to another with the occasional big city thrown in. It was like a traveling circus, really. We were a very close-knit family. We had an orchestra that traveled with us on their own bus.

The spirit of the audiences then was terrific. How excited they were just to have us in their town. And it was a wonderful experience, seeing the United States, but it was also exhausting. We did a lot of sleeping on the bus, as you can imagine. We usually left at eight in the morning. We’d climb in with pillows and blankets and fall asleep. When we finally got back to New York I’d get on the Fifth Avenue bus and hear those gears shifting and, crazy as it sounds, I would start to fall asleep.

You’d arrive in a town after traveling all day and although they tried to get us there with enough time to check into our hotel, eat, and get to the theater to warm up it often happened that you barely had time to do a barre. I can remember pulling up to the theater and having the audience already in their seats.

For two years I traveled all over the country with Ballet Russe with no problems, but during my second year in the company word had gotten around and things began to change.

In a hotel in Atlanta we were hauled off the bus and into the lobby where the man who represented Mr. Denham was talking to the manager. The elevator operator, a black woman, was sitting there watching us as we lined up at the desk. I felt as if something was going on and finally the manager walked over to me and said, “I have asked if there is a Negro in your company and your company manager said, ‘No,’ but the elevator operator identified you as being a Negro. Are you?”

This is what white hotel managers would

do. They would ask the blacks that worked there to identify other blacks if they weren’t sure.

I said, “Yes, I am.”

And he said, “You know you can’t stay in this hotel.”

“I know that,” I said, “but what would you say if I told you that I’ve stayed here for the past two years without any problems?”

Well, the man got very upset and said, “You don’t understand what’s happening down here now. My hotel could be bombed. You will have to leave.”

And of course I said I would. They called a colored taxi and I went to a colored hotel overnight. The funny thing was Eleanor D’Antuono, who was my roommate, wanted to come with me. She was very upset.

“But Eleanor,” I said, “you can’t stay in a colored hotel.”

BR: You knew about the Jim Crow laws. Why did you insist on traveling to the South with the company?

Wilkinson: When I joined Ballet Russe I thought that this issue of race was in the eye of the beholder. I felt that I was a dancer who had just as much right to be there as anyone else. But I also felt that if I were stopped and asked I was not going to say, “No, I’m not black.” I could never do that. That’s what was called “passing” and to me that’s like denying your very being, and I just couldn’t do that. It’s like saying, there’s something wrong with being black.

I’ll tell you a story that illustrates how I felt about what I was doing. When I was young I befriended a white girl named Polly. She used to rent a summer house near my family’s on Long Island. Her family’s home was in Savannah, Georgia, and when I toured there with Ballet Russe she and her parents came to the show. Afterwards, we met and her father said to me, “I have to tell you this. I disagree very much with what you’re doing. We’re Southern people and we feel that segregation is the right of our community and culture.”

I said, “I understand and accept your feelings, but you should be able to do that for me

too. I must have an opportunity to do what I have the ability and talent to do, just as you would expect your daughter to have the opportunity to do what she is capable of.”

BR: Can you tell me of a time when you were confronted with being black during a show and how you dealt with it?

Wilkinson: Once when we were rehearsing onstage the theater manager came down the aisle with another man and they shouted to us, “We hear y’all have a Negra! Where’s the Negra!”

None of us said anything. We were so offended by how they were behaving. Then they came up onstage and went from group to group. “Where’s the Negra?” they kept asking. “Where’s the Negra?”

BR: What did you say?

Wilkinson: I didn’t say a word.

BR: But wasn’t that “passing”?

Wilkinson: Yes and no. First of all, this man was looking for a “Negra” and I don’t consider myself a “Negra.” This poor, ignorant white man’s idea of what a Negro was, I certainly wasn’t that. If he could have found out who I was, fine. If he had come up to me and asked if I was a Negro I probably would have said yes, but it was the way he went about it. I didn’t feel he deserved my respect or my honesty.

When the hotel manager asked me, he was a very decent man who felt it was in his best interest to find out who was black and he did it very correctly. He treated me with respect. I felt that that situation was different from those two ignorant rednecks storming down the aisle the way they did.

BR: I don’t mean to belabor the point, but weren’t you taking advantage of your light skin color?

Wilkinson: When I look back on it now, in middle age, yes, I realize I wanted it both ways. I wanted to be proud of who I was as a black person and yet I took advantage of the fact that I could pass for white.

BR: What exactly were the penalties for not abiding by the Jim Crow laws.

Wilkinson: If you deliberately disobeyed

you could be arrested. But usually they would just ask you to leave if you were found out. Oddly enough, even in the 1950s in interstate areas – airports, bus stations, train stations – you could not segregate. But still I was refused a cup of coffee in Florida in the airport in Daytona Beach. I could have gone to court over that but I felt that that would have been a very explosive thing for the Ballet Russe. Already they were taking a huge risk having me there and I just felt I couldn’t jeopardize the company that way.

BR: How did your situation affect the other dancers?

Wilkinson: I remember at one point Alicia Alonso and Igor Youskevitch wanted to refuse to dance in some of these places because of what was going on. I think they decided finally that it wasn’t going to make that much difference. That, in fact, it might cause more problems than it would erase.

What was interesting was that Alicia wanted to make a stand for me and then she was blackballed from many theaters in the States because of her closeness to Castro. She appeared at the World’s Fair in Canada and we all had to go up there to see her dance. I just thought that was incredible.

BR: Did you ever have any encounters with the KKK?

Wilkinson: Yes. One night in Montgomery, Alabama, they were having a Klan convention when we came into town. When we got to the hotel I went to eat with my friends in the dining room and there were many Klansmen there, their sheets folded up on the chair next to mine. Well, when I got a look at who these scary people really were under those sheets I thought, These are just poor, ignorant country folk in catalogue-ordered Sears’ suits. I realized that they needed that somehow. Yes, they believed in their white supremacy but it was always around somebody else’s neck.

BR: Was your race ever an issue with other dancers in the company?

Wilkinson: No. I always felt supported by the spirit and camaraderie of the Ballet Russe. I didn’t generally feel negative or depressed.



*Ballet Imperial* with Gwenn Barker and Howard Sayette, 1958. (Photo: courtesy of Raven Wilkinson)

Yes, I felt bad when I wasn't allowed to dance because of a fear that I would be discovered, but the dancers made me feel very welcome for the seven years I was there.

If the other dancers suspected some official was coming around who might be looking for a black dancer they would say something to me in French. They understood the dangers I faced, how to behave and how to signal me that there was a danger. It came about naturally, I think, because they felt I was one of them, and we were all in this together. Even Mr. Denham, after trouble started for me in the company and I couldn't perform in certain places in the South, never once said that I would have to leave the company.

The truth is there were many blacks in the South who unnerved me terribly. One morning in Montgomery, after staying locked in

my room all night because of the Ku Klux Klan rally that was going on the previous night, I got into the elevator at the hotel with the elevator operator who was a black woman. As we started down she stopped the elevator between floors, turned her back to the door and just stared at me for the longest time.

"Well," she said, with a hatred in her eyes that I'll never forget, "where you *been?* I ain't seen *you* in a couple days."

She knew. She knew what I was and she just hated me for doing what I was doing.

BR: Why?

Wilkinson: Because this was something she couldn't do. She couldn't "pass." It was a personal resentment. I was getting away with something other blacks couldn't. And another part was that there were laws and they had to live by them, so why shouldn't I?



It was a strange thing that happened. After word got out that we had a black dancer in the company some people made a fuss about it and others didn't. It often happened that we would return to a city or a town we'd been in before where there'd been some trouble and everything would be fine, but then other times the company would get wind of trouble before we went somewhere and I just couldn't go with them; it would have been foolhardy for me and the company.

BR: It must have been hard to plan a performance around you, not knowing whether or not you'd be able to perform?

Wilkinson: We were prepared. In the corps roles someone could step in. It's true we never had many understudies who could fill in, but in my case we managed.

In my second year in the company, just when all the trouble started, I began getting more solo roles. I'm more of a Romantic dancer and I often got cast in those kinds of ballets, *Les Sylphides*, for example. It was remarkable to me to be out there doing the waltz, by myself, wondering if people really understood what they were looking at.

Mr. Denham didn't try to hide me, and the fact is people didn't know. From the house I just don't think people could tell, really, especially since we had so many foreign dancers. We had South Americans who were much darker than I was and this made it difficult for most white people to identify me, which is why they got a black person to do that.

Young people when they hear these stories now think, Oh, that must have been awful, how could you have lived like that? But you have to remember, when you're living through something like the Jim Crow laws or slavery or what have you, these are normal everyday things and people just adjust, the same way they adjust to things now.

BR: How were you treated in other parts of the country?

Wilkinson: Well, even in New York City if I would go downtown on Fifth Avenue it was not a normal thing. People at that time hadn't seen a lot of mixed-race persons so they would

look at me and think I was Indian or Eurasian or Spanish. They'd say, "What are you?" And when I told them I was black they would go through all these different thought processes because they had learned to detest black people, and if you were dressed well and spoke well it just didn't conform to this idea they had of blacks.

BR: You eventually left the Ballet Russe to join the Dutch National Ballet. What precipitated that move?

Wilkinson: After seven years of dancing mostly one-night stands I left the Ballet Russe and they eventually folded. It had become a bit old fashioned and the financial problems, which had always been there, simply became unworkable. Also, I began to have some difficulties with one of the ballet mistresses. At one point she said to me, "You know, a black dancer will never get to do *Swan Lake* in the Ballet Russe." She meant Odette-Odile, and then she said, "Why don't you leave and do African dance?" And I said, "I don't know African dance. I learned how to plié."

It was stunning to me to hear that. Mr. Denham, as I mentioned before, never said anything like this to me. His attitude had always been that I should dance what I was capable of dancing without any concern for my race.

After I heard this from this woman I brought it to Mr. Denham's attention and he said, "That is absolutely untrue." Then he called her on the phone when I was with him in the office and said, "As a matter of fact, I was planning on giving Raven the ballerina role in *Raymonda* next season."

Mr. Denham's kindness aside, something about that whole incident kind of knocked the air out of me and I thought, maybe I just need to take some time off.

When I did finally leave Mr. Denham was quite angry. He felt that he had done so much for me and he was right. Now that I'm older I'm able to see exactly how he felt, but at any rate, I felt it was time to go.

BR: What happened then?

Wilkinson: I started auditioning. I went to SAB. I spoke to Mr. Balanchine. He just sat



Raven, second from left, in Rudi van Dantzig's *Romeo and Juliet*, Dutch National Ballet, 1967.  
(Photo: courtesy of Raven Wilkinson)

there very quietly, wiggling his nose the way he did, but he didn't take me. I was not his type of dancer. I auditioned for Ballet Theatre but Lucia Chase barely looked at me. I think at the time I was almost a liability for a ballet company, given all that was happening and had happened to me in the South with the Ballet Russe. But I kept auditioning.

The worst audition I had was for the Met Opera Ballet and Alicia Markova. She acted as if I didn't even exist. She never looked at me. She was the rudest of all the people I auditioned for, and yet they had dancers there who couldn't even bourrée across the floor. Meanwhile, I had been dancing soloist roles in the Ballet Russe for five years. When I bourrée'd across the floor she was busy talking to other people. She never acknowledged me and I've never forgotten that.

Because of all these rejections I decided

to stop dancing. I thought perhaps this was a crossroads for me, and I got a job in the customer service department of a department store on Fifth Avenue. And then, because I'd always been drawn to the religious life, I decided I would enter a convent.

BR: How did your family react to this?

Wilkinson: My mother was horrified. My father, however, was very practical and down to earth. He said, "I don't know if you're making a mistake or not, but the only way you're going to find out is to go and see." So I did. I entered an Anglican convent in Wisconsin in 1963. I was twenty-six years old.

BR: What was that life like?

Wilkinson: When I got there I realized that human nature is the same everywhere. Posted on the walls of the convent were vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Included in those things are other things like detachment.

You're not supposed to be concerned with what kind of work you're asked to do, you just do it for the glory of God.

Human beings being what they are, that's a very hard thing to ask. It takes years for a woman to become a sister because it's so contrary to human nature. You work on it all your life. In any event, when the duty roster would go up there would be all sorts of reactions. Oh, someone would say, so-and-so got this or so-and-so got that.

Well, one day I was coming down the stairs and saw the duty roster had just gone up. All the little birds (the sisters) were there and suddenly it occurred to me that this was just like when they posted the casting in a ballet company!

Shortly after that I realized I had to look more closely at myself. The idea of working in a convent to glorify God made me see that I had been given a great gift, a wonderful opportunity to dance, and I had not yet used that gift to its fullest. I needed to go back and fulfill what I'd yet to fulfill. So that's what I did.

BR: How much time had passed?

Wilkinson: Two years. I started doing a barre at home and then went back to class. I felt great. I was so happy to be dancing again and quite soon I started performing, doing small things here and there. Then Sylvester Campbell, a black dancer who'd gone to Europe years before to dance with the Dutch National Ballet, where he was a principal dancer, came back to the States. Sylvester was extremely talented. He could jump and turn like you wouldn't believe. His *Corsaire* rivaled Nureyev's. I'm not kidding.

At any rate, Sylvester suggested I go to the Dutch National and, after I spoke with them, they sent me a second soloist contract for the following September.

BR: Didn't Campbell and Nureyev perform together?

Wilkinson: Yes. Nureyev used to come to dance at the Dutch National quite a bit in those days. Nureyev and Rudi van Dantzig, the director, became very close. *Monument for*

*a Dead Boy*, which van Dantzig had choreographed, was one of Nureyev's favorite pieces. The ballet was about a teenage boy looking back at his life and his attraction to another boy. It was very psychological, and Rudolf sort of took it over as his symbol.

BR: Didn't you have an opportunity to work for the Joffrey around this time?

Wilkinson: Yes. Shortly after I got the contract from Dutch National, Robert Joffrey asked if I would be interested in dancing with his company in a ballet by Eugene Loring.

I immediately suspected it was piece about race and I was right. It was a ballet called *These Three*, about the three civil rights workers who were murdered in Mississippi in 1964. I was supposed to play the mother of the black volunteer, James Chaney.

In any event, when I went in to audition for Mr. Loring he had me doing all this modern movement and he would say, "Oh, that's wrong." This went on and on until I said, "Look, Mr. Loring, I have no modern training. I am trained in classical ballet. I spent my entire career with the Ballet Russe and I'm a ballet dancer just like every other member of the Joffrey."

Well, he found this hard to believe. At that time, you see, if you were black and you wanted to dance you studied jazz and modern since there were hardly any opportunities for black ballet dancers in America. I was unusual this respect, but here again there was a kind of prejudice at work. Mr. Loring assumed that because I was black I must know jazz and modern, but that simply wasn't true and he couldn't understand that.

After the audition I waited a few weeks and heard nothing so I called Mr. Joffrey to see what was going on. He said that Mr. Loring hadn't made up his mind yet, and so I said, "Well, the reason I need to know is that I have an opportunity to go to Europe in September."

When he heard this he banged his hand down on his desk and screamed, "Why are you black dancers always going off to Europe! This is your home!"

I just sat there for a moment until he'd



Balanchine's *La Valse* with Robert Fisher, 1967. (Photo: courtesy of Raven Wilkinson)

cooled down and then I said, "You know why, Mr. Joffrey? This is why. This is one of the reasons why." There was a long silence, and then he said, "I understand."

BR: How long did you stay in Holland with Dutch National?

Wilkinson: Seven years, from 1967 to 1974.

BR: When you arrived in Europe did the whole issue of your being a black ballet dancer change?

Wilkinson: Yes. The Dutch were not so conscious of it. In Holland there are many people of color from the Antilles and Indonesia. They'd been there for generations and they were considered as Dutch as anyone else. To the people over there I was simply an American. I wasn't black. I wasn't African American. I was an American.

People in Europe, in Holland anyway, were more concerned about who you were than what you were. They didn't look at you and

your clothes or your skin color to decide if they liked you or not. Of course, our history of slavery didn't exist there and, by implication, the institution of racism, so there wasn't this hurdle I had to jump over to be accepted.

When we toured to England, though, it was like being back in 1940s New York. Everyone was trying to place you, to decide how they should act toward you. I visited an ancient abbey in the north of England and at the end of my prayers a young priest came up to me and we started talking. I told him I was in the Dutch National Ballet and as we were standing there an older priest came up. He was looking at me and looking at me and finally he said, "But you're not Dutch." I said, "No, as a matter of fact I'm not. The company is full of people from all over the world."

Suddenly he started talking about Africa and, in particular, Angola, and he was saying things like, "I can't understand why they're

fighting us. We've given them everything." He was so indignant about Africans and how ungrateful they were toward the English.

Finally I said, "Well, I can understand. I'm from the United States of America and I remember two hundred years ago we wanted to be separate from the British." The young priest had a good laugh about that one, but I don't think the older one thought it was funny.

BR: Why did you leave the Netherlands?

Wilkinson: I had a great experience dancing in Holland but finally I had to come back to America. Mandatory retirement age in the ballet there was thirty-eight and I was thirty-nine at the time. And this is my home.

I felt very displaced at that time, however. I felt I'd had to leave my own country to dance and I was very sad about that, I was very down, but at the same time I was looking forward to a new experience. Then when I came back to the United States I felt as if I'd left my new home.

I thought about staying in Holland permanently because they take such good care of their citizens. Had I wanted to be retrained to do another job after I stopped dancing they would have paid for that. If you needed time off or you were sick they paid you as well. Had I wanted to train to become a teacher I could have done that. Dancers were going to Russia to study the Vaganova style, for example.

But despite all of that I wanted to come back to my country. I missed certain things about America, the airing of all the dirty laundry in public is something one doesn't see in Europe, or didn't see then. I enjoyed the debate, the discussions Americans were willing to engage in.

BR: You've worked at the New York City Opera since 1974. How has that experience been for you in terms of your race?

Wilkinson: As I said, when I joined affirmative action was still strong but then for the

longest time I was the *only* permanent black member of the company. The curtain would rise and all you'd see were wall-to-wall white people in this very Fragonard decor. Finally I said to myself, I am sick of this. I am just sick of it. In the year 2000 to have this as your artistic vision was just beyond me.

During that time the director of an opera said, "I can't have anyone in this production with racial characteristics." Well, the first response I gave was, "The director needs to see me." I said, "Any white person would be allowed to audition for the role but I'm being excluded because I'm black." They said, "It's not prejudice, it's about a certain *look*."

Keep in mind that I'd played many different roles at the opera, including Queen Victoria! So that argument didn't stand up in my opinion. Where I felt the prejudice came in was their assumption about what a black person looks like. I didn't go to management initially, I spoke with my department. In fact, every time something would come up I would say, "Is this due to race?" I was not quiet and nice about it. I think they expected me to sit back and accept what happened but I threw it all back in their face.

Once I raised the issue of prejudice they put me in the role. They could see the whole thing was going down the wrong path. This is what black people have to do now because racism has become much more subtle, sometimes deliberately so, but sometimes it's an unconscious thing we get into by history and force of habit.

BR: After the difficulties you've experienced in this country, do you think you made the right decision to return?

Wilkinson: Yes. I'm glad I came back. I love my country and I'm glad to be living here. Whatever the problems are, and there are many, at least people are trying to do something about them. That's the kind of spirit that I love about this country.