

## Jayne Wrightsman

North"—is among those who have helped to propel her to a new involvement with Russia. Some say it is prompted partly by her fondness—even "passion"—for the Russian conductor Valery Gergiev and his opera productions at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. Others mention her respect for Dr. Mikhail Piotrovsky, an archaeologist who is now director of the Hermitage. "She's better than a czarina," says Piotrovsky with an appreciative chuckle, going on to discuss Wrightsman's key role, by donating money, in the restoration of the General Staff Building, the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opposite the Winter Palace,

which has been developed into a museum for the decorative arts.

Such largesse is not without its privileges, among them the ability to organize and control a rarefied world of connoisseurship and divertissement. During the past several years, the personae in Wrightsman's set—including Everett Fahy, Philippe de Montebello, and the de la Rentas—have accompanied her on several trips to Russia, "in the heat and in the snow," says Annette de la Renta. (These are latter-day versions, perhaps, of Charles's yacht trips.) Oscar de la Renta recalls such a trip several winters ago. One morning the group traveled to Pavlovsk, the neoclassical summer palace of the czars, recently restored to its former splendor, in a project of 45 years.

It was January, the deep of winter, when the silver birches are skeletal and the bronze, lion-paw-footed jardinières along the colonnade are mounded with snow. The cold was impenetrable, as Oscar de la Renta recalls it: "Jayne had organized our ride, on sleds. It was unbelievably cold. Finally we came to the Rose Pavilion, and she said, 'Let's go inside.'" The group entered the interior, with its feminine, rose motif. "It was about 11 in the morning," he continues. "To our surprise it was heated, and there was Russian music, as well as some food—little piroshki and some vodka. She had it all organized, you see..." He pauses, searching for the right words. "But in a very gentle way. Almost invisibly." □

## Bernard-Henri Lévy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 92 was the victim of a homicide bombing by al-Qaeda two days before the attack on the World Trade Center.

In 2000, Lévy set out to look at what he called "the forgotten wars" for *Le Monde*. He had been one of the few French reporters in 1998 to go to Algeria, where hundreds of anonymous villagers are murdered every month. Asked whether he was insured, Lévy responded, "Against what? Being hurt, being wounded, being killed? If I am kidnapped, my friends would try to get me out. If I'm hurt, there's no insurance. And if I'm killed..."

His thoughtful descriptions of massacres in Burundi, Angola, and Sudan, anarchy in Colombia, and female suicide bombers in Sri Lanka came out shortly after 9/11 in *Réflexions sur la Guerre, le Mal et la Fin de l'Histoire* (Reflections on War, Evil and the End of History). The book caused the French, for the third time, to take Bernard-Henri Lévy very seriously. In it he speaks of "the confrontation between the developed, historic world and the peripheral lands we have condemned to slowly edge their way out of the present day." In his preface he describes "other kamikazes ready to say to the nations of the world, 'You ignored us while we were alive; now here we are dead; you didn't want to know about our deaths as long as they happened in our own countries; now we throw them at your feet, into the same fire that is consuming you. We who were invisible when alive will become clear to you as suicides.'"

Philippe Sollers says, "Bernard's freedom comes first from his culture and then because he's protected by his money. There's a professional schizophrenia, which

means he goes from an extremely pleasant life to dangerous situations in the field, and that's where he suddenly remembers the past. He has a great lucidity, and one of the explanations of his engagement is probably his refusal to be introspective, his quest for self being in going forward instead."

"There are writers who use the novel to explore the unknown possibilities of existence," Lévy wrote in *Réflexions sur la Guerre*. "I do reporting... It's into real life, not into fiction, that I have gone, for a long time now, to find my new perceptions."

Over tea in his study in Paris, Lévy talked about his 1981 book, *L'Idéologie Française*. "I said, 'We are wired for Fascism.' It had no embodiment yet, but I deduced it from several French writers and also from the Vichy government. I put my finger into the wound, and it provoked such convulsions—it was like the Devil convulsing when faced with the truth." The consensus at the time was that the book should be burned, and Lévy along with it—"which," he said, "given my surname, was not in the best of taste." In the elections three years later, the extreme right-wing National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen got 12 percent of the vote. "When I saw him on TV in 1984, he talked as if he'd read the book. It was the black truth of France, and no one wanted to see it before me." Lévy was suddenly a prophet. But by the end of the century the National Front appeared to have self-destructed.

Last spring, however, three synagogues were burned, and young Arabs and blacks were in the streets wearing kaffiyehs, shouting "Death to the Jews!" Anti-American sentiment had grown louder and more vicious than usual.

Lévy explained, "I am in a culture where anti-Americanism is a warning light that signals the worst is happening. At the heart of

Fascism is anti-Semitism, or nationalism, or racism. There is something less known, but just as central, and it's anti-Americanism—America taken as a category, not as a region of the world, but as a region of the soul, which describes the non-natural part of human society. Democracy is a mixture of races, a society based not on roots but on a constitution, founded on an oath. Of course the real America isn't faithful to this program, but this is how the anti-American French see America, as a chemical nation, inorganic, the triumph of law, of abstraction, of institution. I'm not pro-American as much as anti-anti-American. When the French begin to feel a mad visceral hatred toward an imagined America, I know the cauldron is boiling and the filthy genie is about to jump out again."

A few weeks after our interview, Le Pen re-appeared, it seemed, out of nowhere, and beat the Socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin, in the first round of presidential elections, with 17 percent of the vote. Chirac won the second round in a landslide, but for Lévy "there are still almost six million French people who voted for Le Pen. And who did it, this time, consciously and with all the facts, after a campaign where his real face was revealed, and they knew that they were voting for an authentic Fascist. That is now the real problem."

Bernard-Henri Lévy became B.H.L. 25 years ago. He published *La Barbarie à Visage Humain* at the same time André Glucksmann brought out *The Master Thinkers*, and a movement was born. The New Philosophers made such an impact that *Time* magazine reported Karl Marx's second death on its cover, and Soviet premier Brezhnev dispatched an envoy to Paris to make a declaration against the "agitators." Bernard Pivot, the creator of the literary TV show *Apostrophes*, conducted a debate

on whether the or right. Pivot movement mer of a few gite marketing cou nal approach t Lévy, his w and very flat c ly holding a ci saying "Un ins one know wh position clear have succeede the totalitarian ler]" He told ly the problem but the next c that her frien Rimbaud on T

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