

# INTRODUCING...

## michael savoie and peter shatalow hot to trot on black ice

"Wow! You just finish a shoot, you come home late at night, your hands and feet are frozen, your ears are aching, your whole body is numb, the wind is whipping around inside your head, your mind is completely whapped, and man, the adrenalin is still pumping! You wanna go out there and shoot it again... It's not a job, it's a joy!" Michael Savoie and Peter Shatalow are high: high on movie-making, high on the success that has been following them steadily for the past seven years.

Cedar Films is their baby. Michael is cameraman/producer and Peter is director/editor. In the three years since the company's conception, these two young men have succeeded in making some twenty-three films.

"Our films are unique in that they are impressionistic," says Michael. "We don't make any pretense about being objective. It's impossible for us to make an objective film — we're completely subjective..."

"We like to make films about people who struggle against incredible odds," cuts in Peter. "People who accomplish, who achieve: we like to share that accomplishment with them."

Their latest and most spectacular achievement thus far is **Black Ice**, a ten minute theatrical short for the National Film Board.

"We could have made a subjective documentary film about iceboating," continues Michael. "But we didn't. We made a drama."

"We were experiencing what those guys were experiencing," adds Peter. "We followed them around for twenty-five days, but the weather wasn't right. We drove for thousands of miles, around and around, looking for those conditions which are in a space about this big (he makes a ball with his hands) and when we did hit it, there was such a sensation of joy that everyone just went wild. The film captures that, and it's nice."

The 'high' started back in St. Catharines,

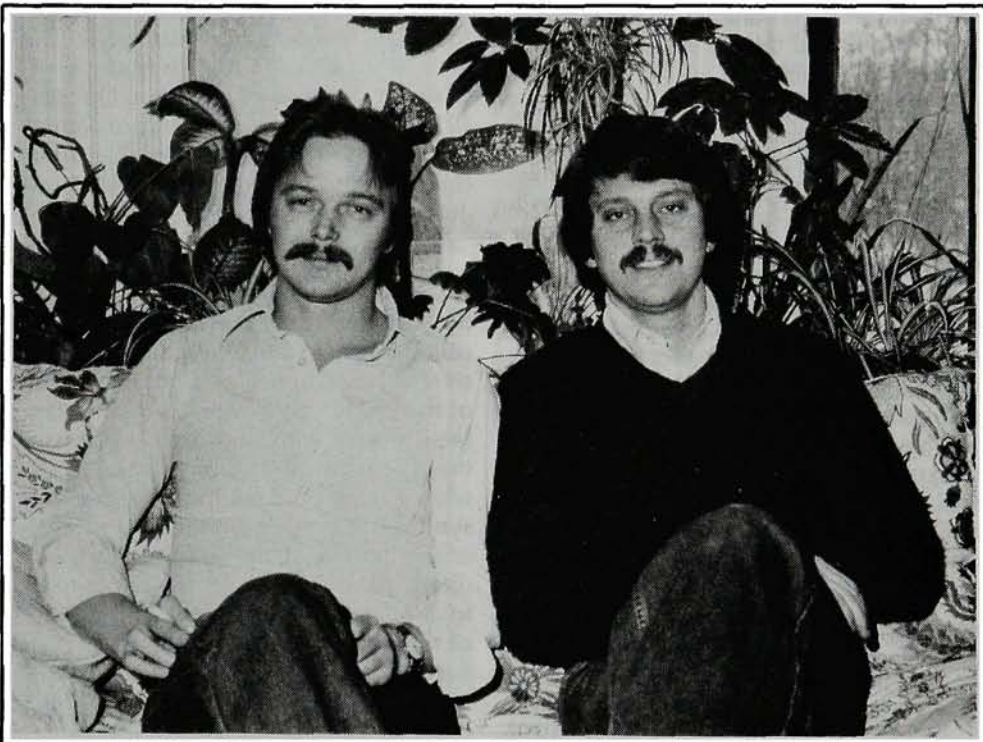


photo: Sunkist Graphics

Teamwork made it happen for Peter Shatalow and Michael Savoie as they mastered **Black Ice**.

Ont., where Michael and Peter met about ten years ago. "From the first time we met each other we were making our own films." St. Catharines offered little opportunity, so the two headed for Toronto where they both got work at the CBC — Michael as cameraman, Peter as editor. "Working at the CBC was great, but in our spare time we still made short films with our own money."

Eagerly, they studied film technique, absorbing all the knowledge the CBC had to offer. "We were hot to trot, and management knew it." Apparently, Peter is still something of a legend. He went through the editing department in two years. By 1976 Michael and Peter knew it was time to strike out on their own. Cedar Films enabled them to do their own work under their own label.

"High production values and quality

have always been top priorities with us," says Michael. "In fact, we are going to record **Black Ice** in stereo. It's almost unheard of to record even a feature in stereo, but this film cries out for stereo, and we're gonna do it."

There's nothing stopping them. The next step after making some dandy little shorts is to shoot for the big one — features. Michael and Peter have bought the rights to a story, details of which they are hesitant to divulge because, as they say, "Everyone steals ideas from you in this business." If all goes well, they will be ready to roll cameras this fall. What they propose sounds good... Adventure, greed, lust, moral dilemma, great characters, great action, murder — and gold!

"We started this company because I could edit and Michael could shoot film" says Peter. "We could make movies and



we didn't need anyone else. Now we are coming to a point where our assets are different than just being cameraman and editor. We spent last year finding out what it takes to put a feature together, putting packages together, weeding out key people, getting the idea out, getting our profile up. I mean, we know how to do a feature.

"It's important that the industry is built here," reflects Michael. "With the capital cost allowance, the spirit of the law is that an industry be built here, and it's up to the producers to make that work. There's an awful lot of work to be done in the writing end, and in the talent end. I think that it is really important to look for Canadian talent in our films; and when we're absolutely convinced there's no one else, we should look again."

It hasn't all been a picnic. Personal relationships suffer, because Michael and Peter 'think film' twenty-four hours a day. "It's a real sickness, a real disease — it's an obsession called Film, and it occupies every moment.

"Having a partner is no picnic," says Michael, wistfully. "It's like being married. A partnership can be the most wonderful, gratifying, tremendous relationship, and at the same time the most nerve-wracking, terrible, frustrating relationship. It's worse than marriage, because you're in business, and at the bottom line is money. With us of course, it's more than that — because we're friends."

Watch for these two friends. If the energy they've put into their projects continues like it has, you'll be hearing a lot more about them in the future.

Krystyna Hunt

mary stephen

## shot silk and sensuality

**Justocoeur** is not the film Mary Stephen wanted to make next. **Justocoeur** is, in her own words, "the story of a dancer who specializes in African rhythms and who becomes involved in a triangular relationship with two men, one of whom is homosexual." Shot in 16mm, colour, with French dialogues translated by Eric Rohmer, it apparently has the Stephen trademark of concern for the five textures of human relationships expressed in what the French call the *intimiste* style. But it isn't **Night Fires** (or as it is now called, **A Slender Thread of Passion/Un mince fil de passion**) — the feature film that this young, expatriate Canadian writer/director hoped to shoot in Paris with Jeanne Moreau and Kate Nelligan.

Shortly after her first feature film, **Shades of Silk**, was released in 1977, Stephen finished the script for a film to be called **Night Fires**. Originally, the synopsis referred to it as a "psychological drama of the games people play when they are face to face with their own... uncertainties." A year later, after some judicious advice from Paul Almond on "selling" a synopsis, it read "an unusual love story," and made a slight bow towards soap opera passions. An agent sent the script to Jeanne Moreau who, within two days of reading it, agreed to play the part of a successful stage and screen star, wife of a jealous actor, and mother of two talented daughters.

That was two years ago. Now, Nicole M. Boisvert of Agora Films is producing the film and the team hopes to begin shooting in the spring. But for Stephen and her partner John Cressey, two frustrating years have already been spent in trying to find the producer and backers. A French investor, who was enthusiastic after seeing **Shades of Silk** at Cannes, pulled out just before filming was about to begin. One Canadian producer felt the project wasn't marketable because Jeanne Moreau wasn't a 'bankable' star. One script reader, hired by an independent producer, said **Night Fires** was the best script he had seen in over a year. Another, with the Canadian Film Development Corporation, sent the script back with, what Stephen called, "incompetent and insulting comments."

It is a commonplace tale among young filmmakers these days. And it takes an indomitable and flexible spirit like Stephen's to keep making films while waiting for the "big break" of a major feature. Stephen is confident, almost blindly so; and she inspires confidence in some remarkable people — in spite of being, as she says, "young, a woman, and Chinese with an English name." Jeanne Moreau has often phoned her at her flat on Paris' Boul. St-Michel, to reassure her "about the difficulties women writers and directors have in getting a major film off the ground." And Stephen counts French filmmaker Eric Rohmer among her friends and enthusiastic patrons. They, at least, are impressed by Mary Stephen. And it was **Shades of Silk** that first revealed her talent to them.

Her early short films include a ten-minute documentary on retarded children (**Independence '73**) shown at the Sir George Williams' Film Festival in 1973, and then on Canadian television; a short film on culture shock (**Labyrinthe**) that was shown twice on Canadian television; a longer documentary on young people travelling across Canada during the summer (**The Great Canadian Puberty Rite**, 1974); and an experimental film on the experience of death (**A Very Easy Death**) that was shown in the Hong Kong Film Festival in 1977. **Shades of Silk**, however, is international in setting, story and cast. It was shot in Paris, premiered at Cinéma Olympique in May 1978, and was shown on the market at both the 1978 and 1979 Cannes Film Festivals.

Set in 1935 in the decadent Chinese



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