

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

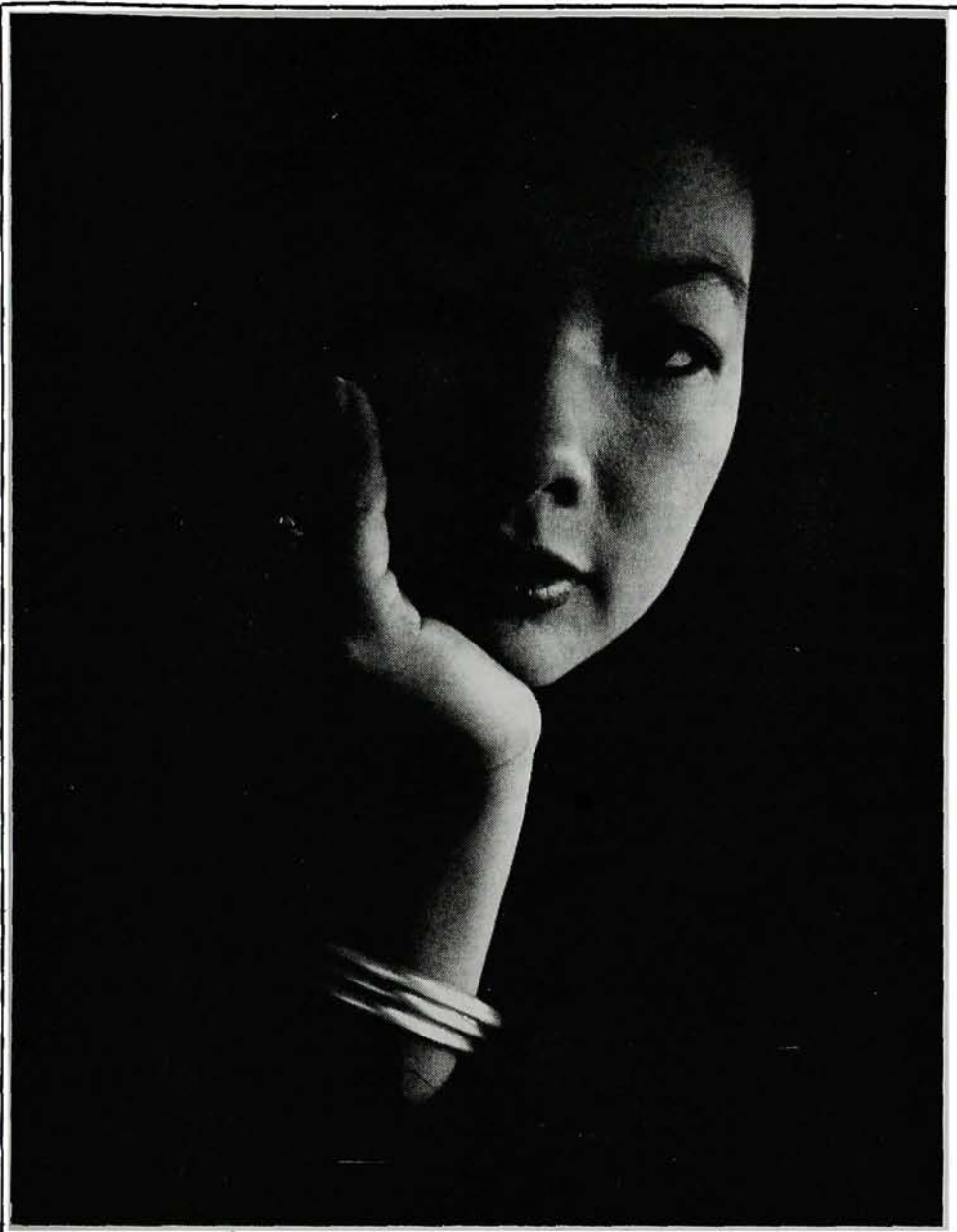


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Mary Stephen's favorite photographer, John Cressey, catches her in a pensive mood.

émigré world of Indochina, it is a poetic story, in the spirit of Marguerite Duras, about the love and separation of two women. All "silk, satins and sensuality," says Derek Hill of Essential Cinema in London (which has picked up the film for redistribution). "It is one of the most erotic films I have seen for a long time."

French audiences and critics were impressed. In *Le Figaro*, critic Michel Marmain called it "un film précieux comme une photographie décolorée dont les mystères nous seraient délicatement dévoilés." Claire Clouzot, in her lengthy review for *Le Matin*, called on **India Song** and **Hiroshima Mon Amour** for comparisons, and encouraged people to see the film if they "aiment à rêver sur des glissements de satin, des ombres de soie, et des ongles laqués de carmin, cependant qu'un gramophone égrène dans la pièce

aux cent mille miroirs quelque chanson rauque, sensuelle et démodée..."

Stephen was a bit surprised. "I didn't expect it to be so successful with audiences. I wanted to make the film because that period fascinates me. It was dreamy, romantic and sensual; the last age of innocence, a voluptuous world unaware of what was going to happen shortly. I suppose it is a "French" film because it is sensitive to the subtleties of film language. But I didn't imagine that people here would like it as much as they did." An encouraging response to a first feature, Stephen assumed **Shades of Silk** would become something of a key to Canadian and French financing for **Night Fires** — a film specifically intended as a large-budget commercial venture.

It didn't; somebody changed the lock guarding Canadian investors. "Commer-

cial" has come to mean something quite specific in Canada. Perhaps it is closest to Richard Norton's script of **Sweet Justice**, which, as reported in the press, "was chosen out of twenty scripts examined by Norton for its mix of action and adventure, a combination he personally favours." Certainly a commercial, Canadian film should avoid what producer Robert Lantos (**In Praise of Older Women** and **Agency**) calls "the presumptuousness of the exercise of aesthetic masturbation." Roy Birkett, a broker with Mead and Co., agrees, and said in a recent interview that he warns film investors to "buy junk films because they sell."

Since Stephen frequently talks about "artistic integrity," and her interest in French film styles, she presumably fits into the 'presumptuous aesthete' category. Her approach to film emphasizes different values. As John Cressey put it one afternoon, just after returning to Paris from Cannes, "When we make a film it is something we believe in, and naturally it will reflect that in devotion, care and energy." Besides, Stephen writes scripts that deal with broad human issues, such as, "a man in search of the Absolute, not knowing whether it exists... only blindly hoping that it does."

Night Fires or **A Slender Thread of Passion** is still in the works. In the meantime, Stephen has been busy. While John Cressey crossed the Atlantic seeking backers, Stephen finished the script for a second feature film. In this film, she imagines an Alan Bates character as a self-exiled hermit. He stumbles into a deserted village in Normandy, where he meets a fifteen-year-old Parisian girl who has run away, from a young love, to her mother's deserted country house in the same village. He falls in love with her, but eventually realizes that little has changed in the world he left twenty-six years earlier.

Then came **Justocoeur** and a small Canada Council grant. **Justocoeur** "is very different from **Shades of Silk**," says Stephen. "It is much colder in a lot of ways (partly because it is shot in Fuji colour which is flatter than Kodak), except for the music. Composed by Guem, one of the best African percussionists in France, the music is hot stuff!" There is also the added titillation of a cameo appearance by the well-known actress/daughter of a certain Canadian diplomat.

Naturally, Stephen is excited about this small film. But she is still waiting for that major feature. A lot of people, in Paris at least, feel it won't be long now.

Boyd Neil