



**SENIORS: CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

# The Teckman Mystery + The Stranger Left No Card

Wendy Toye originally trained as a ballet dancer before turning to acting and then directing, both on the stage and screen. She inspired a generation of female filmmakers to pursue a career in a male-dominated film industry. In celebration, we present two recently restored films. *The Teckman Mystery*, a stylish whodunnit, details a biographer's investigating into the death of a young airman. It will show alongside the award-winning short *The Stranger Left No Card*.

## Wendy Toye

Wendy Toye was born in London on 1 May 1917, and at the age of three and a half appeared on stage at the Albert Hall in London as a member of a juvenile dance troupe. Her solo turn as part of the act brought her considerable publicity, and Toye began to perform in music halls and charity shows with many of the day's top stage stars. By the age of five she was working as 'stooge' for Hayden Coffin, the famous musical comedy star, on a regular basis. At the age of nine, she appeared at the Palladium in a ballet she had choreographed herself, entitled *The Japanese Legend of the Rainbow*, set to music by Scarlatti.

The presentation was an enormous success, and Toye was soon much in demand, choreographing ballets and dance routines for numerous stage companies. She was invited to perform with Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russe, where she met the filmmaker/artist Jean Cocteau. Toye later appeared at the Café de Paris, as a member of the Markova-Dolin Ballet Company, and gradually began doing more commercial work, such as choreographing routines for the Crazy Gang at the London Palladium.

In 1931, she made her first film appearance, in Anthony Asquith's *Dance Pretty Lady*, and in 1935 she appeared as Signora Picci in Paul Merzbach's *Invitation to the Waltz*. But she was more interested in absorbing the technical process of filmmaking than in a career as an actress. By 1942 she was arranging the dances for *The Young Mr Pitt* (where she was befriended by director Carol Reed, editor David Lean, cameraman Ronald Neame and actors Robert Morley and Richard Attenborough) and in 1946, she served as choreographer on Herbert Wilcox and Anna Neagle's *Piccadilly Incident*.

From the 1930s to the early 1950s, Toye remained a popular and dependable stage choreographer and director, working in both the UK and the US. In

1949, she directed the Broadway production of *Peter Pan*, starring Boris Karloff and Jean Arthur, which brought her additional acclaim.

Around the same time, she met British producer George K. Arthur, who had purchased the rights to several short stories, and was casting about for the proper director to bring them to the screen. Toye expressed interest in one story, *The Stranger Left No Card* (1953), and was allowed to make it as a 23-minute film on a budget of £3,000. Precisely timed to a synchronised musical score, the film was a delightfully sinister parable, deeply influenced by Cocteau and René Clair. It impressed Alexander Korda sufficiently for him to offer Toye a contract.

She displayed talent and imagination in directing the 'In the Picture' episode of *Three Cases of Murder* (co-d. David Eady, George More O'Ferrall, 1953), though she felt little enthusiasm for the routine crime films he then offered her. Nevertheless, she handled *The Teckman Mystery* (1954) with professionalism and efficiency. She felt more affinity with her next assignment, the domestic comedy *Raising a Riot* (1955), which was critically and commercially successful.

In January 1956, Korda died of a heart attack, and Toye's contract was shifted to Rank, where she made *All for Mary* (1955) with Kathleen Harrison, Nigel Patrick and David Tomlinson, and *True as a Turtle* (1957), a nautical comedy starring John Gregson, Cecil Parker, June Thorburn and Keith Michell.

Both films did well at the box office, but Toye had to wait until 1962 for her next film assignment, *We Joined the Navy*, another seagoing comedy which boasted a cast which included Kenneth More, Lloyd Nolan, Joan O'Brien, Mischa Auer and John Le Mesurier. Toye's last theatrical film was a short entitled *The King's Breakfast* (1963), after which she turned to directing television drama. In 1981 she made a colour, videotape version of the *Stranger Left No Card* for Anglia Television as part of the *Tales of the Unexpected* (ITV, 1979-1988) series, with Derek Jacobi in the title role; in 1986 she served as an associate producer on the TV movie *Barnum!* starring Michael Crawford.

Although Wendy Toye complained that Rank refused to support her desire to direct projects more ambitious than her comedies, she took pride in the fact that she never went over budget, and that her responsible example paved the way for other women to enter the field. She continued directing stage comedies until the mid-1990s, when she retired, with a lifetime of work in the theatre and film to her considerable credit.

**Wheeler Winston Dixon, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)**

## Films as director

*The Stranger Left No Card* (1952). Cannes Film Festival Award: Best Short Film, 1953. 'I did some things in *Stranger* which I probably, two or three years later, wouldn't have attempted...'

*Three Cases of Murder* (1953). Toye directed *In the Picture*. 'A man called Georges Périnal lit it, and he was such a magic *name* to me. When I was little I saw a film called *Sous les toits de Paris*, which he lit – the *look* of that film was so extraordinary!'

*The Teckman Mystery* (1954). 90 mins, black-and-white thriller scripted by Francis Durbridge and James Matthews, based on a TV play. 'Audiences' brains weren't so quick in those days. They were used to things done slowly. The remarkable cuts we can all do nowadays get rid of such a lot of rubbish.'

*On the Twelfth Day* (1955). Nominated Best Short Film, Venice, 1955. Toye worked closely with Ronald Searle on the production design.

*Raising a Riot* (1955). 'I think this is a good film, I think it whizzes along quite well, even nowadays.'

*All for Mary* (1955). First film made for Rank. 'It is a period piece, isn't it? I think there's absolute truth in it – for the 50s. I don't think that sort of woman, the Nanny, could ever dominate that sort of little boy any longer.'

*True as a Turtle* (1956). 96 mins, colour, nautical romantic comedy starring John Gregson, June Thorburn, Cecil Parker.

*A Life to Be Lived* (1961). 11 mins, black-and-white, 16 mm, distributed by the British Polio Fellowship. Jack Hedley plays a polio victim trying to adjust to life and work.

*We Joined the Navy* (1962). 'A way of taking the mickey out of pomposity, in a very gentle way ... Fellas don't always do everything right, or the best, it's as simple as that, isn't it?'

*The King's Breakfast* (1963). 28 mins, colour, dramatisation in dance and mime of A. A. Milne's poem. Designed by Ronald Searle, made for the Butter Board. 'When this film was made, it was thought to be before its time. It seems now that audiences have become more sophisticated and able to appreciate this type of treatment' (James Archibald, the film's producer, writing on the film's release in 1968).

**Pam Cook and Sylvia Paskin, 'The Director Left No Card – Wendy Toye', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1986**

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## THE STRANGER LEFT NO CARD

*Director:* Wendy Toye  
*Production Company:* Meteor Films  
*Producer:* George K. Arthur  
*Script:* Sidney Carroll  
*Devised by:* Wendy Toye  
*Photography:* Jonah Jones  
*Editor:* Jean Barker  
*Stranger's costume designed by:* Alix Stone  
*Make-up:* Dick Bonnor-Moris  
*Music Director:* Muir Mathieson  
*Orchestrations:* Doreen Carwithen  
*Orchestrated from a suite by:* Hugo Alfvén  
*Cast:*  
Alan Badel (*The Stranger*)  
Cameron Hall (*Mr Latham*)  
Geoffrey Bayldon (*clerk*)  
Eileen Way (*secretary*)  
Jacquie Wallis  
UK 1952  
23 mins

## THE TECKMAN MYSTERY

*Directed by:* Wendy Toye  
©: Corona Films Limited  
*Production Company:* Corona Film  
*Presented by:* London Films  
*Distributed by:* British Lion Film Corporation Ltd  
*Produced by:* Josef Somlo  
*Production Manager:* John Palmer  
*Assistant Directors:* Adrian Pryce-Jones, Peter Maxwell  
*Continuity:* Shirley Barnes  
*Screenplay by:* Francis Durbridge, James Matthews  
*Original Story by [TV Serial]:* Francis Durbridge  
*Director of Photography:* Jack Hildyard  
*Camera Operator:* Peter Newbrook  
*Film Editor:* Albert Rule  
*Art Director:* William Kellner  
*Assistant Art Director:* John Hoesli  
*Wardrobe:* Bridget Sellers  
*Make-up:* Neville Smallwood  
*Hairdressing:* Joan White  
*Music Composed by:* Clifton Parker

*'The Shadow Waltz' by:* Dubois  
*[Music] Played by:* London Philharmonia Orchestra  
*Music Director:* Muir Mathieson  
*Sound Supervisor:* John Cox  
*Sound Recording:* Bill Salter, Red Law  
*Sound Supervisor:* John Cox  
*Recording [System]:* Western Electric Recording  
*Made at:* Shepperton Studios

## Cast

Margaret Leighton (*Helen Teckman*)  
John Justin (*Philip Chance*)  
Roland Culver (*Major Harris*)  
Michael Medwin (*Martin Teckman*)  
Duncan Lamont (*Inspector Hilton*)  
Raymond Huntley (*Maurice Miller, publisher*)  
Meier Tzelniker (*'John Rice', 'Mr Rigby'*)  
George Coulouris (*Andrew Garvin [spelt Gavin on end credits]*)  
Jane Wenham (*Ruth Wade*)  
Harry Locke (*Leonard, Chance's manservant*)  
Frances Rowe (*Eileen Miller*)  
Warwick Ashton (*Sergeant Blair*)  
Irene Lister (*waitress*)  
Gwen Nelson (*daily woman*)  
Mary Grant (*B.E.A. clerk*)  
Andrea Malandrinos (*waiter*)  
Dan Cressy (*Drake*)  
Peter Taylor (*Leroy*)  
Ben Williams (*1st beefeater*)  
Frank Webster (*2nd beefeater*)  
Peter Augustine (*man with pipe*)  
Maurice Lane (*G.P.O. messenger delivering telegram*)  
Mollie Palmer (*air hostess*)  
Bruce Beeby (*Wallace*)  
Gordon Morrison (*Boris*)  
Barbara Murray (*woman on plane at end*)\*

UK 1954©  
90 mins

\* Uncredited

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Wed 8 Mar 20:40  
**Member Exclusive: BFI Southbank and BFI IMAX Tour**  
Mon 13 Mar 10:00  
**Art in the Making: Art We Deserve? (+ intro by Ken Worpole) +  
Marketing the Arts: Foundation for Success**  
Mon 13 Mar 18:15  
**Projecting the Archive: The Clairvoyant  
+ intro by Dr Lucie Bea Dutton, historian**  
Tue 14 Mar 18:10

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Thu 9 Mar 18:15  
**Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI**  
Mon 13 Mar 18:30  
**Preview: Rye Lane + Q&A with director  
Raine Allen-Miller**  
Monday 13 March 20:45

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