



MURIEL BOX: A WOMAN'S TAKE

The Passionate Stranger

The Passionate Stranger (aka A Novel Affair)

Director: Muriel Box
©/Production Company: Beaconsfield Films Ltd.
Presented by: British Lion Films
Producer: Peter Rogers
Associate Producer: Gerald Thomas
Production Manager: Jack Martin
Production Secretary: Nona Binstead *
Assistant Director: Jack Causey
2nd Assistant Director: David Bracknell *
Continuity: Phyllis Crocker
Screenplay: Muriel Box, Sydney Box
Director of Photography: Otto Heller
Camera Operator: Gus Drisse
Focus Puller: Brian West *
Clapper Loaders: Jim Hopewell, Alan Rowland *
Stills: Norman Hargood *
Editor: Jean Barker
Assistant Editor: Marcel Durham *
Art Director: George Provis
Assistant Art Director: Ron Benton *
Draughtsman: Roy Walker *
Miss Leighton's Gowns by: Norman Hartnell
Shoes by: Rayne
Stockings by: Kayser-Bondor
Wardrobe Supervisor: Dorothy Sinclair
Make-up: George Partleton
Hairdressing: Ida Mills
Music: Humphrey Searle
Music Played by: Sinfonia of London
Conducted by: Muir Mathieson
Sound Recording: George Stephenson, Red Law
Sound Camera Operator: Sandy Fairlie *
Boom Operator: Jack Davies *
Sound Maintenance: Alan Blay *
Sound Editor: Chris Greenham
Publicity Director: Ken Green *
Studio: Shepperton Studios
Cast:
Margaret Leighton
(Judith Wynter/'Leonie Hathaway')
Ralph Richardson
(Professor Roger Wynter/'Sir Clement Hathaway')
Patricia Dainton (Emily/'Betty')
Carlo Justini (Carlo/'Mario')
Marjorie Rhodes (Mrs Poldy)
Thorley Walters (Jimmy)
Frederick Piper (Mr Poldy)
Megs Jenkins (Millie/'Millie, publican's wife')
Alexander Gauge (master of ceremonies at dance)
John Arnatt (Maurice Lampport/Martin)
George Woodbridge (1st landlord)
Allan Cuthbertson (Doctor Stevenson)
Michael Trubshawe (2nd landlord)
Ada Reeve (old woman)
Andrée Melly (Marla) *
Michael Shepley (Miles Easter) *
Barbara Archer (Doris, the barmaid) *
Barbara Graley (secretary) *
Christopher Witty (Peter Wynter) *
Fred Tooze (Amos) *
Pat Ryan (guard) *
Michael Scoble (Michael Wynter) *
UK 1956
93 mins

* Uncredited

A StudioCanal release

+ intro by filmmaker Carol Morley (Tuesday 2 May only)

When an Italian chauffeur is taken on by a married couple, the novelist wife writes him into her new book. He finds the manuscript and, believing she's in love with him, tries to woo her. An original idea by Box, this comedy film is her most adventurous cinematically, employing Technicolor fantasy sequences to contrast with black and white reality – an innovation much praised by the critics.

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The Passionate Stranger surely has no serious rival as the most dazzlingly ambitious commercial British film of the 1950s in terms of form and, in its fluent manipulation of meta-fictional levels, now looks several decades ahead of its time.

The Passionate Stranger sees Muriel Box building on the reality-vs-fiction elements of her knockabout 1955 comedy *Simon and Laura*. Adapted by Peter Blackmore and Alan Melville from Melville's play, the latter stars Peter Finch (in one of his first British lead roles) and Kay Kendall as an unhappily married couple who decide, for strictly financial reasons, to play idealised versions of themselves in a kind of quasi-fictional soap opera for the newfangled medium of television. The final act anticipates reality TV by around half a century, as a Christmas special broadcast live turns messily chaotic thanks to the machinations of mischievous child-performer Timothy (a remarkable performance from Clive Parritt).

With *The Passionate Stranger*, romantic fiction is the target of the satire: Italian handyman Carlo (Carlo Justini) is employed by an affluent Home Counties couple: wheelchair-bound scientist Roger Wynter (Ralph Richardson) and his wife Judith (Margaret Leighton), a successful novelist suffering a bout of writer's block. Carlo's arrival gets Judith's creative juices flowing and she quickly produces a lurid potboiler in which Carlo

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The Seventh Veil + The English Inn

Mon 1 May 13:00; Thu 11 May 18:10 (+ intro by Lucy Bolton, Reader in Film Studies at Queen Mary)

Good-Time Girl

Mon 1 May 15:40; Fri 12 May 18:10 (+ intro by Television Producer and Director, Rebecca Towers)

Muriel Box: The Odd Woman Out

Tue 2 May 18:15

The Passionate Stranger (aka A Novel Affair)

Tue 2 May 20:30 (+ intro by filmmaker Carol Morley); Thu 18 May 18:20; Tue 30 May 20:30

Easy Money

Wed 3 May 18:20; Mon 8 May 16:00

Holiday Camp

Sat 6 May 15:30; Wed 17 May 20:30

The Lost People (aka Cockpit)

Sat 6 May 18:30; Sun 21 May 13:40

The Happy Family (aka Mr Lord Says No/Live and Let Live)

Sun 7 May 18:10; Sat 20 May 15:15

Street Corner (aka Both Sides of the Law/Gentle Arm/The Policewoman)

Mon 8 May 13:30; Tue 30 May 18:20 (+ intro by season curator Josephine Botting)

Simon and Laura

Mon 8 May 18:10; Sun 28 May 16:00

Philosophical Screens: The Seventh Veil

Thu 11 May 20:15 Blue Room

Rattle of a Simple Man

Wed 17 May 18:10; Tue 23 May 20:30

The Truth about Women

Thu 18 May 20:40; Sun 28 May 18:10

Eyewitness (aka Point of Crisis) + A Ride with Uncle Joe

Sun 21 May 18:20; Fri 26 May 18:10

This Other Eden

Thu 25 May 18:20; Sat 27 May 13:45

With thanks to

StudioCanal for their new 4K restorations from the best available original materials, scanned and restored to produce three brand new HD masters



Three restored Muriel Box titles (*The Passionate Stranger*, *The Truth about Women* and *Rattle of a Simple Man*) are being released on Blu-ray and DVD by StudioCanal in May and will be available from the BFI Shop.

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and her fictional surrogate enjoy an illicit affair and plot to bump off her inconvenient spouse. When Carlo starts reading the manuscript around the 20-minute mark, the film goes into the fictional universe – and switches from black and white to colour – retelling the whole of Judith's novel in a rapid-fire 45 minutes. After this, back in monochrome 'reality', Carlo now erroneously interprets the novel as a statement of Judith's true feelings – with amusingly farcical consequences.

The collision of heightened fantasy and the humdrum realities of 1950s Britain recall the comic peaks of Preston Sturges' *Unfaithfully Yours*. But Box's picture is really a true original, one of the most fascinatingly complex and accomplished British films made up to that point. Its status as a forgotten curio now seems as inexplicable as it is unjust.

Neil Young, bfi.org.uk, 3 February 2023