



**Close-Up on Nabet Member
Stephanie Johnson —
Lighting Designer/Grip
or
A woman grip in
unchartered waters**

By Liz Jacobs

Stephanie Johnson is used to fighting for a place in the film industry. As a black woman trying to establish herself in such nontraditional areas as grip and electric she has had to prove herself over and over. She is used to being a minority of one on a set, having only worked with another woman grip once in the past eight years.

Stephanie started out as a lighting designer after graduating from Emerson college in 1974. "It was a play about black men and women (Black Dyad, by Evelyn Moore). Evelyn wanted a black

woman as a lighting designer, so with one course in lighting design, I was drafted. I've been doing lighting design for theater for twelve years including such local companies as Theater Rhinoceros, and Oakland Ensemble, as well as theater in Holland and Belgium."

How did she make the transition to film? "Moving to mecca (Berkeley) anything becomes possible! Actually I was hired to grip on a local feature — Booker, by a forward thinking gaffer who liked my honesty and spirit. The highlight of my career was working as the electrician for a few days on the newly released Alice Walker documentary — "Visions of the Spirit." It was such a special experience, being able to work with all black women; there was an unique energy and production style." Her latest job, as a grip on the feature, "Loon," had a more predictable scenario. "Even though this was a film produced by a black woman (Loretha C. Jones, co-producer of "School Daze") it

was a typical LA crew, made up primarily of young white men. Initially they were arrogant and suspicious of my ability to haul cables. It took a few days to prove myself and then there were no problems — I was accepted...but doing this over and over is draining. That's why I look to a union that poses an alternative and a supportive network for women and minorities...NABET 531."

"I'm staying in the film business because of its power as an artistic medium and the potential use of it for social change. Many men have made it difficult for me to stay and progress but I am determined to succeed despite the apparent "isms" which are often used against me on a professional level. Joining NABET has been an important networking element in my career. Through NABET I have met a number of people who have hired me for projects that would have been previously inaccessible.

It is my belief that the best defense against this system of inequity is doing quality work, networking and self-education. Meeting other forward thinkers in film has provided me with work in a healthy progressive environment, factors that are critical to keeping me sane and creative for the long haul!"

Phelan Filmmaking Awards for California-Born Artists

Film Arts Foundation (FAF) opens the competition for the 1988 James D. Phelan Art Awards in Filmmaking, which offers cash prizes to California-born filmmakers whose body of work exhibits high artistic quality and creativity. Three awards of \$2,500 each will be made.

Deadline for entries is September 16. Awards will be announced November 15. Any filmmaker born in California, regardless of current residency, is eligible to apply. Work submitted for consideration must have originated, and be available, on film. A reception and screening of works by the winners will be held in San Francisco in December. Past recipients include Peter Adair, Michael Rudnick, Steven Okazaki, Sal Giammona and James Broughton.

Guidelines and entry forms available from: Film Arts Foundation, 346 Ninth Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 552-8760.

The Phelan Art Awards in Filmmaking are funded by the James D. Phelan Trust, sponsored by The San Francisco Foundation, and administered by FAF.

FAF is the nonprofit membership-service organization for independent film and videomakers in Northern California. With over 1,600 members, it is the largest regional organization of its kind in the country.