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SF Int'l Film Fest 1992

KAY: SATYAJIT



Photo of Satyajit Ray by Nemai Ghosh



Akira Kurosawa

PHOTO BY PAMELA GENTILE

The 1992 Akira Kurosawa Award

SATYAJIT RAY

Award Ceremony: Tuesday, May 5,
at 7:30-10:30 pm with film clips, an
onstage presentation, and a screening of
Charulata (see p. 24). For details
on the West Coast premiere of
The Visitor, see p. 45.

“Not to have seen the films of Satyajit Ray would mean existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon.” —*Akira Kurosawa*

The Akira Kurosawa Award is given each year to one of the masters of world cinema. We are pleased to pay tribute in 1992 to Satyajit Ray, a uniquely accomplished film artist. It is a special pleasure to honor a man whose work has been consistently championed here since 1957, when he received awards for Best Director and Best Film for his first film, *Pather Panchali*, at the very first San Francisco International Film Festival. Over the course of his remarkable career Ray established himself as, in Pauline Kael's phrase, “the supreme humanist of the world's directors.” In 29 feature films and a wide range of shorts and documentaries, he has created an impressive chronicle of the society and history of India, at the same time as he has succeeded in communicating universal emotions to viewers all over the world.

While Satyajit Ray is internationally honored for the humanism of his scripts and the scrupulous realism of his sets, another of his remarkable traits is his protean experimentation. No sooner is he typed as lyrical or humanist or neo-realist than he turns to fantasy, spectacle, or social commentary, even to science-fiction. No detail is too small, no leap of style, language or genre is too large.

Satyajit Ray won international attention with *Pather Panchali* (*The Song of the Little Road*, 1955), about a young boy growing up in rural Bengal. It was followed by two more films in what came to be known as “The Apu Trilogy,” after their young protagonist, whose subsequent adolescence and manhood were traced in *Aparajito* (*The Unvanquished*, 1956) and *The World of Apu* (*Apur Sansar*, 1959).

Just when critics agree that Ray is an unparalleled chronicler of rural Bengal, or of the 19th century Calcutta upper classes, he turns to the social despair of Calcutta's contemporary, disaffected youth in *The Middleman* and *Company Limited*. *Charulata* (see page 24) is a highly structured rendering of the Tagore story of a 19th-century Calcutta love triangle so entangled with duty, respect, love and repression that each touch of the would-be lovers

ripples through the audience like an electric current. He then returns to his “roots” in Bengali culture to film the powerful historical drama (and contemporary political allegory) of the 1943 Bengal famine, *Distant Thunder*.

Like the neo-realist Italian directors he so admires, Ray deliberately works with mixed casts of amateurs and professionals in order to maintain freshness and reality. A commercial artist before making films, Ray first sketches all his shots in extraordinary detail, then turns the sketches over to his set designer. As a result, he rarely does more than one take.

Satyajit Ray, the man, is a physical giant and an unusual figure in the 20th century with its emphasis on specialization. He is a man of authority, the form of his intelligence is a rare one in our time: he sees life whole. He exercises more personal control over his films than any other major director; as well as writing the scripts and composing the music, operating the cameras and supervising sets and editing, he casts the non-professionals, designs the title-lettering, writes the publicity, and arranges the distribution. He has become one of the handful of “world directors,” like Kurosawa and Bergman.

Ray's importance for India is in having found a way to represent Bengali life in a universal medium. Few directors have taken so much of their culture and treated it with such compassion and honesty. A culture is blessed to produce such a genius once in a generation. Satyajit Ray's lifetime in film is proof that vision is not ego, total control is neither narrow nor obsessive. His old-fashioned insistence on total control is rooted not in distrust but in integrity. It is not restlessness that underlies Ray's vision, it is the opposite—serenity. He is like an 18th-century urban man—think of Dr. Johnson in London—who engages everything his city and culture have to offer. That his films speak on several levels simultaneously takes us to a place we have entered all too infrequently. That place is the cinema of Satyajit Ray. —*Adapted from Days and Nights in Calcutta by Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee.*

❖ See next page for details of Ray films in the Festival.

SATYAJIT RAY FILMS IN FESTIVAL

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The Apu Trilogy: Part One



Pather Panchali

The Song of the Little Road

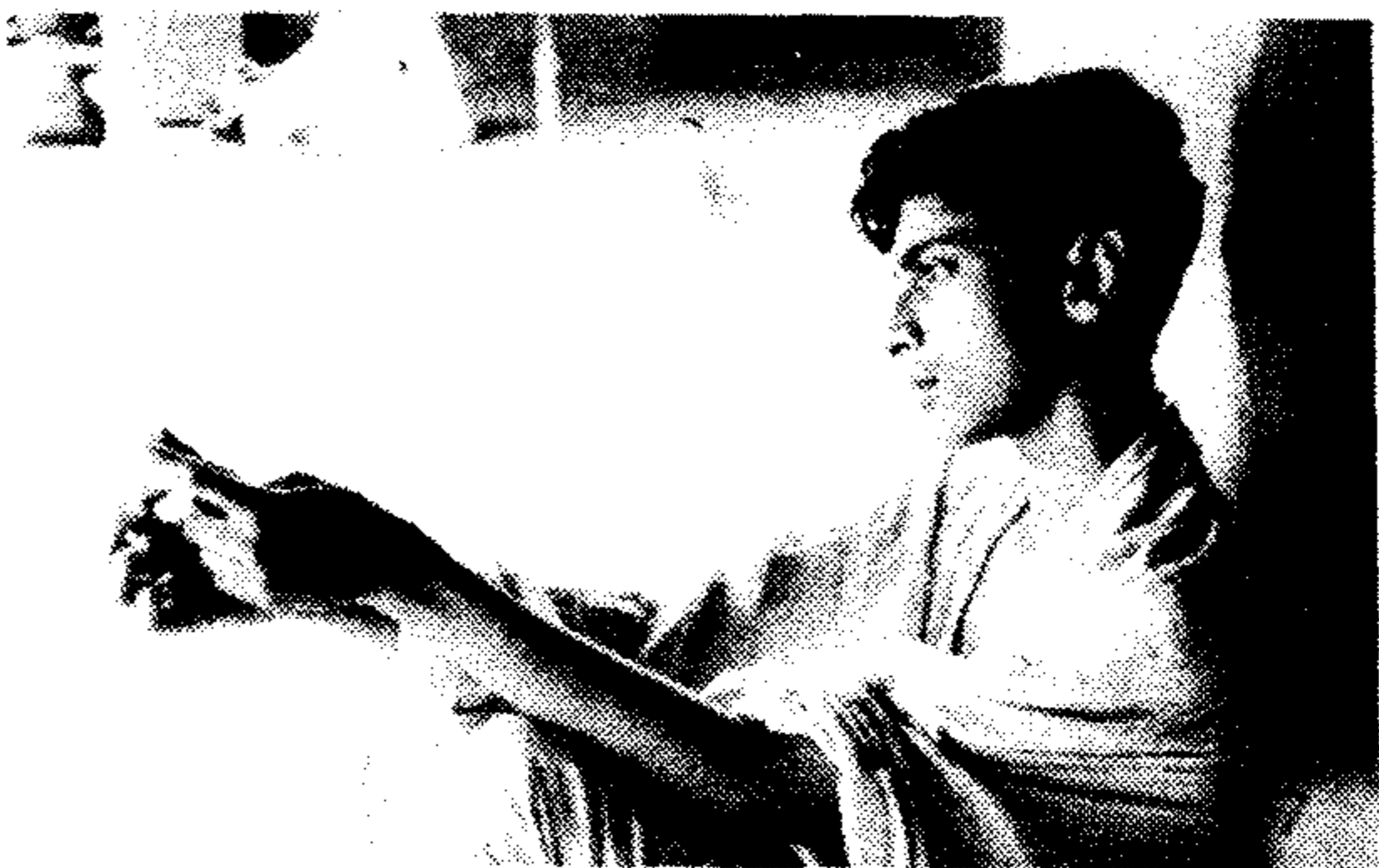
4/25
2:30 KAB
5/6
12:00 KAB

INDIA, 1955, 122 min.
In Bengali with English subtitles
DIRECTOR/SCREENPLAY:
Satyajit Ray
CAMERA: Subrata Mitra
CAST: Kanu Banerjee, Karuna
Banerjee, Chunibala Devi
PRINT SOURCE: Films Inc.

Sometime in the early part of the century, a boy, Apu, is born to a poor Brahmin family living in their ancestral village in Bengal. The father—a dreamer, a poet, an optimist, but not a worker—leaves to his wife the burden of raising Apu and his sister, Durga, in poverty. As the years go by, the children bring home the increasingly complicated results of their forays into the village life (portrayed by Ray with exquisite

nuance). Drawing from neo-realist technique, using a cast of largely non-professional actors, Ray weaves this, his first film (recognized immediately in India and abroad as a masterpiece), into a portrait of Bengali life that is neither comedic nor tragic, but, as Pauline Kael said: "... beautiful, sometimes funny, and full of love; an extraordinary beginning in the career of a modern master."

The Apu Trilogy: Part Two



Aparajito

The Unvanquished

4/26
12:30 KAB
5/6
2:30 KAB

INDIA, 1956, 127 min.
In Bengali with English subtitles
DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/
SCREENPLAY: Satyajit Ray
CAMERA: Subrata Mitra
EDITOR: Dulal Dutta
MUSIC: Ravi Shankar
CAST: Kanu Banerjee, Karuna
Banerjee, Pinaki Sen Gupta,
Smaran Ghosal
PRINT SOURCE: Films Inc.

Aparajito continues the story of the Bengali family after they leave their home to travel to the holy city of Benares on the banks of the Ganges. The boy Apu proceeds a little further along the road of experience and the viewpoint of the film changes with his. While *Pather Panchali* was primarily a matter of experiences, *Aparajito* shows Apu more in his personal and human relationships—above all in his changing relationship with his mother. Ray observes

with remarkable insight and discretion the theme of sacrifice which parents may make in equipping their children for a world which they can never really share. In the latter half of the film, when Apu leaves his mother to go to the University of Calcutta, there is a subtle change in mood: the drama of city life contrasts with the simplicity of Apu's background, and the characterization of Apu lies in the heart of "modern India."

The Apu Trilogy: Part Three



The World of Apu

Apur Sansar

5/3
4:00 KAB
5/6
4:45 KAB

INDIA, 1959, 106 min.
In Bengali with English subtitles
DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/
SCREENPLAY: Satyajit Ray
CAMERA: Subrata Mitra
EDITOR: Dulal Dutta
MUSIC: Ravi Shankar
CAST: Soumitra Chatterjee,
Sharmila Tagore, Swapan
Mukerjee, S. Alope Chakravarty
PRINT SOURCE: Films Inc.

This conclusion of the Apu trilogy begins with the adult Apu deciding to become a writer. Quite by chance, he is invited to attend the wedding of a friend's cousin at the latter's country home. When the prospective bridegroom suffers a nervous breakdown just before the ceremony, Apu is persuaded to take his place—otherwise the girl will be permanently doomed to spinsterhood and the family disgraced. The consequences of this unexpected liaison bring to *The World of Apu* some of the most moving scenes ever filmed. The idyllic happiness

of Apu and Aparna, the birth of their son, and the tragic disillusionment confronted by Apu, all these are described with profound sympathy and tenderness. —*Albert Johnson*. What is remarkable about Ray's talent is the way he can take unusual occurrences and make them representative of our deepest feelings; much as did Shakespeare in *King Lear* and Chekhov in his stories. Masterpieces all, and yet *Apu* can stand comparison with them for it is one of the climaxes of the cinema.

—*Monthly Film Bulletin*



Devi

The Goddess

5/7
6:45 KAB

INDIA, 1960, 93 min.
In Bengali with English subtitles
DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/
SCREENPLAY: Satyajit Ray
CAMERA: Subrata Mitra
EDITOR: Dulal Dutta
MUSIC: Ali Akbar Khan
CAST: Chhabi Biswas, Soumitra
Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore,
Karuna Banerjee
PRINT SOURCE: Films Inc.

Satyajit Ray's dreamily sensual, ironic film about Indian superstitiousness was originally banned from export until Nehru interceded. The story, about a wealthy man who convinces his son's bride that she is an incarnation of the goddess Kali, has startling Freudian undertones. Ray's feeling for the intoxicating beauty within the disintegrating way of life of the 19th-century landowning class makes this one of the rare, honest films about decadence... What we see is the girl's readiness to believe, her liquid acquiescence; not so much pride as a desire to please... And, surrounded by so much luxury, what is there for the girl to do but try to please? The whole indolent life is centered on pleasure.

Ray creates an atmosphere that intoxicates us as well; the household is so rich and the rich people so overripe... And perhaps because of the camera work, which seems to derive from some of the best traditions of the silent screen and the 30s, perhaps because of the Indian faces themselves, the eyes have depths—and a disturbing look of helplessness—that we are unused to. It's almost as if these people were isolated from us and each other by their eyes... Sharmila Tagore (Tagore's great-granddaughter), 14 when she played Apu's bride, is the 17-year-old-goddess; she is exquisite, perfect in both these roles.

—*Pauline Kael, The New Yorker*

NOTE: See Calendar for show dates and times for all Satyajit Ray films.

For program descriptions of other Ray films being shown in the Festival, see p. 24 for *Charulata*, and p. 45 for the West Coast premiere of *The Visitor*.