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The Music Room

1959 95 min. B&W Rental: A
Directed by Satyajit Ray; original title: "Jalsaghar;" screenplay by Ray, based on a novel by Tarashankar Banerjee; photography by Subrata Mitra. With Chhabi Biswas, Padma Devi, Pinaki Sen Gupta. Bengali dialog with English subtitles.

An interest in the almost gothic character of ancient Indian ways among the aristocracy, and the unreal approach to cultural change (or decline), dominate several of Ray's films. *The Music Room* has been compared to a work by Chekhov, for it bears within it the same poignant melancholy toward passing tastes and lifestyles, coupled with an almost savage indictment of lofty self-indulgence. The decaying mansions of once-wealthy landowners can be seen

all over India, emblems of colonial days, when Maharajahs and British



potentates moved in an atmosphere of luxury and cultural isolation. In this film, Ray describes the gradual downfall of a proud, aging man who, to spite the assertive ambitions of a *nouveau-riche* businessman (and his neighbor) decides to present a lavish musical fete. The music symbolizes all that is deeply eternal in his life, and these sequences, in which classical Indian music is brilliantly performed, are a perfect amalgamation of character-drama and social criticism. The visual flair expected in Ray's films is present, too, and the role of the pathetically arrogant landowner is enacted by the late Chhabi Biswas, India's greatest character actor. (AJ)

Devi

1960 96 min. B&W Rental: A
Directed by Satyajit Ray; title translation: "Goddess;" screenplay by Ray; music by Alik Akbar Khan. With Chhabi Biswas, Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore. Bengali dialog with English subtitles.

This strangely compelling film describes the religious superstitions that still hold large numbers of Bengal's inhabitants in their spell. Set in the last century, *Devi* is, nevertheless, a dramatic parable of a continuing social problem in India today, when Hindu orthodoxy and rational, reformist approaches are still very much in conflict.

An elderly landowner, deeply religious and devoted to the Hindu goddess Durga, becomes fanatically convinced

that Daya, his beautiful daughter-in-law, is an incarnation of that deity. Under family pressure and religious hysteria from everyone around her, Daya submits to the worship that she is powerless to control. This acceptance of her fate leads to a succession of superbly emotional sequences, and the descriptions of religious rituals embellished by the moody, atmospheric photography, brings a note of horror to the style and narrative of *Devi*. Its tone, linked to Ibsen or Zola, is sardonic, and the film was a center of political controversy at the time of its release. *Devi* is one of Satyajit Ray's most intensely dramatic films, illuminating the darker side of human behavior, when love and devotions are

misinterpreted through distant gods. (AJ)

(35mm prints are available for rental)



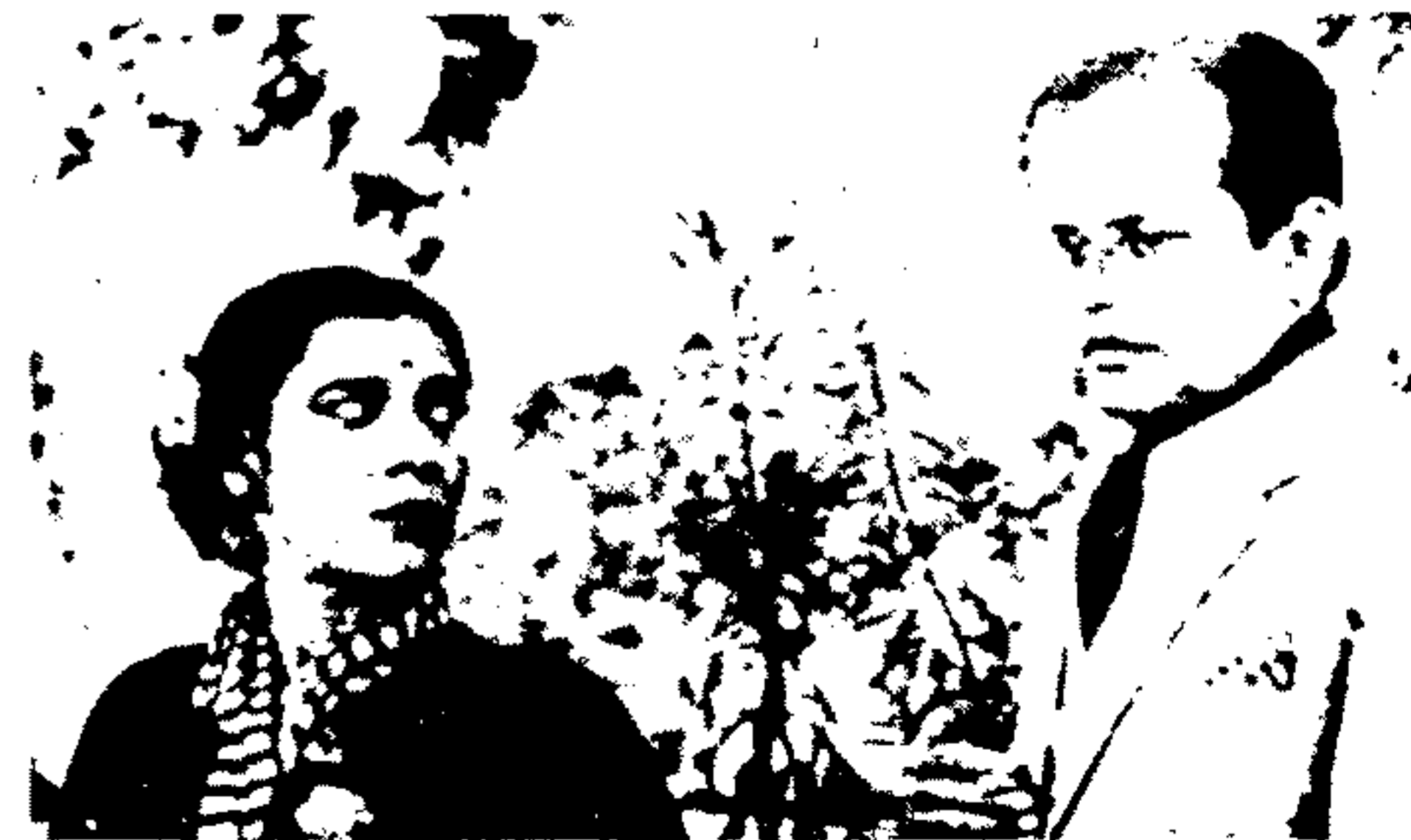
Kanchenjunga

1962 102 min. Color Rental: B
Directed, screenplay, music and title paintings by Satyajit Ray; photography by Subrata Mitra. With Chhabi Biswas, Karuna Banerji, Nilima Roy Chowdhury, N. Viswanathan. Bengali dialog with English subtitles; also some English dialog.

For his first film in color, Ray created a leisurely drama of the modes and manners of an upper class family from Calcutta, who are vacationing in Darjeeling, the hill-station resort city in the Himalayan mountains. The intellectual conflicts within the family and the suppressed antagonisms between the generations are cleverly delineated, with an almost Chekhovian scrutiny. The atmosphere of the area is utilized as a force which subtly affects every character and his responses. The

autocratic father of the family represents the intractable domination of British culture over his generation. He has been a successful industrialist who, somehow, has always ignored the humanistic needs of his children. His wife's personality has been stifled; his son has become a libertine; his eldest daughter is trapped in an embittered marriage, and his youngest daughter is trying to bolster the courage to defy her father's marriage-choice.

On the final day of the vacation, a picnic is arranged, and each member of the family walks his own route to the destination. Through chance meetings with unexpected people, or private conversations that tear open the pretensions and hypocrisies that have



bound them, the characters reach newer awarenesses, with symbolic children and the mountains as silent, omniscient witnesses. *Kanchenjunga* is Ray's most creative and detailed look at contemporary India's cross-cultures. (AJ)

(35mm prints are available for rental)