

Two decades ago Satyajit Ray received an Academy Award for his Lifetime Achievement just before his death in Calcutta. Since then India has become vastly wealthier. Introducing part one of our two-month retrospective, Ray's biographer **Andrew Robinson** asserts that the director's films have lost none of their power, humanity, humour and topicality for both Indians and the world.



Satyajit Ray: Part One

The key to understanding the appeal of Satyajit Ray's body of work is that the director himself, though intimately rooted in Bengal, was also immersed in western culture: European and Hollywood films, of course, but also literature, art and music. 'I'm thankful for the fact that I'm familiar with both cultures and it gives me a very much stronger footing as a filmmaker,' Ray told me. One of his most admired films, **Charulata**, was directly inspired by his love of Mozart's operas.

Born in Calcutta in 1921, Ray was educated in both Bengali and English, and studied for a fine arts degree, which he abandoned for a job as a commercial artist in advertising. As a filmmaker, Ray was entirely self-educated, except for a brief period helping Jean Renoir, who had come from Hollywood to make **The River**. The strongest influence on his first film, **Pather Panchali**, was seeing the neo-realist classic, **Bicycle Thieves**, in London in 1950: 'It gored me,' said Ray.

Ray's films cover an exceptional range of moods and genres: from the epic tragedy of the Apu Trilogy to the black comedy of **The Middle Man**, from the ghost story **Monihara** to the children's fantasy **The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha**, with hugely popular songs by Ray (two of these will screen next month, in the second part of our Ray season).

But what makes Ray virtually unparalleled is his versatility. He wrote his scripts solo, and they were often original screenplays. He designed the sets and costumes down to the smallest details. He acted out the roles for his actors with consummate nuance. He operated the camera and he edited each frame. He composed the music, scoring it in a mixture of western and Indian notation. He even designed the credits and posters.

Akira Kurosawa said of Ray: 'The quiet but deep observation, understanding and love of the human race which are characteristic of all his films, have impressed me greatly.' At a time when the razzamatazz of Bollywood too often dominates Indian culture, it will be a treat to experience – in prints faithfully restored by the Academy Film Archive – an alternative, subtler and richer cinematic vision of India and the human condition: the universe of Satyajit Ray.

See p7 for other Ray events.

Presented in collaboration with
The Academy of Motion Picture
Arts and Sciences





INTRO

▲ **Pather Panchali** Song of the Little Road

India 1955. With Kanu Banerjee, Karuna Banerjee, Subir Banerjee. 122min. EST. U

Ray's debut established his credo that 'the really crucial moments in a film should be wordless'. The eventful story of the uneventful village childhood of Apu, from a novel by Bibhutibhusan Banerjee, is punctuated with some of the most lyrical scenes ever seen on screen: the coming of the monsoon accompanied by Ravi Shankar's music, and, most famously, Apu's encounter with his first steam train.

Joint ticket available with *Aparajito* and *The World of Apu*; £22.50, concs £15 (Members pay £1.50 less)

*Introduced by Michael Lawrence

Thu 15 Aug 18:10 NFT1*
Sun 18 Aug 16:00 NFT1



▲ **Aparajito** The Unvanquished

India 1956. With Kanu Banerjee, Karuna Banerjee. 108min. EST. U

The second Apu film, in which the boy grows into a college student, is perhaps under-appreciated. Yet, it has the deepest characterisation, especially the searing conflict between the mother and her adolescent son; and the first part of the film, set in holy Varanasi (Banaras), is among Ray's finest work. It won the Golden Lion at Venice and was the favourite of Ray's fellow Bengali directors, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen.

Joint ticket available with *Pather Panchali* and *The World of Apu*; £22.50, concs £15 (Members pay £1.50 less)

Thu 15 Aug 20:45 NFT1
Sun 18 Aug 18:30 NFT1



▲ **The Philosopher's Stone** Parash Pathar

India 1957. With Tulsi Chakravarti, Ranibala. 111min. EST

Though not a major film, by Ray's own admission, this is among his funniest. A humble Calcutta clerk, wondrously played by Tulsi Chakravarti, living a humdrum life, stumbles across a stone while returning from his office. To his amazement, it turns all it touches into gold. Suddenly, the clerk is one of the most sought-after society figures. But then his secret gets out, and all hell breaks loose.

Fri 16 Aug 20:40 NFT3
Sat 24 Aug 18:30 NFT1



INTRO

▲ **The Music Room** Jalsaghar

India 1958. With Chhabi Biswas, Padma Devi, Pinaki Sen Gupta. 100min. EST. U

The fatal obsession with classical Indian music and dance of an imperious Bengali landowner in his decaying palace was not something Ray expected would appeal to viewers outside India. But in fact *The Music Room* entranced western audiences, especially in France, where it directly inspired Gérard Depardieu's interest in Ray. Chhabi Biswas gives a monumental, at times mesmerising performance, and the music comes from some of the greatest performers in 1950s India.

*Introduced by Philip Kemp

Sat 17 Aug 20:45 NFT1
Thu 22 Aug 18:10 NFT1*



▲ **The World of Apu** **Apur Sansar**

India 1958. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore, Alok Chakravarti. 103min. EST. U

Ray did not originally intend to make a third Apu film, but at Venice, under press questioning after the success of *Aparajito*, he found himself announcing a trilogy. In the youthful Soumitra Chatterjee and the teenaged Sharmila Tagore, he found the perfect actors to play Apu and Aparna. The story of their bizarrely arranged marriage, transformed by love before being struck by tragedy, is told with many wonderful comic moments.

Joint ticket available with *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito*; £22.50, concs £15 (Members pay £1.50 less)

Sun 18 Aug 20:45 NFT1
Tue 27 Aug 18:30 NFT1



▲ **Devi** **The Goddess**

India 1960. With Chhabi Biswas, Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore. 93min. EST. PG

Although Ray's films are full of imagery about Hinduism, they generally avoid confronting religious orthodoxy directly. *Devi* is an exception. An ageing landowner, disturbingly played by Chhabi Biswas, dreams that his beautiful daughter-in-law is an incarnation of a goddess. Crowds come to worship her, despite her modern husband's horror. The film is set in the 1860s, but its contemporary resonance has increased over the past half-century since it was made.

Mon 19 Aug 18:20 NFT1
Sat 24 Aug 20:45 NFT1



▲ **Rabindranath Tagore**

India 1961. 54min. EST

Ray made the moving documentary *Rabindranath Tagore* for the birth centenary of the poet, writer, painter and song composer, who wrote India's national anthem and was its first Nobel laureate. The film was funded by the Indian government, but was also a personal tribute. Tagore had been a close friend of Ray's grandfather and father, Sukumar Ray, both writers and artists; moreover, as a child Ray had known Tagore and later attended his university as a student of fine arts. The trickiest challenge was shortage of film footage, solved with some sensitive dramatizations of Tagore's early life.

+ **Sukumar Ray**

India 1987. 30min. EST

Sukumar Ray, made for his birth centenary, emphasizes Sukumar Ray's much-loved work as a writer and illustrator of Bengali nonsense verse – comparable with Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear – and closes with his poignant premature death, when his son Satyajit was just two years old.

Mon 19 Aug 20:40 NFT2
Mon 26 Aug 16:00 NFT2



▲
Three Daughters
Teen Kanya

India 1961. With Anil Chatterjee, Chandana Banerjee, Aparna Das Gupta. (The Postmaster. 56min/Samapti. 56min/Monihara. 61min). Total 173min. EST. U
These touching short features derive from three Tagore short stories with a female central character, set in the 1890s. *The Postmaster*, a two-hander about a sensitive orphan servant girl and a lonely city-bred postmaster stuck in a backwoods village, is among Ray's greatest films: a gem, sparkling with pathos and comedy. *Samapti* is a near-farical love story about a tomboy; *Monihara* a ghost story involving a wealthy wife with a dangerous obsession.

Tue 20 Aug 17:30 NFT3
Sat 24 Aug 14:10 NFT2



▲
Kanchenjunga

India 1962. With Chhabi Biswas, Alaknanda Roy, Karuna Banerjee. 102min. EST
Ray's first colour film skilfully exploited the atmosphere of the famous hill-station Darjeeling beneath the snow-capped Himalayan peak of Kanchenjunga. For wealthy Bengalis, Darjeeling is a place to escape from the heat and grime of Calcutta: a romantic setting where conventional values may not always prevail. Will the young woman at the centre of Ray's subtly orchestrated ensemble accept the eligible suitor chosen by her tyrannical businessman father, or will she stand alone?

Thu 22 Aug 20:45 NFT1
Mon 26 Aug 20:45 NFT1



▲
The Expedition
Abhijan

India 1962. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Waheeda Rehman, Ruma Guha Thakurta. 150min. EST. PG
Neglected outside Bengal, *The Expedition* was a hit at home, because of its elements of melodrama, including a car chase, drug-running, a punch-up and low-life comedy with the brilliant Rabi Ghosh, and also because it starred the Bollywood heroine, Waheeda Rehman, as a village girl forced into prostitution. The central character, a taxi-driver with Rajput warrior values, does not wholly convince, but the compensation is his Chrysler of 1930 vintage.

Fri 23 Aug 17:50 NFT1
Sun 25 Aug 15:40 NFT1



▲
Charulata
The Lonely Wife

India 1964. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Madhabi Mukherjee. 117min. EST. U
Ray justifiably regarded *Charulata*, based on a Tagore novella, as his most accomplished film. Almost everything – from the plush Victorian settings and probing camerawork to the rich and witty script, Tagore's music and the flawless performances, especially by the entrancing Madhabi Mukherjee – feels perfect. The triangular relationship between a rich husband, his neglected wife and her younger brother-in-law came from Tagore's own youthful relationship with his sister-in-law.
**Introduced by Philip Kemp*

Fri 23 Aug 20:40 NFT1
Thu 29 Aug 20:30 NFT1*



▲ **The Coward** **Kapurush**

India 1965. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Madhabi Mukherjee, Haradhan Banerjee. 75min. EST

This highly contrasting double bill, chosen by Ray for simultaneous screening, pairs a contemporary love story with a hilarious farce. In *Kapurush*, a tyro screenwriter from Calcutta looking for 'local colour' on a tea plantation is stranded by a breakdown and has to stay the night with a hard-drinking planter, whose wife unexpectedly turns out to be a former lover. Soumitra Chatterjee and Madhabi Mukherjee are rematched as the romantic leads after *Charulata*; whether or not the planter is aware of their relationship is left tantalizingly ambiguous.

▲ **+ The Holy Man** **Mahapurush**

India 1965. With Charuprakash Ghosh, Rabi Ghosh, Prasad Mukherjee. 65min. EST

Mahapurush pokes fun at Indian willingness to be duped by dubious gurus, with some delicious satire carried off with aplomb and relish, though not easily translatable. As a cynical procurer of a guru remarks, the holy man seeks not young followers but old and wealthy ones, 'blinded by faith or by cataract'.

Sun 25 Aug 17:50 NFT2
Sat 31 Aug 17:30 NFT2



▲ **The Hero** **Nayak**

India 1965. With Uttam Kumar, Sharmila Tagore, Bireswar Sen. 120min. EST. PG

This original screenplay came from Ray's desire to direct the matinee idol of Bengali films, Uttam Kumar. Ray disliked Kumar's films but admired his talent – as was true of most Bollywood actors cast by Ray. *The Hero* is a film about the commercial movie industry with an ironic title. Set mainly on a train taking the 'hero' from Calcutta to collect a prize in Delhi, it captures his less-than-heroic career in a series of disturbed flashbacks.

Wed 28 Aug 18:15 NFT1
Fri 30 Aug 20:30 NFT3



▲ **The Zoo** **Chiriakhana**

India 1967. With Uttam Kumar, Sailen Mukherjee, Susil Majumdar. 125min. EST

Ray had a penchant for Sherlock Holmes from boyhood and later for American thrillers. He wrote detective stories from the 1960s, but *The Zoo* derives from another writer's story, bought by Ray's assistants, who cajoled him into directing. It involves a murder at a peculiar colony founded by a retired judge with a conscience about the people he condemned to death. The key clue to unravelling the murder is a catchy film song composed by Ray.

Thu 29 Aug 18:15 NFT3
Sat 31 Aug 20:30 NFT2

TALK



Satyajit Ray Season Introduction

In this illustrated talk, Dr. Manishita Dass (Lecturer in World Cinema, Royal Holloway) will lead us through the hybrid cultural milieu of Calcutta that shaped Ray's cinematic sensibility and cosmopolitan world view, and examine the interplay between the local and the global in his films. As well as pointing to some highlights in the upcoming two month season, she will also explore the lesser-known links between his filmmaking and his career as a writer and a commercial artist.

Wed 14 Aug 18:10 NFT3

Coming in September: **Satyajit Ray: Part Two**

The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha; Two; Days and Nights in the Forest; The Adversary; Sikkim; The Inner Eye; Bala; Distant Thunder; Company Limited; The Golden Fortress; The Middle Man; The Chess Players; The Elephant God; The Kingdom of Diamonds; Deliverance; Pikoo; The Home and the World; An Enemy of the People; Branches of the Tree; The Stranger + short course on *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray*

Restoration and Print Credits

Pather Panchali, Aparijito, The Music Room, The World of Apu, Devi, The Postmaster, Samapti, Charulata

Restored by the Satyajit Ray Preservation Project through a collaboration of the Academy Film Archive, the Merchant-Ivory Foundation and the Film Foundation. Prints courtesy of the Academy Film Archive.

The Philosopher's Stone, The Coward, The Holy Man, Monihara, The Expedition, The Hero

Restored by the Satyajit Ray Preservation Project at the Academy Film Archive. Prints courtesy of the Academy Film Archive.

Rabindranath Tagore, Sukumar Ray, Kanchenjunga

Prints courtesy of the Satyajit Ray Film and Study Center Collection at the Academy Film Archive.

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The Big City Mahanagar

Wonderfully enjoyable, with the scope and density of a great novel, Satyajit Ray's tale of family and city life is set in mid-50s Calcutta, a society still adjusting to Independence.

Subrata Mazumdar (Anil Chatterjee), a young bank clerk struggling to support his family on a meagre salary, is horrified when his wife Arati (a ravishing performance from Madhabi Mukherjee) dares to challenge his cherished belief that 'a woman's place is in the home'. She not only takes a job but proves a huge success, relishing her independence and thoroughly upsetting the family dynamic. Bengali star Mukherjee, working with Ray for the first time, confessed herself 'stunned' by his extraordinary 'woman-centred' screenplay, so different from anything she had previously encountered. Yet, for all his focus on Arati, Ray – who is renowned for his breadth of sympathy – also deploys warmth, humour and acute psychological insight in his depiction of Arati's conservative father-in-law, her studious teenage sister-in-law and her benevolently despotic boss. Newly restored and re-released to mark its fiftieth anniversary, *The Big City* with its emphasis on conflicting social values – and most particularly the role of women – still feels sharply relevant. – *Margaret Deriaz*

India 1963. Dir Satyajit Ray. With Anil Chatterjee, Madhabi Mukherjee. 135min. Digital. EST. PG. A BFI release.

Seniors' Matinee Fri 23 Aug 14:00 NFT3, Introduced by Behroze Gandhi

Fri 16 – Sat 31 Aug (Continues in Sept)

NEW
PRINT



Browse our calendar for times and screens