It's got lists of books by and about Ray, a filmography, and much more, including an excellent biographical essay by Dilip Bausu (http://arts.ucsc.edu/rayFASCdetail.html) from which the following notes are drawn:

Ray was born in 1921 to a distinguished family of artists, litterateurs, scientists and physicians. His grand-father Upendrakishore was an innovator, a writer of children's story books, popular to this day, an illustrator and a musician. His father, Sukumar, trained as a printing technologist in England, was also Bengal's most beloved nonsense-rhyme writer, illustrator and cartoonist. He died young when Satyajit was two and a half years old.

...As a youngster, Ray developed two very significant interests. The first was music, especially Western Classical music.

He listened, hummed and whistled. He then learned to read music, began to collect albums, and started to attend concerts whenever he could.

By this time a third dimension was added to Ray's passionate interest in cinema. This was Ray's exposure to and training in drawing at Kala Bhavan in Santiniketan.

He joined the art school at his mother's insistence and [with] encouragement from Tagore, the great poet, who was a friend of his late father. While in Santiniketan Ray learned to draw from the great master-teacher Nandalal Bose, a pioneer in art education in Modern India. The other teacher who made an abiding impression on him was Binode Behari Mukherjee. Binode Bihari had trained in China and Japan. Calligraphic elements had entered his otherwise modernist oeuvre.

With his natural talent in drawing, Ray later developed and deployed this element in his illustrations and graphic designs.

Ray did not complete the art course in Santiniketan. He returned to Calcutta, where among other things, he could see the Hollywood films he had enjoyed as an adolescent. While in Santiniketan, Ray had an unusual exposure to film theory, however. Deprived of the chance to frequent his favorite film-shows of the Golden Age variety, he read books on cinema. He read Rotha, Annheim and Spottiswoode. He discovered that his two passions - music and film - actually have a common essence.

If he had access to funds for the kind of films he wanted to make on his fiercely independent and nonnegotiable artistic terms, the world would have seen some seventy novellas, stories and translations and each one of them became a

An introduction about great films with Diane Christian and Bruce Jackson

Satyajit Ray (2 May 1921, Calcutta, West Bengal, India—23 April 1992, Calcutta) is one of the half-dozen universally acknowledged masters of world cinema. Perhaps the best starting place for information on him is the excellent UC Santa Cruz web site, the "Satyajit Ray Film and Study Collection" http://arts.ucsc.edu/rayFASC/. It's got lists of books by and about Ray, a filmography, and much more, including an excellent biographical essay by Dilip Bausu (http://arts.ucsc.edu/rayFASCdetail.html) from which the following notes are drawn:

Ray was born in 1921 to a distinguished family of artists, litterateurs, scientists and physicians. His grand-father Upendrakishore was an innovator, a writer of children's story books, popular to this day, an illustrator and a musician. His father, Sukumar, trained as a printing technologist in England, was also Bengal's most beloved nonsense-rhyme writer, illustrator and cartoonist. He died young when Satyajit was two and a half years old.

...As a youngster, Ray developed two very significant interests. The first was music, especially Western Classical music.

He listened, hummed and whistled. He then learned to read music, began to collect albums, and started to attend concerts whenever he could. These interests and skills were to prove most useful when he chose to score music for his own films.

His second interest was cinema, or 'bioscope', as it was called in the early years of Motion Pictures. He saw silent films as well as 'talkies' and started to compile scrapbooks with clippings culled from newspapers and magazines on Hollywood stars.

He wrote fan letters to Durbin Durbin who replied, [Ray] carefully put it in his scrapbook, along with pictures of Durbin. The Ray family has preserved this early scrapbook to this day. Ray wrote to Ginger Rogers too, but did not receive a reply. Billy Wilder received a 'massive massive', a twelve-page long letter from Ray, now a young man who had developed a keen interest in the craft of cinema. The occasion was Ray's fascination with Double Indemnity which he saw in the late 1940's.

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Upon his return to Calcutta, he would go to the theater with a 'note-book'. He was not just watching, he was studying as well. His apprenticeship in film-making began as a pleasurable self-education. This eventually put him on the path to making Pather Panchali. In retrospect, when his family background, early education and exposures are considered, he seems to have a perfect grounding to be a filmmaker.

Even the diversions in his early life helped pave this career path. His job at D. J. Keymer saw Ray blossom into a great graphic artist, typographer, book-jacket designer and illustrator (he would later sketch frames of his films). While at Keymer, he visited Jean Renoir, had intense discussion on cinema with him when the great French director was shooting The River outside Calcutta. Before this, he had established the Calcutta Film Society where he saw films by Capra, Ford, Huston, Mileston, Wilder, Wyler among others. He also saw films by Eisenstein (the heard Bach in them) and Pudovkins (where he heard Beethoven). During a six-month stint in London in 1950 he saw over one hundred films. Among them were The Bicycle Thief and La Règle du Jeu [Rules of the Game]. Both made a deep impression on Ray and later significantly influenced the craft of his film-making.

In 1950, Satyajit Ray was asked by a major Calcutta publisher to illustrate a children's edition of the Adventures of Goopy and Bagha (1968). In the mid-sixties, for a couple of years he had no work. The solution to making ends meet for his small family surfaced this way. In 1968, a prominent editor of a widely...After the completion of the Apu Trilogy (1959), regarded as a classic of World Cinema, Ray continued to work with amazingly diverse and varied material. With read literary magazine in Bengali persuaded Ray to write a novella for its annual number. Ray the writer of whom had, adventure stories, science fictions, appropriately illustrated by himself, made a dramatic appearance on the Bengali literary scene. In addition, there was no surcease since then in his literary output until the time he was taken to the hospital in 1992. His last writing, My Years With Apu, was published posthumously in 1994. He wrote some seventy novellas, stories and translations and each one of them became a
The two short films poet, composer and singer than a ruler submitted to the British take-over, as his shows rape as well. on the Bengal Famine of 1943 was made during the Bangladesh war. This film shibboleths against narrow nationalism, mix of religion and politics, demogogues Ghare Baire voice that sought social correctives through acts of enunciation in cinema in even more isolated and distant, telling his telos in enunciatory terms. Unlike the The third and last phase saw Ray's "crisis" come full circle. He became apartment. He even seriously considered leaving Calcutta - his beloved in his world-view, the way he looked at people and things around him. seemed to have suffered a "crisis" -- arguably a personal one, but certainly one in his world-view, the way he looked at people and things around him. There is little doubt that the protagonist is Ray himself. Ray is a transnational. His global concerns and questions are articulated locally and nationally as the post-Cold War era is ushered in. Issues that are brought up implicate Ray and his visions: Who is an artist? How does his loved ones measure it? In monetary terms? Who is civilized and who is "primitive"? The world-traveller and the ethnographer reveals his telos at last. He is against narrowness of all sorts, against boundaries, borders and barriers. "Don't be a frog in the well," he tells his young grandnephew as he moves on to his next destination.


RAVI SHANKAR (7 April 1920, Benares, India), bio from IMDb: “Ravi Shankar is a world-renowned musician, composer, performer, and scholar of classical Indian music....His long and distinguished musical career includes numerous recordings, performances at all the world's leading venues, and a series of unprecedented collaborations with other leading musicians. Although he is well known because of his interaction with the popular music world, it is important to underscore that Shankar is considered the leading international figure in a very elevated art form, Hindustani music. Shankar was born on April 7, 1920, in Varanasi, India. He moved to Paris in 1930, and received most of his education there. From the age of 12, he performed as a musician and dancer on tour in Europe and America with his brother Uday Shankar, and in 1939 had his first concert as soloist at a music conference in Allahabad. By 1945 Shankar's reputation as the leading performer of traditional Hindustani music on the sitar had coalesced. He began to branch out as a composer, writing music for ballet and for important films such as such as Dharti Ke Lal and Neecha Nagar. He also composed the song Sare Jahan Se Acha, which is the most widely known piece of music in India, second only to the national anthem. In 1949, Shankar became Music Director of All-India Radio at Delhi, and founded the Vadya Vrinda Chamber Orchestra. The years 1950-55 were a particularly intense period of compositional activity, most notably in the internationally-acclaimed film studios of Calcutta, where he scored The Ray Trilogy. For his outstanding contribution to Indian music and culture, he received his first of five Presidential Awards in 1962, India's highest honor in the arts. In the mid-1960s he performed once at the world festival of serious musicians was augmented with wide popular success.” Shankar is currently Regents Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego.

David Shipman: The Apu films are to cinema what Proust is to literature: they are simply richer and more universal than most films ever made. Akira Kurosawa: Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon.

Time 1958: Pather Panchali is perhaps the finest piece of filmed folklore since Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North It is a pastoral poem dappled with the play of brilliant images and strong, dark feelings, a luminous revelation of Indian life in language that all the world can understand.

Elia Kazan, Director, 1991: I want to add my voice to those of Scorsese and Merchant in asking the Academy grant Satyajit Ray an Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award. I have admired his films for many years and for me he is the filmic voice of India, speaking for the people of all classes of the country...He is the most sensitive and eloquent artist and it can truly be said in his case that when we honor him we are honoring ourselves.

James Ivory, Director, 1991: Satyajit Ray is among the world's greatest directors, living or dead...Isn’t it curious that the newest, the most modern of the arts, has found one of its deepest, most fluent expressions in the work of an artist like Ray, who must make his seamless films—many have been masterpieces—in a chaotic and volatile corner of one of the world's oldest cultures, amidst the most stringent shortages of today's advanced movie-making material and equipment?..It would be fitting to honour this great man, who has influenced so many other filmmakers in all parts of the world, and to salute him with a Lifetime Award in the spring of 1992.

Martin Scorsese, Director, 1991: We would like to bring to your attention, and to the attention of the distinguished board of directors of the Academy, a master film-maker, Satyajit Ray. Though somewhat unknown during past few years he has completed two additional films, centered around his deeply humanitarian vision. His work is in the company of that of living contemporaries like Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa and Federico Fellini.
Ray had clear ideas as to what every character, certainly the main ones, looked like in his films. For the main characters, he visualized the faces in sketch-form before making it become serious. At some point, I began to take notes in the dark on cutting.”

The movies he watched were almost exclusively western. “The cinemas showing Indian films…were dank and seedy…The films they showed us, we were told by our elders, were not suitable for us.”

“...the professors I studied under were great artists. Not just painters, but people with vision, with understanding, with deep insight. I think everything [they taught me] has gone into my work… I read a tremendous lot...novels, Indian literature, western literature, everything.”

Ray left abruptly in 1948. “If I return to Calcutta, when news came the Japanese had bombed the city. He found work as a layout artist with a British-rum advertising agency, D. J. Keymer & Co. He stayed with the firm for ten years, rising to senior art director.

In the forty years of its existence Indian cinema had yet to produce a single director, or even a single film, of unequivocal world stature. Ray ascribed this failure to two major factors. First, that Indian filmmakers had never grasped the essential nature of cinema. ‘It would seem to me...the fundamental concept of a coherent dramatic pattern existing in time was generally misunderstood.”

Secondly, misguided attempts to emulate foreign movies, especially those of Hollywood: “What our cinema needs above everything else,” Ray proclaimed, “is a style, an idiom—which would be uniquely and recognizably Indian.”

His ambition was to create, singlehandedly if necessary, this uniquely Indian style and idiom. In 1947, the year of independence, Ray and his friend Chidananda Das Gupta had founded Calcutta’s first film society. “Thereby shackling ourselves willingly to the task of disseminating film culture among the intelligentsia.”

In addition to his advertising work, Ray, by now considered one of Calcutta’s leading graphic artists, was often commissioned to illustrate books. One such commission, in 1946, was for an abridged edition of a modern classic, Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee’s novel Pather Panchali (Song of the Little Road). Ever since, he had been considering turning this story into a film that he would both script and direct. Two events helped push his ideas into reality.

In 1949 Jean Renoir arrived in Calcutta to make The River. Overcoming his shyness, Ray called on him and found him “not only approachable, but so embarrassingly polite and modest that I felt if I were not too careful I would probably find myself discoursing on the Future of Cinema for his benefit.” Ray helped Renoir scout locations, watched him filming whenever possible, and eventually mentioned his own plans. Renoir was full of encouragement. If only, he said, Indian filmmakers “could shake Hollywood out of your system and evolve your own style, you would be making great films here.”

Within three days of arriving in London I saw Bicycle Thieves. I knew immediately that if I ever made Pather Panchali... I would make it in the same way, using natural locations and unknown actors.”

Ray realized that to make the film he wanted, he would have to finance it himself. He scraped together all his savings, borrowed from his relatives, raised a loan on his life insurance, and hired some equipment... [4,000 feet of film and still no takers]. Ray sold off his precious books and classical records, and Bijoyja pawned her jewelry but to no avail. Some eighteen months after filming had started, Ray sadly disbanded his team.

[About this time Monroe Wheeler from MOMA visited looking for Indian material and suggested if Ray could finish the film would be part of exhibition.] Six months later John Huston turned up, scouting locations for his Kipling movie, The Man Who Would be King, and was shown the edited footage. He was favorably impressed and reported as much to Wheeler.

Meanwhile, through a contact of his mother’s, Ray had gained access to the Chief Minister of the West Bengal government, Dr. Roy. News of foreign interest in this eccentric project had filtered through. Roy viewed the footage and agreed that the state government would purchase the film outright, taking in return any profit accruing from domestic exhibition. (According to some accounts, the funds came from the Department of Roads, who believed, taking the title literally, that Ray was making a documentary about road-building.) With this backing and a six-month leave of absence from Keymer’s, Ray was able to resume shooting, now on a full-time basis. Working against time—Ravi Shankar’s evocative score was composed in eleven hours—Ray and his team completed the film in time for Wheeler’s exhibition in April 1955.

“The cinematic material,” Ray wrote later, “dictated a style to me, a very slow rhythm determined by nature, the landscape, the country, the people. . . . The Script had to retain some of the rambling quality of the novel because that in itself contained a clue to the feeling of authenticity: life in a poor Bengali village does ramble.” Affectionately, and never condescendingly, Pather Panchali offers us a series of events, not seen through Apte’s eyes but rather reflected in his wide-eyed, responsive gaze. “Instead of simply identifying with the child’s view.” Robin Wood observed, “Ray makes us increasingly sensitive to the child’s reactions to what he sees.”

As Adib, film critic of The Times of India, recognized, something revolutionary had appeared in Indian cinema: “it is bunal to compare it with any other Indian picture—for even the best pictures produced so far have been cluttered with clichés. Pather Panchali is pure cinema. There is no trace of the theatre in it... .The countryside lives in the quiver of every leaf, in every ripple on the surface of the pond, in the daily glory of its mornings and evenings. The people live in every nerve and we live with them. . . . If sequence after sequence fixes itself in the mind of the audience, it is because every scene has been intensely conceived.”

With some reluctance, since it was felt to give an adverse impression of India, Pather Panchali was chosen as official Indian entry for the 1956 Cannes Festival. Many critics stayed away, convinced by past experience that no Indian film could be worth watching, but almost all who attended the screening hailed the début of a major new director, and the revelation of an unprecedented maturity in the Indian cinema. (A dissenting voice came from François Truffaut, who walked out after two reels, announcing that the film was “insipid and Europeanized,” and that in any case he was not interested in Indian peasants.) Pather Panchali was awarded the prize as Best Human Document and went on to win a fistful of other awards including the Selznick Golden Laurel at Berlin, and received wide international release. In Sight and Sound Lindsay Anderson described it as “a beautiful picture, completely fresh and personal,” in which Ray’s camera “reaches forward into life, exploring and exposing, with reverence and wonder.”

With the completion of the Apu trilogy, Ray was widely acclaimed as one of the great masters of humanist cinema, comparable with Renoir, Flaherty and de Sica. As far as the rest of the world was concerned he stood as the dominant figure in Indian cinema, sole representative of his country’s vast movie industry. Within India his status was more ambiguous. Although he enjoyed huge prestige as the only Indian director to have achieved international respect, he was also the object of considerable resentment, especially in Bombay; and his work—then as now—was limited to a relatively restricted audience: the intellectual middle classes of the Bengali-speaking minority. (Ray always refused to have his films dubbed into Hindi or other languages).

“Villains bore me,” Ray has remarked.
In all Ray’s films, even Pather Panchali, interiors are shot in the studio, although so subtly are the sets constructed and lit that we are rarely aware of artifice.

Outside the avant-garde, there is perhaps no filmmaker who exercises such control over his work as Satyajit Ray. Scripting, casting, directing, scoring, operating the camera, working closely on art direction and editing, even designing his own credit titles and publicity material—his films come as close to wholly personal expression as may be possible in mainstream cinema. Not that his working methods are in the least dictatorial; those who have worked with him pay tribute to his patience, courtesy, and unfailing good temper in the face of all the setbacks and disasters inherent in moviemaking. “I make films for the love of it,” he once wrote. “I enjoy every moment of the filmmaking process,” from the first draft of the scenario to final cut. This enthusiasm is evidently communicated to his collaborators; Ray’s direction, Soumitra Chatterjee told an interviewer, “is inspired, and it’s an inspiration that is contagious and spreads to the entire crew.”

For all his fame, though, he remains amusedly indifferent to movie-world glamour. He lives with his family in a rambling 1920s apartment in North Calcutta, where he types his own scripts and answers his own phone, and where aspiring actors drop in at all hours without an appointment.

Audiences in India who have responded warmly to Rays early films have sometimes been troubled by the complexity of his middle films. A film like Shatranj Ke Kilhari was expected by many viewers to reconstruct the splendors of Moghul India as the early Jogajhar had reconstructed the sensitivity of Bengali feudal landlords and Charulata the decency of upper class Victorian Bengal. What the audience found instead was a stern examination of the sources of Indian decadence. According to Ray, the British seemed less to blame for their role than the Indians who demeaned themselves by colluding with the British or by ignoring the public good and plunging into private pleasures. Ray’s point of view in Shatranj was not popular with distributors and so his first Hindi film was denied fair exhibition in many cities in India.


“SCREENING THE FIFTIES” continues Thursdays at 7:30 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. This week it’s Elia Kazan’s, A Streetcar Named Desire 1951, starring Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, Karl Malden and Kim Hunter. Then: Feb 28 Stanley Kubrick, The Killing 1956....March 7 Emilie de Antonio, Point of Order 1964....and March 14, Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, Singin’ in the Rain 1952. All hi-res DVD projection except Point of Order, which is available only in video. The Garden Restaurant will be open for dinner on screening nights. Call 716.270.8233 for information and reservations)

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