

# The Drum

( US = "Drums" )

UK : 1938 : dir. Zoltan Korda : London Films / United Artists : 104 min

prod: Alexander Korda : scr: Lajos Biro, Arthur Wimperis, Patrick Kirwan & Hugh Gray

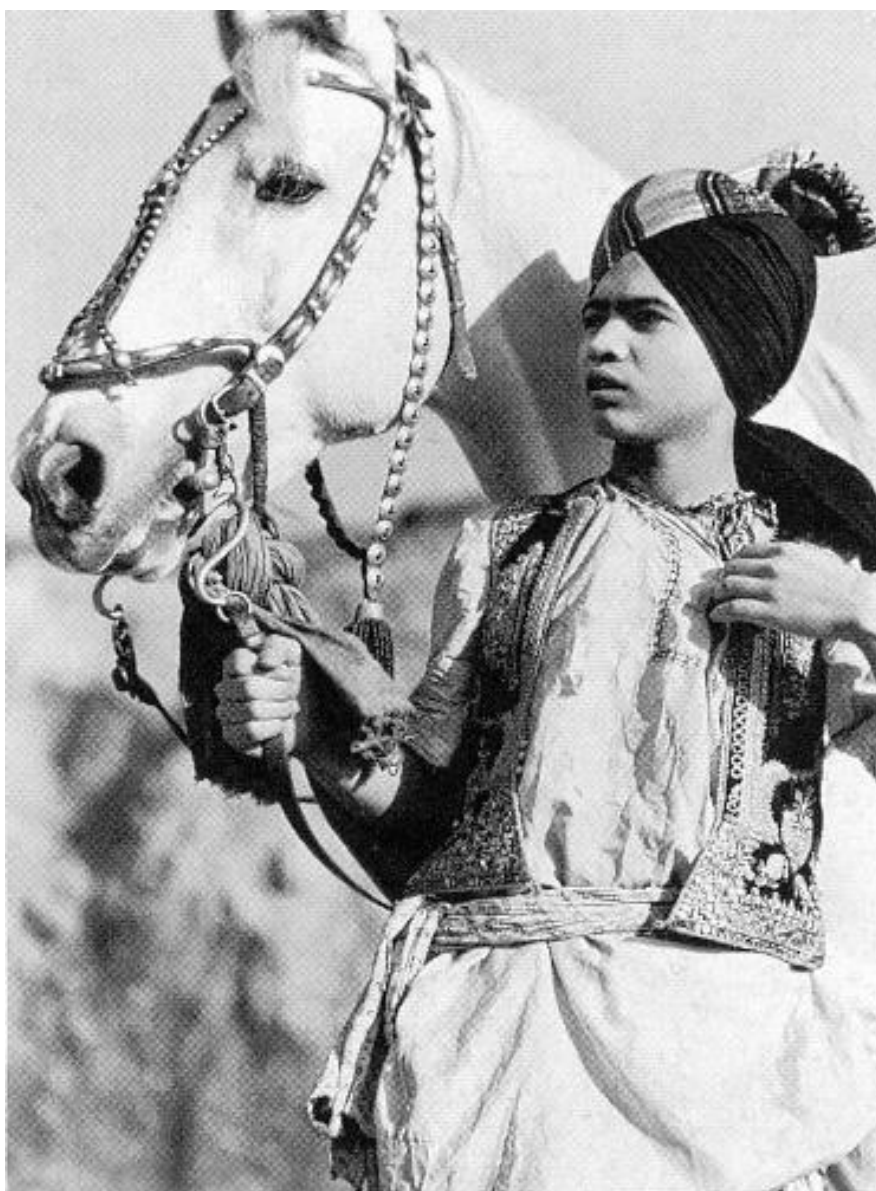
: dir.ph.: Georges Périnal & Osmond Borradaile

*Sabu; Desmond Tester* .....

Roger Livesey; Raymond Massey; Valerie Hobson; David Tree; Francis L Sullivan;

Martin Walker; Edward Lexy; Roy Emerton; Edward Lexy; Leo Genn; Guy Rolfe

| Ref:  | Pages | Sources | Stills | Words | Ω □ ≠ Z ☼ | Copy on VHS | Last Viewed |
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| 5170a | 3½    | 12      | 3      | 1,190 | 3 - 3 - - | No          | Pre-1998    |



*Jewel in the Korda brothers' crown – Sabu Dastagir*

*Source: The United Artists Story*



*Boy Holder (Desmond Tester) gets his kilt hoist for smoking in the barracks – it's a man's life in the British Army...*

**Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide**  
2001 review:

"Fine, colourful adventure with precocious Sabu [sic] rescuing British cavalry in early 20<sup>th</sup> - century India; atmospheric and actionful. Original British running time 104 minutes [cut to 99 minutes for US release]. \*\*\* "

**Speelfilm Encyclopedie** review:

"Colourful adventure story in which precocious Sabu [sic] saves the British cavalry in nineteenth-century India. Splendid atmosphere and full of action. \*\*\* "

**Halliwell's Film Guide** review

"The British army helps an Indian prince to resist his usurping uncle. Reasonably entertaining story of the Raj, with adequate excitement after a meandering start. From the novel by A.E.W. Mason. \* "

"Looks like a 100% commercial bet"

- **Variety**

**The Good Film and Video Guide** review:

"There is turmoil as usual along the North-West frontier and for once it is a British studio, and not Hollywood, which is saluting the gallant British troops who restore peace. A wily tribal usurper (Raymond Massey) has got hold of a supply of machine guns; his nephew (Sabu) helps the Brits, who include Roger Livesey, Valerie Hobson, Francis L Sullivan and David Tree. Stirring stuff, from the novel by A.E.W. Mason. \*\*\* "

**Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89**  
review:

"A lad saves the British regiment in India from being slaughtered by a tyrant. Picturesque, colourful, action-packed melodrama, highly enjoyable. \*\*\* "

**The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television** review:

"Polished 1938 adventure about rebel tribesmen in British India attempting to usurp Prince Sabu's throne. Raymond Massey makes a powerful heavy; Roger Livesey, Valerie Hobson suitably weak sahib, memsahib, and Zoltan Korda directed for brother Alex. 3 "

**The Time Out Film Guide review:**

"Korda's lively slice of imperialist adventure set on the Northwest Frontier during the days of the Raj, with true blue Brit officer Livesey helping out young prince Sabu against the machinations of his evil uncle, the snarling Massey. Good fun, brimful of action and Boys' Own heroics, given a touch of class by Georges Périnal's Technicolor camerawork. Video: Pickwick VHS CTV1060 "

**TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:**

"Rip-roaring adventure yarn about the British in India struggling to prevent rebel tribesmen from usurping a young prince's throne. The battle scenes are extraordinarily well done, and the Technicolor photography takes the breath away. As the little prince, Sabu followed solidly on his success in **"ELEPHANT BOY"**, and the suavity and presence of Raymond Massey gives much power to the villainous Ghul. A favourite line comes from the sergeant-major instructing his men on how to behave at a Mohammedan party: "It doesn't matter what the entertainment is, snakes or stomach-wiggling or whatnot. I want to see a look of rapture on every face." Spot, if you can, Leo Genn (as Massey's right-hand man) and Guy Rolfe beneath a mass of make-up, in minor roles. \*\*\* "

**The United Artists Story comment:**

" **"DRUMS** (GB: "The Drum") beat a Technicolor tattoo to the glory of British imperialism in India. According to scenarists Lajos Biro =====

**Video Movie Guide 1993 review:**

"Stiff-upper-lip British Empire epic starts slow but builds to an exciting climax as soldiers of the queen aid young Prince Sabu in his struggle against usurping uncle Raymond Massey. \*\*\*½ "

**The Virgin Film Guide review:**

"Set in northwest India at the height of the British presence there, **"DRUMS"** finds the treacherous Indian Prince Ghul (Raymond Massey) usurping his brother's kingdom by murdering his sibling and forcing his nephew and the heir apparent, Prince Azim (Sabu) into hiding. The boy finds refuge at the British garrison, where the commander, Captain Carruthers (Roger Livesey), and his wife (Valerie Hobson) treat him with kindness. Azim learns the regulations of the British Army and how to beat military cadence on a drum, a skill he uses later to warn the garrison that it is about to be attacked by Ghul and his evil followers. The spectacle is excellent, the direction and beautiful colour cinematography superb. Sabu is wonderful as the innocent, wide-eyed royal youth, a role that earned him 100 fan letters a day, and Livesey is a great match for the wily Massey, a villain minus a decent bone in his body. \*\*\*\* "

**The Virgin Film Guide review:**

"Film is based on a story written specially for the screen by A.E.W. Mason. He supplies an excellent machine-made suspenseful tale [sic] laid in India, with fine dialogue. Entire action is laid in the tribal territory of the northwest frontier of India. An elderly khan is anxious for British protection to ensure his throne for his son, Prince Axim (Sabu). Ruler's brother, Prince Ghul, is fanatically anti-British, kills the old man, and the plot involves the attempt to do away with the young prince. Sabu, the 14-year old Indian youth who came to attention in **"ELEPHANT BOY"** (1937), lives up to the promise given in that film and conducts himself with requisite dignity. He now speaks very good English. Raymond Massey is sufficiently sinister as the throne usurper; Roger Livesey is excellent as the military commander."

"Returning to the Empire, this time in Technicolor, Zoltan Korda demonstrates his not to be under-rated skill for directing exciting action pictures. The action is here set in India's North-West Frontier and revolves around the confrontations between a wily usurper, Prince Ghul (Raymond Massey), and the English regiment whom he plans to massacre in order to precipitate war with England. Substantial

performances by Roger Livesey and Valerie Hobson and Sabu's touching friendship with a young drummer boy helped to ensure the film's success."

Historical Boys' Clothing website review:

"Desmond Tester is a drummer boy in a Scottish regiment stationed in India. He wears a kilt uniform. A young Indian boy, played by Sabu, saves the regiment from a massacre in Imperial India."

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide" or "Rating the Movies (1990)"]

The critics are being unaccountably kind to what is, when all's said and done, an arthritic relic of Britain's imperial age: starchy, insufferably patronising of Johnny Foreigner, and with an air of blimpish self-congratulation. As much could be said of Kipling, it's true, except that Kipling's Indian adventures were generally enlivened by more interesting characters. Raymond Massey here plays a traitorous native troublemaker with all the subtlety of Captain Hook.

See also "**BADKONAK-E SEFID**" and "**BASHU**" - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.