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### **‘The epic and intimately human’: Contemplating Tara’s theme in *Gone With the Wind***

The octave-vaulting Tara theme from *Gone With the Wind* is one of the most recognized melodies ever written for film. ‘Whenever that music starts to play,’ David Thomson quips, ‘people all over the world think, “Hollywood”.’ Described at the film’s release as ‘filled with Southern flavor, with beauty, strength, and affection,’ the theme now serves as shorthand for an overwhelming cinematic experience: ‘We hear four notes of Max Steiner’s theme ... and we’re awash in emotions,’ avers Molly Haskell.

For all its power, however, Steiner’s Tara theme has received surprisingly little attention from scholars. This paper builds on earlier discussions from Michael Long, Kathryn Kalinak, and Peter Franklin by offering the first historical investigation of the theme itself, including its earlier use in a strikingly different film. Close study of *Gone With the Wind*’s production history—in particular, Steiner’s reliance upon assistants to compose the score—further reveals that the theme’s placement in the film alternately reflects sensitivity to narrative trajectory *and* conflicting views over the theme’s role *Gone With the Wind*. Featuring original research of production documents and manuscript scores from the Max Steiner Collection (Brigham Young University) and the David O. Selznick Papers (Harry Ransom Center), this study shows that Tara’s theme carries considerable baggage. Exploring the theme’s transformation through multiple films and the collaborative scoring process allows us to engage this well-known melody with fresh ears.