

I'm Beginning to See the Leitmotif: Max Steiner's Sketches for *Are These Our Children?*

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As a pioneering film composer and musical director at RKO Pictures, Max Steiner wrote, arranged, orchestrated, and selected music for about three dozen films between December 1929 (when he arrived in Hollywood) and the end of 1931. But the only sketch that he preserved from this early period was the music for a rather obscure crime film called *Are These Our Children?* (1931).¹ Steiner had the sketches for this film bound and preserved alongside other more significant film scores, which suggests that it held some importance for him.² Examining the sketches more closely – including several cues that were not included in the final version – will show that these sketches reveal important developments in Steiner's early use of the leitmotif technique, far beyond what he had attempted in previous films.³

In order to better understand the significance of Steiner's score for *Are These Our Children?* (hereafter *ATOC*), we will provide a brief summary of Steiner's prior work in Hollywood and some historical context surrounding the film's production. Then, we will describe the contents of Steiner's sketches for *ATOC* and attempt to resolve some issues regarding their relationship to the film's soundtrack. After a short discussion of the history of the leitmotif in early film, we will then

ARCHIVAL NOTES

Source Studies in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Music, No. 10 (2025)

© Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia | ISSN 2499-832X | DOI 10.69125/AN.v10.n04.73-99

analyze and describe the two main themes that act as leitmotifs in *ATOC* and examine how Steiner develops these leitmotifs in response to events in the film's plotline.

STEINER'S EARLY CAREER IN HOLLYWOOD

RKO released its first film in March 1929, less than a year before Steiner was recruited from Broadway, where he had been working as an arranger, conductor, and composer. Hollywood was enjoying great commercial success with musicals at the time, and RKO engaged Steiner in December 1929 to assist composer Harry Tierney with *Dixiana*. But following the stock market crash of October 1929, the public began to lose their appetite for musicals, leading some studios to close their music departments altogether.⁴ Michael Slowik notes that 'by the end of 1929 all major studios switched from continuous to intermittent music',⁵ drastically reducing the amount of music in their films overall.

Facing cutbacks, Steiner was ready to leave Hollywood when he was unexpectedly promoted to musical director. He had demonstrated to studio heads that he could not only arrange and orchestrate songs for musicals, but could also create new music for dramatic scenes.⁶ He had already composed an original main theme for *The Case of Sergeant Grisha* (a lost film) in February 1930.⁷ These abilities helped better position him in an environment that was trending away from a reliance on Tin-Pan Alley songs and other pre-existing compositions. As Slowik notes, 'increasingly during this period, studios provided larger proportions of original music composed by staff members [...]. Original compositions – particularly those of Steiner – also offered certain advantages, including a score that could better 'fit' the narrative'.⁸

By the end of 1931, RKO's music department remained comparatively small, employing only five musicians on contract.⁹ According to Nathan Platte, 'heading one of the smallest music departments among the major studios had its perks: Steiner enjoyed more control over both his work and its presentation in the trade presses'.¹⁰ It also kept him pretty busy. Prior to *ATOC*, Steiner contributed to at least 33 RKO films as a composer, arranger, orchestrator, conductor, and musical director.

APPENDIX A summarizes Steiner's involvement with these early RKO productions and how much original music was composed for each of them.¹¹ Following his promotion to musical director, most of this original music appeared only in the opening and closing credits, as is the case with his score for *Cimarron* (February 1931).¹² Steiner did create some noticeable underscoring for *Beau Ideal* (January 1931), *Cracked Nuts* (April 1931), *The Public Defender* (August 1931), and

Traveling Husbands (August 1931); but considerably more music was planned for *ATOC*, with 17 minutes of original music in the final film. This was a big-budget picture that afforded him greater opportunities to 'flex his compositional capabilities'.¹³

Are These Our Children? is a socially conscious 'ripped-from-the-headlines' film about the problem of juvenile delinquency in the 1930s. Advertisements described it as a 'super-drama [...] that lays bare the amazing story of many of today's young moderns', depicting 'young hearts aglow with the first fires of love melting together like mad meteors in the sky'.¹⁴ The plot centers around Eddie, a bright, promising young man – with a devoted and respectable girlfriend named Mary – who falls in with the wrong crowd and is led astray by a modern girl named Flo. Eddie drops out of school, quits his job, and, as a result of too much drinking, late-night dancing, partying, and general teenage rebellion, ends up shooting and killing an old family friend in a liquor-store robbery. The film begins as a light-hearted and hopeful story but becomes darker and darker in tone as Eddie is made to face the consequences of his actions, is found guilty of murder in the first degree, and is sentenced to death.

Contemporary reviews found the story compelling, calling it 'an exciting screen sermon on the younger generation and what may happen when it gets beyond control'¹⁵ and 'one of the greatest, most realistic and powerful pieces of screen entertainment the year has produced'.¹⁶ Eric Linden (playing the lead, Eddie) was often singled out as having made an excellent screen debut.¹⁷ The reviewers characteristically focused on the stars, the director, and the overall subject matter of the film, with no mention of the score, although the RKO publicity department made sure to highlight Steiner's contribution, to the point of hyperbole. One reviewer poked some gentle fun at the studio's characterization of Steiner's score as a 'symphony':

What I should like to hear, though, is the Philharmonic Orchestra running through Steiner's little number. I can see the program now:

SteinerSymphony no. 5 in E minor, op. 3257 'Are These Our Children?'
Andante sostenuto
Andantino in Modo di canzona
Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato
Finale: Allegro con fuoco¹⁸

Although Steiner's score for *ATOC* is clearly not a symphony, in comparison with his previous work at RKO, it does represent an important step forward. Not only was the music more abundant than in any of his previous films (APPENDIX A), it was also much more *noticeable*, occurring in pivotal montage scenes without any competing dialogue. And rather than re-using or adapting pre-existing music, as was more typical for Hollywood films in this time period,¹⁹ nearly the entire

soundtrack consists of newly-composed music,²⁰ which may be why Steiner received his first ‘Music by’ screen credit for *ATOC*.

Most importantly for this study, *ATOC* represents a step forward in Steiner’s use of the leitmotif. Rather than simply restating associative themes, Steiner developed them in a manner that carefully followed developments in the plot.²¹ The themes in *ATOC* never recur without variation, and these variants are starkly different from one another (to such a degree that the average moviegoer might not even recognize their common origin). This technique of leitmotivic development for dramatic purposes, which we are only ‘beginning to see’ in Steiner’s work with *ATOC*, would become an important aspect of his mature compositional style.

PIECING TOGETHER THE SKETCHES FOR *ARE THESE OUR CHILDREN?*

In order to demonstrate how the *ATOC* sketches in BYU’s Max Steiner Collection reveal important early developments in Steiner’s use of the leitmotif, we will first need to resolve some issues regarding the sketches themselves. His sketches are normally quite carefully organised, clearly identifying musical cues with reel, part, and measure numbers, and providing detailed sync points that link musical events with screen events down to the beat level. For example, in the cue from *The Most Dangerous Game* shown in FIGURE 1 (a film which was released just ten months after *ATOC*), the music on page 1 of Reel 2, Part 2 is clearly identified as the ‘Saroff’ theme. Sync points (underlined in blue) are connected with on-screen action or shot details: ‘Joe goes upstairs’, ‘Picture of orangutan [actually a hideous centaur] carrying woman’, and ‘Close up of Count’. Steiner also provides precise timings (in red boxes) to help him align his music with onscreen images as he conducts the studio orchestra. Additionally, Steiner’s sketches are often laden with textual information for himself and his orchestrators. For instance, he writes ‘2 horns muted?’ in measure 1 and adds a note at the bottom of the page (not shown) that reads: ‘The Count’s theme appears for the first time (kind of “Saftig”?)’.

In comparison with his data-rich and carefully-organised later scores, the existing sketches for *ATOC* are fragmentary and confusing. Cues exist in multiple versions, often with conflicting titles. Pages and measures are unnumbered or erratically numbered. For example, the cue in FIGURE 2 is labeled ‘Alternative Transition [crossed out] #8 (if no chorus) #7’, but is identified in the RKO cue sheet as ‘Transition #5’.²² The possible page numbers for the cue are 1, 7, or 15, but none of the pages preceding or following this page in Steiner’s bound collection are numbered. Additionally, there are no other textual annotations on the page to help connect this cue with what’s happening in the film.

Another issue with the *ATOC* sketches in the Max Steiner Collection is that

I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LEITMOTIF

Reel 2 (Part 2) 262-4-06 43876 43913. Dangerous game
 Soroff (HEAVY) molto marcato 37 ft.
 H.W.
 1. Ye goes upstairs
 (The cook looking after him)
 2. Horro mure 2
 m. molto marcato
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FIGURE 1. Reel 2, Part 2 of *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), bb. 1–5. BYU, Max Steiner Collection.

① Alternatives Transition #8 (if no chorus) #7 ⑤ P. 7

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper. At the top, the title 'Alternatives Transition #8' is written in black ink, with a circled '8' and a circled '5' next to it. Below the title, the text '(if no chorus) #7' is written in green ink. The score is written on three systems of staves. The first system has two staves, the second has two staves, and the third has two staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, time signatures, and notes. There are also handwritten annotations in black ink, including 'p', 'a tempo', and 'rall'. The paper is yellowed and has some dark spots.

FIGURE 2. ‘Alternative Transition #8’ from sketches for *ATOC*. BYU, Max Steiner Collection.

the page ordering has been thoroughly jumbled. Before the sketches were bound together, they consisted of loose sheets of manuscript paper, using various styles and colors of paper, created at different times by different hands.²³ Since the pages are not consistently numbered, and since some pages are clearly missing, Steiner was apparently not able to put them back in order.²⁴ For instance, the first cue in the bound sketches is the inked version of ‘Transition #13’ (which is never used in the film), followed by the second half of the music for the ‘Washroom Sequence’, which does not occur until 25 minutes into the film, followed by a pencil sketch of a *Marcia Maestoso* transition that is used 9 minutes into the film. It is not until page 17 in the bound sketches that we encounter the music used in the first scene of the film.

Thus, our first task was to piece together a reordered version of the sketches that would follow the order of the music in the film. In the process of doing so (FIG. 3), we learned that of the 68 pages in the sketches, about a third were duplicates of other pages, and another third were not used in the film at all. Additionally, some of the music that *was* used in the film did not appear anywhere in the sketches. Most of this missing music was source music, which we don’t typically expect to find in the score (such as live dance bands, songs on the radio, or on-screen singing). However, a few of the orchestral cues were missing as well, including a one-minute dream sequence occurring at a pivotal point in the film.²⁵

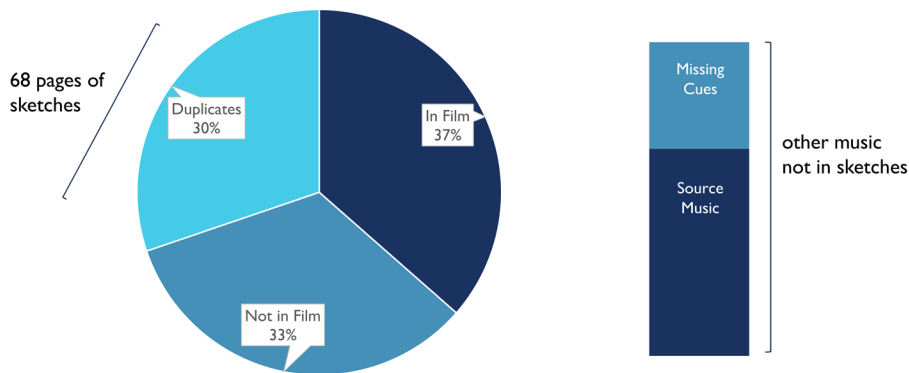


FIGURE 3. ‘Organization of the sketches for ATOC.

Examining the pages more closely, we determined that they can be divided into three groups (summarised in FIG. 4). The first group consists of pages using pencil on yellowish paper with a 3-hole punch on the side and the RKO logo at the bottom (FIG. 5).²⁶ Most of these cues bear the title ‘Cock-eyed Youth’ (see the top right corner), which was an earlier working title for the film,²⁷ helping us to

identify these sketches as the earliest ones. FIGURE 4A provides a summary of the contents of this first group, which comprises pages 3–33 of the original unordered sketches. Note that this first group of sketches contains most of the cues that were *not* used in the film (the middle row in the example) and very few duplicates (the bottom row). The cues that were not retained include potential variants on the main themes as well as various popular tunes for the dance scenes.²⁸

a) Group 1 (pages 3-33 of the unordered sketches)

[illegible]

b) Group 2 (pages 1–2 and 34–57 of the unordered sketches)

Used In Film 34-35 46 47 48 49 51 54-57

Not in Film 1-2 39-40

Duplicate 36-38 41 42 43-45 50 52-53

c) Group 3 (pages 58–71 of the unordered sketches)

Category	61-62	63-64	66-67	71
Used In Film	59	60		
Not in Film	58		65	68-69 70
Duplicate				

FIGURE 4. Page groupings in the unordered sketches. Numbers represent page numbers in the unordered sketches. Colors represent different themes.

One explanation for the abundance of unused cues is the unusual workflow that was used for this particular film. Ordinarily, Steiner would not begin working on the score for a film until after it was completed, but for *ATOC* he was required to write themes for the characters to sing, whistle, and dance to onscreen – themes that would also be heard in the orchestral score. Thus, at least some of his work had to be completed before filming took place.²⁹ When the film was finished, he undoubtedly found that some of these pre-conceived themes (and their variants) did not have a home in the film.

The second group of pages (FIG. 6) uses heavy ink on cream-colored paper with no hole-punches, with the RKO logo at the bottom, and the title *Are These Our Children?* at the top. These were likely used as conductor's scores and were created by an unknown copyist's hand.³⁰ As the summary in FIGURE 4B illustrates, most of the music in the second group was used in the film (the top row), but quite a few of these pages are duplicates of existing pencil sketches (the bottom row).³¹

The third group of pages (FIG. 7) features a different copyist's hand with lighter ink on yellowish paper and no hole-punches, with the words 'Property of R.K.O. Studios' at the bottom of the page. As illustrated in FIGURE 4C, this section con-

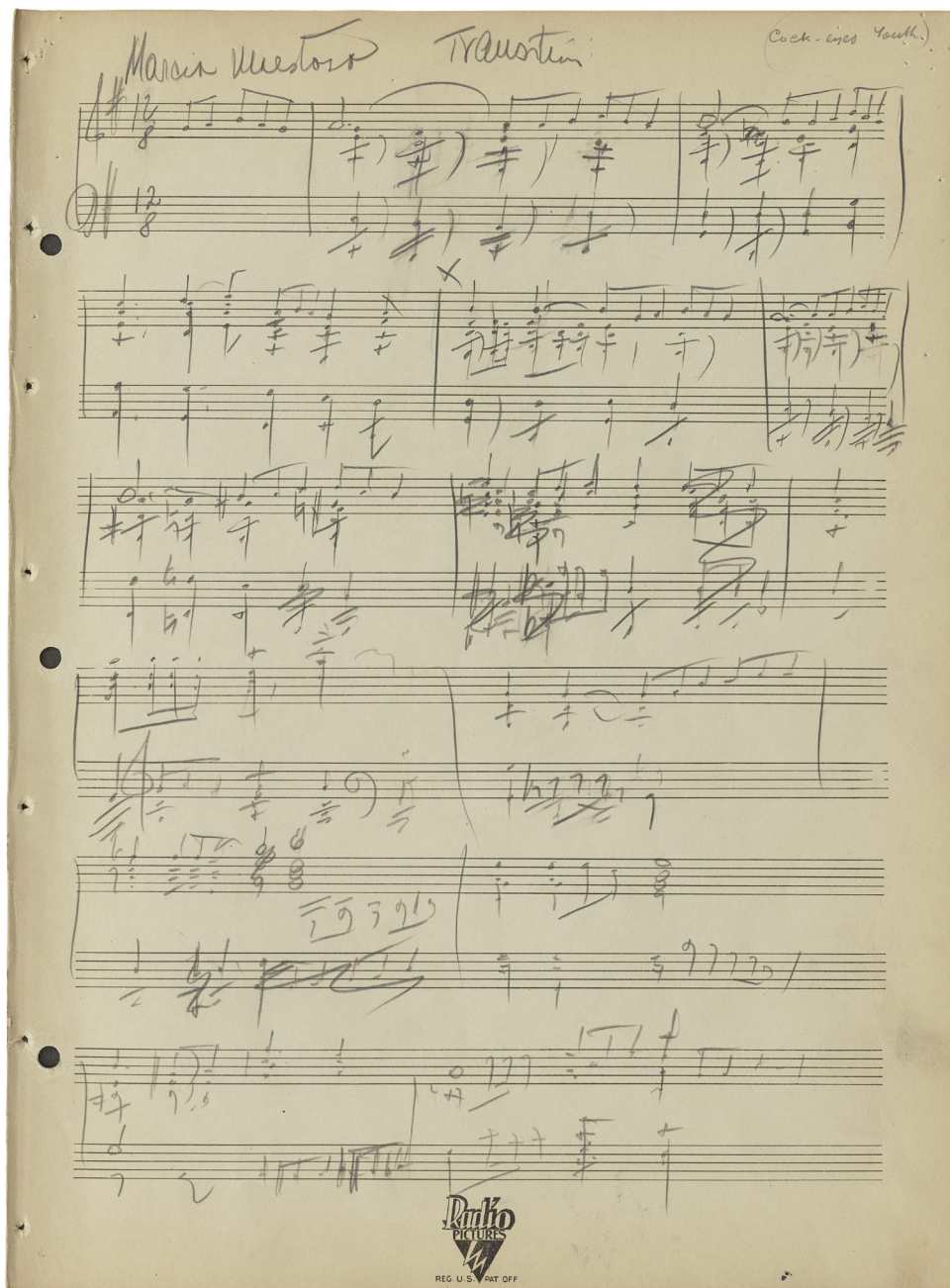


FIGURE 5. A page from Group 1 in the sketches (p. 6). BYU, Max Steiner Collection.

These are Children! Transition #12 38-12

Allegro

The musical score is handwritten on aged, slightly yellowed paper. It begins with the title "These are Children!" in a cursive script, followed by "Transition #12" and the number "38-12" in the top right corner. The tempo marking "Allegro" is written in a large, bold script. The score consists of ten staves of music. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is written in a cursive, handwritten style with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The paper shows signs of age, including some staining and wear along the edges. At the bottom center of the page, there is a small logo that reads "Rinko PICTURES".

FIGURE 6. A page from Group 2 in the sketches (p. 46). BYU, Max Steiner Collection.

The image shows a single page of handwritten musical notation on aged, cream-colored paper. The notation is arranged in several systems, each consisting of multiple staves. The notation is dense and complex, featuring numerous accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and dynamic markings such as 'piano' and 'crescendo'. The handwriting is in dark ink, and the paper shows signs of age, including some staining and wear along the edges. The notation appears to be a sketch or a working draft, given the complexity and the presence of many accidentals. The page is oriented vertically, and the notation is written in a standard musical notation style.

FIGURE 7. A page from Group 3 in the sketches (p. 64). BYU, Max Steiner Collection.

sists mainly of duplicates of the pencil sketches (the bottom row) but does also contain some cues not found elsewhere in the sketches (the middle row).

If we eliminate the duplicates in FIGURE 4 and separate out the cues that were never used in the film, putting the remaining cues in correct film order, the result is FIGURE 8.³² Surprisingly, of the original 68 pages of sketches, only 24 were actually used in the final score. A few clues in the sketches allow us to determine with some certainty where the unused cues might have gone (FIG. 9). The cues on pages 16, 14, 23–24, 65, 26, and 70 of the original unsorted sketches appear to be alternatives for existing cues.³³ The music on pages 19–20, 58, 68–69, 28, 1–2, and 33 seems to be intended for scenes that were cut from the film (or left unscored). And it is unclear where the music on pages 7–8, 9, 10, 12, and 39–40 would have gone.

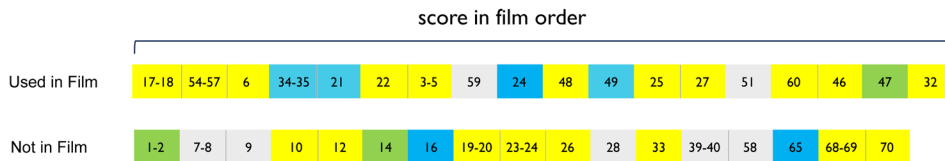


FIGURE 8. Groups 1–3 combined, with duplicates eliminated and unused cues separated out.

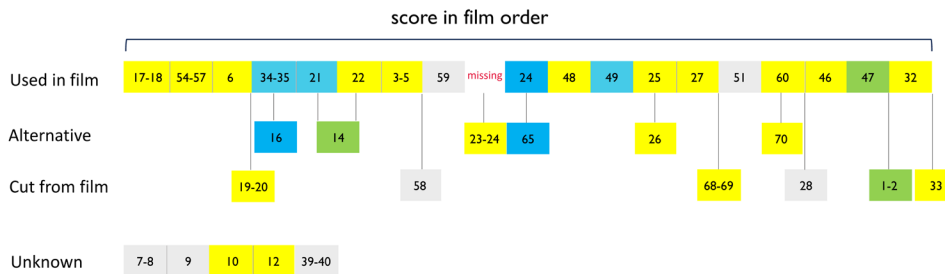


FIGURE 9. Hypothetical positions of unused cues.

Our final proposed reordering of the sketches is given in APPENDIX B, which we will refer to throughout the remainder of this study. The appendix lists all of the cues in film order, along with their titles³⁴ and original/revised page numbers. APPENDIX B also gathers together important textual information found in Steiner's sketches at BYU, and the scores and July 9 shooting script preserved in UCLA's RKO archives. Bolded items in the list are the non-diegetic cues heard in the film (those played by the film orchestra). Shaded items in the list are the cues that are

not heard in the film. Red text indicates music that is in the film but is missing from the sketches.

THE THEMES IN *ARE THESE OUR CHILDREN?*

The colored blocks in the examples above represent the principal themes used in *ATOC* (FIG. 10). In our interpretation, the ‘Dreams’ theme (the yellow blocks), represents Eddie’s hopes and dreams and his potentially bright future with his faithful girlfriend Mary.³⁵ There are 23 variants on this theme in Steiner’s sketches, although 13 of these do not appear in the film. The theme occurs twice in its original form, twice as source music (whistled by Eddie), and three additional times in cues that are missing from the score, for a total of 30 instances (accounting for roughly half of the music in the soundtrack).

Dreams	2 original + 23 variants in sketches + 2 source + 3 not in score = 30 instances (17 in film)
Makes You Forget Your Troubles	3 original + 8 variants in sketches + 9 source = 20 instances (16 in film)
Dreams + Makes You Forget	3 variants in sketches = 3 instances (1 in film)
Other	

FIGURE 10. Themes in *ATOC*.

‘Dreams’ is a harmonically stable tune in 32-bar AABA form, which allows it to be used as a tender love song. But it is also tightly constructed around two motives x and y , (as illustrated in EX. 1), which allows Steiner to develop the theme through motivic transformation.³⁶ Each of the four phrases is in sentence form, with motive x as the basis of the A phrases and motive y as the basis of the B phrase (the bridge). As we will demonstrate below, Steiner primarily focuses on the development of motive x , with its characteristic short-short-long rhythms and 1–2–3–2–1–2 melodic contour.

The second theme, ‘Makes You Forget Your Troubles’ (the blue blocks), is a catchy dance tune that is associated with the negative influences in Eddie’s life. Flo seduces him by singing this song in his ear and Eddie whistles it whenever he thinks of her. Although there are only 8 variants of this theme in the sketches, we end up hearing it often as source music (whistled, sung, and played by onscreen bands), for a total of 20 instances. Unlike ‘Dreams’, the melody of ‘Forget Your Troubles’ does not lend itself well to motivic development, consisting mostly of the melodic whole-step oscillations of motive w (EX. 2). The narrow range and repetitious nature of this melody (along with its ‘sinful’ syncopation) clearly align it with the misguided aims and dead-end desires of the crowd Eddie hangs out with.

I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LEITMOTIF

Example 1, 'Dreams', consists of three staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff, labeled 'A', contains 'motive x' (a four-note ascending eighth-note pattern), 'x transposed' (the same pattern transposed up), and 'x transposed and expanded' (the pattern expanded into a longer phrase). The second staff, also labeled 'A', contains 'motive x', 'x transposed', and 'x transposed and expanded', ending with a 'PAC' (Perfect Cadence) symbol. The third staff, labeled 'B (bridge)', contains 'motive y' (a four-note descending eighth-note pattern), 'y transposed' (the same pattern transposed down), and 'y transposed and expanded', ending with a 'HC' (Half Cadence) symbol.

EXAMPLE 1. 'Dreams'.

Example 2, 'Makes You Forget Your Troubles', consists of three staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff, labeled 'A', contains three instances of 'motive w' (a four-note ascending eighth-note pattern). The second staff, also labeled 'A', contains three instances of 'motive w'. The third staff, labeled 'B', contains a single instance of 'motive w' followed by a longer phrase. The fourth staff, labeled 'A', contains three instances of 'motive w'.

EXAMPLE 2. 'Makes You Forget Your Troubles'.

The second theme sometimes appears in contrapuntal combination with the first theme (illustrated by the green blocks in the examples above). This combination of themes represents a conflict between Eddie's dreams and his desires, which comes to the forefront at the end of the film as he is faced with the consequences of his immoral behavior.³⁷ The gray blocks in the diagrams above represent all of the other cues in the film. Note there are not many of these, illustrating how most of the material in the film is derived from the two main themes, 'Dreams' and 'Forget Your Troubles'.³⁸

CONTEXTUALIZING THE THEMES OF *ARE THESE OUR CHILDREN?*

Having identified and described the principal themes in *ATOC*, it is important to step back and examine the historical context that permits us to characterize these themes as *leitmotifs*. The term *leitmotif* was initially created to describe the types of themes found in Richard Wagner's mid-nineteenth-century operas. One common definition is that 'a leitmotif refers to a musical motif or theme that, through consistent reuse, attaches itself to a particular character, situation, or idea in the narrative'.³⁹ According to Bribitzer-Stull, this general definition lacks elements that help us distinguish *leitmotifs* from other types of associative themes. Perhaps the most crucial of these is that the leitmotif must *develop* to reflect changing musico-dramatic contexts: 'the leitmotif as conceived by Wagner [...] is not only a melody or melodic fragment that recurs, unchanging, throughout a work. Rather it is more like a mutable theme from a sonata form, inherently dramatic in nature'.⁴⁰ He continues by asserting that 'it is only in their development that we experience a sense of progress through musico-dramatic (or musico-narrative) time'.⁴¹

Early film composers were clearly inspired by Wagner's use of the leitmotif. As early as 1912, silent film composer Joseph Carl Breil 'treated his themes not as fixed compositions but as fluid expressions requiring modification in response to changing film circumstances'.⁴² And in their 1920 manual for the accompaniment of silent films, Lang and West clearly illustrate how improvising organists can use thematic development to enhance music's relationship to the drama and its underlying emotions (by varying the meters, modes, keys, rhythms, articulations, harmonies, timbre, texture, and the overall style of a recurring theme).⁴³

However, in practice, this type of leitmotivic variation was rarely encountered in the accompaniment of silent films. Theater orchestras did not usually have original scores with thematic variants worked out by a composer, relying instead on compilations of pre-existing tunes chosen by the theater's musical director.⁴⁴ And without extensive rehearsals, they could not vary these themes like an improvising organist might do. Instead, as Slowik notes, 'the same theme, often tied to a particular character, would usually be heard regularly and without variation virtually any time the character appeared onscreen'.⁴⁵ The consequence of this approach, as Altman observes, was that 'instead of developing musically, characters were held in bondage by the repetition of unvaried themes'.⁴⁶

In the early years of sound film, it was the associative aspect of leitmotifs that persisted, in the use of recurring themes that did not vary substantially. In his overview of the early sound film era, Slowik identifies some instances of thematic variation, but categorizes these as 'extremely unusual',⁴⁷ with most variants involving simple changes like the recasting of a theme in a minor key, or slightly modifying the tempo or the instrumentation.⁴⁸

One of the most common musical trends in the films of the late 1920s (bridging the end of the silent era and the onset of the sound film era) is the use of recurring 'theme songs'. Ken Wlaschin explains this trend as follows:

Almost every major production had its especially composed song. These songs were not only heard as background music during the film, but were used to advertise and exploit the feature. Sheet music and recordings were released prior to the film showings.⁴⁹

An example of this trend in Steiner's work can be found in *Traveling Husbands* (released just a few months prior to *ATOC*, in August 1931), which features his theme song 'There's a Sob in My Heart'. It is first heard in the opening title sequence, then whistled and sung onscreen, played live in a night club, played by a Dixieland band, sung as a love duet, and overheard on the radio in a variety of styles (including an exotic 'Arabian' style and a sad waltz).⁵⁰ 'There's a Sob in My Heart' was also published as sheet music and even appeared in a few subsequent RKO films as source music.

The 'theme song' approach soon extended beyond musicals to dramatic pictures, where a recurring instrumental theme might be associated with the protagonist (or a love theme for the two leads). Rosar refers to this as a 'theme song without words'.⁵¹ But as with musicals in general, audiences began to tire of the 'theme song craze' by the late 1920s. As one filmgoer remarked in a letter to the editor in 1928: 'Give the film fans credit for a little imagination. They don't need theme songs to help them follow the plot'.⁵² Rosar observes that these songs were often 'injected with little rhyme or reason into dramatic screen action ... [and] were rarely integrated into the stories very well (if at all) and tended to bring the screen action to a standstill'.⁵³ In other words, the songs were not enhancing the drama in the manner of a developing *leitmotif*.

In his description of the music of *ATOC*, Nathan Platte (following Rosar) refers to the main theme as a 'theme song without words'.⁵⁴ Indeed, like many theme songs of the 1920s, the main theme, 'Dreams' originates as a lyrical 32-bar melody in AABA song form. And like many similar 'big themes', it permeates the soundtrack (along with 'Makes You Forget Your Troubles'). However, there are some important differences between the music of *ATOC* and the now-waning theme song trend. Throughout the film, the 'Dreams' theme is increasingly distorted to parallel the changes in Eddie's character, developing in a way that makes the tune harder and harder to recognize. Notably, the main theme is not heard at all during the final scene, so there is little chance of moviegoers whistling the tune as they leave the theater. If Steiner's goal was to plug a song or sell sheet music (as he gleefully did for *Traveling Husbands*), he failed miserably here.⁵⁵ Instead, in *ATOC*, Steiner used his recurring themes less as a 'sales pitch' and more as a technique to enhance emotions and highlight dramatic events in the story (as he

would subsequently do throughout his career). In other words, he began to see the potential of using these recurring themes as *leitmotifs*, associating them with characters, ideas, and relationships, and transforming them to illustrate how the characters were developing.

Although Steiner was not the *first* composer to develop leitmotifs for film music, he was one of the earliest adopters of this technique in the sound era and became one of its most influential practitioners. But prior to *ATOC*, only seven Steiner films featured any thematic development (see APPENDIX A). In *Dixiana* (1930), three themes (composed by Harry Tierney) were developed a little. In *Half Shot at Sunrise* (1930), the main theme (also composed by Tierney) was arranged as a march, an exotic dance, and a waltz. Later, In *Public Defender* (1931), a recurring ‘Mystery’ leitmotif was developed to some degree. There are some interesting variations on the theme song in *Traveling Husbands*, but this music is mostly diegetic, and there is evidence in the RKO archives that some of these arrangements were not created by Steiner. Thus, *ATOC* was the first film in which Steiner began to experiment with thematic development in earnest, composing twenty-three noticeably distinct variants of the main theme, ‘Dreams’ and eight variants of ‘Makes You Forget Your Troubles’.

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN *ARE THESE OUR CHILDREN?*

Now we will trace what Stephen C. Smith calls the ‘de-evolution of a likable teen into a cold-blooded killer’⁵⁶ in *ATOC* by examining transformations of the principal theme ‘Dreams’ throughout the course of the film. Although it is introduced as a gentle and lyrical love theme, as the plot develops, Steiner twists it to become dark, violent, comical, chaotic, dramatic, or funereal – whatever befits the current dramatic situation. These thematic transformations occur in a series of stylised montages and dream sequences inserted by director Wesley Ruggles to mark the steps leading to Eddie’s eventual demise.⁵⁷ The recurrence of these transitional montages throughout the film gave Steiner some space to experiment musically.⁵⁸ As Platte compellingly observes, these impressionistic montages are ‘accompanied by increasingly cacophonous iterations of the opening theme, which functions like Oscar Wilde’s deteriorating portrait of Dorian Gray’.

TABLE 1 provides a list of some of the most significant transformations of ‘Dreams’, along with their variant names, keys, meters, and musical characteristics. Note the general progression from calmer variants in major keys at the outset of the film to darker variants in minor keys, more discordant variants with unstable tonalities, and finally, solemn variants in minor keys.⁵⁹ EXAMPLE 3 provides the melodies for many of these variants. Note that each develops a recurring leitmotif

Cue #	Variant Name	Key	Meter	Characteristics
2	'Opening Scene'	F major	$\frac{4}{4}$	Gentle / Sweet (strings and harp)
(NIF)	'Meno'	D $\flat$ major	$\frac{4}{4}$	Peaceful / Pastoral
7	'Marcia Maestoso'	G major	$\frac{12}{8}$	March: Majestic / Heroic to Comical (brass)
9	'Coney Island'	C major	$\frac{3}{4}$	Waltz: Joyful / Fun
23	'Washroom'	F minor	$\frac{2}{2}$	Source music: Somber (low-register instruments)
29-30	'Dream Sequence'	Unstable – F #	$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$	Lyrical to Tragic / Dark (strings to full orchestra)
35	'Montage'	Unstable	$\frac{4}{4}$	Dissonant parallel quartal chords (wordless chorus)
44	'Newspaper Montage'	F–A $\flat$ –C $\flat$ –E $\flat$	$\frac{4}{4}$	Sad / Mournful (swirling string effects)
46	'Andante'	Unstable	$\frac{4}{4}$	Dissonant parallel quartal chords (wordless chorus)
47	'Risoluto'	Unstable / minor	$\frac{3}{4}$	Violent / Strange (low-register strings / muted brass)
48	'Transition #8B'	B $\flat$ minor	$\frac{2}{2}$	Mysterious / Restless

TABLE 1. Transformations of the 'Dreams' theme.

(using the melodic shape 1–2–3–2–1–2 of motive *x*) to dramatically represent the current status of Eddie's progress towards achieving his dreams. APPENDIX C provides transcriptions of some notable variants of 'Dreams' (along with audiovisual links), which the reader should refer to as we now present a detailed synopsis of the film.

In the opening scene (cues 2–4 in APPENDIX B), Mary and Eddie are together. Mary reminds Eddie that it is getting late ('half past nine') and that he has responsibilities at school the next day. Underneath the scene we hear 'Dreams' as a gentle, sweet love theme featuring strings and harp. This is the only time that we hear the theme in its full 32-bar AABA form. It is tonally stable with a calm, moderate tempo (VIDEO EX. 1). As Eddie leaves to go home, he whistles 'Dreams' to himself, clearly thinking of his relationship with Mary. Already, the music from the soundtrack has bled over into the diegetic world, since Eddie is whistling in the same key and at the same tempo as the orchestral music in the film score.⁶⁰

The second variant in TABLE 1 ('Meno') is a peaceful, pastoral setting of 'Dreams' in D $\flat$ major. It does not appear in the film, but would have occurred

a) Opening Scene (cue 2)

b) Marcia Maestoso (cue 7)

c) Coney Island (cue 9)

d) Washroom (cue 23)

e) Montage (cue 35)

f) Newspaper Montage (cue 44)

g) Risoluto (cue 47)

h) Allegro (cue 56)

i) Eddie's Prayer (cue 59)

EXAMPLE 3. Recurring leitmotifs in transformations of the 'Dreams' theme.

early on, given its stable and restful character. EXAMPLE C–I in Appendix C provides a transcription of this variant from Steiner's sketches.

A turning point in the story occurs with the next variant, 'Marcia Maestoso' (cues 7–8 and ex. c–2). As Eddie participates in an oratory competition about the U.S. Constitution at school, we hear 'Dreams' as a heroic march, featuring brass and percussion. The leitmotif is re-cast in 12/8 with fanfarish triplets in the trumpets. Onscreen, we see a montage of clapping hands and stylised special effects. But at the transition's climax we see a dramatic explosion, accompanied by falling gestures. The cue ends with a comical variant of 'Dreams' (played by muted trombone), followed by the sound of laughing students – making it clear that Eddie has not done well in the competition.

The next variant shown in TABLE I is a joyful waltz labeled 'Coney Island' (not heard in the film). Following Eddie's failure in the competition, he runs into Flo, who, when seeing him, comments to her friends: 'You don't know what happened at Coney Island!' Perhaps this is the music that would have been used in that deleted scene (EX. C–3).⁶¹ The leitmotif is rhythmically adapted to fit into 3/4 meter,

with a waltz accompaniment that feels like it could have been composed by Johann Strauss, Jr.⁶²

Hoping to cheer Eddie up, Flo invites him to join her at a local club called 'The Orient' that night, where teens dance wildly as the band plays 'Hold That Tiger'. Between dances, Flo openly flirts with Eddie in a manner that probably wouldn't pass the soon-to-be-enacted Hays code. She then runs up to the band and asks the leader: 'Hey Leon, would you play "Forget Your Troubles" next?' As they begin playing Steiner's tune, Flo sings in Eddie's ear: 'Makes you forget your troubles, makes you forget you're sad, makes you feel good and loving ...'.⁶³ As Eddie leaves the club, he whistles and wordlessly sings 'Forget Your Troubles' to himself, creating a parallelism with the earlier scene where he whistled 'Dreams' after leaving Mary's house. Eddie's thoughts of Mary (and dreams for the future) are now being replaced by thoughts of Flo.

The two themes come into direct conflict in the following dream sequence (cues 18–19), which features a variant on 'Forget Your Troubles' that becomes wilder and wilder, crescendoing and accelerating to a dramatic climax.⁶⁴ This is followed by a rather somber and enigmatic variant of the 'Dreams' theme in a whole-tone setting evocative of Debussy, featuring parallel major thirds over a pedal tone (EX. C–4).⁶⁵ Following the transition, Eddie has a tense exchange with Mary, telling her that he's quit his new job and that she should dress differently or do something with her hair. Walking away, he whistles 'Forget Your Troubles' instead of 'Dreams'.

Now the variants begin to get darker. In the 'Washroom Sequence', a supposedly diegetic version of 'Dreams' is played at a party (cues 22–25 and EX. C–5).⁶⁶ It is unusually somber, with the motive played by low-register instruments in F minor (in the style of Duke Ellington's growling Cotton Club-era 'jungle music').⁶⁷ The doleful mood of this variant effectively represents the darkness entering Eddie's life as he plots an upcoming crime with his friends on the sidelines of the dance floor.

Eddie dances with Flo to a syrupy saxophone theme called 'Moonbeams'⁶⁸ (cue 27), after which there is another tragic turn in the story as Eddie enters Flo's apartment, and by means of a clock tower montage, we see that two hours have passed. Steiner's music for this montage (cues 28–32) begins with 'Moonbeams' but is soon transformed into a fragmented, tonally-unstable variant on 'Dreams' that passes the theme back and forth between high and low registers (EX. C–6), followed by a dark F#-minor setting of the same theme played bitingly by brass under tense string tremolos. As Eddie leaves Flo's apartment, the montage concludes with a happy-go-lucky woodwind variant of 'Forget Your Troubles'.⁶⁹ It appears that Eddie's late-night visit has at least temporarily made him forget his troubles.

Arriving home late (and drunk), Eddie argues with his grandmother. After

he shoves her aside and leaves, the ‘Crime Montage’ begins (cues 35–38). First, we hear a violent, syncopated variant on ‘Dreams’ played by low brass (EX. C–7), featuring diminished seventh chords in a tense rising sequence that continually accelerates.⁷⁰ This is followed by a frenetically-repeated fragment of ‘Forget Your Troubles’ over a rising chromatic scale. Onscreen, we see a montage of Eddie drinking, pointing a gun at someone, and counting his ill-gotten gains. In the middle of the crime montage there is an unexpected flashback to ‘Moonbeams’, followed by an abrupt return to the scene of the crime as Eddie strikes a man down with his fist. The cue ends with a dark oscillating gesture that leads seamlessly into the sound of a ticking clock onscreen.

In the following fateful scene, Eddie and his friends, looking for liquor, force their way into a delicatessen owned by Heinie Krantz (an elderly man and family friend). When Heinie refuses to bring them the ‘hooch’ they desire, Eddie impulsively shoots him. Notably, this scene is left unscored, underlaid only with deathly silence as Eddie reflects on what he has done. It’s possible that the omission of music was a conscious artistic choice, but more likely it indicates how studios were still uncomfortable putting music into dramatic scenes (with the exception of montages). As the boys walk away from the scene of the crime, they try to ‘forget their troubles’ (by singing the theme) but this time, it doesn’t seem to work.

A slow, mournful variant on ‘Dreams’ is heard as Mary and the grandmother lament Eddie’s actions, accompanied by a montage of newspaper headlines that describe the killing of a shopkeeper by an unknown assailant (cue 44 and EX. C–8).⁷¹ This thick chordal version of the leitmotif is durationally augmented (quarter-quarter-half) and modulates through a series of third-related keys. According to Steiner’s sketches, this music was an alternative to his initial setting of the newspaper montage (cue 46). EXAMPLE C–9 shows this alternative – a harmonically-adventurous variant for wordless chorus, which would have featured parallel quartal chords and whole-tone chords.⁷²

Although Eddie pretends to be unaffected by Heinie’s death – attempting to pick his life back up where he left it – when his co-workers discuss how the murderer has eluded capture, we hear a distorted and unsettling variant of ‘Dreams’ called ‘Risolutto’, along with another montage of spinning newspaper headlines (cue 47 and EX. C–10). This variant features violent, disconnected fragments of the theme in the lowest register, punctuated by strange, dissonant trumpet effects.⁷³ A mysterious and restless variant called ‘Transition 8B’ (cue 48 and EX. C–11) would have occurred somewhere in this part of the film (perhaps replacing the ‘Risolutto’ variant). This turbulent B $\flat$ -minor variant unfolds over a rumbling ostinato, culminating in an augmented sonority over a dissonant bass.⁷⁴

Eddie responds by becoming more prideful, conspiring with his friends to cover up the crime and refusing to believe that the cops could be smart enough to

catch him.⁷⁵ But they do find him (based on an eye-witness's testimony), and he and his friends are arrested and taken to jail. This is followed by another newspaper montage accompanied by a slower, more legato setting of the 'Risoluto' variant of 'Dreams' (cue 53).

There are likely cuts in this part of the film because the sketches contain cues labeled 'Transition 9' and 'Transition 11' that are never heard.⁷⁶ The first is a dark variant of 'Dreams' (cue 54 and EX. C-12) that features dramatic sigh gestures and accented dissonances in the dark key of A $\flat$ minor, followed by a 'misterioso' section that uses whole-tone sonorities and ends with a dissonant hexachord. The second omission (cue 55) is a setting of Handel's aria 'Lascia ch'io pianga', using the text: 'O Lord! correct me not in thine anger. Have mercy on me, and blot out all my sins'. Although the text suggests penitence, Eddie does not yet display any remorse for his actions.⁷⁷

Eddie relishes the attention that he gets from court reporters, posing for pictures and bragging about his future career in politics. In the culminating trial scene, Eddie's arrogance leads him to dismiss his own lawyer, believing that he could do a better job himself. He even tries to interrogate the witnesses. This attempt backfires as Nick, Eddie's intended alibi, decides to betray him and tell the truth about the murder.

As we see newspaper headlines proclaiming 'Accomplice Accuses Eddie', and 'State Demands Conviction', we hear a chaotic and frenzied variant on 'Dreams' (cue 56 and EX. C-13). Here, motive *x* repeats over a rapid whole-tone ostinato, harmonised with parallel augmented triads in a whole-tone collection. Motive *y* is also used, in a chromatically descending sequence (not shown). As the excitement dies down, a preacher appears and declares that 'this young boy is a product of our civilization'. This solemn assertion is accompanied by a somber combination of both of the main themes from the film (EX. C-14): the slowly-oscillating syn-copated figure of 'Forget Your Troubles' (motive *w*) is played by the horns and 'Dreams' is echoed by a lonely oboe. Note that Steiner times the ending of the cue so that the judge's banging of the gavel corresponds exactly with the final musical statement of the word 'trou-bles'.

At this point in APPENDIX B (cue 58) we have included a cue that does not appear in the film called 'Transition #13'.⁷⁸ Like the previous cue, it combines 'Forget Your Troubles' and 'Dreams' contrapuntally (EX. C-15). The only clues as to its purpose are the words 'Funeral March' in measure 16 and 'bell' in measure 19. We propose that this cue was intended to be used for an existing scene that was left unscored in the film. If the cue were to begin directly after the judge pronounces Eddie's death sentence, it would fit the picture quite well, filling in some awkward silence in the courtroom and continuing into the following scene where Eddie marches down a prison corridor accompanied by the sound of a tolling bell.⁷⁹

Now awaiting execution on death row, Eddie bids farewell to his grandmother, to Mary, and to his little brother Bobby. He confesses his sins, tells Mary that he loves her, and pleads with Bobby not to make the same mistakes he made. As Eddie recites the Lord's Prayer in his cell, we hear the final variant of 'Dreams', called 'Eddie's Prayer' (EX. C-16). Here, Steiner uses organ and wordless chorus to create a penitent and religious mood, in the rather serious key of F minor. The chorus sings a slow and solemn version of the 'Dreams' theme that swells to an expressive climax, followed by a dramatic pause and an 'Amen'-like coda.⁸⁰

The film ends solemnly with a tolling bell and slow fade to black (representing the death of the protagonist) rather than with the usual rousing end title music. However, Steiner did include a more typical end title cue in his sketches, which is another variant of the 'Dreams' theme (EX. C-17).

CONCLUSION

Are These Our Children? is a forgotten film from the pre-code era that is rarely mentioned by film scholars today. And it is certainly no standout for its acting, directing, cinematography, or script-writing. But Max Steiner's sketches reveal important early developments in his application of the leitmotif technique (both in the music heard in the film and in music that was left un-heard). Although he had already completed a number of film scores by this time, in none of them did he attempt to work out, transform, and combine themes as carefully as he has done here. The thematic variations in this film are complex and interesting, representing a broad array of styles and evoking a wide range of emotions. These advancements in his compositional technique, which served him well for so many years at RKO and Warner Bros., might explain why he decided to preserve the sketches from this early film (even in their jumbled and incomplete state) for posterity.

We agree with Platte's assessment that 'Steiner's music for *Are These Our Children?* ... represents the capstone production in Steiner's early Hollywood career'.⁸¹ And it came at a pivotal moment in his career as well. Just days after *ATOC* debuted in theaters, RKO hired a dynamic young producer named David O. Selznick. As Platte notes, 'Steiner's "symphony" for *Are These Our Children?* demonstrated musical capabilities that Selznick would quickly move to capitalize upon'.⁸² With Selznick's support and encouragement, Steiner would soon go on to achieve far greater successes with his scores for *Symphony of Six Million* (April 1932), *The Most Dangerous Game* (September 1932), and most notably, *King Kong* (March 1933). In these landmark film scores, the technique of leitmotivic development that we only 'begin to see' in Steiner's score for *Are These Our Children?* would be more fully realized.

Notes

- 1 *Are These Our Children* premiered in New York City on 13 November 1931 and was widely released the following day (see American Film Institute listing at <http://catalog.afi.com/Film/4117-are-theseourchildren>).
- 2 Steiner's hand-written film score sketches are preserved in the Max Steiner Collection at BYU (Brigham Young University, Max Steiner Collection, MSS 1547). The sketches for *Are These Our Children* were bound together with those of another notable early film score, *Symphony of Six Million* (April 1932). Additional materials from this early period (mostly orchestrations and production documents) are currently preserved in the RKO collection at UCLA (Los Angeles, University of California, RKO Radio Pictures Records, PASC.0003).
- 3 Credit for Steiner's first significant use of the leitmotif technique in film is usually given to *Symphony of Six Million*, which Steiner himself described as 'the most important picture I did as far as trendsetting. But who's heard of it today?', cited in: Steven C. Smith, *Music by Max Steiner: The Epic Life of Hollywood's Most Influential Composer*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 87.
- 4 William H. Rosar, 'Theme Songs without Words: Max Steiner and the Big Theme', *Journal of Film Music*, 9, nos. 1–2, 2018, p. 14.
- 5 Michael Slowik, *After the Silents: Hollywood Film Music in the Early Sound Era, 1926–1934*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 104.
- 6 Nathan Platte, 'Composing Himself: Max Steiner and the Invention of the Film Composer', *Journal of Film Music* 9, nos. 1–2, 2018. Upon examining the sketches for *Dixiana* in the RKO archive at UCLA, Platte notes that 'Steiner's hand in the music manuscripts crops up regularly', p. 113.
- 7 See Nathan Platte, 'A Star is Born: Max Steiner in the Studios, 1929–1939' in: *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound*, New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 257–269, and Platte, 'Composing Himself' for a thorough account of the music for this lost film.
- 8 Slowik, *After the Silents*, p. 184.
- 9 By contrast, MGM had 38 musicians on contract, Paramount had 36, and Fox had 24. See Nathan Platte, *Making Music in Selznick's Hollywood*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 39.
- 10 Platte, 'Composing Himself', p. 115.
- 11 The principal source for the data provided in APPENDIX A is BYU's *Max Steiner Digital Thematic Catalog* (www.maxsteinerinstitute.org), which also contains more detailed cue breakdowns for each film.
- 12 Although *Cimarron* was clearly an 'A-list' (winning the Oscar for Best Picture in 1931), many of the films listed in APPENDIX A can be considered 'B movies', which, as Slowik notes in *After the Silents*, 'rarely contained nondiegetic music outside of the opening and closing credits', p. 187.
- 13 Platte, *Making Music*, p. 40.
- 14 *The Washington Times*, 4 December 1931, p. 34.
- 15 Andrew R. Kelly, 'Wild Youth Film Reviewed', *The Washington Times*, 5 December 1931, p. 8.
- 16 *The Constitution*, Atlanta, GA, 3 January 1932, 9. Not everyone agreed that the film was realistic, however. One reviewer in York, Nebraska commented that '*Are These Our Children?* has just been shown in our local theatre, and it is interesting to note the discussion it has caused. All the young people agreed that it was a good picture, but extreme; and they insisted that none of their crowd lived such extraordinary lives', *Screenland*, March 1932, p. 89.
- 17 Director Wesley Ruggles chose all young unknown actors for the main roles and gathered his extras from 'high schools and the Los Angeles dance halls and night clubs and chop suey parlors', 'What are the youths about these nights', *The Washington Post*, 6 December 1931, section A, p. 1.
- 18 Philip K. Scheuer, 'A Town Called Hollywood', *Los Angeles Times*, 11 October 1931, section B, p. 11. Platte critiques a similar review of *ATOC* published in the *Film Daily*; see

- ‘Composing Himself’, p. 107.
- 19 Slowik notes that ‘from 1929 to 1931 preexisting music constituted a far larger presence in film scores than original compositions’, *After the Silents*, p. 104. This began to change in the period ‘from 1931 to 1933, [which] ... often struck a balance between original and preexisting compositions’, p. 184.
 - 20 Only two pre-existing pieces were used as source music: ‘St. James Infirmary’ and ‘Hold That Tiger’.
 - 21 Peter Wegele notes that prior to this time in Hollywood ‘leitmotifs were rarely developed in complex fashion; rather, they were simply restated when the characters linked to them appeared’. Peter Wegele, *Max Steiner: Composing, Casablanca, and the Golden Age of Film Music*, Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014, pp. 28–29.
 - 22 We are indebted to Stephen Butler for providing access to his vast collection of cue sheet data for Max Steiner’s music at RKO Studios and Warner Bros. This cue sheet data is available online in a searchable format at www.max-steinerinstitute.org/cuesheets.php.
 - 23 In addition to Steiner’s handwriting (in pencil), some of the music has been neatly re-written in ink by a copyist – making no changes to Steiner’s originals.
 - 24 Since this was an early film, Steiner had likely not yet established a procedure for organizing his sketches. The studio may have kept some of the missing pages or he might simply have lost them, unaware that he would be interested in preserving them in the future.
 - 25 An orchestrated version of this dream sequence has been preserved in the RKO collection at UCLA.
 - 26 The seven smaller holes to the left of the hole punches were caused by the stitching that was used to bind the sketches together. The score has since been disbound for long-term preservation.
 - 27 RKO production documents indicate that the name of the film was changed sometime between 4 May (when it was budgeted) and 20 June 1931 (when rehearsals began).
 - 28 Preliminary sketches like these are uncommon in the Max Steiner Collection since Steiner did not usually preserve them.
 - 29 Production documents in the RKO archives show that Steiner was rehearsing music as early as July 8 and held recording sessions with ‘sideline’ musicians (those that appear on-screen in the dance scenes) on July 15, 18, and 29. The last day of shooting was August 27, with the studio orchestra recording sessions taking place on September 10 and 14.
 - 30 Although production documents do not identify any of the copyists, we do learn that the orchestrator for the film was Emil Gerstenberger. The thankless job of orchestration and part preparation was budgeted at \$500 (including supplies), just short of Steiner’s flat fee of \$700 as music director. Notably, the RKO music budget sheets in 1931 do not even have a space for ‘composer’, illustrating just how little recognition film composers were receiving at the time. Steiner made a little bit more than the prop man and the makeup artist, but less than the typists and sound grips.
 - 31 Only two cues from this group were cut from the film – some incidental music and a cue called ‘Transition #13’ – indicating that by this point most of the decisions about which scenes would be in the film and how they would be scored had been made.
 - 32 The seemingly random ordering of the page numbers in ex. 8 illustrates clearly how jumbled the sketches had become.
 - 33 The music on pp. 23–24 is the alternate version of a cue heard in the film but missing from the sketches.
 - 34 Whenever possible, we chose titles based on information provided in Steiner’s sketches or in the cue sheet. Whenever a theme is varied, the variant is given a name in parentheses.
 - 35 This cue is sometimes labeled ‘The Fatal Hour’ in RKO music documents, but we have preferred the title given in the RKO cue sheet, ‘Dreams’.
 - 36 A similarly tight motivic construction can be found in the main theme of Steiner’s 1939 score for *Dust Be My Destiny*, which was used as the basis for 71 different thematic variants depicting a wide range of dramatic situations. See Brent Yorgason and Jeff Lyon, ‘Mono-

- thematicism and Fate in *Dust Be My Destiny* (1939)', *Journal of Film Music*, 10, no. 2, 2022, pp. 79–110.
- 37 Steiner combined the themes three times, but two of these instances do not appear in the film.
- 38 All of the instances of these two themes, along with their variants, are listed in APPENDIX B.
- 39 Slowik, *After the Silents*, p. 14. Thus, a *leitmotif* is a particular type of theme.
- 40 Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif: From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 15. A similar description is given by James Buhler, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer: 'When a musical theme (usually short) is created for a film and then developed (varied, reorchestrated) within that film, the theme acquires some of the properties of a word or symbol, with independent meaning or associations that can be called up when the theme is repeated. In such a case, the theme is sometimes referred to as a *leitmotif*', *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 17.
- 41 Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif*, p. 56.
- 42 Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 373.
- 43 Edith Lang and George West, *Musical Accompaniment of Moving Pictures*, New York: Boston Music Co., 1920; see especially the section about 'Thematic Development' on pp. 8–13.
- 44 For more details, see Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, pp. 375–377, and Slowik, *After the Silents*, pp. 34–37.
- 45 Slowik, *After the Silents*, p. 37.
- 46 Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, p. 377.
- 47 In describing the score for *One Hour With You* (1932 – a year after the release of *ATOC*), Slowik writes that the 'filmmakers are so invested in using music as a narrative tool that they take an extremely unusual step: they allow musical themes ... to be substantially *adjusted and molded* for narrative purposes', *After the Silents*, pp. 165–166. Notably, Slowik does not identify any early sound films that use thematic variation in a significant way prior to 1932.
- 48 Slowik, *After the Silents*, pp. 43, 185.
- 49 Cited in Rosar, 'Theme Songs without Words', p. 13.
- 50 Characters in the film even add self-aware comments about the recurring song: 'Oh, I give up. Every place I turn, it's the same thing, "Since I Lost You". I got a lump in my head listening to that song!'
- 51 Rosar, 'Theme Songs without Words', pp. 11–13. He goes on to suggest that this 'theme song without words' ultimately became the 'big theme' of Classic Hollywood film music, pp. 17–18.
- 52 Cited in: Katherine Spring, *Saying it with Songs: Popular Music and the Coming of Sound to Hollywood Cinema*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 120.
- 53 Rosar, 'Theme Songs without Words', p. 14.
- 54 Platte, 'Composing Himself', p. 118.
- 55 Unlike 'There's a Sob in My Heart', it appears that Steiner made no attempt to market 'Dreams'. No lyrics were penned for the melody and no commercial recordings were ever made.
- 56 Steven C. Smith, *Music by Max Steiner*, p. 77.
- 57 Appendix B illustrates that a good deal of Steiner's music in the film was connected with these transitional scenes. The final film contained nine of these 'Transitions' (see blue cue sheet names), all with music by Steiner. Notes in the sketches and the script indicate that there were at least 14 transitions originally planned. The transitional scenes were not filmed until after principal photography was completed, giving Steiner only a few weeks to complete the bulk of his score.
- 58 Platte writes that *ATOC* 'offered Steiner significantly more space for music than previous efforts'. See 'Composing Himself', p. 118.
- 59 Although we make no claims regarding large-scale tonal structure here, it is interesting to note the overall progression from F major to F minor in the film.
- 60 In order to explain this 'thematic bleeding' to the audience, the director has Eddie comment to Mary's downstairs neighbor through the

- open window: ‘Say, that sure was a swell new record you got!’ to which she replies: ‘I like it’. The need to clarify that the music was coming from the phonograph all along illustrates a common worry among studios at the time, as Steiner himself describes: ‘they had decided you could not have background music unless you showed the source [...] so that people would not wonder where the music was coming from’, cited in: Tony Thomas, *Film Score: The View from the Podium*, South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1979, p. 76.
- 61 The Coney Island scene was cut from the production schedule shortly before filming began (likely for budgetary reasons). Since most of the dialogue referring to this scene was excised from the July 9 shooting script, we (like Flo’s friends), may never know what happened at Coney Island.
 - 62 Strauss, Jr. was Steiner’s godfather and close family friend in his hometown of Vienna.
 - 63 This is the only time the lyrics are heard in the film. But it appears that Flo is actually singing here, and the music the (unseen) orchestra plays comes from Steiner’s sketch (cue 12), so it is clear that this is one of the cues he had to complete before filming. According to production documents, local jazz musicians were contracted to play Max’s music at the Chop Suey Joint for this scene.
 - 64 Here, as in cues 7–8, the transition begins with Eddie humming the music to himself, suggesting that he was perhaps hearing the orchestrated music in his head.
 - 65 An alternative setting of this cue (number 20 in Appendix B) features an octatonic version of ‘Dreams’.
 - 66 Steiner also wrote a bridge and a coda for this variant that are not found in the film, and the first three pages of the cue (including an introduction) are missing from the sketches.
 - 67 Since Steiner was a New York City resident during Ellington’s Cotton Club years, he would have been familiar with this style of music.
 - 68 In the sketches, this is preceded by an omitted dance tune called the ‘Flapper and Eddie Waltz’. (‘Flapper’ is Flo’s name in the script.)
 - 69 All three of these themes have now moved from the diegetic world (as source music on the radio, in a club, and at a dance) to the non-diegetic film score. Cues 31 and 33 provide alternate versions of the music in this transitional scene, using similar content but re-composed.
 - 70 This cue was later published as ‘The Restless Driver (Careening Taxi)’ in: *The Sam Fox Collection of Max Steiner Compositions*, Vol. 1, 1933. This title is unusual since the cue was clearly written for *ATOC* (featuring the ‘Dreams’ motive), but there are no scenes with a ‘careening taxi’ anywhere in the movie.
 - 71 The chromatic swirling effects in the strings (imitating the spinning papers onscreen) are not included in Steiner’s sketches. He must have added this effect later.
 - 72 This is one of the most experimental cues in *ATOC*, using a modern harmonic style that is even more dissonant than many of Steiner’s later scores.
 - 73 The trumpets play high tone clusters purposely out of tune to create a dissonant effect that resembles a rooster’s crowing. Perhaps this was meant to symbolise a ‘wake-up call’ for Eddie.
 - 74 Although it was never used for *ATOC*, this cue was obviously recorded because it was later used as stock music in the RKO films *Hooray for Love* (1935), *The Witness Chair* (1936), and *You Can’t Buy Luck* (1937), films for which no original music was composed.
 - 75 Another party scene here includes live performances of Steiner’s tunes ‘Hey! Hey!’ and ‘Forget Your Troubles’ (cues 49–50). The kids sing fragments of the latter tune as they carouse drunkenly.
 - 76 A ‘Symbolic Transition #10’ is also mentioned in the script, but no music exists for this transition.
 - 77 The shooting script clarifies that this music was sung by a church choir as part of a montage in which various people in the community discussed the details of the murder trial. Production records show that an organist and a choir were paid to record this scene, which was not included in the final cut.
 - 78 If the numbering in the sketches is to be trusted, this would have been used after the conviction scene (‘Transition 12’) and before

- the final scene of contrition ('Transition 14'). Although never utilised in *ATOC*, this cue was eventually published as 'The Fatal Hour (*A Frenzied Dramatic Appassionato Raving and Exhaustion*)' in: *Sam Fox Collection* (1933), p. 15. It was also used as stock music in a few RKO films, including *Behind the Headlines* (1937).
- 79 The music would start at 1:17:14, right after the words 'may God have mercy on your soul'. The script also lists a 'Symbolic Transition #13' at this point in the story.
- 80 Some of the music for this final cue can be found in Steiner's original sketch, but some noticeable changes were made later. The full revised version of the cue is preserved in the RKO archives.
- 81 Platte, 'Composing Himself', p. 118. Platte goes on to say that 'it is possible to perceive in Steiner's early Hollywood years seeds that foreshadow his later work as a composer of theme-driven scores', p. 108.
- 82 Platte, 'Composing Himself', p. 118.