

Proceedings of the Second Max Steiner Symposium, “Film Scoring in the Classic Hollywood Period,” Brigham Young University, November 1–2, 2019

Editorial

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Three particularly significant events at the Second Max Steiner Symposium made 2019 a landmark year for Steiner studies: the premiere screening of Diana Friedberg’s feature-length documentary *Max Steiner: Maestro of Movie Music*,¹ a sneak preview of Steven C. Smith’s magnificent biography *Music by Max Steiner: The Epic Life of Hollywood’s Most Influential Composer* (Oxford University Press, 2000),² and the world premiere performance of John Morgan’s carefully reconstructed score to *King Kong* (1933), performed live to film for the first time by the BYU Philharmonic.³ In addition to these

milestone events, the symposium featured exciting new research by film music scholars gathered from around the globe, an impressive *King Kong* discussion panel, a Halloween night screening of *The Beast with Five Fingers* (one of a handful of Steiner scores in the horror genre), and the official launching of the *Max Steiner Digital Thematic Catalog* (<https://maxsteinerinstitute.org>).⁴ Symposium-goers were also given access to the voluminous holdings of the Max Steiner Collection in Brigham Young University’s Special Collections, with various items on display, such as Steiner’s original film score sketch for *King Kong*, Oscar statuettes, and other memorabilia. Indeed, those in attendance at the symposium were richly rewarded.

This special issue of the *Journal of Film Music*, which I am pleased to have been invited to co-edit with my colleague Jeff Lyon, contains selected papers from the symposium, some of which have been

1 Although its official release was delayed by the worldwide pandemic in 2020, Friedberg’s documentary on the life and work of Max Steiner has gone on to win numerous awards, including Best Documentary Feature at the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival, Best Biography at the Montreal Independent Film Festival, Best Biographical Feature Film at the Cannes World Film Festival, and Best Feature Documentary (The Leo Award) at the Da Vinci International Film Festival (a full list of awards can be found at <https://dianafriedberg.com/max-steiner>). The documentary began streaming on HBOMax in October 2022 and was also featured on Turner Classic Movies.

2 Smith’s meticulously researched Steiner biography was officially published just a few months later. It has been awarded the Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Book Award by ASCAP, the Richard Wall Memorial Award by the Theatre Library Association, and was chosen by BBC as one of the “Best Books about Classical Music” in 2020.

3 Morgan’s score was reconstructed from sketches in BYU (Brigham Young University)’s Special Collections (with insights gleaned from his in-depth discussions of the score with Steiner in his later years) and was recorded by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, conducted by William Stromberg, in 2005 (Naxos 8.557700). The symposium performance was the first attempt

ever made to perform Steiner’s ground-breaking (and quite difficult) score to *King Kong* live to film in a concert setting, complete with no breaks, in front of a capacity crowd. Special thanks should go to BYU Philharmonic director Kory Katseanes, sound editor extraordinaire Ray Faiola, and the BYU students who helped to create the digital score and parts, the click track, and the visual streamers and punches which enabled near-perfect synchrony in the live performance.

4 Videos of the presentations, panels, and demonstrations from the symposium are available online at <https://maxsteinerinstitute.org/symposium2019.html>.

significantly revised and expanded since the date of their initial presentation. This is the certainly the case with the first article in this issue, Tom Schneller's "Tugging at Heartstrings." By collaborating with Tâhirih Motazedian, the contents of his brief presentation have grown into a fully-fleshed-out theory of harmonic schema in the love themes of Classic Hollywood, with a particular focus on the "Heartstring schema" and downstep modulations. Eric McKee also focuses on love scenes in his article "Loving Out Loud," examining how diegetic-to-nondiegetic drifts and jumps influenced the critical reception of the use of music in ballroom love scenes in early sound films.

In contrast to the earlier "Max Steiner: Man and Myth" symposium, research presented at the "Film Scoring in the Classic Hollywood Period" symposium in 2019 was not strictly limited to Steiner's music. Thus, Michael Lee and Sarah Reichardt Ellis's "Fractured Reasons and Fractured Reason" examines expressive doublings found in Roy Webb's film score to the RKO film *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943).⁵

The two articles that follow, featuring collaborative research by the co-editors of this volume, bring renewed attention to two forgotten gems in Steiner's oeuvre: *Dust Be My Destiny* and *We Are Not Alone* (both from 1939). "Monothematicism and Fate" traces the variants of a recurring "Fate motto" in the former film, and "New Surprises" examines the manner in which Steiner develops and subverts the main theme from Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony in the latter. Collaborative research is also evident in "Collections

of Cinema and Media Music Database," in which a cadre of music librarians describe an ongoing initiative to provide an index that will help scholars locate film music resources that are spread across numerous archives and library collections.

In response to the symposium's focus on *King Kong*, Jonathan L. Friedman compares Kong's "climbing motif" to similar gestures in later film and television examples in "Music to Climb By." Next, in "Making Space for Music," Nathan Platte describes the fruitful director-composer relationship between Robert Wise and Max Steiner in the two Warner Bros. films they worked on together: *So Big* (1953) and *Helen of Troy* (1956).

Mariana Whitmer shifts the focus to Westerns in "Steiner's Early Western Film Scores." Her analysis of *Dodge City* (1939) examines Steiner's technique of self-borrowing, as he reuses and adapts material from *Gold Is Where You Find It* (1938). Finally, Peter Wegele uses scenes from *Jezebel* (1938) and *Citizen Kane* (1941) to draw a comparison between the compositional styles of Steiner and Bernard Herrmann in "Composition-Variation-Deconstruction: A Comparison of Two Philosophies of Film Scoring."

This issue of the *Journal of Film Music* features a significant expansion in the amount of multimedia content included with each article, with numerous video and audio examples that will undoubtedly enhance the reader's experience. Jeff and I would like to thank copyeditor Dean Bargh and the other editors at Equinox Publishing for making this possible.

⁵ This article has since been published as a chapter in Michael Lee's *Music in the Horror Films of Val Lewton* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022).