

= Mother Knows Best ( song ) =

" Mother Knows Best " is a song written by composer Alan Menken and lyricist Glenn Slater for Walt Disney Pictures ' 50th animated feature film Tangled ( 2010 ) . Appearing on the film 's soundtrack Tangled : Original Soundtrack ( 2010 ) , " Mother Knows Best " is a Broadway and musical theatre @-@ inspired pop and jazz ballad recorded by American actress and singer Donna Murphy in her role as the film 's villain , Mother Gothel . Lyrically incorporating a series of passive @-@ aggressive insults , the song serves as Gothel 's attempt to frighten Rapunzel into remaining in the tower despite of her constant request to see the floating lanterns so that she may continue to exploit her hair 's regenerating abilities in order to remain youthful . The song is later reprised in a more sinister , vengeful tone by Gothel after Rapunzel openly defies her for the first time .

Menken and Slater deliberately wrote " Mother Knows Best " in the style of an old @-@ fashioned musical theatre song after the directors specifically requested one . Musically , the song is in direct contrast to the more pop @-@ oriented singer @-@ songwriter motif of Rapunzel 's music , which are performed by pop singer Mandy Moore . Meanwhile , Murphy recorded " Mother Knows Best " by imagining Gothel as someone who enjoys being in the spotlight .

Often cited as the film 's best song , " Mother Knows Best " has garnered widespread acclaim from both film and music critics alike , who identified it as a notable standout amid an otherwise unimpressive track list by complimenting its melody , humor and darkness . Murphy 's vocal performance has also been lauded , with critics voicing their preference towards it over Moore 's , while comparing it to the likes of actresses Patti LuPone and Julie Andrews . Additionally , the song has drawn comparisons to the work of Broadway composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim , as well as songs from the musical Les Misérables and Disney 's own The Hunchback of Notre Dame ( 1996 ) , the latter of which Menken himself had also worked on as a composer .

= = Background = =

" Mother Knows Best " was written by composer Alan Menken and lyricist Glenn Slater . Menken and Slater wrote " Mother Knows Best " as a musical theater @-@ oriented song at the behest of the directors , who specifically asked the songwriters to provide the film with " a musical theatre moment " . Menken was initially concerned that the song would not be appropriate for the film 's soundtrack due to its different genre . While Menken conceived the majority of Tangled 's music in the style of a singer @-@ songwriter similar to the work of Canadian musician Joni Mitchell , the composer envisioned Gothel 's songs as " classic " Broadway . Before writing the song , Menken and Slater first researched appropriate moments in the film in which its main characters could possibly perform , observing that " Mother Knows Best " " flows directly out of the conflict between " Mother Gothel and Rapunzel .

Menken revealed that he had observed similarities between Gothel and Claude Frollo , another Disney villain for whom he had written songs while working as a composer on The Hunchback of Notre Dame ( 1996 ) . Menken described Gothel as " a scary piece of work " while " Frollo is a much more sophisticated villain , but easier to understand ... than Mother Gothel " , whose relationship with Rapunzel is more manipulative than the Frollo @-@ Quasimodo dynamic . While writing " Mother Knows Best " , Menken was briefly concerned that " there [ would ] be a rash of children trying to kill their parents after they ? ve seen the movie . " According to directors Byron Howard and Nathan Greno , one of the song 's lines , " getting kind of chubby " , was lifted from an interview the directors had held with several female Disney employees , in which they asked them to describe their relationships with their mothers . Menken revealed that " Mother Knows Best " is a song with which he had ultimately become " very pleased . "

Primarily a Broadway actress , Donna Murphy had never voiced an animated character prior to Tangled , and decided to audition for the role spontaneously . Because the film is a musical , all potential voice actors were required to audition a song of their choice ; Murphy auditioned the song " Children Will Listen " from the musical Into the Woods . Menken said that Murphy , with whom the composer himself had previously worked on his musical Little Shop of Horrors , " brought musical

theater expertise " to the song . Because of the actress ' extensive Broadway and musical theatre background , Menken and the directors were open to her ideas and suggestions about Gothel 's music , on one occasion suggesting an alternate arrangement of " Mother Knows Best " . Murphy envisioned her character as an entertainer , describing her as " somebody who envisions herself periodically being hit with a spotlight " , which ultimately influenced her performance on " Mother Knows Best " . The New York Post writer Lou Lumenick felt that , as songwriters , Menken and Slater had given the film 's " real showstopper " to Murphy . The Korea Times reported that it was only after animator Jin Kim heard " Mother Knows Best " for the first time that he conceived a " 1940s Hollywood screen siren motif " for Gothel 's appearance and personality .

= = Context , sequence and analysis = =

A " big " musical number , " Mother Knows Best " begins within the first fifteen minutes of Tangled during the film 's first act when , on the eve of her eighteenth birthday , Rapunzel finally summons enough courage to ask Gothel for permission to travel and see the floating lanterns in person . Gothel , whose eternal youth and beauty solely relies on the safety and protection of Rapunzel 's magical hair , denies this request by sarcastically reminding her that " mother knows best , " warning her ward that " the world is full of wicked people who want to steal her hair 's magic , " while explaining to her that it 's " for her own good , " claiming to only want to protect her . At one point during the scene , Gothel actually contradicts herself ; Teena Elizabeth of BookMyShow observed , " Gothel has no intentions of letting her go . Though Mother Gothel sings , ' soon , but not yet , ' but ironically later says , ' Rapunzel will never leave the tower ever . ' " Writing for the Tulsa World , Michael Smith observed that Gothel uses the song " as her lie / rationale for keeping the girl safe ( holding her hostage ) from those who might steal her for their own hair @-@ inspired profit schemes . " Amid Amidi of Cartoon Brew felt that the scene is both funny and scary , citing Gothel 's " theatrical gestures " and " claustrophobia @-@ inducing stark black backgrounds " as examples of both . " cementing [ the ] character 's ruthlessness , " Gothel ultimately orders Rapunzel to promise never to ask permission to leave the tower again . Moviefone 's William Goss cited the musical number as an example of " fear @-@ mongering , " which has been defined by Dictionary.com as " a person who creates or spreads alarming news . " Jennie Punter of The Globe and Mail penned , " Mother Knows Best hilariously convey [ s ] the fear and guilt that have kept Rapunzel in the tower of her own free will . " In her book Marvels & Tales , author Kendra Magnusson observed that , during the " Mother Knows Best " musical sequence , " the manipulation of Rapunzel 's hair leaves the heroine 's body wrenched in one moment and bound up in it the next " , depicting that , while Rapunzel 's hair can be used to defend herself , " it is simultaneously a liability " and can just as well be used to harm her .

A writer for Disney.com observed , " The creepiness of this song lies in the fact that the very untrustworthy Mother Gothel is positioning herself as a helpful figure to Rapunzel . " Brian Galindo of BuzzFeed wrote that the song , its purpose having been summarized by Curt Holman of Creative Loafing as " simply to manipulate Rapunzel into staying at home , " " perfectly disguises Mother Gothel 's true motives . " According to Simon Miraudo of Quickflix , Gothel craftily uses the song to guilt trip Rapunzel " into staying in the tower ... frightened into imagining the horrors that lay outside her door . " In her book How Fairy Tales Live Happily Ever After : ( Analyzing ) the Art of Adapting Fairy Tales , author Conny Eisfeld observed that " Mother Knows Best " emphasizes Gothel 's " status of superiority " , in spite of the fact that " her existence solely depend [ s ] on Rapunzel . " Bitch identified Gothel as an abusive mother , writing , " she is manipulative , dishonest , and dedicated to undermining her daughter 's independence . This is shown consistently through all her appearances in the film , but comes out clearly very early indeed , with the song ' Mother Knows Best ' . Critics have often identified the sequence as one of the film 's darkest and edgiest moments . Acknowledging the song 's " extremely dark undertone " , Anthony Falco of Film Class Junkies wrote , " This song rues in the fact that a child is impressionable ; Rapunzel believes that Mother Gothel has the best intentions , but obviously , the evil witch is using the princess for her own gains . Falco continued , " The audience knows what Gothel wants with Rapunzel , but the fact that we are unable

to protect the naïve princess results in further hatred for the witch . " Falco also concluded that Gothel 's " sinister reprise at the end of Tangled allows for these horrifying undertones to emerge , which makes ' Mother Knows Best ' one of the most sinister villain songs in the Disney library . " Similarly , Elissa Smith of Paper Droids wrote that while the audience is fully aware of Gothel 's evil intentions , Rapunzel is denied " the outsider 's point of view . " Glen Chapman of Den of Geek wrote that the scene " strikes a balance between melodic and narrative sophistication , as well as being equal parts sweet and sinister . " Gothel later reprises the song " in indelible fashion . "

= = Music and lyrics = =

According to the song 's official sheet music , which has been published by Walt Disney Music Publishing at Musicnotes.com , " Mother Knows Best " is a " brash , " upbeat Broadway musical @-@ inspired show tune written in the key of F major at a moderate tempo of 66 beats per minute , performed " with rubato . " At a total length of three minutes and ten seconds ? the second @-@ longest song on the film 's soundtrack , behind " I See the Light " ? Io9 author Meredith Woerner described the ballad as a " twisted song about " a mother " sheltering her fake daughter from the real world so she can live forever . " According to Tom Charity of CNN , " Mother Knows Best " is a " grand , theatrical number " with both jazz and pop influences . Michael Smith of the Tulsa World referred to the song as " a bouncy little Freudian nightmare . " Musically , " Mother Knows Best " is an " insidious show @-@ stopper " that utilizes a " cautionary " melody , with one critic identifying it as a " drag ? anthem . " Sharing similar sentiments , Variety 's Justin Chang called the song an " authoritarian anthem . " Describing " Mother Knows Best " as a " fiery number " , Andrew L. Urban of Urban Cinefile wrote that the song 's music and lyrics are " as theatrical as is [ its ] character . " According to Anthony Quinn of The Independent , " Mother Knows Best " is a " creepy @-@ funny ode to self @-@ interest . " Joe Williams of the St. Louis Post @-@ Dispatch described the song as a " Broadway @-@ targeted tune " with " a mercenary undertone . " On the song 's subtle darkness , Filmtracks.com wrote that its " lovely romantic melody and instrumentation is betrayed by its absolutely evil lyrics . "

Lyricaly , the song mentions all " the evils out to get Rapunzel " and is essentially about manipulating ones ' daughter . Featuring " Mommie Dearest @-@ style passive @-@ aggressive putdowns , " The song begins with Murphy speaking , " You want to go outside ? Why , Rapunzel ! " , and features the lyric " skip the drama , stay with mama , " one of the song 's most memorable , according to Kenneth Turan of the Los Angeles Times . As Gothel , Murphy lists several things for Rapunzel to fear , such as ruffians , thugs , poison ivy , quicksand , cannibals , snakes and the plague , in an attempt to deter her from leaving . Teena Elizabeth of BookMyShow also observed that at one point the song contradicts itself , with its lyrics first implying that Rapunzel that can leave " soon , but not yet " , only to eventually conclude , " Rapunzel will never leave the tower ever . " Brian Galindo of BuzzFeed cited " don 't ever ask to leave this tower again " as the song 's " most villainous lyric . " John Roebuck of ReelGood observed that the song 's lyrics are essentially " Snide remarks on [ Gothel 's ] stolen daughter 's appearance and abilities ... disguised as a mothers concern . " Writing for Slant Magazine , Christian Blauvelt felt that the song 's lyrics were similar to those of " Out There " from Disney 's The Hunchback of Notre Dame ( 1996 ) , specifically Judge Claude Frollo 's verse . Both " Mother Knows Best " and " Out There " , in fact , were composed by Menken . Also comparing the song to Menken 's previous work , AllMusic 's James Christopher Monger wrote that " Mother Knows Best " is " cut from the same pop cloth as all of the late 20th / early 21st century Disney offerings . "

Murphy 's vocal range on the song spans roughly two octaves , from the low note of F3 to the high note of C5 . According to James Kendrick of QNetwork Entertainment Portal , the song provides the actress with an opportunity " to stretch her Broadway vocal chops . " Writing for Little White Lies , Georgie Hobbs opined that Murphy " performs ... Mother Knows Best ... with a schizophrenic frenzy " , comparing the song to the work of Broadway composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim , while Jeff Bayer of The Scorecard Review compared it to " Master of the House " from the musical Les Misérables . Meanwhile , Dan Kois of The Village Voice compared the song to Sondheim 's musical

Gypsy . Norman Wilner of Now wrote that Murphy 's " clear , " " belted @-@ out , " " powerhouse " vocal performance , which according to Marjorie Baumgarten of The Austin Chronicle " drip [ s ] with sarcasm and biting wit , " reminded him of Broadway actress and singer Patti LuPone . Meanwhile , Tim Robey of The Daily Telegraph likened Murphy 's performance to actress and singer Julie Andrews , describing it jokingly as " Julie @-@ Andrews @-@ on @-@ stimulants . " According to Bitch , the song 's reprise " features far darker harmonies and a slightly revised melody as compared to the original rendition of the song . " Additionally , the reprise serves as a " dark twist on the original performance with a much more ominous sound in both the singing and the orchestration . "

= = Reception = =

" Mother Knows Best " has garnered universal acclaim from both film and music critics , several of whom were rather unimpressed with the majority of the film 's songs but admitted to having enjoyed " Mother Knows Best " . Writing for The Blade , Kirk Baird opined that most of the songs " aren 't particularly memorable " , except for " Mother Knows Best " . Likewise , Lindsey Ward of Canoe.ca wrote , " the musical numbers aren 't the best things in Tangled -- the exception being ' Mother Knows Best ' , a brash track that scene @-@ stealing Tony @-@ winner Murphy alone turns into a giant spectacle with her voice " , describing it as " a powerful force to be reckoned with . " Acknowledging that , initially , " The songs ... don 't sound on first hearing like top @-@ drawer Menken " , Richard Corliss of Time highlighted " Mother Knows Best " , describing it as " a pot of poisoned honey . " Similarly , Anthony Quinn of The Independent wrote , " The songs are no great shakes ... apart from ' Mother Knows Best ' . " Michael Smith , writing for the Tulsa World , felt that the song 's darkness " remind [ s ] of the nasty bits of the original Grimm 's fairy tale and give [ s ] Tangled a bitter balance for the sugar and spice moments . " Mal Vincent of The Virginian @-@ Pilot described the song as " a good villain entry . " Critics have continuously cited " Mother Knows Best " as the film 's best song . The Scotsman hailed it as Tangled 's " finest song . " Similarly , Nigel Andrews of the Financial Times acknowledged " Mother Knows Best " as one of Tangled 's " best tunes , " while Georgie Hobbs of Little White Lies identified it as the film 's " standout " , deeming it " worthy of the very best of [ Stephen ] Sondheim 's crazed heroines . " Likewise , Ken Hanke of the Mountain Xpress highlighted " Mother Knows Best " as the " standout " song surrounded by " passable ones . " Calling the song one of the film 's " potential Broadway showstoppers " , Steve Persall of the Tampa Bay Times described " Mother Knows Best " as " a knockout . " Also singling out the track as the film 's " finest number " , Dan Kois of The Village Voice called it " a Mama Rose ? worthy tune . " Similarly , Andrea Gronvall of the Chicago Tribune felt that " Mother Knows Best " was one of the more memorable songs of the film , calling it " show @-@ stopping " , and feeling that " Murphy channel [ ed ] all the monstrous smothering power of Mama Rose in Gypsy . "

Murphy 's " scene @-@ stealing " vocal performance has been met with largely enthusiastic reviews , which Filmtracks.com felt was " more accomplished " than Mandy Moore 's . Rolling Stone film critic Peter Travers hailed it as " comic bliss with a sting in its tail . " 7x7 's Rossiter Drake called the actress ' " vocal prowess ... a welcome revelation , " while Hannah Goodwin of Christian Broadcasting Network described it as " wonderful . " The Austin Chronicle 's Marjorie Baumgarten praised Murphy for " bring [ ing ] stage showmanship to her musical interludes as Mother Gothel . " Tom Charity of CNN complimented the actress for " seiz [ ing ] Menken 's grand , theatrical number ' Mother Knows Best ' for the showstopper it deserves to be . " Writing for CNN 's iReport , Julie Ellerton simply described her performance as " exceptional . " GamesRadar 's Jonathan Crocker wrote , " Donna Murphy 's vocal performance as the vain , villainous fake @-@ matriarch is marvellous [ sic ] " , continuing , " her belted @-@ out rendition of ' Mother Knows Best ' is easily the film 's top musical number . " Opining that " Mother Knows Best " is " belted out wonderfully by Murphy " , Linda Cook of the Quad @-@ City Times concluded that the actress " makes the purchase of the soundtrack worthwhile by itself . " Christian Blauvelt of Slant Magazine wrote , " If a couple of Menken 's songs feel less than soaring , it 's due only to the limited pop @-@ star vocals of Mandy Moore as Rapunzel " , concluding , " when Broadway vet Murphy takes to scaling Menken 's octave @-@ climbing melodies like a vocal escalator , it 's a different story . " Sandie Angulo

Chen of Common Sense Media wrote that Murphy 's vocals are " on fabulous display in the amazing number ' Mother Knows Best ' . " William Goss of Moviefone said , " Mother Knows Best " is " belted out perfectly " by Murphy . In review of the film 's soundtrack , AllMusic critic James Christopher Monger observed that both Murphy and Moore " take on the lion 's share of the work , and ... deliver the goods . "

In one of the song 's rare mixed reviews , Wesley Morris of The Boston Globe enjoyed the song itself but felt that it was unnecessary and melodramatic , writing , " The movie doesn 't need [ songs ] , for one thing . For another , their archness ( Gothel sings with a forearm to her forehead ) suggests that the filmmakers want to have it both ways ? to be sincere and to sneer . " James Berardinelli of ReelViews gave the song a negative review , feeling that it was equally as unmemorable as the other tracks and writing , " It 's hard to imagine someone humming ... ' Mother Knows Best ' when leaving the theater . "

Io9 ranked the song 11th on the website 's list of " The 36 Greatest Supervillain Musical Numbers of All Time . " BuzzFeed ranked " Mother Knows Best " 12th on its list of " The 12 Greatest Disney Villain Songs " . Disney.com awarded the song a score of six out of 10 , complimenting Murphy 's " amazing singing voice and showmanship . " The lyric " mother knows best " was recognized and quoted in the book The Quotable Mom : Appreciation from the Greatest Minds in History by Familius .