



VIVIEN LEIGH

Born: Vivian Mary Hartley, November 5, 1913 (Darjeeling, West Bengal, India); died 1967 (London, England).

Star qualities: Radiant petite beauty; blue-green eyes; brown hair; superb stagecraft; played the powerful and vulnerable with emotional intensity.

Like that of Orson Welles, the nature of Vivien Leigh's Hollywood starring debut was so mythic that some degree of anticlimax thereafter was virtually inevitable. The story of her casting as Scarlett O'Hara is a fairy tale, stepping in at virtually the last minute after producer David O. Selznick had poured \$50,000 into a two-and-a-half year-campaign to find the perfect actress. Leigh was on a visit to New York to see her lover and future second husband, actor Laurence Olivier, when the couple met Selznick, who invited her for a screen test. Not exactly unknown in Hollywood—several of her British films of the 1930s had been well received—Leigh was by no means a star, and it was a risk for Selznick to cast her. It helped that she was a perfect match for the character physically, and any problems of accent and style were carefully smoothed over in what is still an arresting and commanding performance.

Immediately after *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Hollywood tried hard to consolidate her Oscar-winning success in *Waterloo Bridge* (1940), in which she is equally radiant, yet she made only nine more screen appearances. Most of them were in historical or classical roles such as Lady Hamilton, Cleopatra, and Anna Karenina, and she also worked widely in theater.

There was a second Oscar for Best Actress as another Southern belle in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), but the second half of her career was clouded by mental and physical illness. She suffered from tuberculosis and was diagnosed as suffering from bipolar disorder, and she

gained a reputation as a difficult person to work with. Her mental health and its accompanying mood swings and erratic behavior also cast a cloud over her marriage to Olivier, and in 1960 the couple eventually divorced. **MC**

Top Takes...

- Ship of Fools* 1965
- The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* 1961
- The Deep Blue Sea* 1955
- A Streetcar Named Desire* 1951 ★**
- Anna Karenina* 1948
- Caesar and Cleopatra* 1945
- That Hamilton Woman* 1941
- Waterloo Bridge* 1940
- 21 Days* 1940
- Gone with the Wind* 1939 ★**
- Sidewalks of London* 1938
- A Yank at Oxford* 1938
- Storm in a Teacup* 1937
- Dark Journey* 1937
- Fire Over England* 1937
- The Village Squire* 1935

"As God is my witness, they're not going to lick me!"

—Scarlett O'Hara, *Gone with the Wind*

RIGHT: Vivien Leigh tussles with hunk Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

