

The Rhythm Kings
Backstory/Character Tree: Roberta "Bobbie" Lane
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Roberta May Lane was born on June 10, 1945 in Detroit, Michigan to Reverend Franklin Lane and wife Thelma Louise. She was the baby of seven children (four boys and three girls). "Bobbie," as she was called from an early age by friends (though never by her father), grew up singing gospel at Rev. Lane's church. By the time she was ten, she began singing solo in front of the choir and gathering a reputation amongst parishioners as "the little girl with soul."

As a child, Roberta was very close to and in awe of her daddy, tending to view him as Godlike. Her father, a strict but basically loving man, held a special place in his heart for his baby girl as well. Roberta was a very bright child and obedient daughter, basking in the love of her father and eager to shower him with affection. She was "Daddy's little girl," and her phenomenal vocal gift, the way she could raise the spirit of his congregation, endeared him to her even more.

As she reached late adolescence, the character traits that would define her adult personality became clear. Her vocal prowess (and the admiration it engendered in others) gave her a supreme sense of confidence, an inner security. Roberta's singing and her early recognition that it set her apart from others largely defined her sense of self, and created a spring-board toward positive psycho-emotional growth.

Hence, as she reached her mid-teens, Roberta's facility to enchant precipitated the development of strong powers of will and imagination ("Throat"). By 17, Bobbie was a petite '5"5, 103 lbs., vivacious, extremely attractive and increasingly at odds with her father. She had begun to date, wear make-up, and, to Rev. Lane's intense disapproval, dream of a career in popular music. Her love for gospel music didn't abate, but now she saw greater possibilities. And, although she still loved and respected her father, the emotionally mature and insightful Roberta no longer viewed him as infallible; rather, he came to seem didactic and narrow-minded. At 18, Bobbie began singing R&B and Blues standards at Detroit-area clubs, moving out of her father's house and into an apartment with some girlfriends. If not wholly estranged, the relationship between father and daughter became severely strained.

Now on her own, the once relatively sheltered Roberta learned to trust her instincts ("Feet") when dealing with thieving and mendacious club-owners, over-friendly boyfriends and audience members, and a generally hostile white world. She became a bit harder, more wary, but basically retained a thoughtful and compassionate nature ("Right Shoulder"). Bobbie was the kind of young woman who would (and did) spend two solid days and nights on a bus to visit her ailing sister Bethanie in Georgia. Once there, she took over the cooking, washing and cleaning, nursed Bethanie back to health, and made sure her sister's children did their homework. Bobbie cares, and she knows what it means to be a true friend.

In a social environment poisoned by racial prejudice, Roberta from the time we meet her nonetheless appears relatively free of judgmental attitudes toward whites ("Left Shoulder"), a fact illustrated by her romantic involvement and subsequent marriage to Lucas Carver. It isn't until the crisis year of 1968 that simmering resentments and expanding identification with black empowerment (sic) alter her attitude. As with any vibrant young lady coming of age in the '60's, sexual desire ("Groin") plays its part in Bobbie's life, though she is too mature to allow that impulse to overrule her, and too prim as a minister's daughter besides. Authentic emotional relationship is far more important to Roberta. Even so, Bobbie might be called a sensualist in that she's comfortable with her body, aware of her attractive appearance and not above making a romantic (as opposed to baldly sexual) advance.

As a soul singer par excellence who frequently contributes valuable ideas to the live staging and production of the music she makes with the Rhythm Kings (sic), Roberta is professionally knowledgeable ("Left Cheek"). As the film progresses her knowledge of social and political events grows more keen as well, contributing to the friction that will develop between her and Carver. One of Bobbie's most appealing and dominant personality traits might be called "heart wisdom" ("Right Cheek"). She is a warm, sensitive, genuinely loving woman who knows what's important in life: personal integrity, honesty, passion and authentic relationship with others. People sense this, and are drawn to her.

Unlike Lucas Carver, Roberta is not strongly driven by need ("Heart"), nor is she obsessed with obtaining a particular goal. As noted previously, she operates from a position of inner security and relative self-confidence, hence she's not out to prove herself, or heal herself, in the same way Carver is. For the most part she

knows who she is, which is why, along with the qualities mentioned in the above paragraph, Lucas finds her so attractive when they eventually meet.

Like Lucas, Bobbie wants to be successful and possesses a healthy ego, but also like Lucas, she's not motivated by glory-lust ("Right Hip"). Roberta's drive toward victory/success ("Left Hip") isn't as pronounced as Carver's -- since she isn't as compelled by need -- though she works for it just as hard. Victory for her is closely aligned with inspiration ("Crown"), and again like Carver, Bobbie is inspired by the healing power of music.

In 1965, at the behest of *Crossroads Records* owner/producer/impresario Marshall Holtzman (sic), Roberta travels to the swamp-surrounded *Crossroads* studio in Rain Creek, Alabama to begin her recording career with the Rhythm Kings. Holtzman's coaching and Carver's exceptional band behind her, she learns how to fuse the ecstatic uplift of gospel music with the down-and-dirty tendencies of stripped-down R&B, to muster a throaty belt *and* a pure, caressing tone. In doing so Roberta helps create a new brand of American music. It is that music -- *soul* music -- which becomes the abiding passion of her life, a passion she's inspired to share with others. The scale of Bobbie's inspiration is more modest than Carver's because it isn't fueled by internal rage, but it's no less genuine.