

UP ABOVE MY HEAD – STORY REPORT

TITLE: Up Above My Head **GENRE:** Drama
WRITTEN BY: B. Parker **LOCALE:** Chicago, IL
BASED ON: Rosetta Tharpe **CIRCA:** 1915-1973
FORM/PAGES: _____ **DATE:** 9/24/2021
DRAFT DATE: _____ **ANALYST:** Penda L. James
SUBMITTED TO: Michelle Murray **PAGES READ:** ALL
SUBMITTED BY: _____

CREDITS (if applicable): _____

DIRECTOR: _____

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
PREMISE:	X			
EXECUTION:		X		
STRUCTURE:		X		
DIALOGUE:		X		
CHARACTERS:		X		

PROJECT for Development: Pursue

PROJECT for Production: Pursue

WRITING SAMPLE: Pursue

LOGLINE: A woman must use her gift of music in order to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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SYNOPSIS:

ROSETTA THARPE is the daughter of negro parents in Arkansas. Her mother, KATIE BELL, is a traveling Pentecostal Evangelist and can play some music. Her father, WILLIS ATKINS, is a farmer with no aspirations outside of his pig/cotton farm. Rosetta watches her mother play the mandolin and around the age of three, learns from her mother how to play. When she picks up the instrument she plays as if she has been trained for years, however her mother recognizes it as a gift from God and nurtures her music with spiritual training and music experience.

Rosetta plays the mandolin in service when her mother is speaking in church. This grows her musical talent and gives her a strong following in the community. In a service, Katie hears about opportunities for negroes in Chicago and wants to move her family even though she does not like the cold weather. When she mentions the idea to Willis, he is uninterested in the move. Katie, with hopes set on bettering her family refuses to stay in staying in Arkansas. Katie leaves Willis behind and boards a train to Chicago, hoping that Willis would join them later.

By the time Rosetta is a teenager, she draws the attention of a celebrity, ARIZONA DRANE, a blind recording artist who invites Rosetta to join her on a musical tour for three months. Katie is reluctant to allow Rosetta to join the tour but feels the unction of the holy spirit to allow her to go and reminds her that playing her guitar is how God will use her to spread the good news of the gospel.

While on tour, Rosetta meets BISHOP TOMMY THARPE, a single pastor of the Pentecostal church. Katie has a plan to get them together so that Rosetta can marry him and become the First Lady of his church. Rosetta does not want to get married and Katie pressures her with the idea causing Rosetta to relent and marry him. Immediately Bishop Tharpe changes his ways toward Rosetta and becomes strict with his treatment of her. He tells her how to dress, when to play her guitar, what to play and when to speak. Bishop Tharpe is jealous of Rosetta and does not tell her that people are traveling to the church to hear her play. Rosetta is grieved in her marriage to the point of wanting to leave her husband. Katie encourages her to stick it out and Rosetta develops a friendship with the leader of the Pastor's Aide committee, SISTER ROSIE.

In a casual conversation, Sister Rosie expresses her marital frustration and the two women become close. When Bishop Tharpe preaches a sermon about Rosetta on a Sunday morning, she gains the courage and strength to leave him. Rosetta and Katie move to Harlem and invite Sister Rosie to join them which she eventually does.

While in Harlem, Rosetta begins to work at the Cotton Club and signs a contract (without reading it) stating that she will play any song that is requested of her, at times the music is to her chagrin. Sister Rosie chooses to return back to her husband in Chicago to make her marriage work. Rosetta continues to play and sing, gaining a large following across the country and going on a tour of her own.

While on tour she gives opportunities to other singers such as the JORDANAIREs and a young singer by the name of MARIE KNIGHT who joins her on tour and eventually becomes a close friend/lover. After a tragedy where her Mother and two children are killed in a house fire, Marie returns home to start a solo career. Rosetta continues to record music and tour. She receives a prophecy from PROPHETESS DOLLY, one of her mother's colleagues to be careful, but does not heed the warning.

As her career wanes and sales decline for her music, RECORD EXECUTIVES create a plan to have her get married at a stadium, sell merchandise and revive her career. Rosetta, despite having a relationship with Marie, decides to marry a man she met one time, RUSSELL changes all of the contracts, takes her money, is unfaithful and leaves her at the end of her life with no true estate.

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COMMENTS:

Stories about the African American experience are at times told through the lens of people who have exaggerate the story adding unnecessary details, or who have no direct connection to the community and make gross assumptions. In this case, the writer has chosen to submit a screenplay about the life of Rosetta Tharpe who is an important figure not only in gospel music from the 1930s through the 1950s, but for the foundation of what later became the Rock 'n Roll genre of music. This film has the potential to reach a wide audience of viewership due to the message of faith and music; it will translate to views intergenerationally and interculturally.

When music and other art forms were thriving in the Black community, historical accounts of the accomplishments of Black people are rare, either because records were not kept, or their legacy was erased. *Up Above My Head* is a compelling biographical tale of an important figure in music who shaped and influenced many artists. These performers took notes from Rosetta Tharpe and made a name for themselves without crediting her work or legacy.

The characters for *Up Above My Head* are relatable. There is fear, betrayal, love, creativity, loyalty, and family; values that anyone could find themselves understanding and connecting to within the characters. The characters have a foundation that equips the viewer to understand their background, desires, and conflicts. Because this is a story based on a real person, some of the details to form the back story of each character are necessary for the development of the characters. The setting is clear, and it was easy to visualize the characters in their daily activities with the dialogue and slug lines working together to paint the full image.

The writer does need to make some typographical corrections within the script in some areas, however, these errors do not prevent one from understanding the story, or the premise of *Up Above My Head*. Once the writer makes the corrections and resubmits the screenplay, this project and the writer would be an ideal investment for this production company.