

## Chapter 2

### DEFINING CHARACTER, BEHAVIOUR AND PERSONALITY: CLUES TO THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SUN, MOON & ASCENDANT

Very often, the first 'way in' to reading a horoscope – or to grasp its essence quickly – is to consider the Big Three: the Sun, Moon and Ascendant, either individually or as a trio. Together, these three complexes (their sign and house position and aspects from planets) form the fundamental components and core dynamics of a birth chart and act as excellent starting points for following trails and spotting chart themes.

When beginning to synthesize these areas, it's vital to keep in mind that the meanings of the Big Three are not interchangeable: the Sun in Taurus is not the same as the Moon in Taurus and when Taurus is placed on the Ascendant, it is quite distinct from its role as the Sun or Moon sign. The characteristics of Taurus (the *how*) will be present when it's the sign of any of the trio, but the *why* (the driving force, energy, motivation) and possibly the *where* (the area of life affected) will be different.<sup>1</sup>

So, what are the main distinctions between the Sun, Moon and Ascendant? One way of considering the Big Three is to examine the differences between the meanings behind the words 'character' (the Sun), 'behaviour' (the Moon) and 'personality' (the Ascendant). These words are often used interchangeably, but a deeper exploration of their meanings can shed light on interpreting this astrological trio.

#### **Character: The Sun**

*Our essence, vocation, type of 'heart'*

The Sun reveals our main life purpose, core reasons behind why we've been born and what we're in the process of becoming. When we express our Sun complex (its sign and house position and aspects), we are acknowledging our birthright: the opportunity to manifest our individual life path and potential. Each Sun sign

and Sun-planet combination is an *archetype* (a pattern or a set of symbolic images) that each of us can strive to embody.

Interestingly, the Sun is often reduced to a *stereotype*, thanks to an oversimplified formula of adjectives and keyword traits used to assist chart interpretation. Although these keywords can be helpful, the Sun's meaning invites a more subtle interpretation. It shows how we envision our individual life path and what essentially are the most important things in life to us.

Our character is a collection of fundamental, integral philosophies that we have gathered over time. I link the Sun to the process of the *development of character*. Character is an *accumulation* of traits, responses and behavioural patterns (underscored or challenged by other parts of the chart) that becomes the *central direction, focus and set of beliefs* in a person's life. The embracing of character (the Sun: its message, its archetype) leads to healthy self-esteem and a path of integrity and wholeness (again, concepts linked to the Sun placement, through which we are encouraged to 'follow our bliss'). Character is more difficult to ascertain in ourselves and others, and like the sometimes elusive nature of the Sun in our horoscope, it takes time for us to uncover it – and time for it to reveal itself.

### **Behaviour: The Moon**

*Our needs, habits, sensory input and impressions*

The Moon complex reveals our fundamental relationship needs, drives and expectations. It shows our innate responses to everyday life. At worst, this can be habitual behaviour that we are slaves to, or a 'default' position where we simply absorb experience passively or become little more than 'a bundle of reactions'.<sup>2</sup> The Moon can reflect our most tender, vulnerable and immature side – a storehouse of emotions. The Moon speaks of what we're attached to, what we need to feel safe and rooted.

Our behaviour is a collection of instincts formed to create a complex pattern. It is an interconnected web of habitual responses – with the chief aim of remaining safe and being looked after. Here, we recognize some of the key functions of the Moon. For instance, the Moon in Gemini learns to be informed on a variety of topical issues – ready for exchange and discourse – in order to be, and feel, needed. For the same reasons, Taurus learns to be the loyal,

dependable rock, to build ties that last and to embody a set of firm guiding principles.

Behaviour is how we *conduct* ('bring together') ourselves to create a range of responses in ourselves and those around us. Another word that is descriptive of the Moon, astrologically, is *temperament*, which is often linked to the four elements (the four 'humours' that were said to make up our disposition). But the Moon is a mix of elements of the emotional realm; it reveals our emotional nature.

### **Personality: The Ascendant**

*Our approach to life, interactions, a role/part we play*

The Ascendant is a symbol of our one-to-one, meet-and-greet personality that we rely on to socialize. It is a vehicle we use to interact with others – our personal interface, a cloak we wear to 'appear' to others when we walk out of our front door. I like to think of the Ascendant as our opening position and overt agenda (quite different from the hidden, sometimes painful agenda revealed by the Moon).

Essentially, the Ascendant is a collection of expectations we have of the world and our immediate place in it. The Ascendant reveals the first impressions we make and receive – and these start as early messages about our behaviour ('good/bad' and 'right/wrong') and how we attempt to meet the expectations of others through our actions as children.

The personality is seen in the Ascendant complex (most importantly its sign and major planetary aspects to its degree). It is the *variable means by which we negotiate* our needs with others (as seen by our Moon) and formulate or build something we can identify as character (as seen by our Sun). In other words, the Ascendant acts as an interface between the Sun or Moon (or other parts of the chart) and the immediate world around us.

With 'personality', there is *energy* – a particular attitude, humour, engagement and interaction. This energy is quite different from the accumulation of early (lunar) behaviours or the formation of (solar) character.

Personality is easy to pick up on, quick to read and decipher – usually upon first meeting someone (Ascendant). I've found that it shows up in personal mottos (e.g., 'No pain, no gain,' says the

Scorpio Ascendant person; ‘If you want it done, you have to do it yourself,’ the Aries Ascendant realizes) – although the *combination* of Ascendant and Midheaven signs is often more descriptive of lifelong mottos or creeds.

Personality traits have little to do with our true character. They are what we show to others (our appearance, in many ways) and the means we use to get through life. Astrologically, the Ascendant is often seen as the vehicle by which we reach the Sun’s destination (i.e., our life goal). It is the route to getting our needs (Moon) met in relationship and how we negotiate these personal needs in a one-to-one environment.

So, here is a quick summary:

- The Sun (core character) is linked to our central purpose, goal, focus and life path; a *journey* of self-discovery – the process of becoming whole.
- The Moon (behaviour, temperament) speaks of our needs and habitual responses to everyday life; our emotional nature: a bundle of reactions and a storehouse of feelings.
- The Ascendant (one-to-one personality) reveals our approach to life; the tools we use to interact with others; our first impressions (made and received).

The Sun is the very heart of our horoscope, but the Ascendant and Moon say more about our personality and behavioural traits. These two chart factors are of far greater importance when considering how people come across, behave, react and interact in life. Both are key to relationship patterns and dynamics that start early in childhood with family members and schoolmates, and form the basis of expectations (and roles played out) in love, work and friendship. The Sun is more concerned with a journey, a path of self-discovery and our major life statements. It is the ultimate path, the archetype that we are here to embrace and embody.

In short, the Sun-Moon-Ascendant trio offers a quick ‘way in’ to the major traits of a person – their character, behaviour and personality. How do the Big Three work together in a horoscope? And how can they provide trails to discover key themes?

### The Original Dreamgirls:

#### The Sun-Moon-Ascendant Combinations of the Supremes

Let's consider the Sun-Moon-Ascendant trio in the horoscopes of the most successful girl group in music history, the Supremes.

Who would imagine that three young women would have such different destinies? One would stay with the group to the bitter end 18 years after it started, one would die tragically at age 32, and one would achieve stratospheric success as a solo artist - and bear the brunt of the other girls' relative post-group failures.

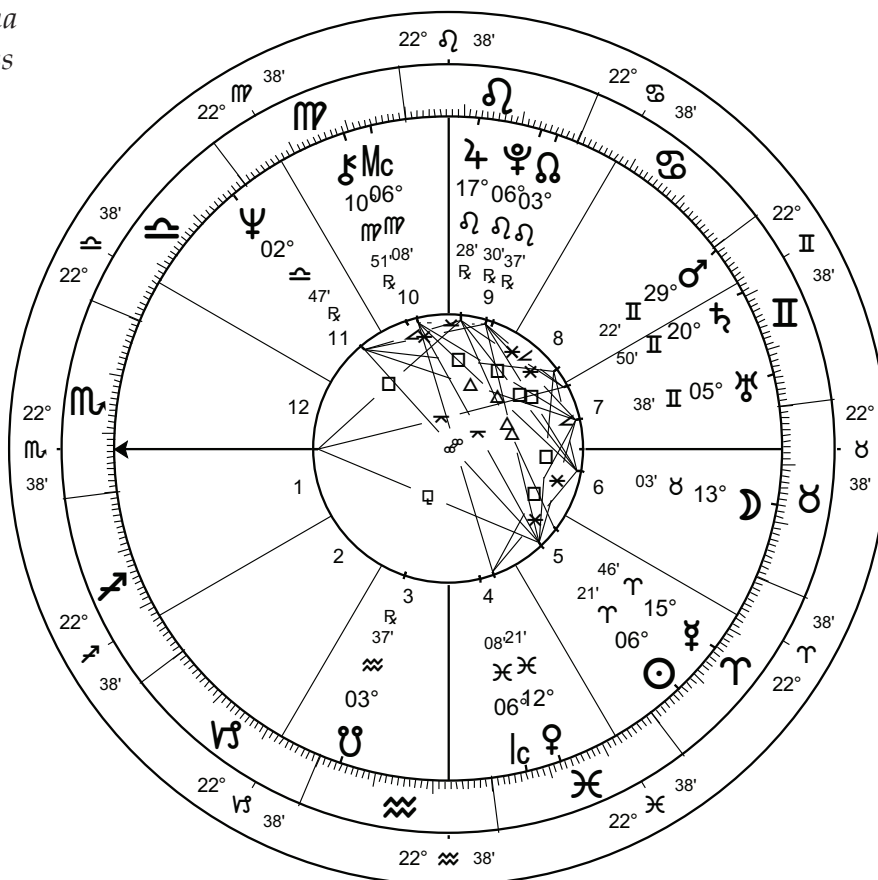
In the 1960s, the music scene was defined by the Beatles, Elvis, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones and three innocent girls-next-door from Detroit: Diana Ross, Mary Wilson and Florence Ballard. They formed the Supremes and their music was the soundtrack to the 1960s era of social change. Diana, Mary and Florence were role models of African-American empowerment - their appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was a landmark moment for 'coloured people' on American TV. Diamonds in the rough, the Supremes were polished by Berry Gordy's Motown hit factory, and each singer morphed into the epitome of sequined star power: glamorous and elegant, with poise and panache.

Diana Ross, with impatient ambition and single-minded focus, was promoted to lead singer. The group first hit the Top 40 charts in June 1964, when Uranus transited over Diana's Midheaven (MC). Soon Diana was having an affair with the married Gordy (apparently consummated on 15 April 1965, as transiting Saturn conjoined her Venus, and Uranus opposed it).

Over the next few years, the group had a string of hits that topped the charts and they became world-famous. But before long, Gordy was grooming Diana Ross for solo stardom; it seemed that Mary and Florence has become little more than excess baggage. Diana Ross went solo in January 1970 and Gordy washed his hands of the original group, choosing to focus on steering Diana's music and film career.



Diana  
Ross



Diana’s first audition for Gordy had been in the summer of 1960, when transiting Pluto was conjunct her MC. Aptly for the transit, Gordy would become Diana’s professional father, controlling mentor, lover, and father to her first-born. She nicknamed him ‘Black’. His tunnel vision about Diana and his Svengali-like control (Pluto) over her can be seen by his natal Moon in Scorpio, his Venus on Diana’s Ascendant, and his Saturn exactly opposite her Mars.<sup>3</sup>

Let’s take a look at the Sun–Moon–Ascendant combination for each member of the trio.

### Diana Ross

*Sun in Aries, Moon in Taurus, Ascendant in Scorpio*

Two of Diana’s Big Three are in fixed signs (tenacity, staying power, persistence), and there’s a Mars–Pluto theme with Aries and Scorpio highlighted (drive, combative energy, selfishness,

power). The latter signature is underscored by its links to the Big Three:

- The Sun in (out-of-sign) square to Mars;
- The Sun in exact (partile) trine to Pluto;
- The Ascendant ruler, Mars, in the 8th House;
- The Moon in square to Pluto.

In addition to Diana's trio being Mars- or Pluto-themed, the Sun is in the 5th (by Equal houses, and on the 5th cusp by Placidus) and opposite Neptune. Neptune is that intangible, special 'something' that suggests star quality – the X factor. In a performer, it is charisma, stage presence, magical allure, longevity and – most importantly to the music moguls – the promise of mainstream commercial success that transcends all cultural barriers. The Sun in Aries in the 5th opposite Neptune suggests an illusion of warmth, intimacy and approachability (the diva wanting to 'reach out and touch' her audience's hands). With this placement and the Moon square Jupiter in Leo, Diana personifies the modern-day idea of diva-hood: the demands, perfectionism, fashions and all-consuming vanity. In short, the haute and hauteur.

The Supremes were the first glamorous African-Americans sold to a white, pop music audience – a lacquered Neptunian fantasy. They created a bridge between white conservatism and black radicalism at a time in the mid 1960s when the Uranus-Pluto conjunction opposed Saturn. But it is Ross's Neptune- and Mars-tinged horoscope (absent in the charts of Wilson and Ballard) that indicates her ability to project glamour to the masses (Sun opposite photogenic Neptune) and channel her ferocious drive to attain excellence (Mars) and realize her dreams (Neptune). At times, Neptune has also been evident in her struggle to maintain control (Scorpio), personally and professionally.

Neptune's downside is the backlash of scandals and allegations, of being tarnished by rumours. Public perception of Diana's temperamental behaviour brought unparalleled criticism, thanks to Mary Wilson's disingenuous book (published in October 1986, as transiting Neptune conjoined Diana's Solar Arc Ascendant). Music historian David Nathan wrote, 'Diana personified a myth ... [a powerful woman] to be scorned, disliked and diminished.'<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps she has never overcome the public's inability to reconcile her soft onstage image and Venusian voice with her ruthless Martian drive: 'The lure and slink of the kitten, and the claw of the tigress.'<sup>5</sup> Her wispy, sensual, coquettish voice and waif-like appearance (the Venusian and Neptunian feel to the chart) are at odds with her dynamic ambition and self-centredness (Mars, Aries, Scorpio). It seems women are seldom forgiven for going after what they want.

Diana Ross is a living embodiment of the power of positive action – a testimony to dedication, hard work and self-belief. With the support of Gordy, she created an image and nurtured her talent and willed herself to become the first female African-American global superstar. In 1976 and 1996, *Billboard* magazine named her Female Entertainer of the Century. The Sun in Aries and Moon in Taurus combination is suggestive of the childish stubbornness she showed during her early fame, being a 'chiffon battering ram', having grit and grace, or, as one critic put it, 'part guts, part geisha'.

### **Mary Wilson**

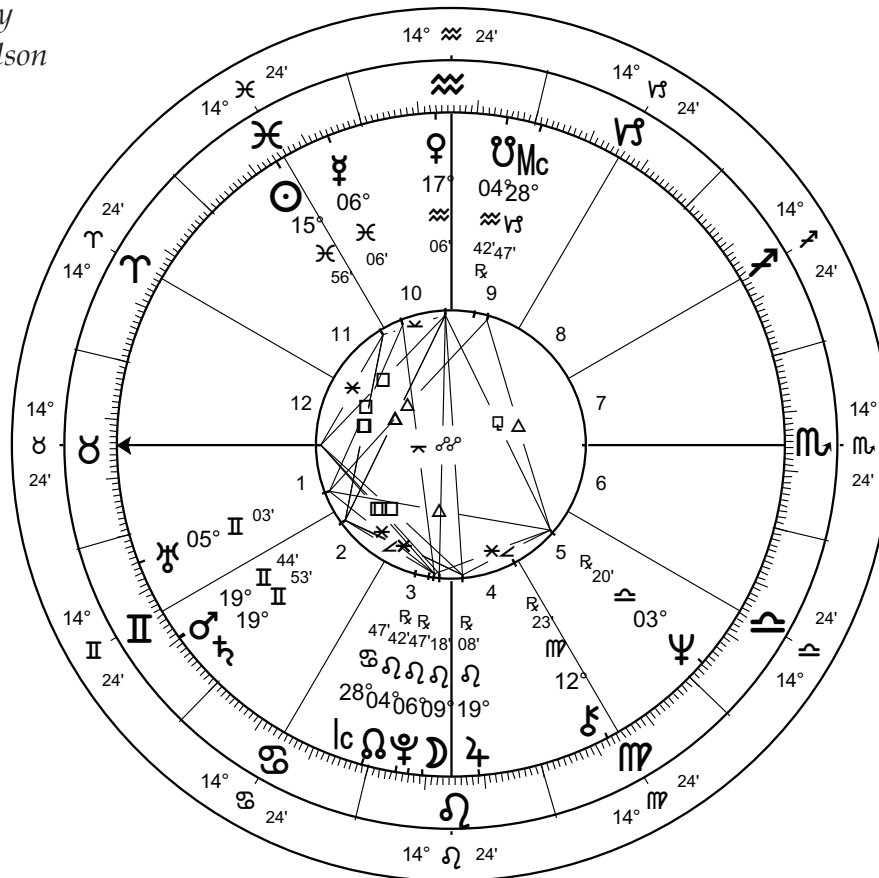
*Sun in Pisces, Moon in Leo, Ascendant in Taurus*

Wilson's Big Three attest to her enduring (Taurus) theatricality and drama (Pisces, Leo) and a tenacious spirit (fixity). Through books, fashion exhibitions, and line-ups of new Supremes members, Wilson has soldiered on (Taurus) to keep the magic of the Supremes alive (Pisces) – a proud keeper of the flame (Moon in Leo). Now a goodwill ambassador and motivational speaker, Mary Wilson offers her 'Dare to Dream' lecture, which emphasizes the need for personal perseverance (Taurus Rising) in order to achieve goals and dreams (Sun in Pisces).

With the Ascendant in Taurus, Mary Wilson has been territorial about the group and, since its dissolution, she has *stood firm* to keep hold of her part in the *rightful ownership* of the brand: she spent many years fighting Motown for the right to use the name of the Supremes in her concerts (whereas Ross was automatically granted that privilege), and she has helped to create legislation that prohibits impostor groups from using the names and likenesses of famous acts.

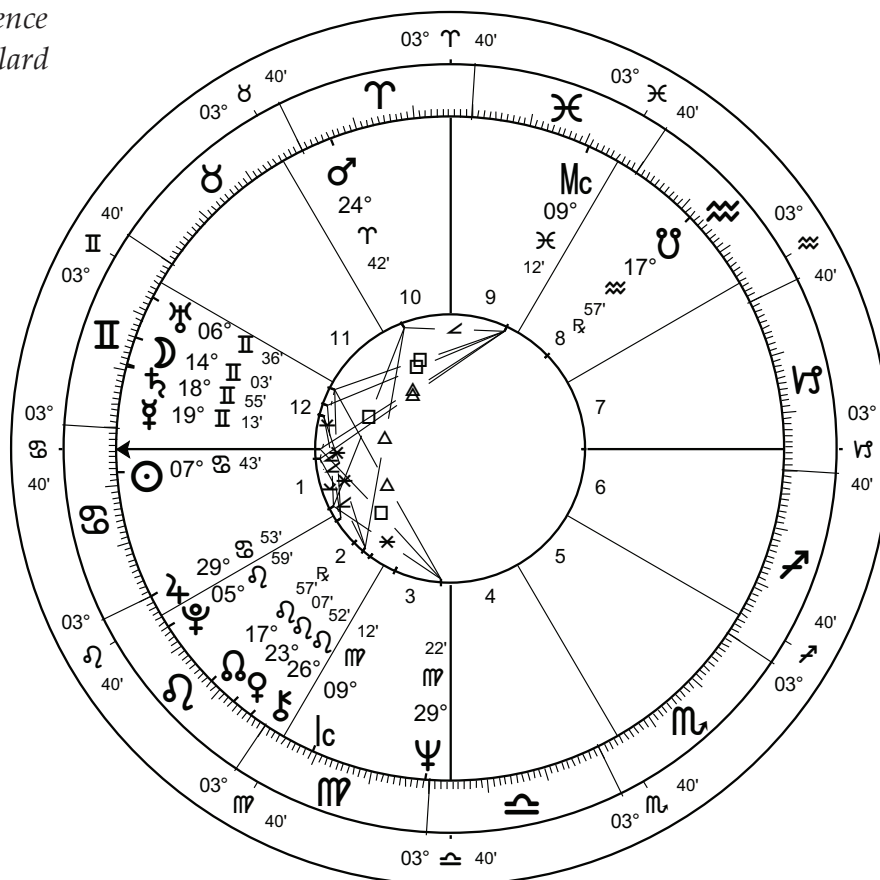


Mary  
Wilson



But with the Sun in Pisces, Wilson seems to have become a living, suffering martyr to the Supremes' cause, someone who felt (justifiably, perhaps) wronged by Motown, pained by Ross's attention-grabbing antics, and overlooked by music historians. Holding on to resentment (fixity, Moon-Pluto in Leo) for being in the shadow of her more luminous rival, Wilson seethed through two volumes of autobiography, painting Ross as vain, selfish and ruthless. (Her Sun squares Mars-Saturn in Gemini, suggesting a journey of learning to speak up for herself, as well as the bitter war of words between her and Diana.) Tellingly, her Ascendant is conjunct Diana's Moon in Taurus, and the pair share fixity (obstinacy, firmness, attachment to unwavering principles), Mars in Gemini and a Moon-Pluto aspect. Mary appears to relish her role as a persistent thorn in Diana's posturing, preening side, and seems determined to keep the (one-way?) vendetta alive.

Florence  
Ballard



### Florence Ballard

*Sun in Cancer, Moon in Gemini, Ascendant in Cancer*

Flo Ballard's Big Three lead us to the major dynamics of her chart: the focus on the Water sign of Cancer and its powerfully placed ruler, the Moon, which is conjunct Uranus, Saturn and Mercury in Gemini. In her short life, Ballard went from celebrated Supreme to an erratic, defiant nuisance who was ejected from the group (on 1 July 1967) for gaining a reputation for unreliability and a dependency on alcohol (note the Pisces MC and Neptune square the Ascendant). The following year, she attempted a solo career and began legal wrangles with Motown (both in vain). By 1975, she was on welfare to help feed her three young children. When Ballard died from a blood clot on 21 February 1976, she was only 32 years of age.

In truth, Flo felt abandoned and betrayed (Moon-Uranus) by her former friends and, even up to her untimely death, could not

let go of the pain she felt (Cancer). 'Flo could seamlessly slip into moody silence, her eyes haunted by something unspoken.'<sup>6</sup>

Both haughty and earthy, Ballard was the group's original lead singer – a proud, regal woman who was nicknamed 'Blondie' (Sun Rising, Venus in Leo). Aggressive and sassy on the surface, Ballard was a seething soul, tortured by her past. Just prior to signing with Motown, she was raped at knifepoint (in early autumn 1960, as transiting Uranus crossed her Venus-Chiron, and Solar Arc Pluto approached her Venus). Mary Wilson wrote of how this event turned Flo sceptical, fearful and cynical. Mary also observed (picking up Flo's Sun Rising/Moon-Cancer emphasis): 'Everything about [Flo] was big. When she was happy, it was contagious ... She was terribly moody, constantly up and down ... She'd be in some dark mood, and then, miraculously and suddenly, it was over.'<sup>7</sup> Writing of Flo's tragedy and depicting her as a victim of Gordy's exclusive focus on Diana Ross and Diana's own ambition, Mary has kept Flo's contribution to the group alive (aptly, Wilson's Sun-Mercury flanks Ballard's Midheaven in Pisces).

Like the Big Three, the lives of the Supremes are exemplars of compatible and contradictory goals, temperaments and attitudes; the ability of each member to deal with the unnatural state of celebrity (where stardom can easily become a narcotic); and the disorientating fall-to-earth that follows life after intense fame. We can also see each member of the Supremes as the epitome of one of the Big Three:

- Diana as the Sun (in Aries, the pushy go-getter out in front: the charismatic, limelight-stealing lead singer with a direct line to the boss);
- Florence as the Moon (in Gemini, besieged by Uranus and Saturn: the sensitive, forgotten 'soul' of the trio whose sudden reversal of fortune began her demise);
- Mary as the Ascendant (in Taurus: the 'glue' who attempted to keep the Supremes – and the old grudges – going).

### References and Notes

1. I recently rediscovered a gem in my library: Donna Cunningham's *How to Read Your Astrological Chart* (Weiser, 1999), which I highly recommend as a book that looks at this trio in some depth. Cunningham also labels it the 'Big Three'.
2. This is an interpretation proposed by Dennis Elwell who, in a 1999 interview with Garry Phillipson, spoke of the Moon as having the potential to be 'almost the Achilles heel' in the horoscope. See [www.astrozero.co.uk](http://www.astrozero.co.uk) and [www.skyscript.co.uk/elwell.html](http://www.skyscript.co.uk/elwell.html)
3. A gambler and visionary dream-maker, Gordy was born with the Sun, Mercury and Mars tightly conjunct in Sagittarius opposite Jupiter in Gemini. The Sun–Mercury–Mars conjunction opposes all three Supremes' Uranus and closely trines Gordy's own Uranus in Aries.
4. David Nathan, *The Soulful Divas*, Billboard Books, 1999, p. 148.
5. Mark Ribowsky, *The Supremes*, Da Capo, 2009, p. xvii.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.