Lowman Pauling & The “5” Royales

Musician and songwriter Lowman “Pete” Pauling was born in 1926 and lived in Winston-Salem during his early childhood. Lowman and his younger brother, Clarence, moved to West Virginia, where their father worked as a coal miner, after his parents’ divorce. During their teenage years, the Pauling brothers moved back to Winston-Salem to live with their mother, Arsula. Back in Winston-Salem, Lowman and Clarence formed a gospel group with family and friends. This act – the Royal Sons Quintet – played on local radio stations WSJS, WAIR, and WAAA on Sunday mornings.

In 1951, Apollo Records executives came to Winston-Salem to record two demos of the Royal Sons Quintet. Over the next year, record executives worked with the band to secularize their music, though the influence of their gospel roots remained evident in their popular music. The new R&B group – The “5” Royales – was introduced in 1952 and released their first single in 1953. The original members of the “5” Royales were Lowman Pauling, Otto Jeffries, Johnny Tanner, Obadiah Carter, and Jimmy Moore. Clarence Pauling, who later changed his name to Clarence Paul, left the band for a position as music producer at Motown Records in Detroit, where he worked with Stevie Wonder and The Temptations. Eugene Tanner, Johnny’s brother, later replaced Otto Jeffries when he took on a manager role.

Pauling’s personal life changed dramatically in 1952, as well. On December 1, he married Ellise Maye. A year later, Lowman and Ellise purchased Lot 28 of J.B. Dyer’s East Winston property, located on the southeast corner of Rich Avenue and 12th Street. Lot 28 is where this historic marker stands and where Lowman and Ellise spent the early years of their marriage. Darryl, Lowman and Ellise’s only child, tells stories of his dad pulling the station wagon into the driveway after being on tour, and girls from Atkins High School rushing across the street to see the band. Ellise lived in the house until her death in 2013 when Darryl inherited it.

Lowman Pauling was the primary songwriter and guitarist for the “5” Royales, while Johnny Tanner was the lead vocalist. In February 1953, “Baby Don’t Do It” by Pauling was a No. 1 hit on Billboard’s R&B chart. In June 1953, “Help Me Somebody”, also written by Pauling, hit No. 1 and remained there for five weeks. The “5” Royales did not have another No. 1 hit, but five additional songs broke into the R&B chart’s Top 10 during the 1950s.

Endless touring was necessary to pay the bills because, like many artists of his era, Pauling signed away the rights to his song-writing credits. In June 1953, you could have heard The “5” Royales on stage in Newport, RI. In 1956, they played a segregated concert and dance in Chattanooga, TN. A 1957 advertisement publicized a show in Nashville, TN. 1958 took the band to Lubbock, TX and back to Chattanooga, where Chuck Berry shared the bill. Bo Diddley,

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Etta James, Little Richard, and others were also on a 1958 tour, which was announced in the New York papers and took the band to Georgia.

Some of Pauling’s biggest hits became better known after being covered by other artists. 1957’s “Dedicated to the One I Love” was covered by The Shirelles and hit No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100 and No. 2 on the R&B chart in 1961. The Mamas and the Papas 1967 cover of the song hit No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100. “Think”, also released by the “5” Royales in 1957, was covered by James Brown in 1960, making it to No. 7 on the R&B chart and No. 33 on the pop chart. Ray Charles had a hit with his 1959 cover of “Tell the Truth”.

The “5” Royales broke up by 1965, and Lowman moved to New York, where he continued to play music and found work as a janitor. Although he and Ellise remained married, he never moved back to the Rich Avenue home. He died in Brooklyn on December 26, 1973.

In 2015, seven years after the passing of the last living member of the group, The “5” Royales – including members Carter, Moore, Pauling, and the Tanner brothers – were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. As the Hall of Fame group biography states, The “5” Royales “became a cornerstone of the soul music to come” and were inducted in the Early Influencers category. Ray Charles, James Brown, and guitarist Steve Cropper are among the artists whose work has been influenced by Pauling and the “5” Royales. Cropper said, “I know when I saw Lowman Pauling onstage, it changed my style and my life. He was a one-man show who played rhythm and stinging riffs when necessary … I owe a lot to Lowman.”

This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission web site: www.ForsythCountyHRC.org