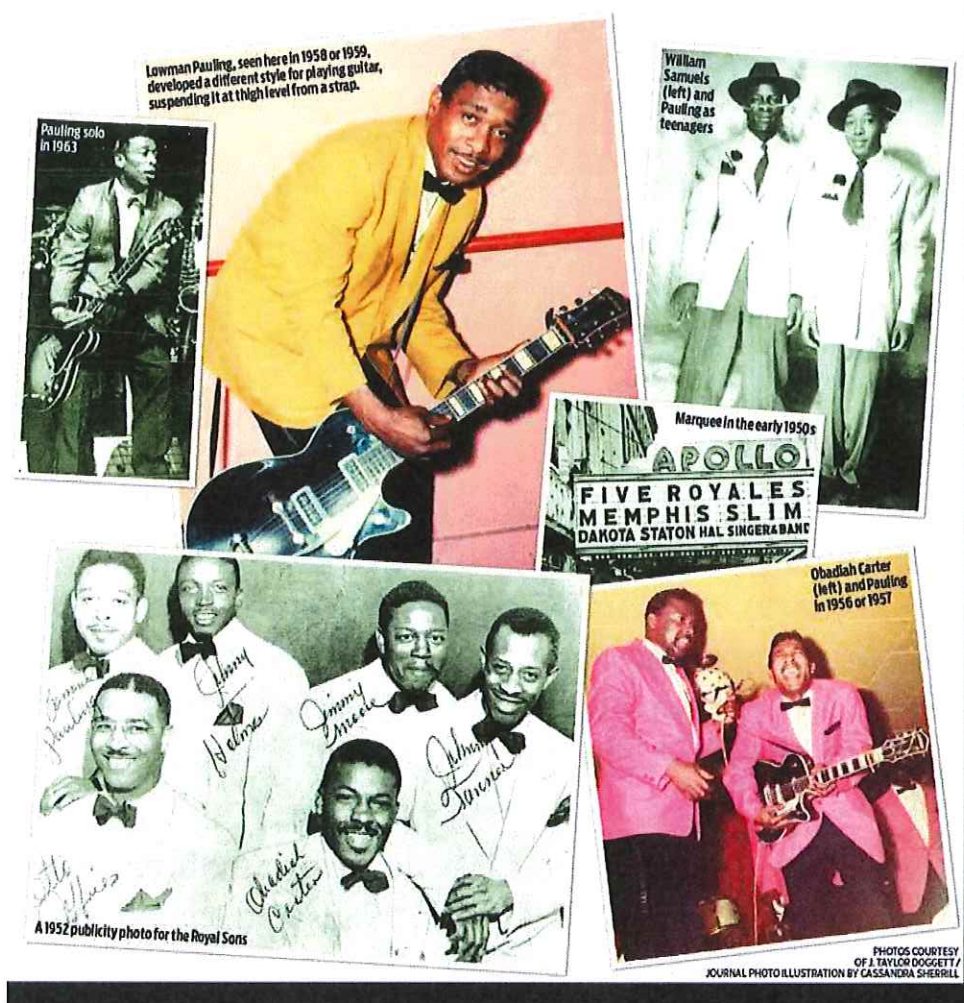


https://www.journalnow.com/news/local/music-s-unsung-pioneer/article_760fb6eb-0c86-54f3-bc51-9147db6fe52f.html

Lowman "Pete" Pauling helped give birth to rhythm and blues in U.S.

Music's Unsung Pioneer

Lisa O'donnell Dec 4, 2011



Buy

A small obituary, lost in a wash of gray newsprint appeared halfway down Page 5 of the Winston-Salem Journal on Dec. 28, 1973, announcing the death of a one-time city resident who had lived in New York for the past 10 years.

Beyond his survivors, the obit contained nothing of the man's life, the miles he traveled, the musical masterpieces he created, the impact he made on pop culture.

More than those errors of omission, the blink-and-you'll-miss-it obituary of a rock 'n' roll pioneer, arguably the most important musical figure to emerge from Winston-Salem, included one other egregious mistake.

His name was misspelled.

Which is all sadly emblematic of the life of Lowman "Pete" Pauling (misspelled *Lawman* in the obituary), a visionary guitarist and songwriter who transcended his impoverished upbringing in the coal camps of West Virginia and the streets of Winston-Salem to become one of the pillars of early rhythm and blues, only to die alone at the age of 47 while working as a custodian at a Brooklyn synagogue.

Pauling was the guiding light for The 5 Royales, a groundbreaking Winston-Salem band whose fusion of gospel and R&B in the 1950s laid the groundwork for soul and rock 'n' roll.

While most casual, and even some die-hard, music fans are unfamiliar with Pauling's name, his music has reached millions, across all genres.

Consider his most enduring composition, "Dedicated to the One I Love," which was a smash hit for the folk group The Mamas and The Papas in 1967 and sampled by hard-core rapper DMX on his 2003 song "Dogs Out."

Pauling's vocal arrangements for the Royales influenced such bands as The Temptations, and his approach to guitar left an indelible impression on Steve Cropper, best known for his guitar work with Booker T. and the M.G.'s, Sam and Dave, and Otis Redding.

Yet, even within the music industry, Pauling is regarded as a musical footnote, rarely rating a mention among the great rock 'n' roll guitarists and failing to get into the rock 'n' roll and R&B halls of fame.

Peter Guralnick, who is in the pantheon of great American music writers, is emphatic in his praise for Pauling, citing his singular body of work with the Royales.

"It is a miscarriage of justice that they are not in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame," Guralnick said. "In fact, they should have been among the first because of their influence, which cuts across every category. They were as great as anyone out there."

It's an oversight that Cropper hopes to correct with "Dedicated: A Salute to the 5 Royales," his all-star tribute album that includes such A-listers as B.B. King, Steve Winwood, Lucinda Williams and Queen guitarist Brian May.

The album has unleashed a flood of publicity and received warm reviews in such media outlets as The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, National Public Radio and Mojo, a British-based music magazine, while sparking a renewed interest in Pauling and his band mates, all of whom have died.

"I hope the audience sees this as an educational tool, to look at where music started, and maybe I can stir some interest," Cropper said from his home in Nashville, Tenn. "It's all about educating ears."

Cropper, whose songwriting credits include "(Sittin' on) The Dock of The Bay," "In the Midnight Hour" and "Knock on Wood," became enamored with Pauling after watching him perform one night at a theater in Memphis, his guitar slung low in his trademark style.

"Some people might look at the comedy aspect of that, maybe comparing it with the way Chuck Berry played behind his back. But I didn't see the humor in it," Cropper recalled.

"I thought it was the coolest thing I had ever seen."

Don't Try to Figure Out Where I Come From

That first line from the Royales' 1957 song, "The Slummer the Slum," serves as an apt warning for Pauling researchers.

Thanks to the exhaustive research of Greensboro businessman J. Taylor Doggett, much is known about the Royales' recorded history. But details about Pauling's personal life are scarce.

Most of his contemporaries are dead or their memories have faded. Compounding matters was Pauling's penchant for secrecy, even mystery. His widow, Elise, and only child, Darryl, both of whom still live in Winston-Salem, describe a quiet man who spent most of his adult life crisscrossing the country in a station wagon with his band.

"He'd get quiet, very quiet," Elise recalled one day while sitting in the house on Rich Avenue that she shared with Pauling. "You'd never know what he was thinking."

Pauling also seems to have given few interviews.

This we do know: Pauling was born in South Carolina on July 14, 1926, the second of Lowman Sr. and Arsula Pauling's four children, all of whom are dead.

About the time he was 9, his parents divorced, and Pete, as his family and friends called him, and his younger brother, Clarence, were sent to live with their father in a coal camp near Bluefield, W.Va.

A coal miner who later died of black lung disease, Lowman Sr. introduced his sons to music, leading a gospel group that rehearsed weekly in the Pauling home.

The Pauling brothers, just two years apart, were a tight twosome, known to locals as Pete and Repeat, according to Bettye LaVette, who once dated Clarence and sings on the "Dedicated" tribute album.

Clarence Pauling, it is worth noting, became a major figure at Motown, producing early Temptations' records and shepherding the career of a young Stevie Wonder. He later dropped the "ing" from his name to avoid confusion with his brother.

In a 1990 recorded interview with his daughter, Alexis, that has been posted on a website devoted to soul music, Clarence recounted a childhood filled with music.

Contrary to popular belief, the coal camps of southern West Virginia were not culturally isolated, but they rang with all kinds of music, from country music blasting from WLW, Cincinnati's powerful AM station, to vaudeville tunes performed at traveling shows, to gospel and blues songs that workers brought with them on their northern migration, said Christopher Wilkinson, a professor of music history at West Virginia University.

Some of the top jazz acts of the day — Ella Fitzgerald, Jimmy Lunceford and Count Basie — frequently played to the large population of black coal workers in the Bluefield area, Wilkinson said.

Clarence had vivid memories of watching some of these bands from afar, studying their complex orchestration and melodies. No doubt his big brother, Pete, was at his side.

Pete Pauling soon discovered another means of musical expression. Using a cigar box and strings, the industrious Pete built a guitar, plucking on it all day and sleeping beside it each night, Clarence told Goldmine magazine in 1993.

The boys put together a musical act and represented their school in talent contests against other schools.

"Clarence used to tell me lots of stories and, once, he told me they entered a talent contest and won the first indoor toilet for their school," LaVette said with a hearty laugh. "This was a big deal."

The musical life they led in West Virginia surely planted a seed in each of them. Back to live with their mother in Winston-Salem as teenagers, the Pauling brothers formed a gospel group with assorted family members and friends in the late 1930s and began singing in local churches, with Pete Pauling singing and playing guitar.

The act, which later became the Royal Sons Quintet, became so popular that three radio stations — WSJS, WAIR and WAAA — broadcast them on Sunday mornings.

One day in 1948, Pauling and a friend, William Samuels, crossed paths with the Maye sisters at Macedonia Holiness Church.

With his coffee-colored complexion, doleful eyes, pencil-thin moustache and wisp of hair beneath his bottom lip, Pauling cut a striking figure. He and Elise Maye exchanged phone numbers and later went to see a movie.

"He seemed to be a nice gentleman," she said.

Three years later, they were married in High Point and settled into a comfortable life, with Pauling playing steadily with the Royal Sons.

But change was just around the corner.

Too Much of a Little Bit

In 1951, executives at Apollo records in New York caught wind of the Royal Sons and traveled to Winston-Salem to record two demos at the old Fries Auditorium at Winston-Salem State University.

The tunes, "Bedside of a Neighbor" and "Journey's End," were straight gospel tunes, no different from what they had been singing for years.

Impressed with the band's stunning harmonies and the soaring vocals of Johnny Tanner, Apollo called the band up to New York to record a mix of gospel and R&B songs, many of which were written by Pauling.

Apollo executive Carl LeBow must have sensed that with a little tweaking, the Royal Sons, which now consisted of Pauling, Otto Jeffries, Tanner, Obadiah Carter and Jimmy Moore, could compete with The Dominoes, The Clovers and other vocal groups in the burgeoning R&B market. After a 1952 session, the makeover was complete, and the Royal Sons became The 5 Royales. (Tanner's brother, Eugene, later joined the group, replacing Jeffries.)

By February 1953, Pauling's composition, "Baby Don't Do It," hit No. 1 on Billboard's R&B chart, followed a few months later by another Pauling-penned song, "Help Me Somebody," a title that came from a refrain frequently uttered by a preacher at Shiloh Baptist Church in Winston-Salem.

Although little is known about Pauling's songwriting habits — his son and widow never saw him write or fiddle with his guitar at home — he clearly had no trouble switching from gospel to the raunchier R&B style, tossing in double entendres such as "If you leave me pretty baby, I'll have bread without no meat," from "Baby Don't Do It."

Meanwhile, back in Winston-Salem, Elise Pauling had no inkling what was going on in her husband's career.

"All of this was a surprise to me," she said. "Next thing I know, 'Baby Don't Do It' was on the radio. I didn't know all that was in him."

With his songs selling hundreds of thousands copies, Pauling and the band hit the road for months at a time, playing for segregated audiences at such legendary venues as the Apollo Theater in Harlem and rubbing elbows with the likes of Little Richard, Sam Cooke and James Brown.

On stage, Pauling, not about to be outdone by Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and other guitar slingers of the era, was a picture of cool. With perfectly creased slacks and matching jacket, processed hair and a Gibson Les Paul hanging down to his knees, Pauling cut loose, delivering manic blasts of notes colored with distortion, his fingers blazing up and down the fret board, even playing with his feet.

On those rare shows in Winston-Salem, the band packed them in at armories, warehouses and a hotspot called the Kosmopolite, now a Mason's temple on Old Greensboro Road.

Rudy Anderson has fond memories of the Royales' shows he saw at the Kosmopolite.

"That group was always energetic," said Anderson, who is 85. "They'd make you get up and do it. And Pauling was what you might call the Daddy of Funk. He was a funky guitar player."

The 5 Royales moved to King Records in 1954, becoming label mates with James Brown, who frequently cited Pauling and the 5 Royales as major influences.

Brimming with confidence, Pauling took over guitar duties on the band's recorded songs beginning in 1957, punching up such songs as "Think" and "Dedicated to the One I Love" with stinging riffs and licks that hinted at the guitar's growing role in pop music.

Pauling's growing celebrity did not awe his wife. She rarely accompanied him on the road, took a job as a seamstress and mostly raised Darryl as a single parent.

But Pauling could be generous, bringing her gifts, including a fur stole. But she had no use for a pantsuit that he bought for her while he was in New York City. Finding it much too masculine for her tastes, she wore it once then told him it was too small.

For all its hits on the R&B charts, mainstream success eluded the band, forcing them to tour endlessly to pay the bills. Pauling, as the band's chief songwriter, should have generated a steady income but, like many R&B pioneers, he apparently signed away many of his rights.

Not one to share such information with his wife, Pauling often told Elise that life would get easier once he settled a dispute with his lawyer. But he did not elaborate and life never got easier.

Weary of the road and unable to recapture the glory of the 1950s, most of the original members quit in the early 1960s and returned to Winston-Salem, finding blue-collar jobs, returning to church and disavowing show business.

With his brother Clarence writing hits for Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye, it's not a stretch to imagine that Pauling couldn't stomach the thought of returning to a sleepy, segregated Southern city and taking up manual labor.

He moved to Brooklyn in the mid-1960s, toured as a guitar player with Sam and Dave's band, played in clubs under the moniker El Pauling and developed a comedy act with his older brother, Curtis.

Occasionally, Pauling came home to take his son and wife to the beach. But mostly, he was absent, something Elise had long gotten used to.

Pauling never produced another hit, and he fell on hard times, drinking up much of his income, Clarence said in the Goldmine article. He finally took a job as a custodian at a Brooklyn synagogue.

"I'm quite sure he was not living the fancy lifestyle because we were struggling here," Darryl said.

Often careless with medicine to control his epilepsy, Pauling went to work one day, suffered a seizure and died on Dec. 26, 1973, Elise's birthday.

That morning, she took a call at the house from a friend, who simply told her: "We lost him."

Darryl, then 17, traveled with an aunt and uncle to identify the body and pick up his few possessions, which did not amount to much. Sadly, most of his father's belongings, including his stage clothes and guitars, were either destroyed in a basement flood or stolen. They arranged for his body to come home to Winston-Salem.

Now 55, Darryl is a soft-spoken man who delivers newspapers for the Winston-Salem Journal and cares for his mother. He never learned to play an instrument; his passion is cooking.

The older he gets, the more he realizes his father's pioneering role in music. Just before Johnny Tanner, the last of the Royales, died in 2005, he told Darryl, "Your dad was brilliant and, if you do anything, get your dad's music heard."

It's a charge that he takes seriously. Yet, he concedes, "I don't know how to do it."

Whisper a Little Prayer for Me My Baby

Now 80 and receiving regular dialysis treatments, Elise, the muse for those tender, aching lyrics from "Dedicated to the One I Love," sits in her living room on a recent warm day, reflecting on a man who has been dead for nearly 38 years.

Whatever feelings she may have about Pauling's long absences and drinking, she keeps to herself.

But nearly every night before she goes to bed, she does, indeed, think of him.

"I think about him all the time, especially at night," Elise said, her voice growing weak from an hour of reminiscing. "I think about everything, him traveling, him pulling up."

She never remarried.

For years, Pauling lay buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Winston-Salem under a headstone no bigger than a shoe box that listed the wrong date of death.

His name has since been engraved on a nearby headstone in a plot with some of Elise's family. Elise, apart from him for so much of their married life, will one day rest beside him.



LOCAL NEWS

Music's Unsung Pioneer

Dec 4, 2011

MORE INFORMATION



Winston-Salem band '5 Royales to be inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

