the Teenagers and the many New York aggregations. Most would rank the '5' Royales well down in their list of favourite groups. However, those who like their music earthy and unsophisticated often rank the '5' Royales high in the pecking order of great groups. This new five-CD box set is a fitting tribute to the group, who along with such as Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin and others, succeeded in breaking out of sanctified music into the heady world of r&b and soul.

They began in the late 1940s as a gospel group, The Royal Sons Quintet, in their hometown of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Coming to the notice of New York-based Apollo Records in 1951, their first recordings were pure gospel. They cut two sessions for the label in August and October of that year, resulting in two releases, Apollo 253 ('Bedside Of A Neighbour'/Journey's End') and Apollo 266 ('Come Over Here'/Let Nothing Separate Me'). Whilst, excellent, their initial sides failed to stand out in the array of gospel talent already in place in Apollo's roster. They already had Mahalia Jackson, The Dixie Hummingbirds, The Roberta Martin Singers and The Prof. Alex Bradford Singers on their books. Persuading the group to depart from their gospel vocation to sing secular didn't prove too difficult, and at their second session, they recorded two r&b numbers, 'Too Much Of A Little Bit' and 'Give Me One More Chance'. Issued as Apollo 434, as by the Royals. Whilst the release didn't exactly set the hit parade on fire, it did come to the notice of Federal Records, who already had a group of that name and were threatening litigation. Thus The '5' Royales were born. The group, having seen several changes to their line-up in their final gospel period, now consisted of Lowman Pauling, Johnny Tanner, James Moore, Obediah Carter and Otto Jeffries.

TheRoyales' line-up, although varying somewhat due to the draft and other reasons, remained reasonably stable throughout their 15 or so year career: Lead tenor Johnny Tanner provided the powerful lead singing on most of the Royales' classic recordings over the next decade and a half, being joined by his brother Eugene (tenor), who was with the group for 10 years from 1954. James E. 'Jimmie' Moore (baritone) sang with the group until 1963. Obediah 'Scoop' Carter (baritone/ tenor) was with the Royales throughout their career. However, it was Lowman Pauling who was the driving force of the group, writing most of their material and later providing the devastating guitar licks that he became famous for and besides singing bass, also fronting the Royales with his own deep-voiced lead on several sides.

Lowman's powerhouse guitar licks on the later King sides are legendary. The amazing story is that since their gospel recordings, Pauling was not called upon to play his guitar on any of their recordings, Apollo using the services of Charlie Singleton's cooking band for the most part, whilst King used a variety of session players, notably Mickey Baker on guitar. It wasn’t until a February 1957 recording date on which they were using legendary guitarist Tiny Grimes, when, halfway through the session, whilst recording 'Think', Pauling picked up his axe and the number just exploded. The song became a major milestone in the group's career, being later picked up by James Brown, becoming one of the cornerstones of his act, until today it would be most likely regarded by the average soul fan as a Brown number. The Royales' original, with its swinging treatment is much preferable to Brown's funked-up version to these ears.
The other number which went on to bigger things by other acts was 'Dedicated To The One I Love', which of course was a smash by The Shirelles, and later still a pop hit by The Mamas And The Papas, but here we get the Royales' version in all its raw r&b-going-onto-soul glory.

As the group's career progressed, various 'splinter' groups spun off, usually fronted by Pauling, who, teaming up with original Royal Sons member Royal Abbit, recorded variously as El (or 'Ed') Pauling, Royal Abbit & The Royaltones, and later aggregations The Exciters and The Poor Boys. Even included is an early track by bluesman Guitar Shorty that features background harmonies by the Royales, 'Pumpkin Pie', a rather undistinguished number from 1959.

'Soul & Swagger' (great title) is a mighty handsome thing to own. Consisting of a 7" (45 rpm size!) square, stiff backed, 116-page book, with inlays in the inside front and back covers and three thicker inner pages for the five CDs to nestle in. First problem, the CD inlay pop out on the inside front of my copy will not grip the CD, causing it to fall out, a minor problem when reading through the book. Secondly and more serious, the second CD was jammed into the pocket solid and wouldn't budge when trying to ease it out in the normal manner. I had to resort to inserting a round-edged piece of plastic behind the CD and prise it out. It was then evident that the CD had become jammed in the adhesive used...
to bind the stiff pages together. The disc had a fair amount of residue on the playing surface, meaning it would not play. I resorted to removing it with the help of WD-40. The CD is still badly scuffed, but at least I got it to play.

Okay, whining over. Following a single page foreword by No one of the all-time great groups in the history of black music! 

lings of The '5' Royales, caught up in the rich harmonies and tough r&b sty played the whole thing through several times now and never fail to get the hallmarks of the high standards set by such as Bear Family etc. I've

in the history of r&b and soul. The presentation is superb, having all the hallmarks of the high standards set such as Bear Family etc. I've played the whole thing through several times now and never fail to get caught up in the rich harmonies and tough r&b sty of the '5' Royales, one of the all-time great groups in the history of black music!

SOUL & SWAGGER: THE COMPLETE '5' ROYALES 1951-1967. ROCK BEAT ROC-CD-3101
Track Listing:

DISC ONE:
ROYAL SONS QUINTET: Bedside Of A Neighbor/ Dedicated To The One I Love (Alternate Mix)/ Islander/ I'm Gonna Love You Till I Die'/Baby Don't You Leave Poor Me' (Federal 12402, 1960), although this does not feature any members of the core group. There are other, later tracks, on the History Of Soul album, but they are outside the scope of the release in question.

Overall, this box set, lovingly created by Rock Beat, is a fine, worthy tribute to one of the great (though sometimes neglected) vocal groups in the history of r&b and soul. The presentation is superb, having all the hallmarks of the high standards set such as Bear Family etc. I've played the whole thing through several times now and never fail to get caught up in the rich harmonies and tough r&b sty of the '5' Royales, one of the all-time great groups in the history of black music!