

Philip Paul, legendary Cincinnati drummer, dead at age 96



Phillip Paul <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKzkU83Q94M>

The Enquirer

Drummer Philip Paul, who played on studio sessions for R&B, blues, rock, country and jazz recordings made at King Records in Evanston, died Jan. 30. He was 96. Paul's drumming can be heard on the original "Twist" by Hank Ballard (the later cover by Chubby Checker is more famous) and Charles Brown's "Please Come Home for Christmas."

Paul later performed in musical groups, one of them a jazz trio featuring his name, for years around town.

But it was his work for King Records that was iconic. For 15 years, he would provide the beat for 350 King recordings, including many of the biggest, most essential recordings of the golden age of rock, R&B and electric blues.

His work at King included drumming on Wynonie Harris' "Good Rocking Tonight," on the original "Fever" by Little Willie John and on virtually all of Freddie King's seminal blues sides, including the great instrumental "Hide Away."

Paul also performed on numerous country records. "I did (recordings with) Grandpa Jones, Cowboy Copas, Bonnie Lou," he recalled in 2002, adding that he never had problems because of his race. "None whatsoever. I think times then were better than they are now."

Paul was born in New York City. His father, Philip Paul Sr., was born in St. Croix in the Virgin Islands and worked construction by day but played in a band at night with two of his brothers. Paul's uncle John was the drummer in the band. "He fascinated me," Paul said in an October 2009 article in *Cincinnati Magazine*.

When he was in his early teens, "my father would take me around to these parties," Paul said in the article. "We'd start playing 11, 12 o'clock at night, and play until 5 o'clock in the morning." What kid could resist that – playing music, making a few bucks, staying up all night, and being treated as an equal by your dad?

Paul came to Cincinnati in 1951, lured to play at the Cotton Club in the West End, the lone integrated nightclub in the city that drew some of the greatest jazz talents of the era. He arrived in Cincinnati to play with R&B master Tiny Bradshaw. Paul had no intention of staying here. He was from New York, the center of the musical universe. Back home, he had a reputation as a reliable and often imaginative drummer.

But then he met Syd Nathan, a cigar-chomping wheeler-dealer who wanted the talented Paul to be the guy who would be available to step into the recording studio whenever Nathan needed him. "It was a hard decision," says Paul. "My parents hadn't wanted me to come here in the first place. None of us had ever heard of Cincinnati."

"But the gig definitely had appeal," writer David Lyman noted in [a 2018 article in *The Enquirer*](#). "Nathan was offering steady work in an inherently unsteady business. Besides that bargaining chip, he knew that Paul had recently married a young woman named Juanita (Paul's late first wife) who was determined to stay in Cincinnati. Nathan helped the young couple find an affordable house that was, coincidentally, just a few blocks from King's recording studio at 1540 Brewster Ave. in Evanston."

Outside of the studio, Paul backed many famous artists on the road including John Lee Hooker, Albert King and Smokey Smothers, according to [Ultimateclassicrock.com](#).

After leaving music in the 1980s, when jazz was in an eclipse, Paul took a job as a

compliance coordinator with the Council on Aging, according to the Cincinnati Magazine article. But when he turned 69, "I got that music itch again." He retired – to play music full time.

In 2009, he was honored at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland as part of its series "From Songwriters to Soundmen: The People Behind the Hits." In 2016, Paul was inducted into the Cincinnati Jazz Hall of Fame.

And in 2018, Cincinnati's Playhouse in the Park would stage "Cincinnati King," a documentary play looking at the record company. The play was based on talks that playwright and former assistant artistic director KJ Sanchez had with Paul.

Sanchez coaxed Paul into spending countless hours sharing yarns about music and friends and life at King. In time, Paul – an actor portraying him, actually – became the centerpiece of "Cincinnati King," the narrator who guided audiences through the story.

Paul continued playing music well into his 90s; here is a YouTube video of him performing in a band at Newport's Southgate House Revival in 2019.