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Written by Maureen Younger

ARTS

Rated or dated: Hopelessly in Love

Carroll Thompson released the lovers rock classic 35 years ago. Does it still make *Maureen Younger* swoon?

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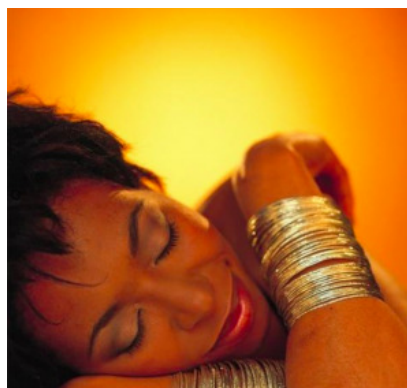
Attending a school in North London where being white meant you were an ethnic minority, unsurprisingly the soundtrack of my youth and that of most of my friends consisted primarily of two types of music: soul and lovers rock.

Long before postcode gangs plagued London streets, in the early 1980s I would attend parties which started late, finished in the early hours of the morning and everyone just had a great time. A predominately black crowd meant no one got drunk (though strong rum was always available, the brand a sure give away of the parentage of the host: Rivers = Grenada, Mount Gay = Barbados, Appleton = Jamaica etc.), and in those now seemingly innocent days all we did was dance.

At some point the lovers rock would kick in and the serious dancing would start. Anyone who knows how to wine understands what I'm talking about. (For the non-aficionados, let's just say it's amazing what you can do with your knee!)

Lovers rock was an incredibly popular style of music – a combination of reggae and soul, the songs were often romantic in nature and many of the singers were female. And for anyone like me, who attended those parties in the early 1980s, there was one album whose tracks were played again and again and again.

You cannot overestimate how massive tunes such as *Yesterday*, *Hopelessly in Love* and *I'm So Sorry* were from Carroll Thompson's 1981 album *Hopelessly in Love*. Not only could everyone recognise the tunes from the opening bars, everybody



Carroll Thompson courtesy of carrollthompson.co.uk

knew every single word. I played the album so much I knew every word to *each* and *every* song; my personal favourite being *No, You Don't Know*.

"As if on cue, the whole audience, packed into the 1800-seater theatre, along with the acts and techies standing in the wings, immediately started singing along."

Rated or dated?

Has the album dated? I replayed it recently and enjoyed it as much as I did in my youth. And yes, I still sang along. (Fortunately I was at home at the time). But don't take my word for it.

Earlier this year I had the honour of being the opening act for a show celebrating the well-respected American author Terry McMillan. Closing the show was Carroll Thompson and Janet Kay, whose hit *Silly Games* was also a classic from that era. Carroll Thompson went on first and started singing *Hopelessly in Love*. As if on cue, the whole audience, packed into the 1800-seater theatre, along with the acts and techies standing in the wings, immediately started singing along. We still all knew the words, and everyone backstage not only sang but danced along to the tune.

And then something the teenage me would definitely not have believed possible (nor anyone who has had the misfortune to hear me sing, I should imagine), I actually ended up onstage singing along to Janet Kay's *Silly Games* alongside Carroll Thompson and several other actual singers.

Fortunately for the Croydon crowd, Carroll and most of the others had a mic, I didn't. I presume the stage-manager, who'd ordered me on, clearly wasn't so daft as to mic me up. (And when I say sing along to *Silly Games*, I obviously don't mean the high notes which, let's face it, presumably only Janet Kay, Aretha Franklin, Mariah Carey and an above-average opera singer have any hope of reaching.

But what the reaction in that packed South London theatre to Carroll Thompson and Janet Kay's songs proved was that some songs can never date. They are like musical DNA, so entwined with what we once were, that no matter how far removed we've come from our teenage selves, they will remain an intrinsic part of us for ever.

Rated.

Janet Kay and Carroll Thompson play *Under The Bridge*, London, on Friday, July 8.

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