

## Paul Carrack

Despite being behind some of the most cherished singles of the 70s and 80s, you can be forgiven for not knowing the name of Paul Carrack. In fact, the singer of the No.20-charting yacht rock classic *How Long* (as the vocalist for Ace) and the No.2-peaking *The Living Years* (as part of Mike + The Mechanics) is used to a degree of anonymity.

“When I started going out on the road as a solo act 20-25 years ago, even after Mike + The Mechanics, people didn't know my name,” the 73-year-old says. “I was really starting from a low level, but I gradually built it to the point where I’m playing the Albert Hall now.”

Performing at that illustrious venue seems vindication for 50 years of hard graft for the man born Paul Melvyn Carrack. Having broken through in 1974 with *How Long* (not just the first record Carrack had ever sung on, it was also the first song he’d ever written), he’s spent the past half-century as a member of some of music’s biggest bands (as the keyboardist of Squeeze, he sang on one of their most popular numbers, 1981’s *Tempted*), been a session player with others (Roxy Music, The Smiths, The Pretenders, Elton John, Simply Red, the list goes on) and has released an incredible 20 studio albums (including this year’s *Greatest Hits* collection, which currently sits at No.1 in the Blues and Jazz Chart) since branching out on his own in 1980. The BBC once dubbed him “the man with the golden voice”, while Phil Collins described the Sheffield-born singer as an “incredible voice” who “could sing the telephone directory”. High praise indeed.

“I’m fortunate to have had opportunities to work with lots of different people,” Carrack says of his five decades in the music biz. “But then I like to keep a roof over my head. My career’s been quite varied, but in a way that’s been a necessity. It wasn’t planned like that. I was just always happy to be involved with something.”

Carrack’s natural self-effacement has meant he’s been happy, over the years, to be the hired hand within the group dynamic. Occasionally, however, as was the case with Mike + The Mechanics, what started out as a simple singing job, turned out to be more creatively satisfying as time went on.

“In the beginning I was just brought in as the singer,” Carrack says of the band he joined in 1985. “With Mike [Rutherford, of Genesis fame] being a guitarist he decided he wanted to make a solo record but didn’t want to sing, so I was one of several singers on that first album [Carrack was the vocalist on the LP’s debut single, *Silent Running*]. Then on the second album I sang *The Living Years*, which was a big hit, and by the fourth and fifth albums, I was much more involved as a songwriter.”

Carrack stayed with Mike + The Mechanics until 2004, but during his 19 years with the band, he was still releasing solo records. In fact, the rate in which he’s put out albums since 1980 would shame any artist half his age. Does he consider himself a workaholic?

“I’m not driven to write, I’m not a great thinker,” he says, modestly. “I just dabble in my studio, and usually something happens musically, a melody or a hook, and then I build around it. So I don’t think I’m a workaholic, but I do have a strong work ethic – that’s different.”

Having so many songs under his belt of course means there's an embarrassment of riches to choose from when playing gigs, and Carrack's latest tour – titled the How Long 50th Anniversary Tour – sees him playing his most famous tracks, as well as some personal favourites.

“I don't get fed up doing them,” he says of performing his most popular numbers. “It's not like I'm bored and I've got to reimagine them or anything, I like the songs as they are. And I always include them, even the ones with Squeeze and Mike + The Mechanics – I contributed to what they are and it's nice to have them in my name.”

This latest run of gigs kicked off in Southampton on 6 September, and is taking him all over the country, before climaxing at Guildford's G Live theatre on 19 October. And then, Carrack admits, he'll be free to continue work on his latest album, a record that he says will see him taking on a genre he's never explored before.

“I've made some inroads with it already,” he teases of a record he hopes to bring out next year. “It's a country album. It'll be traditional – I'm not a real fan of modern country and western, what they call hat acts. I like old-school country, Hank Williams and that sort of stuff.”

Having experimented with various different genres over the years, including soul, big band, jazz, blues and soft rock, are there any other types of music Carrack would like to try his hand at?

“Not really,” he shrugs, adding: “I hate to blow my own trumpet, but I do have a musicality and a way of finding my way around different genres. But my base is what they call blue-eyed soul, rootsy stuff.”

So we shouldn't hold our breath then, we ask, for a Paul Carrack hip-hop album?

“I don't think so,” he laughs. “Not unless some hip-hop guy says he's got to have me singing on a track – then I would give it a whirl. But I'm not going looking!”