



**Then, now, always:** The harmonies from the Hollies still sounded fresh.

# Rejigged Hollies prove they still ain't heavy

## MUSIC

- The Hollies
- Wellington Convention Centre, Wednesday, February 2
- Reviewed by Simon Sweetman

**B**RITISH pop act The Hollies were one of the most successful bands of the 1960s and 1970s.

The band has never stopped touring and recording but only two members from the heyday remain: drummer Bobby Elliott and guitarist/vocalist Tony Hicks. Vocalist Allan Clarke retired from duties in 1999.

In recent times, Peter Howarth has assumed the lead-singer role, with Hicks and guitarist Steve Lauri sharing the vocals. Bassist Ray Stiles and keyboardist Ian Parker supply some harmonies also.

A sold-out crowd waited to hear the hits. It didn't take long – *Jennifer Eccles*, *Just One Look* and *Sorry Suzanne* were all early inclusions, the sunny harmonies still sounding fresh.

At first everything was in place but it still felt a little like a *Stars In Their Eyes*-version of the band; a common complaint of bands from the 1960s that continue with new members.

That small gripe became completely insignificant as the hits continued to tumble from the stage. The Hollies' famous cover of *Stay* (by Maurice Williams and The Zodiacs) was a treat, as was *Carousel*.

At times the arrangements were slightly different, the songs in lower keys now – but the band was tight and the winning pop tunes were hard to argue with.

There was a short interval and the second set opened with *I'm Alive* and *Bus Stop*.

Howarth took a couple of moments to show his skills, first with a cover of Bruce Springsteen's *Sandy* and then with an earlier Hollies B-side, *I Can't Tell The Bottom From The Top*.

But "The Hollies was never about one person, it was about the blend of voices", as he rightly pointed out, leaving Hicks, Lauri and Stiles to work through more of the 1960s hits, such as *Gasoline Alley Bred* and *Here I Go Again*.

Hicks frequently delighted with guitar spots, and his banjo intro to *Dance, Dance, Dance* was superb.

The finale of *Carrie Anne*, *The Air That I Breathe* and *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother* had everyone singing along and got a full standing ovation.

Great playing, great songs – you could not ask for more.