

THE HOLLIES



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1963-2014</i>	<i>Classic pop-rock</i>	<i>Here I Go Again (1964)</i>

Only Solitaire

Artist: *The Hollies*

Years: *1963-1965*

George Starostin's Reviews

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STAY WITH THE HOLLIES

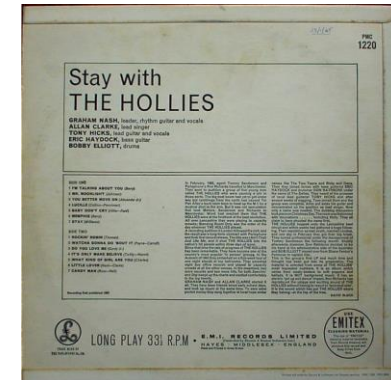
Album released:

V A L U E

January 1964

3 3 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) Talkin' 'Bout You; 2) **Mr. Moonlight**; 3) You Better Move On; 4) Lucille; 5) Baby Don't Cry; 6) Memphis; 7) Stay; 8) Rockin' Robin; 9) Watcha Gonna Do 'Bout It; 10) **Do You Love Me**; 11) It's Only Make Believe; 12) What Kind Of Girl Are You; 13) Little Lover; 14) **Candy Man**; 15*) Ain't That Just Like Me; 16*) Hey What's Wrong With Me; 17*) Searchin'; 18*) Whole World Over; 19*) Now's The Time; 20*) Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah; 21*) I Understand; 22*) Stay; 23*) Poison Ivy.

REVIEW

Most of the early British Invasion acts had a favorite role model or two from across the Atlantic before they'd start carving out their own identities — it was only a matter of *how* early in their career that carving-out process would start, especially relative to the defining moment when the band in question landed its first record contract and set foot in its first proper recording studio. From that point of view, the Hollies landed theirs a bit too early in the game (imagine for a second the Beatles getting theirs in, say, late 1960 rather than late 1962), and although, in retrospect, this does not sound like a huge problem, **Stay With The Hollies** set them off on the wrong foot in the LP business department — an inauspicious move whose consequences, it might be argued, would reverberate through the band's entire career.



The role model in question was, as one might easily guess, the Everly Brothers — in fact, the Hollies pretty much started out intentionally as the UK's answer to Phil and Don, with Allan Clarke and Graham Nash modeling themselves as a folk-rockish singing duo; and even if the band's debut album does not include any of the Everlys' songs as such, most of its material, even in terms of the diversity of the covered styles, is delivered very much in the Everlys' style. Sound-wise, the Hollies played a polite, un-angry, family-friendly version of rock'n'roll that went rather light on electric guitars and heavy on two-part vocal harmonies. Like Phil and Don, they were not at all averse to taking lessons from Chuck Berry and Little Richard, but since Phil and Don always emphasized the melodic, rather than punkish, sides of these guys, the Hollies followed suit — their cover of Little Richard's 'Lucille' here, with close harmonies and drawn-out vowels, is almost 100% identical to the way the Everlys did it, and that's the way it would always be.

That said, even without any original ideas and without any significant attempts to write their own songs, already at that earliest stage the Hollies had a major advantage of their own — a lead singer blessed with a voice every bit as distinctive as that of John Lennon, Mick Jagger, or Eric Burdon. As the record opens with a standard guitar introduction to Chuck Berry's 'Talkin' 'Bout You', the very first line, "let me tell you 'bout a girl I know...", even though it is sung in harmony by Allan Clarke and Graham Nash (and maybe Tony Hicks as well?), totally belongs to Allan, as does almost everything else on this album. It is not a deep, rumbling tone of the Eric Burdon variety, or a sharp, guttural, devilish tone à la Mick Jagger — it is a high, ringing, and ever so slightly raspy tone that suggests inoffensiveness and friendliness, yet one that goes along with punchiness if necessary: it is, pitch- and timbre-wise, more or less in Phil and Don's ballpark, but... how do I put this? Well, let's just say that if it ever came to a fist fight between Phil or Don Everly and Allan Clarke, there is little doubt who would win, if the comparison were based purely on their vocal styles.

So ultimately, Allan's vocal tone may be comparable to many others, yet it is a tone that stands out loud and proud in a sea of millions, and one that can't help drawing your attention just because you instinctively feel something *extreme* about it. And I know that it is pretty damn hard to sound *extreme* in the middle of a soft-melodic vibe, yet in the end Clarke's singing is that one element which makes words like «wimpy» or «sissy» inapplicable to the Hollies, while words like «kick-ass» seem surprisingly reasonable.

And there are few other generalizations one might make, really, about the 14 songs on this record — except that, in general, just like their American mentors, the Hollies show a good taste in covers, and with Allan regularly giving it his all, they succeed in producing sharp, energetic, and usually-far-from-superfluous versions of many of them. Not many people, for

instance, could have competed with the exuberance of the Contours which permeates every second of 'Do You Love Me': Mike Smith of the Dave Clark Five sang the song as close to the black-voiced original as possible, and *that* may indeed have been superfluous, but Allan Clarke, adding a funny bit of gurgle to his razor-sharp voice, delivers it exactly as it should be delivered by a sneery, snotty, cocky, yet ultimately good-natured British teenager, coming up with the single best white boy cover of that song (at least until the much more maniacal cover of the Sonics one year later).

Another highlight is Roy Orbison's 'Candy Man': this is a particularly happy choice, because Roy wrote a good handful of excellent rock'n'roll songs without, however, being much of a rock'n'roll singer — and this provides Clarke with a great chance to squeeze *all* of the tune's implied sexuality out onto the surface. Is «cock-pop» even a term? If it is not, it should be invented specifically for this hilarious performance: musically cuddly, no match for even the Beatles, let alone the Stones, but vocally... oh boy, just lock up your daughters when Allan mouths "let me be... mmm, your own candee-e-e... candy ma-a-a-an". Maybe the UK press never saw that much of a threat in the Hollies (probably because they never had themselves an Andrew Loog Oldham to market their threat-ability), but it is hard to imagine how any UK parent, upon hearing such a song, could remain fooled by the band's «clean look».

Admittedly, some of these covers work worse than others. Just as in the case of the Beatles, for instance, it is hard to understand the love all those bands had for 'Mr. Moonlight' (here spoiled even further by the unlucky choice of Nash as the lead vocalist — this does not seem to be the right kind of material for him at all, what with all the loud screeching required in the bridge section). Similarly, Bobby Day's novelty-nursery hit 'Rockin' Robin' is one of these proto-bubblegum numbers that is very hard to take seriously with all of its tweedlee-dees. Also, the Hollies' only original composition on the album is 'Little Lover', delivered with plenty of fire but songwriting-wise, largely just a minor variation on the Chuck Berry formula (although the resolution of the chorus, with the unexpected twist of "come on and discover... my lo-o-o-o-ve for you!" is quite indicative of future pop songwriting ideas to come). Yet on the whole, there are very few open embarrassments or misfires compared to the number of good songs done in already classy Hollies style.

Granted, that style has not yet been fully worked out: somewhat parallel to the earliest recordings by the Beach Boys, it took the band some time to become experts in multi-part studio harmonizing, meaning that most of the entertainment here is provided either by Allan solo or by Allan propped up and thickened by the other two singing guys. Likewise, guitarist Tony Hicks is not at the top of his game, either, although his brief, well thought-out leads compete rather well with contemporary George Harrison. Unfortunately, the Hollies could not get George Martin for their EMI Studios sessions and had to do with

second best, namely, producer Ron Richards (Martin's assistant), who was good enough but could not get them that sharp, echoey sound which had made **Please Please Me** sound a bit outer-space-ish: in comparison, the Hollies sound far more downhome and in-yer-face, which also makes all their mistakes and occasional lack of professional tightness sound quite in-yer-face, too. But at least they play their own instruments (at least, I *think* they do: experience these days tells you to never trust the credits on any early Sixties' records).

The expanded CD reissue is essential for completists, since it throws on the band's first three singles from 1963, giving you a better glimpse into the early stages of their development and public success. However, I am not a major fan of the Hollies covering the Coasters — like most of the other British bands, enamoured of Leiber and Stoller's home pack of adorable musical clowns, Clarke and Co.'s sense of humor was significantly different from that band's, meaning that 'Ain't That Just Like Me' and 'Searchin' both come off somewhat stiffer than necessary. This means that in this particular case, you will not be uncovering any hidden gems, as opposed to subsequent albums where the bonus tracks are essential, since many of them represent the band's finest, single-oriented songwriting efforts. But if you simply want to stay a bit more with the Hollies, then what's wrong with extending the album's running length by another 20 minutes?..





IN THE HOLLIES STYLE

Album released:

November 1964

V A L U E
3 3 4 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) Nitty Gritty / **Something's Got A Hold On Me**; 2) Don't You Know; 3) To You My Love; 4) It's In Her Kiss; 5) Time For Love; 6) What Kind Of Boy; 7) Too Much Monkey Business; 8) I Thought Of You Last Night; 9) Please Don't Feel Too Bad; 10) Come On Home; 11) You'll Be Mine; 12) Set Me Free; 13*) **Just One Look**; 14*) Keep Off That Friend Of Mine; 15*) **Here I Go Again**; 16*) Baby That's All; 17*) **We're Through**; 18*) Come On Back; 19*) What Kind Of Love; 20*) When I'm Not There; 21*) Yes I Will; 22*) Nobody.

REVIEW

If you are listening to the expanded CD version of the Hollies' second album, be sure to program it (at least once) so that most of the bonus tracks come first — this will give you a much better perspective on the band's creative growth through 1964. More than ten months separate **In The Hollies Style** from **Stay With The Hollies**, which is actually quite a bit of time by the typical standards of the 1960s; however, this is perfectly excusable, considering that most bands at the time still measured their progress in singles, not LPs, and that the more often you put out an LP, the more probable it was that it would consist of little other than perfunctory covers of other people's material. Admittedly, the Hollies themselves still

largely relied on cover versions even for their singles — but, just as it was with the more R&B-oriented bands like the Stones and the Animals, this relative inconvenience did not prevent the band from steadily maturing as fully autonomous and innovative artists, if not necessarily expert songwriters in their own right.



Our story begins with Doris Troy's 'Just One Look', where the band's classic three-part harmonies finally fall into place: Clarke, Hicks, and Nash together, then the first two jointly supporting Nash on the bridge section. Where Troy's original on Atlantic Records was a tad slower and her vocals were soulful rather than playful, the Hollies sensed the song's immense pure-pop potential, tightened up the rhythm section, and turned it into their first mini-explosion of infectiously celebratory teen sentiment. Next to the Beatles (and maybe, *maybe*, very occasionally the Dave Clark Five), nobody in Britain could quite match the ringing sharpness of that ascending "and I felt so I... I... I-I-I-I'm in love..." (despite the screaming ungrammaticality: actually, the original line goes "and I fell so hard, hard, hard in love...", but I guess nobody bothered to provide them with a lyrics sheet for the session. And no, they are not singing "I felt so high", by the way, which wasn't even a running ambiguity back in 1964) — so there was no way the song could not carry them all the way to No. 2 on the UK charts, and even scrape the bottom of the US charts at that (though in the States).

Next step: 'Here I Go Again', provided by the famous Mort Shuman and representing the Hollies in the full swing of their youthful powers — you could, in fact, argue that whatever they would do in the future could often match the effect of this song, but could never properly outdo its combination of a loud, tight power beat with a «waiting-in-ambush» type of vocal hook: I do not mean the "watch me now, cause here I go again!" main chorus — no, the main hook of this song is actually nested in the middle of each verse, first lulling you a bit with gently back-and-forth rocking bits ("I've... been hurt... so much... before... I told myself... yes I did..."), then turning round and hitting you smack dab in the guts with the shrill, multi-tracked archway of "NO MORE NO MORE WON'T GET HURT ANY MORE!". This is the kind of suspenseful vocal Heaven that you might not even find on a Beatles song — you really need the Hollies for this sort of experience.

Next step: 'We're Through', the first Hollies single credited to «L. Ransford» — that is, written by the Clarke/Hicks/Nash songwriting team rather than commissioned from an external source. Although it is not easily identifiable as a rip-off, the quirky, jazzy little acoustic riff which serves as its main musical hook bears an uncanny similarity to Dale Hawkins' 'Suzie Q', except for being less syncopated and more «baroque» than «swampy» in execution. Pretty soon, however, the riff passes the baton on to the vocals — some of which seem to be attracted by the riff itself, following it closely in an almost scat-like manner. Compared to all of the band's previous singles, it is notably darker in atmosphere and could be regarded as the band's equivalent of the Beatles' 'Things We Said Today', even if the band is too busy reveling in all those subtle vocal and instrumental flourishes to attain a comparable depth of feeling. Still, the band has to be commended for making their first original single so stylistically different from its predecessors, including that wonderful melismatic slide down from falsetto

all way down the scale in the chorus (a pretty good correlation with the general message of "we're through"). The record-buying public, so it seems, did not fully appreciate the transition, making the single stall at #7 on the charts — apparently, the fans wanted their Hollies loud and swaggy rather than quiet and pensive, so it was not until the tellingly titled 'I'm Alive' next year that they would resume their triumphant journey to the top of the charts.

It is at this point, with the Hollies firmly established as a major force on the contemporary pop stage, that they finally return to Abbey Road to complete their second LP — hugely different from the first, if only for the fact that 7 out of its 12 tunes are self-written *and* generally match the quality level of the cover versions. Oh, and the three-part harmonies, of course. Mind you, this is not superb songwriting *à la* Fab Four: most of the songs stick too close to each other in terms of atmosphere and feel too derivative of the major ideas of the singles to be as individually memorable as I would like them to be — for instance, something like 'Don't You Know' feels way too much like a retread of the up-winding «vocal stairs» of 'Just One Look', even if it is diluted with a Beatlesque beat and bridge. Similarly, 'Please Don't Feel Too Bad' is impressively upbeat (adding handclaps to your percussion always helps, just in case), but feels a bit too mechanically artificial, like all those catchy, but still lifeless pop constructions from the Dave Clark Five — no signs of the exuberant spark of life that lights up the stylistically similar 'Here I Go Again'.

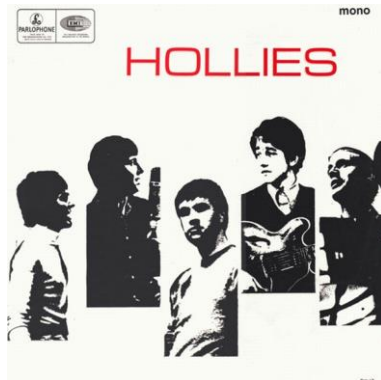
On the other hand, repeated listens expose the band's honest hunt for marginally unconventional pop tricks to try out in their own songwriting. For instance, 'You'll Be Mine' features a smooth, but relatively uncommon transition between the fast, ascending, pop-rocking verse ("it's been too long since I kissed you...") and the drawled out, descending, soulful ballad-style resolution ("...tonight, yes tonight, you'll be mine..."), both of them following the exact same tempo of the rhythm section. We also get faint hints of the emergence of the band members' individual styles — 'To You My Love' is essentially a Nash solo performance, sentimentally chivalrous in tone, while still supported by a steady and determined guitar melody and back-beat, a nice combination of introspective vulnerability and pop-rock crunch for which only Graham's lead vocals could be suitable, given how 100% extraverted is Clarke's artistic persona.

With so much songwriting on the line, it's like they hardly need those covers any more (at least, for their LPs), but the adrenaline-crazed run through Etta James' 'Something's Got A Hold On Me', with Eric Haydock stepping on the bass gas like there was no tomorrow and Clarke putting on his best pair of rock'n'roll shoes (watch out for those never-failing glottal strains on his 'I-I, I-I, I-I's!'), is still first-rate. And it's fun how they have all three singers swap lead vocals on the verses of 'Too Much Monkey Business' (it is also the only place on the album where you can hear what Tony Hicks' regular singing

voice sounds like on its own — just for information's sake). Still, arguably the best rock and roll number on the album is their own: compositionally, 'Set Me Free' is little more than a sped-up version of 'Confessin' The Blues', but performance-wise, it is an excellent showcase for drummer Bobby Elliott (watch out for those briefly slowed down three cracks on "...if you DON'T! WANT! MY! LOVE... set me free!..."), and Clarke's harmonica solo (occasionally double-tracked?) is quite invigorating as well. There is a brief part there, from about 1:20 to 1:40, when Clarke and Elliott are left alone to their devices, both going crazy on a solo of their own, and I would say that it is a fine competitor with the Yardbirds in terms of rave-up rhythm'n'blues intensity.

In the end, they got that title just right: **In The Hollies Style** truly establishes an individual style for the Hollies, and while they would still go on to write and record many more classic tunes, as well as expand that style to incorporate many new influences, it could also be argued that never again would they make such an extraordinarily gigantic quality leap as they pulled off from early to late 1964. This is both a compliment and a putdown, since it reminds us of how the band would ultimately be unable to make a proper transition to the next step of musical maturity, and remain lagging behind while their peers such as the Beatles, the Stones, and the Kinks would be scaling new artistic heights — but for those of us who are able to taste juicy morsels of spiritual delight in perfectly composed and performed «simplistic» pop *à la* 1964, this shouldn't be too much of a problem. Besides, this is certainly not the end of the story of the Hollies' creative evolution: **In The Hollies Style** merely deserves a big pat on the shoulder as that one LP on which the Hollies became the Hollies — on a purely song-by-song quality basis, they would continue on an upward trajectory for at least two more years, before the psychedelic revolution trapped them in a corner and messed them up pretty bad, that is.





HOLLIES

Album released:
September 1965

V A L U E
3 4 4 2 4

More info:



Tracks: 1) *Very Last Day*; 2) You Must Believe Me; 3) Put Yourself In My Place; 4) Down The Line; 5) That's My Desire; 6) *Too Many People*; 7) Lawdy Miss Clawdy; 8) When I Come Home To You; 9) Fortune Teller; 10) So Lonely; 11) I've Been Wrong; 12) Mickey's Monkey; 13*) I'm Alive; 14*) You Know He Did; 15*) Look Through Any Window; 16*) Honey And Wine; 17*) If I Needed Someone; 18*) You In My Arms; 19*) I Can't Get Nowhere With You; 20*) She Gives Me Everything I Want.

REVIEW

I think it would be madness to try and deny that the trilogy of LPs released by the Hollies in 1965–66 — **Hollies**, **Would You Believe** and **For Certain Because** — as well as the magnificent run of singles surrounding them represent the band at the absolute peak of their powers. These two years are all about the former teen pop music reaching substantial and formal maturity without, however, fully transitioning into technically and spiritually more sophisticated genres — psychedelia, art-rock, confessional singer-songwriter stuff, etc. — and that was precisely the threshold which the talents of Allan Clarke, Graham Nash, Tony Hicks and others would struggle to cross. Although the «Age of Aquarius» would not completely sweep away the Hollies, the way it made obsolete so many of their lesser brethren from the early British Invasion years, they still ended up buried under its waves, only occasionally rising to the surface to catch some air, rather than proudly riding them like the Beatles or the Stones would. But 1965 and 1966 — that's a different matter: these years were just perfect for the Hollies' level of pop sophistication, which went far beyond the likes of The Dave Clark 5 or, for instance,



Gerry & The Pacemakers, while still never letting them truly catch up with the biggest leagues. Those who love their Sixties' pop smart, but not too risky or ambitious; melodic, but not too challenging; masterfully arranged and produced, but not too experimental — these three albums are already well on the way to becoming your new addiction.

As usual, let us start with the singles; The Hollies had four of those out in 1965, with the earliest one ('Yes I Will') today included as a bonus track on the CD edition of **In The Hollies Style** and the other three attached to the CD edition of **Hollies**. 'Yes I Will' was a nice and catchy sentimental pop ballad, but somewhat old-fashionedly **Please Please Me**-like for January '65, and although it did barely crack the UK Top 10, it was not as successful as their previous singles — possibly because people did catch on to that old-fashionedness, expecting a great pop single to point a way to the future rather than drag them back into the past (for that matter, I think that 1965 was probably the single most artistically awesome year for the pop single market in recorded history — far more so than 1967, by which time major artistry was rather expected on the LP level than that of the 7-inch little guy).

This relative mistake («relative», because 'Yes I Will' is still very nice all by itself) would be corrected five months later with 'I'm Alive', the first Hollies recording to be surrounded with elements of scandal — the song, written for the band by Clint Ballard Jr. (the same guy who had also written 'You're No Good' for Dee Dee Warwick, later made famous by Linda Ronstadt), was initially passed on to their Manchester colleagues The Toggery Five, but then, allegedly, the Hollies heard their recording, got jealous, decided to record the song themselves and then managed to stop The Toggery Five from putting out their version. In subsequent interviews, members of The Toggery Five complained about injustice, insisting that their recording was superior and that The Hollies intentionally smothered their artistic and commercial success in the cradle — unfortunately, we'll never know because The Toggery Five's recording remains unavailable. Considering that their *other* records, from what I have personally heard, are not particularly outstanding or imaginative, I have reasons to suggest that they might be exaggerating the superiority of their version — but that The Hollies themselves were capable of pulling the rug from under their possible competitors, I could never doubt. It's always been a dog-eat-dog world, after all.

Anyway, what remains certain is that 'I'm Alive' is a perfect song for Allan Clarke to sing, and for the rest of the band to assemble around his singing. It actually does something that no Beatles song up to that point ever did — when the Beatles did an exuberant pop song, they usually made sure to smash you over the head right from the very start, be it a *SHE LOVES YOU YEAH YEAH YEAH* or a *CAN'T BUY ME LOVE, OH!...* or a *HELP! I NEED SOMEBODY*, but 'I'm Alive', totally true to the song's lyrical message of gradually finding the meaning of life in love, builds that exuberance up gradually, from the

almost somber, melancholic verse through the ascension in the "*now I can breathe... I can see... I can touch... I can feel...*" bridge (was that an inspiration for **Tommy** or what?) to the all-out ecstatic chorus where Allan's triumphant declaration of the song's title does sound like a natural reaction from somebody who's just been unfrozen from a 100-year rest in the freezing chamber. Other than Hicks' rather perfunctory jangly solo in the middle, the song is perfect in how it tells a dynamic story even if you don't understand a single word. How many three-minute pop singles at the time told that kind of dynamic story? Apart from 'Remember (Walking In The Sand)', very little springs to mind.

(Of course, The Hollies wouldn't be The Hollies if they didn't have to demonstrate us just how second-rate they were after all, by putting an «original» composition, 'You Know He Did', by the perennial «L. Ransford» on the B-side — which happens to be 'Louie Louie' with a new vocal pop melody on top that tries to mimick the classic guitar riff. Taken all by itself, it's a silly, but funny variation on this cornerstone of rock'n'roll; taken in the context of 'I'm Alive', it merely reminds us of how hard it is to be a good songwriter.)

As if the emotional dynamics of 'I'm Alive' was insufficient cause for self-elation, with their next single the Hollies allowed themselves yet another mini-artistic triumph over their Liverpool competitors: 'Look Through Any Window', the first of two big hits that the band scored from Graham Gouldman, the golden boy of UK pop songwriting circa 1965–66, was their first single *not* to focus on the ubiquitous issues of boy-girl relationships — while just about every Beatles song up to that time, except for a handful of covers, still focused on precisely that. Instead, 'Look Through Any Window' was just a playful, joyful celebration of the life-goes-on-around-you variety — it did not make a particularly big point, and lyrically it was even sort of old-fashioned ("*you can see the little ladies in their gowns*" has a bit of a Charles Dickens ring to it), but it sure as hell was *different*, and so was the music, too: that guitar jangle driving the song is decidedly 12-string, and in 1965 that meant a Byrds influence, and a Byrds influence meant merging rock, pop, and folk, pushing your music out of the sphere of teen entertainment and onto the Serious Artistic Plane.

That was something that the Beatles, too, had started to do on **Help!**, but for them it would not reach fruition until **Rubber Soul**, where, I'd think, you could probably even squeeze in a song like 'Look Through Any Window', except it might be just a tad *too* happy for the somewhat more cynical and world-weary vibe that the Fab Four were pushing at that stage in their life. Not that 'Look Through Any Window' is itself totally devoid of any signs of wistfulness; there is at least a tiny touch of pensiveness and doubt in the chanting of the "*movin' on their way...*" chorus, or in the anxious backing vocal of "*where do they go?*", so that, with a bit of twisting and turning and shock-value-baiting, you could build a case for 'Look

Through Any Window' as a reflection on life's meaninglessness and vanity — not sure, though, that this is how either Gouldman or the Hollies themselves ever envisioned their creation. Still, they are definitely *not* going for a kind of 'What A Wonderful World' vibe — the same way neither the melody nor the lyrics of 'Penny Lane', the «descriptive» Beatles song that would probably be the closest that the Fab Four ever got to this kind of vibe on their own records, really warrant describing the song as a «happy blast of nostalgia».

This feeling that 'Look Through Any Window' is not nearly as jovial as it might seem upon first sight is further reinforced by the B-side — this time, «L. Ransford» actually bothered to write a good original song, because 'So Lonely' is one of their finest melancholic creations; I sense a possible Zombies influence here, what with all the minor chords and the sudden vulnerability in Clarke's usually tough voice. There's a great mood swing in the chorus, too, when the outwardly expressed despair ("I get so lonely, I get so lonely without you!...") smoothly switches back into inward, shut-off gloom ("I get lonely for you"), with the guitar trading its romantic arpeggiated chords for a bit of dark, «ominous» bluesy phrasing. A trifle, perhaps, but clearly showing that the band's melodic instincts were nothing to laugh about, at least not when they actually gave themselves the chance to sit down and properly develop them.

At this point, we should probably switch to the album, released within a month of the single, but just so as to close the subject of the Hollies' singles run in 1965, it probably makes sense to mention here their fourth and least auspicious cut of the year — a cover of George Harrison's 'If I Needed Someone', which, as fate would have it, Parlophone actually released on the very same day as **Rubber Soul** itself, for all the world to compare. Alas, the comparison never worked in favor of The Hollies; in fact, people still wonder as to why Clarke and Nash decided to make use of the demo, given to them by George Martin — especially considering the ongoing and well-publicized rivalry between the two bands at the time. Perhaps they were secretly hoping that, since it was a frickin' George Harrison song, rather than the mighty Lennon-McCartney, they'd end up singing it better than George and thus, get a good chance for a *TAKE THIS, YOU LIVERPUDLIAN SCUM!!!* moment of their own. If so, such hidden aspirations could only turn around and smack them in their faces themselves.

It's not a «bad» cover as such — they play and sing the song well enough, for sure — but the difference is that the song actually meant something to George (presumably, he wrote it as a sort of goodbye for all his female fans in light of his upcoming engagement with Pattie) and hardly meant anything to the Hollies, who, therefore, sing it in a typically brash and boisterous Allan Clarke way, when in reality it requires a cautious and moody George Harrison approach. The crucial difference is to be found in the bridge: George sings "*but you see now I'm too much in love*" almost apologetically, as if he

were a little shy and embarrassed about how things turned out to be, whereas Clarke changes that to "*can't you see how I'm too much in love?*" in a visibly pissed-off tone that implies a "get out of here, all you nasty clingin' bitches!". It's not so much that it's rude as that it simply does not go too well with the overall melody and mood of the song. Both George and John publicly dismissed the Hollies' version at the time (which was then used by the Hollies as a convenient reason to explain the single's commercial failure), and although this may all have been largely the side effect of overall competitive jealousy, clearly 'If I Needed Someone' is not going to be remembered as two and a half minutes out of the band's finest hour — not even out of its finest hour when confined to the year 1965.

But now let us, after all, get back to the self-titled album, which came out in September, a good three months before the cute-in-retrospect conflict over 'If I Needed Someone', and overall constituted a *very* solid effort, even if covers of other artists still prevailed over «L. Ransford» originals. Some of those covers, too, were quite ancient — it is questionable, for instance, whether there was any serious need to profess the band's love for Fifties' rock'n'roll with performances of Roy Orbison's 'Down The Line' or Lloyd Price's 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy', both of which are fun but feel like filler whose only possible purpose is to continue proving that the Hollies *are* a rock'n'roll band at heart. Unfortunately, the fact that the guitar solo on 'Down The Line' is almost identical to Harrison's solo on 'Everybody's Trying To Be My Baby', and also the odd «coincidence» that 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy' ended up released within a month of the Beatles' 'Dizzy Miss Lizzie', still implies that they only wanted to go on proving that because the Beatles were still proving that on each of their LPs — and even if wild wild rock'n'roll is not the most natural breeding ground for either of the bands, the Beatles could still rock much harder than the Hollies, whose only true «rock'n'roll asset» was Clarke's voice, and even that one with certain reservations.

Still, they try their best, and within the context of a pop LP it always makes sense to interrupt the smooth'n'liltin' melodic flow with a few «rough cuts», even if you couldn't make them genuinely «rough» to save your life. And they work a little better than 'Fortune Teller' (nobody in the UK did that song better than the Rolling Stones anyway, with their stone-cold deadpan approach to the humorous original) or the maudlin oldie 'That's My Desire' (because any Hollies album should have at least one tune for grandmas to cherish).

Yet there *are* some absolutely brilliant choices in covers here, too, and the best of the lot is saved for first. In its original incarnation, Peter, Paul & Mary's '[Very Last Day](#)' was a well-written, catchy pop song, clumsily disguised as ominous gospel-folk and rather meekly delivered by means of rudimentary acoustic guitars and wobbly vocal harmonies. What the Hollies did with it was string it up and tighten the ropes so harshly that in their version, the song speeds along as a tight,

disciplined harpoon, skewering the listener in passing — Allan Clarke was simply born to bring this material to life, and though, of course, it still remains a catchy pop song rather than a slice of authentic gospel fury, I cannot help but clench my own fist every time the man lashes out with his "*everybody's gonna pray to the heavens on the Judgment Day!*" Again, how many UK bands in 1964–65 actually tried adding aggressive gospel-pop to their setlist? Verily we have not seen this since at least the days of good old Lonnie Donegan, whose vibe the band also seems to be channelling here.

It's a bit more difficult for the band to assert their superiority over Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions, but they still do a fine job of turning the American soul groove of 'You Must Believe Me', armed with brass leads and sweet head voices, into a British pop-rock groove, staking its claim with electric guitars and sharper, shriller, teen-angstier vocal harmonies. Curtis Mayfield is intimately apologizing with his heart on his sleeve when singing "*you must believe me, darling, it just didn't happen that way*"; Allan Clarke is declaring his innocence to the whole world from the top of the bell tower in the church square. Both approaches are efficient in their own way, though they are so different that, most likely, everybody *will* have their own favorite. In a similar manner, they redo the Miracles' 'Mickey Monkey', turning it from a brass-led dance groove into a guitar-driven rave-up *à la* Yardbirds; I'm not the biggest fan of either version (a little too silly for my tastes), but this is surely the kind of Smokey Robinson material that the young and energetic Hollies could hardly fail to do justice to.

Of the remaining four original compositions (in addition to the already discussed 'So Lonely'), I find two to be okay and two more to be little precious gems. The «okay» ones are on the second side of the LP. 'When I Come Home To You' is rather flat and outdated for 1965 — the one great thing about it is the trilly little lead line that Tony Hicks keeps playing as a counterpart to Clarke's harmonica, a technically masterful and proto-psychedelically beautiful flourish that, unfortunately, is rather wasted on a song whose harmonies belong in the **Please Please Me** era and whose lyrics are so inept, I really wouldn't be surprised to learn it was some ancient outtake they'd dug out at the last moment to fill up space. 'I've Been Wrong' is a little better, but feels to me like a conscious attempt to write a «hard-rockin' ballad» in the style of the Kinks' 'I Need You' or 'Tired Of Waiting For You' (plus, Nash's "*stand by me my love...*" middle-eight sounds *very* corny).

So I'm easily trading off both of these in exchange for 'Put Yourself In My Place', which, although its groove is dangerously close to the Merseybeat of 'Hold Me Tight', is just so impossibly exuberant and has the band firing on so many cylinders at once that any criticism flies right out the door. They wind themselves up so fiercely, in fact, that during the instrumental break they end up floating right out of the world of the Beatles and into the world of the Stones, with the rhythm section of Haydock and Elliott, amplified by more of Clarke's hystrionic harmonica and equally excited guest piano runs from Alan

Hawkshaw, kicking up such a mighty ruckus, I'm almost disappointed that they then re-emerge from it back into the safe haven of disciplined pop-rock. In any case, despite being one of their oldest tracks on the LP (dating back to a session in November 1964), it's definitely one of their best.

However, the finest example of «L. Ransford»'s original songwriting on the album is probably 'Too Many People', a song that shares its title, but not its message or its influences, with a future Paul McCartney masterpiece. Perhaps its creation is somehow connected with the idea of covering 'Very Last Day' — at the very least, it clearly reflects the band's active interest in the folk and newly-nascent folk-rock scene, and, albeit the lyrics are certainly nowhere near the level of a Bob Dylan, is clearly more «serious» in tone than, once again, any Beatles song up to that date. Melodically, it's stuck somewhere between the Fab Four and the Searchers, and the overall sound, though it's got a tinge of melancholy, is still light and friendly enough to make you pay little attention to the lyrics — which *are* worth paying attention to, though, because it's basically a song about how God periodically purges the planet from excessive human presence by means of wars and epidemics: "*that's how he planned it, you can't do naught about it — too many people!*". (Too bad those vinyl days are behind us — I'd love to see somebody release a single with Billy Preston's 'That's The Way God Planned It' on Side A and 'Too Many People' on Side B; now *that* would be a truly kick-ass artistic statement!). The cheerful tone in which they deliver the punchline, "*There ain't no fooling death / So you just gotta sit and wait*", is alone worth its weight in fool's gold.

The conclusion is obvious: **Hollies** is a must-have album for any fan of the classic British Invasion era, and ample proof that the band was able to deliver a solid LP experience. In fact, the reason why the Hollies are still remembered as a primarily «singles band» is that, unlike the Beatles, they rarely ever incorporated their singles into LPs (which the Beatles did plenty — 'Can't Buy Me Love', 'Ticket To Ride', etc.). Chip away a few weak cuts off **Hollies**, replace them with 'I'm Alive' and 'Look Through Any Window', and you get yourself a record that can easily rank up there with all the giants of 1965, or at least come really close. Admittedly, the band's formally impressive stab at «social relevance», with 'Very Last Day' and 'Too Many People' sending out explicit messages that neither the Beatles nor the Stones had on their own agendas at the time, looks a bit too cutesy, and foreshadows their failure at successfully transitioning into a «serious» band in the second half of the decade — but for the young-and-fragile standards of 1965, this was still more than enough.

