

THE GUARDIAN
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Reviews

Pop

The Divine Comedy
Old Royal Naval College, London
★★★★☆

Trust Neil Hannon to find a venue grand enough to



Frolics and hits ...
Neil Hannon of the
Divine Comedy

accommodate his pop symphonies. Wren's 17th-century hospital-turned-college - home to the Greenwich Summer Sessions, of which this was the opening night - was a fitting backdrop for the florid twists and turns of his Divine Comedy catalogue: at one end, colonnaded splendour; at the other, a view of Canary Wharf across the Thames. Neither end escaped his notice. In tribute to the college's stateliness, he toasted his audience with Pimm's, then drawled: "We have a marvellous view of the financial district. This song is for them." It was called *The Complete Banker*.

There was more drollery where that came from. Performing solo brings out the joker in Hannon, whose relentless wryness suggests he goes through life with an eyebrow perpetually arched. That's also the default setting of his lyrics: if you hadn't known he was a master of portraying the British middle classes as Pooterish fumbler, you did after two hours and 20 songs.

Hannon played his current album, *Bang Goes the Knighthood*, in its entirety, his piano taking the place of the album's orchestral arrangements. Noting that audiences find it hard to clap in time to *At the Indie Disco* (such irony!), he produced a metronome, and kept the comedy flowing by inviting a fan to tell a joke during *I Like*.

Throughout these frolics, and the run of hits that comprised the second half of the show, Hannon was both charming host and serious artist. An accomplished pianist and decent crooner, he made even the vaudeville larkiness of *National Express* seem commanding. There's got to be a medal, if not a knighthood, for a performer who can do that.

Caroline Sullivan
The Greenwich Summer Sessions end on 31 July.