

# Daily Mail

## **JOOLS HOLLAND & MARC ALMOND: A Lovely Life To Live (Warner Music)**

Verdict: Unlikely duo delivers ★★★★★

■ JOOLS HOLLAND believes his new album with Soft Cell singer Marc Almond 'brings out the best in both of us' — and he has a point. The pair are both OBEs, but they are unlikely bedfellows, with Holland the cheery, boogie-woogie pianist and Almond the left-field maverick.

But it is those differences that make *A Lovely Life To Live* a success. Mixing some startling originals with big band versions of soul standards and torch songs, it brings 'gutter heart' Marc closer to the mainstream and adds mystique to Jools's artistry.

Almond, 61, has worked courageously to get his career back on track following a near-fatal motor-bike accident in 2004. He sang magnificently during a two-hour Soft Cell reunion concert in London in September and his adaptability shines through again here.

Jools, 60, and his band provide polished backing, with his keyboards dominating a brassy, baroque title track and the Edith Piaf cover *Hymne A L'Amour*.

The centrepiece, however, is a triptych of new songs about London. Theatrically sung by Almond, who moved to the capital from Leeds in the early Eighties, *I Lost My City* laments the disappearance of 'the cafes and corners where we once met', swept away by gentrification.

The party number *London You Were My Lover* looks back on the singer's neon-lit, night-clubbing youth, while *Workhouse Blues* is a smoky jazz piece that sounds ready-made for a stage musical.

The covers include two Bobby Bland soul numbers and a rollicking take on *When The Saints Go Marching In* — a fiery finale to a rewarding alliance.

■ *RITA ORA starts a UK tour at the Motorpoint Arena, Cardiff, on May 21 (axs.com). Jools Holland & Marc Almond are on tour until December 22 (joolsholland.com).*

PHOTOGRAPH BY NEVIN WILKINSON