

METRO

WEEKEND

MARC ALMOND TOURING WITH JOOLS HOLLAND ISN'T AS ODD AS YOU MIGHT THINK, SAYS **SIMON GAGE**

ONE is a gay, black leather-clad singer of edgy, sexual, naughty songs (he loves that description, by the way). The other is more at home in smart trousers and brogues, and is a honky-tonk pianist with a manor house in the country. So why would Marc Almond and Jools Holland not only decide to tour the country together but also write and record songs for a new album? Strange bedfellows, or what?

'Oh, thank you very much,' says Jools, in that slightly posh-sounding voice of his.

'I think we actually have more in common than you think,' says Marc. 'We're both quite Britishly bonkers. And we both come from the same time of music, basically - that post-punk era.'

'The British couldn't-care-less area of music,' says Jools, a former member of the band Squeeze, who has performed with pretty much everyone from Sting to Chaka Khan in his capacity as the country's best-loved band leader.

The pair first met when Marc's band, Soft Cell, appeared on Jools' show *The Tube* in the 1980s.

Marc later worked with Jools and his Rhythm & Blues Orchestra after he was involved in a serious motorbike accident in 2004, although they had toured together before then.

'You might think that Marc is a funny person to sing in front of a big band, but he has a very specific way of leading the orchestra when he's singing. He has this power,' says Jools. 'And it's great to capture that on record. The album is actually based on

Suited: Marc and Jools have a mutual musical admiration



Subversive: Soft Cell-era Marc, in 1981



Cool cat: Squeeze man Jools, in 1979

'WE'RE BOTH QUITE BRITISHLY BONKERS'

our relationship with the audience.' You can't help but wonder what that audience looks like these days, what with Marc's old punks and Jools' more grown-up set. But Marc reckons that his fans have been won over to Jools by coming to see him, especially now there's an album.

'I realise that there was quite an urban blues sound to Soft Cell,' says Marc. 'I grew up listening to blues rock, so when we started working together, it just seemed a very natural thing that I'd sing more blues, but with a pop sensibility. *Tainted Love* was born to be a big band song.'

'We realised we'd been picking material to do live,' says Jools. 'Stuff that we both liked. Then we thought "we need to write together" so we did some songs to do live, then thought "we need to record this". So the audience has been the boss of the record.'

'I don't usually write like that,' says Marc. 'I get sent music and write lyrics. This was an old-school way of songwriting and I was terrified, but we created there and then in the studio and it was great.'

In fact, they were on the same page to such an extent that they even ended up writing songs about the same subjects. 'We both wrote songs about London on the album,' says Marc. 'Jools wrote a song called *I've Lost My City*, and I wrote *London You're My Lover*, which is us as old men moaning about the London we used to love, and where has it gone?'

'But we both agree that London is still the greatest

capital city in the world. And we're both very British artists, so there are very British flavours.' It's all well and good to mesh musically, but somehow you don't quite see Marc and Jools as mates.

'Personally, we've always got on incredibly well or we wouldn't be touring together 15 years later,' says Marc. 'I don't think Jools and I have ever argued about anything. We've always been pretty respectful of each

other. But ask us after this record... And I think he could use a few fashion tips. Last week he was wearing a suit with trainers. It was his "funky" look but it wasn't very him.'

With the tour lasting up until Christmas, with Marc performing seven or more songs with Jools and the Rhythm & Blues Orchestra per gig, and the album *A Lovely Life To Live* out now (It's the title of our record and our philosophy of life,' says Jools) we remark that

the two actually don't seem such an odd couple after all. 'Well thank you very much,' says Marc. 'We will send you an invite to the wedding...'

■ *A Lovely Life To Live* is released today. The tour continues tonight and tomorrow at Glasgow SEC, Armadillo, ticketmaster.co.uk



In harmony: Marc has rediscovered his love of blues