

# THE *Piano*

Jools Holland holds a unique place in British music. The pianist, bandleader, singer, composer and TV presenter is one of its most enduring figures on stage and screen. Here, he talks to *Music Week* about working with George Harrison, live music's place on TV, celebrating 25 years of *Later...* and his unbreakable bond with his piano...

## TALENT

BY JAMES HANLEY

If a man is known by the company he keeps then Jools Holland is up there with the very best. The former Squeeze man has worked with the likes of George Harrison, Bono, Eric Clapton, David Gilmour, Tom Jones and Mark Knopfler, while as the host of *Later...* and before that, *The Tube*, he has provided a platform to the past, present and future of music for more than three decades.

Given his unofficial status as the face of music TV, it's easy to forget Holland is an artist in his own right, having released more than 30 studio albums since striking out from Squeeze in 1981. He has been signed to Warner since 1996 and his most recent LPs, 2015's *Jools & Ruby* and 2016 instrumental *Piano*, which have sold 39,330 and 12,043 units in the UK respectively, came via the label's East West imprint.

"Jools Holland has had an extraordinary career - as a musician in his own right and as one of the great tastemakers in music," ADA, Rhino and East West UK president Dan Chalmers tells *Music Week*. "His influence is legendary thanks to his *Later...* show as well as his Radio 2 programme, and he continues to be an important champion of newly-emerging talented artists and genres. It's been an honour and a privilege to work with him for a number of years and I look forward to many more brilliant albums from him on East West."

"I might take the world record for being with a label the longest," jokes Holland. "We've been with Warner for a long time and Dan Chalmers has been very supportive of what we try to do. We're very fortunate to be one of the few acts in the record business that have had the long-term support of a label."

*Piano*, released last December, is based around his 50-year relationship with the instrument with which he is synonymous. "I wanted to do something that would put the focus onto the piano," Holland tells *Music Week*. "It's at the centre of everything. It drives whatever I do with the big band, but it's always there in the background - never the foreground - so I wanted to make something special of it."



He continues: "if you do play an instrument, it's your voice. No two people make the piano sound alike. It's one of those records where I don't mind if people don't like it, it doesn't matter because this is what I sound like."

The 59-year-old's best-selling solo album is 2001's *Small World Big Band* (UK sales, 719,671), notable for featuring the last recorded performance of George Harrison. "He was a friend and also a hero," smiles Holland. "He had this song, *Horse To The Water*, and said, I think your band should play it and I'll sing it. He sang it great. I think it's one of his great songs. We've done it live since with different singers."

Holland is rarely off the road with his legendary Rhythm & Blues Orchestra and has extensive touring plans for 2017, beginning in the Netherlands on February 25. He returns home for a 50-plus date trek of the UK from May onwards, including his traditional double-header at the Royal Albert Hall, a month before Christmas.

"What I've discovered is that the artists who are slightly older than me - like Tom Jones, Eric Clapton, The Rolling Stones - seem to tour more than they ever did. I think that's because you enjoy it more as you get older. It's not the hard work it was, you're not schlepping about in the back of a van, it's relatively comfortable and people look forward to seeing you."

"I remember seeing Eric Clapton last year at the Albert Hall and he's never been better. It's the same with Paul McCartney, those big iconic artists get stronger and have learned how to connect better because they're slightly more relaxed. I enjoy touring very much. We probably

do a little more than ever before and, of course, we're unique. Well, I'm unique, in that people don't really have big bands anymore - certainly not with the same people in them."

One of the mainstays of Holland's live shows is vocalist Ruby Turner, co-star of 2015's *Jools & Ruby* album. The pair hit it off instantly. "When I first met Ruby I realised that she's a bit like me in that she had a talent that went to a root," he reflects. "It wasn't particularly refined, but that's what I liked; it was uniquely her. It also had echoes of another age - her music is in touch with the blues, gospel and Jamaican music, and she's mixed up all those things. Sometimes, you hear an echo of something from the past - that's what she has in her voice - but with this incredibly powerful spirit."

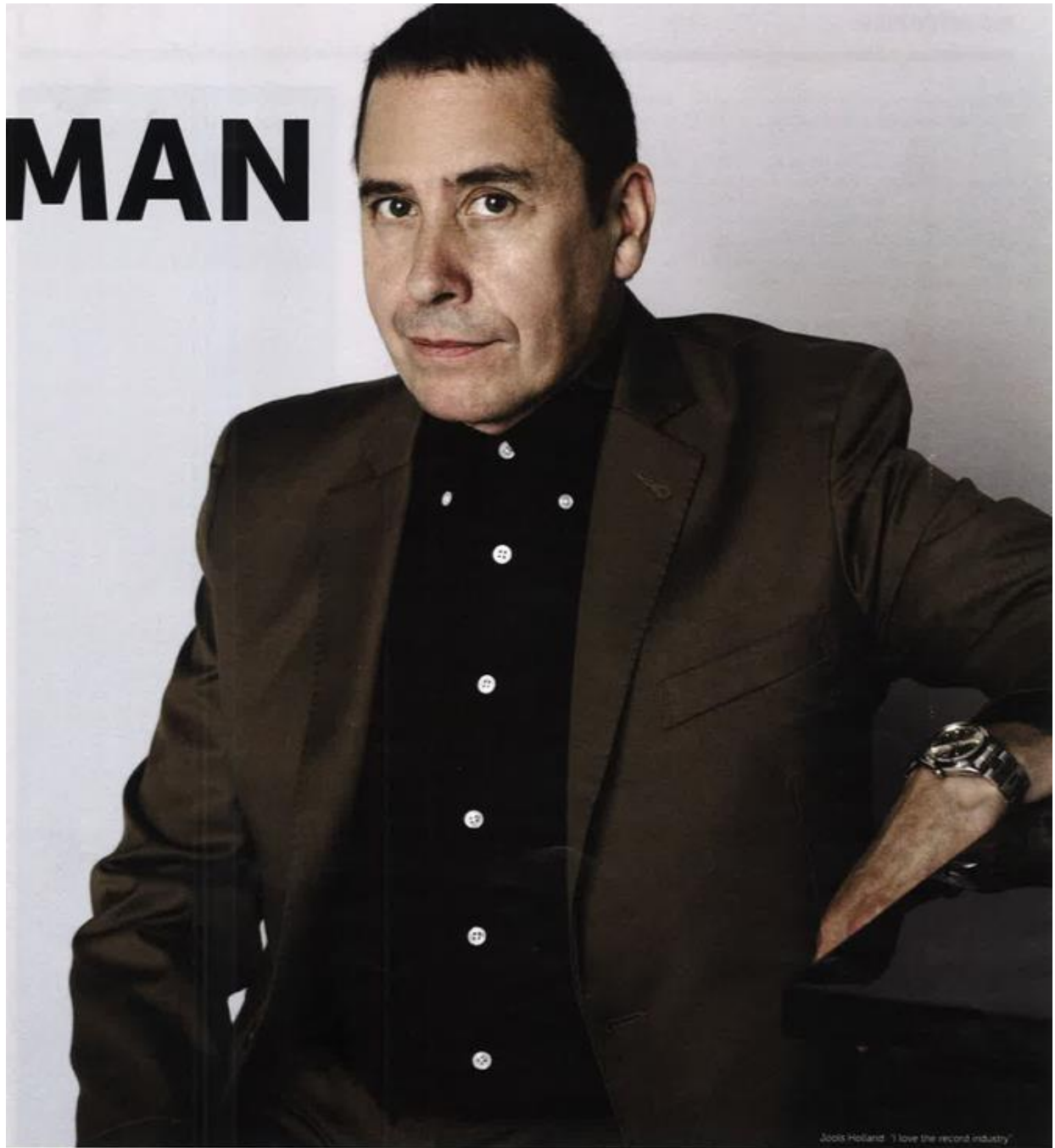
Holland is managed by One Fifteen's Paul Loasby, while his live career is guided by booking agent Nick Peel of Miracle Artists and tour manager Stephen Taylor. He credits the team around him for allowing him to multi-task. "People say you're running a big band, you're doing all these live shows, you're doing a TV show and a radio show, you've got recording studios, you've got all this stuff going on, how do you do it all?" explains Holland. "And the simple answer is, I don't, they do - and without them I would be completely lost."

Here, Holland sits down (sans piano, for once) to discuss his innermost thoughts on live music, on TV, the joy of collaborations and the death of the record shop...

### What makes a good collaboration?

There's definitely something to adding 1+1 and, if it can add up to three or seven, that's much better than adding up to two. An example of that is, with the *Piano* record, I collaborated with Brian Eno and he brought a completely different attitude towards things. We were Floyd Cramer fans for instance - Floyd Cramer had the greatest selling piano instrumental of all time with *Last Date* and we both loved that record. Brian took it apart and examined it, and I thought it was marvellous.

One of your most well known collaborations was



with Tom Jones (2004 album Tom Jones & Jools Holland charted at No.5 in the UK). Why do you think you hit it off?

We both loved the same sort of music and we get on very well. Tom is charming and funny and is the best sort of person you could want to sit and have dinner with. The other thing is that he's a Jerry Lee Lewis fanatic and so, between the two of us, we could morph into one big Jerry, with my piano playing and his voice. It was

always a joy to work with him.

**What are the biggest changes to the music business you've noticed during your time in the industry?**

That mullet haircut seems to have vanished now [laughs]. I suppose the first thing I've noticed - apart from the internet practically clearing off the record business - is the disappearance of the record shop, which is very sad and which I would never have

believed. I love the record industry, I'm a record collector and there were times when I would walk into a record shop and, because there was an enthusiast working behind the counter, you felt they were part of the same world.

**So what about the vinyl revival?**

I think the vinyl revival is a small blip, but it's great that there is a vinyl revival. I predict a CD revival next [laughs]. People want to own something.

People like collecting things. I want the rare Jerry Lee cover, ideally with a signature, and you can't get that with the internet. The other big change is the way that people perceive and buy music. They are more broad-minded now which I think is for the best. A 10-year-old child can now find every piece of music that they'd ever dreamed of, at the press of a button, whereas we used to have to hunt all over to find an obscure record. It's given everybody everything, but they don't quite know what they want. What is good is that when I was growing up, people used to think to themselves, I'm a reggae fan so I couldn't possibly like heavy metal. Or I like folk music, so I couldn't like pop music. Now, the tribal way in which people buy and appreciate music has changed. They're less close-minded.

**"The tribal way in which people buy and appreciate music has changed. They're less close-minded"**  
**JOOLS HOLLAND**

**Do you feel the format of Later... was a precursor to that?**

One of the great things about Later... is that it evolved into what it is. For the first time there were no stages - we didn't have the money - I was on the same level as the band and you saw everything from my point of view. We realised we'd invented something there, but I don't think we realised it was much better when we featured all sorts of music until a few series in. We didn't want huge stars every week and that was quite an odd thing because in any other television show - if it had been on ITV, for example - they'd have only wanted the huge stars because then more people would watch. But we felt our responsibility was more to have a show that could be as mixed as possible and have a variation of different types of music. You wanted somebody new, you wanted somebody who was a legend, somebody who was a great star at the moment and then somebody who was from a genre of music that perhaps might not have a home anywhere else on television. And as we were coming to that view, curiously enough, the music consumer was as well.



*Suited and booted:  
 Jools Holland*

**What are your thoughts on the present state of live music on TV?**

I've always said the more the better. There are some great chat shows and places for music on which you can appear, but there are no other shows really dedicated to music like us - and that's a shame. The BBC should be carried shoulder high through the streets because only they would have kept a show like us on. I mean, nobody else has bothered trying to do one for long enough. I don't know what other programmes address music in a serious way.

**Could a show like The Tube work as well in the modern age?**

The thing about The Tube was that the BBC had ignored punk in many ways - or at least hadn't embraced it - because they thought it wasn't to be taken seriously. Some of their music television was very good, but quite earnest. The Old Grey Whistle Test was a great show, but some of the other ones were a bit 'Smashie and Nicey'. So when The Tube came along it was very amateurish, which was great and people loved it. It was the beginning of youth television in lots of ways and it had great music. The idea was it's Friday, it's half past five and the weekend starts here. It was like a TFI Friday - Chris Evans always said that's the slot he wanted. And it was genuinely edgy - it wasn't trying to be edgy - it was the real thing. You never knew quite what was going to happen, I certainly didn't and I was in the middle of it. But it was very much of its time. To have another one today... I'm not sure what areas it would plug into.

**What did it mean to you to receive the MITS Award in 2011?**

It was a magical evening. I was very honoured and very touched. People often think of the music business as like stepping into the serpents' den, so to speak. But actually, when you think about Nordoff Robbins, Band Aid and things like that, you realise music does a lot to help people all the time.

**And what's next?**

We're about to go into the studio with [Grammy Award-winning Latin American musician] José Feliciano. He came on the show and blew me away with his voice and guitar playing, so we're going to be making a record and he's going on tour with us at the end of the year.

## LATER WITH JOOLS... TURNS 25



A staple of the BBC's live music coverage since 1992, Later... With Jools Holland is a national institution. The show's winning formula of contemporary acts, evergreen legends and rising stars - allied to the spotlight it shines on lesser-known talent - has stood the test of time, finding favour around the globe.

Originally broadcast from the BBC Television Centre, it has aired from The Maidstone Studios since 2013. Occasional special editions of the show have focused on major artists such as Oasis, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Metallica, The Verve and R.E.M.

Holland is in no doubt as to the reason for its longevity - the respect with which it treats its subject matter. "It's the music, that's the key," he proclaims. "And also, trying to be the servant of the music and not the other way around. On some TV shows they try and get the music to serve the purposes of the show. We are not trying to do that, that's an important difference."

"There's not another show like it in the world anymore and that's why it's sold all over the place - because it has this reputation for collecting the music of today, yesterday and tomorrow."

Its commitment to helping break new acts remains as resolute as ever. "What I love is when you see a brand new young artist and an ancient legend who's maybe from a different world," says Holland. "That's a great mix and a great thing to see and hear. I would be upset if there were genres of music that we weren't covering."

New Year's Eve tradition Jools' Annual Hootenanny has been another long-running triumph, much to the surprise of the man himself. "I can't believe that it has stayed on so long, but I'm delighted it has," he grins. "My orchestra come to life on it because there are all these different artists that they can work with."

He adds: "A strange but true story is that I was on tour in Arbroath when the idea for the Hootenanny was first mooted. We'd just heard on the news about [Arbroath-based Scottish singer and entertainer] Andy Stewart, who had been the face of New Year's Eve in Britain throughout the '60s. It was his memorial and on the news they were saying to avoid Arbroath because there were traffic jams."

"[Later... producer] Mark Cooper called me and said, 'Do you want to do a New Year's Eve show?' I was touring at the time and said to Steve, my tour manager, 'Go straight into Arbroath. I don't care about the traffic, we're having a cup of tea and we're playing our respects. It was like the baton being passed on so yeah, spooky story.'"