



Glasgow

EDINBURGH MAY HAVE THE FESTIVAL BUT WHEN IT COMES TO COMEDY THERE'S ONLY ONE BILLY CONNOLLY, WRITES **ALBERT EHRNROOTH**

“People make Glasgow” is the latest slogan and it is true, Glaswegians are a pretty friendly lot. It could be that Scotland’s imminent referendum for independence has led to a sense of collective cheerfulness. A more likely explanation is that it has something to do with the extensive clean-up of the city that took place in preparation for the Commonwealth Games.

It is not that long ago that Glasgow conjured up images of tenement slums, inebriated citizens and the somewhat mythical deep-fried Mars bar. It remains a fact that life expectancy at birth for both men and women in the UK remains the lowest in Glasgow City. Those statistics come as a surprise, because Glasgow has changed so much for the better since my last visit, back in 1983. The harbour district has been regenerated with the help of some eye-catching architecture like Norman Foster’s exhibition and conference centre nicknamed ‘the Armadillo’ and Zaha Hadid’s design for the fantastically entertaining Riverside Museum. It is clear that art and design matter to the locals in the UK’s third largest city. It became evident a few months ago when the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) caught fire and was nearly lost. Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s iconic library was reduced to smouldering rubble, which visibly moved some Glaswegians to tears.

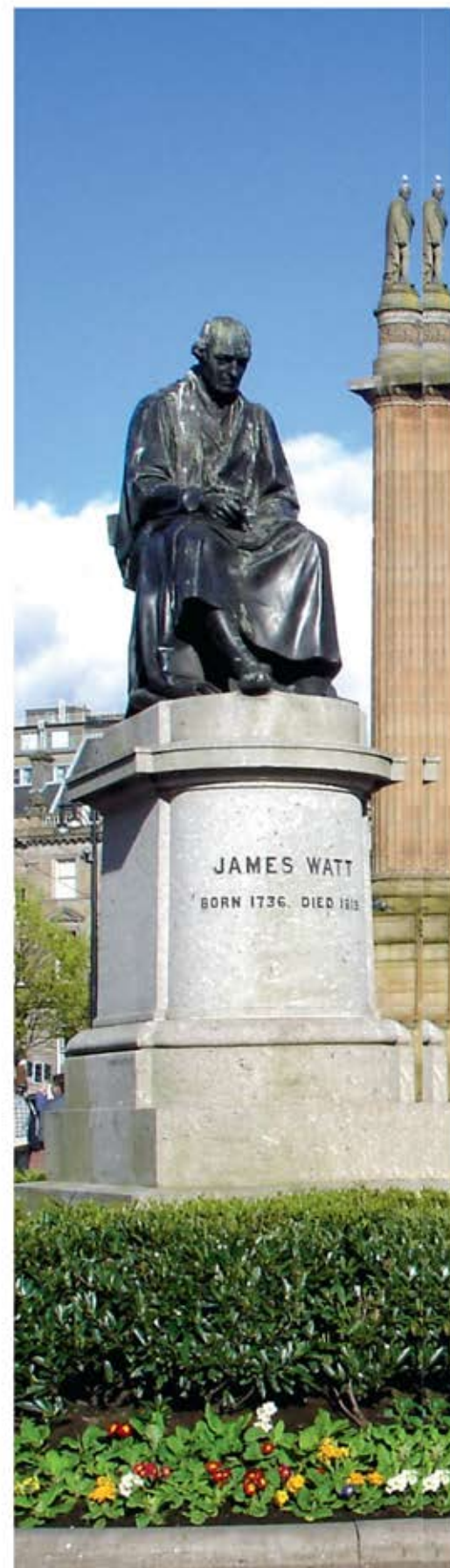
With hindsight it seems incredible that Glaswegians only in the 1970s started to realise the touristic value of Charles

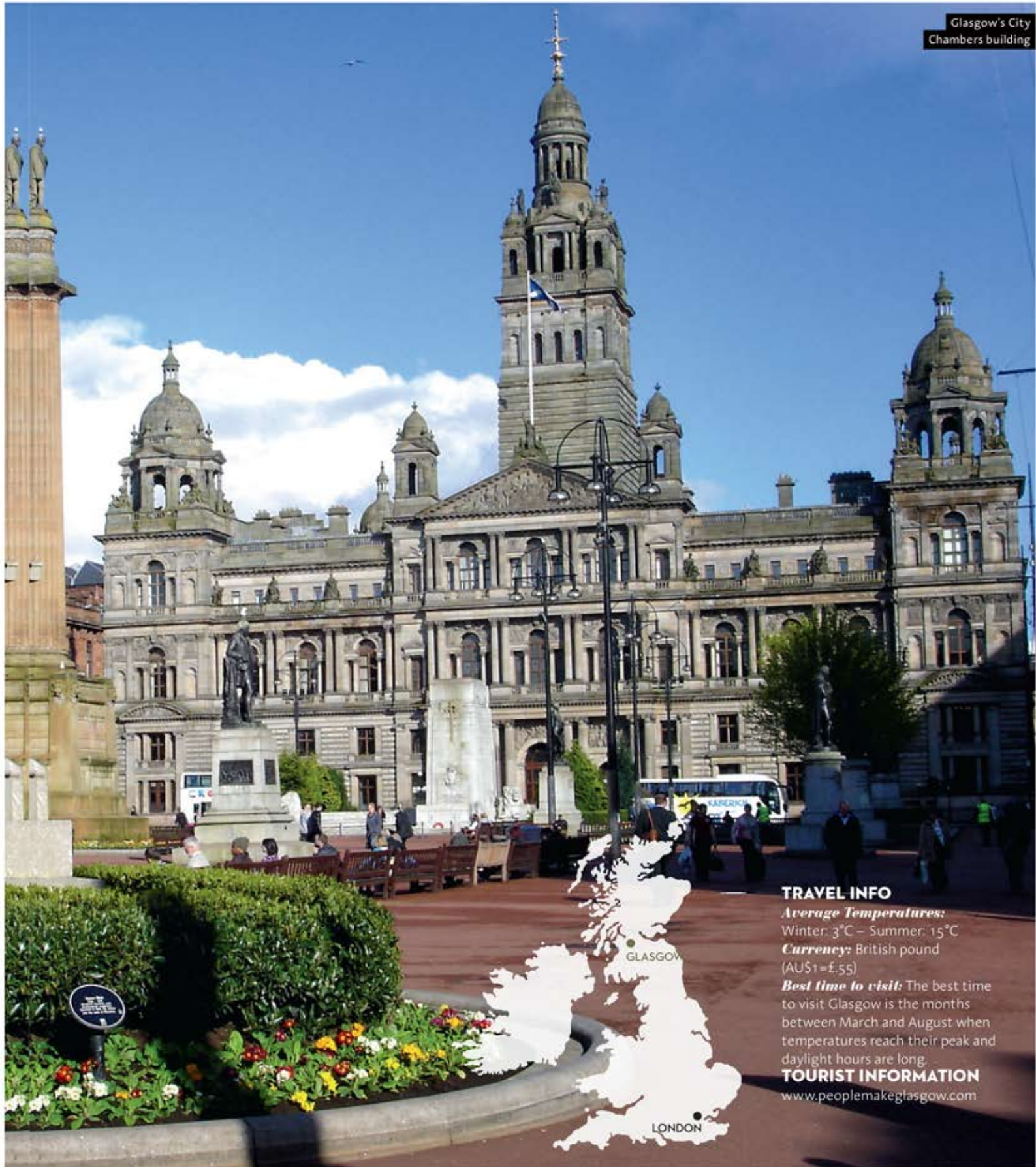
Mackintosh’s eclectic body of work.

At the same time it saddens me that the local bands and musicians, who I believe started the culture-led regeneration of Glasgow, hardly ever get a mention in the travel literature. You could easily argue that pop and rock music helped to get the ball rolling for the rebranding of Glasgow. Acts like The Blue Nile, Simple Minds, Orange Juice and Aztec Camera experienced considerable commercial and artistic success in the early 1980s. That and former boilermaker Billy Connolly’s rise to comedy stardom provided conclusive evidence that Glasgow’s creative industry was on the rise. The fine arts also received a boost with the opening in 1983 of the magnificent and highly individual Burrell Collection.

That same year the surprisingly successful rebranding campaign “Glasgow’s Miles Better” was launched. It changed the attitude of many potential tourists who associated the city with social deprivation. The advertising certainly whetted my appetite. That summer I took the train from London and fell in love with the red sandstone buildings. I noticed the soot and polluted façades but promised myself that one day I would return.

Here I am 31 years later and everything’s different again. Today Glasgow can boast a serious and quite healthy classical music scene. Is it purely incidental that Scottish violinist Nicola Benedetti at the moment dominates both the UK and Aria classical music chart? Most orchestras and ensembles



Glasgow's City
Chambers building**TRAVEL INFO****Average Temperatures:**

Winter: 3°C – Summer: 15°C

Currency: British pound

(AUS1 = £.55)

Best time to visit: The best time to visit Glasgow is the months between March and August when temperatures reach their peak and daylight hours are long.

TOURIST INFORMATION

www.peoplemakeglasgow.com



tour the length and breadth of the country but how many will receive financial support in the future if Scotland becomes independent? If the yes vote wins the day on September 18 it will certainly lead to the disbandment of BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (BBCSSO).

The BBC orchestra's home is the shoebox shaped City Hall auditorium which is much admired for its acoustics. The neighbouring Old Fruitmarket has a vaulted roof and is very atmospheric as a concert venue. Both halls are in an area which is now known as Merchant City, but older Glaswegians know it as 'the tron' or 'Trongate'.

Around here you will also find some of Scotland's most exciting contemporary art and if you only visit one gallery, make it the Modern Institute. The Gallery of Modern Art is also worthwhile exploring for

temporary exhibitions. The Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist coined the phrase "The Glasgow Miracle" in the 90s, even before Douglas Gordon became the first of many Glaswegians to win the UK's most coveted art award, the Turner Prize. The fact that three out of four nominees for this year's Turner Prize have studied at Glasgow's School of Art says it all!

That was another reason why I wanted to join a 'Mackintosh at the Glasgow School of Art' tour guided by students from the academy. Following the devastating fire in May the GSA had to cancel their very popular tours of the interior of the school. The alternative walk through the city is equally worthwhile, taking in various other buildings that Charles and his wife Margaret were involved in designing. A number of houses built by their contemporaries also get a look-in.

A prime example of imperial self-confidence set in stone is the City Chambers building (1888) in the heart of the city on George Square. This is municipal architecture from the High Victorian Gothic era at its very best. Despite its Italianate Renaissance tower and riot of French, Flemish and Venetian influences architect William Young's grand manifestation manages to look stylish and perfectly poised. Now compare this opulence with the uncompromising design Mackintosh came up with nine years later for the Glasgow School of Art. The scales fall from my eyes when I begin to realise how revolutionary his 'nouveau' functionalism – slightly softened with poetically wrought iron brackets sprouting a growing rose – must have looked at the start of the last century.

Should you wish to truly immerse yourself in a Mackintosh interior I recommend you pay a visit to the Willow Tea Rooms on Sauchiehall Street. Book a table in the Room De Luxe where Charles and Margaret designed everything from the furniture

and the menu down to the waitresses' uniform. For more on Charles Rennie's unique take on Art Nouveau you should head to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum where his spindly and high-backed furniture and sparse furnishings have been allocated a room to themselves. The cathedral-like centre hall is used for concerts and the magnificent organ is in daily use for lunchtime recitals. Salvador Dali's powerful *Christ of St John on the Cross* is one of the art section's many highlights, but the Glasgow Boys (1880-1900) and the Scottish Colourists also deserve attention.

After this a stroll through the lush Kelvingrove Park, with the rather idyllic river Kelvin running through it, will take you past the imposing gothic revival building that houses the surprisingly ancient university (among the alumni are seven Nobel Laureates and two Prime Ministers). Don't miss out on the Hunterian Art Gallery where

“THE CITY HALL AUDITORIUM IS MUCH ADMIRER FOR ITS ACOUSTICS”

the fascinating Mackintosh House has been reassembled meticulously.

Save the best for last. The Riverside Museum last year deservedly won the European Museum of the Year Award. It is only a 15-minute walk from the Kelvingrove and takes you to the river Clyde, the waterway that used to be Glasgow's lifeline. Zaha Hadid's construction houses all means of old and new transport as well as a street from a bygone era. At the end of the 19th century Glasgow was referred to as the Second City of Empire and nowhere is the evidence of those halcyon days more evident than here.

What makes classical Scots shout “wha hae”?

Should Scotland decide to go their own way on September 18 you can be sure that the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO) will be invited to accompany the declaration of independence proceedings. Scotland's oldest full-time professional band (since 1950) is based in the slightly colourless Royal Concert Hall. Under its longest serving principal conductor Alexander Gibson (1959-1984) the orchestra's interpretations of Jean Sibelius and Carl Nielsen's works became their international calling card. During the era of Neeme Järvi and Bryden Thomson the orchestra made hundreds of recordings for the Chandos and Naxos labels. The British/Canadian violinist and conductor Peter Oundjian has helmed the orchestra since 2012.

