



Lonnie Donegan in 1957. Below: Dr Krishna Thiagarajan

## This city has so much to sing about

**MY CITY**  
DR KRISHNA  
THIAGARAJAN

My first awareness of Glasgow was while growing up in Germany, and it came from football. Borussia Dortmund would square off regularly against Celtic and Rangers in the 1980s. However, it was the rich recording legacy of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra that revealed Glasgow's cultural significance to me. While working in America, the RSNO was regularly featured on my favourite radio station, WQXR. Since becoming chief executive of the RSNO just over two years ago and making Glasgow my home, I've been struck by the unique character of this city. Glasgow appears to me as friendly, creative, always sincere, sometimes acerbic, proud — and yet self-effacing when it comes to achievement.

Being confident in pronouncing one's successes is surely as important as the accomplishment itself. I paraphrase for the sake of more sensitive readers, but Glasgow comedian Frankie Boyle illustrated the issue for me perfectly when he described a scene in which John Logie Baird is being congratulated on inventing the television. He replies: "Aye, but there's nothing on."

Glasgow has been given the title Unesco City of Music, a substantial honour. It didn't happen by chance. From the days of music hall and the height of variety, to the explosion of pop in the 1950s and the city's major contribution to the post-punk and alternative music genres from the 1970s onwards, Glasgow has consistently punched above its weight.

Our orchestra was born from necessity. The Glasgow Choral Union, whose committee used to meet regularly in a coffee shop on Argyle Street (now Waterstones bookshop), decided to hire orchestral musicians in order to perform the Scottish premiere of Handel's *Messiah*. These musicians consolidated themselves as the Scottish Orchestra, now the RSNO.

Since then, this organisation has been involved in a number of significant moments in the history of music. We sometimes, with tongue rather firmly pressed in cheek, take credit for the birth of pop music in the UK. Lonnie Donegan, the king of skiffle, was born in Glasgow and his father was leader of the Scottish Orchestra in the 1930s. Where else could the man who inspired the Beatles have developed his love of music?

This is a city that is home to four out of the five national performing companies, the Glasgow School of Art, the Burrell Collection, and which hosts on average over 100 cultural events a day.

We should encourage this city's pride to overwhelm its modesty.

**Dr Krishna Thiagarajan is chief executive of the RSNO**



# Glasgow's most valuable resource — its people

SUSAN DALGETY

Just as people make Glasgow, so poverty and deprivation define the city, and the statistics are as stark as they are stubborn. Almost half of Glasgow's residents (283,000 people) live in some of the most deprived areas in Scotland, and more than a third of all children in the city are classed as living in poverty. In some of the city's neighbourhoods, more than 45 per cent of children live in poverty.

This epidemic of deprivation is a powerful brake on Glasgow's stated ambition to be the most productive city in the UK by 2023.

Worse, it destroys thousands of lives every year. Life expectancy for a Glasgow man is nearly seven years below the national average.

However, one Glaswegian has decided that it doesn't need to be this way.

The entrepreneur Iain MacRitchie believes the cycle of poverty that has trapped generations in ill health and hopelessness can be broken, and that the city can be transformed.

Mr MacRitchie is a change guru. His entire career, since his first job in a small plastic labels company in East Kilbride, has been about taking companies that are broken and fixing them.

He has advised more than 100 companies, won countless awards, including the St Mungo Medal from Glasgow city council and an honorary degree from his alma mater, the

University of Strathclyde. He has also started three successful businesses. As a result, Mr MacRitchie is a rich man — but one with a mission that goes beyond profit.

For the past eight years, first in a part-time role, now full-time, his mission has been to change Glasgow through his charity, MCR Pathways, and its Glasgow Young Talent mentoring programme for the city's most vulnerable youngsters.

He wants to build a bridge — not over the River Clyde, but from poverty to opportunity.

Mr MacRitchie explains: "The best analogy I can use is two banks of a river. There are an increasing number of opportunities on one side of the river and there are large numbers of communities and people on the other

side with no means of crossing or belief that they can.

"Poverty limits choices, ones that we all take for granted. Lack of choice reduces hope, limits aspirations, kills confidence and with it, self-esteem. We should not then be surprised about the fundamental health and wellbeing impact that this creates."

So far, so predictable. There have been countless poverty initiatives in Glasgow, each one promising to change the city for good, but none appears to have made a lasting difference. Why is Mr MacRitchie so confident that his scheme, in partnership with Glasgow city council, will work where others have failed?

"I would not go as far as to say I have cracked it," he says, "because that breeds complacency. I will apply a classic

business principle here: as soon as you think you have made it, you have started your decline.

"But in practice, I think we understand what has created the poverty gap, and we have developed a very effective way of addressing it."

That way is deceptively simple. The MCR Pathways model is straightforward: on the surface anyway. The programme is for vulnerable youngsters aged 12 to 18, with a particular emphasis on those who have experienced the care system.

In the first two years of secondary school they take part in class-based work. From the third year they are matched with a mentor for a minimum of a year and take part in "talent tasters" for college, university, work experience, sport, art and culture.

The data is impressive. In the first ten

### CREATING CHANCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Scottish government's independent poverty adviser Naomi Eisenstadt published a report this year on the life chances of young people in Scotland.

The report showed that young adults (aged 16-24) are more likely to be in low-quality employment compared to past generations, and that school-leavers who do not go directly to university are finding the process of getting a job increasingly complicated.

It highlighted the persistence of health inequalities in the country's most deprived areas. Dr Eisenstadt's recommendations for action focused on three areas — employment, housing and mental health — and included ideas such as



subsidised transport for people under 25 and more affordable housing, as well as research on mental health and school practices that encourage wellbeing.

It was published on the same day that the Scottish government set up its Poverty and Inequality Commission, whose first task is to provide advice to ministers on its child poverty delivery plan, due in April 2018.

The commission is chaired by Douglas Hamilton, the director of the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust, with Dr Eisenstadt and the race equality adviser Kaliani Lyle as deputies.

Caroline Kennedy, *main picture*, is one of five commissioners, and is working alongside the economist David Eiser; Hugh Foy of the Conforti Institute; Katie Schmuecker, the head of policy at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation; and Inclusion Scotland's Sally Witcher.

**Caroline Kennedy, from Parkhead, who has joined the Scottish government's Poverty and Inequality Commission. Below: a food bank in Scotstoun**

schools where the scheme ran, the number of vulnerable youngsters going from school to work, college or university went from 48.4 per cent to 81 per cent. The scheme has proven so successful that from January 2018 it will be in each of Glasgow's 30 secondary schools.

Mr MacRitchie is quietly confident that he, and his partners, have found a way of breaking the poverty cycle.

"Policy-wise, we have got it. Do we have a magic bullet? We are probably close," he says.

"The currency of life expectations is educational outcomes. Full stop. They create the career choices, which in turn create life chances, and that is the same for everyone.

"We now have evidence from one, five, ten, fifteen schools, and we are about to see it across the city. It is really simple. We can have equality of opportunity for our young people."

Liam's story suggests that Mr MacRitchie may indeed have found that magic bullet, at least for this generation. Liam was a pupil at St Andrew's Secondary School in Glasgow, where MCR Pathways ran for five years before Mr MacRitchie convinced the council to take it city-wide.

"When Liam arrived in the first year, he was at Primary 3 level," explains MacRitchie. "Previously he would never have caught up, but through Talent Tasters he found something he liked — trades and working with his hands.

"He found relevance to his education and with the support of his mentor, he got to university and a 2.1 degree. He is now a building surveyor — and also a mentor — and his two younger sisters have followed his path. But he is only one example; there are hundreds."

Caroline Kennedy, from Parkhead in the East End of Glasgow, is one of the hundreds of volunteers who make communities such as Castlemilk and Easterhouse work, sometimes against almost insurmountable odds.

A single parent, with two teenage sons, Ms Kennedy volunteers in her local church, is chairwoman of the Parkhead Youth Project and for two years was a member of the multifaceted Poverty Truth Commission. In July she joined top poverty experts on the Scottish government's new Poverty and Inequality Commission.

Ms Kennedy is very clear as to why her home city continues to suffer from disproportionately high levels of poverty. "When the shipyards and steel works closed down, many households were left unemployed, thrown out of a job for life, and there was no employment elsewhere. Today, poverty is made worse by zero-hours contracts and benefit sanctions."

Her solution to ending poverty echoes that of Mr MacRitchie. "If I was first minister, my priority would be more opportunities for young people leaving school," she says.

"Apprenticeships are usually one

to two years, with no guarantee of employment at the end. Young people are the future of Scotland, but because there is not enough full-time employment, it is not unusual for them to have to work two or three jobs to earn a half-decent wage."

Ms Kennedy is scathing of the most recent symbols of poverty — food banks. "I would like to see an end to food banks," she says. "People are forced to use them because there is no alternative, but they take away people's dignity.

"I would like to see families with young children, the elderly and people with long-term medical conditions being given vouchers for their closest supermarket so they have the choice of fresh fruit and vegetables."

John Dickie, the head of the Child Poverty Action Group Scotland, Scotland's leading anti-poverty charity, is supportive of Glasgow's attempts to help families living in poverty.

He says that parents go to extraordinary lengths to protect their children, but he adds: "Too often, they hit massive barriers — stagnating wages and uncertain working hours at the same time as family benefits are losing value; lack of affordable childcare; additional costs for school trips, course materials and activities; and prohibitively expensive and inadequate transport links.

"The good news is that the city is taking a real lead in removing many of these barriers — for example, through its Cost of the School Day programme — automating payment of school clothing grants, promoting the living wage and ensuring all families get the financial support they are entitled to."

Mr Dickie has a strong message for Glasgow, and its ambition to be the most productive city in the UK. "If Glasgow is truly going to flourish, every aspect of its economic strategy, every investment, every bit of business support, needs to be tested for its impact on those on the lowest incomes.

"Are the jobs being created paying decent wages? Do they provide opportunities for skills development and career progression? Are they family friendly? Are transport and childcare barriers being addressed?"

"Only if people are freed from the daily struggle to scrape by will they be able to fully contribute to, and benefit from, the city's economic future."

Mr MacRitchie is determined that his legacy will be that every Glaswegian will have the chance to do just that, and he is convinced the impact on the city's economy will be transformational.

He says: "We are creating the conditions for the people of Glasgow to look after each other, to develop all the city's talent. Once we have done that, then the city will explode with creativity and energy."



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