

### 9.3.2 The Rebranding of Glasgow, 1983-1989

In a book published by Glasgow City Council to commemorate the City of Culture, it was stated that “the musical events scheduled to take place in Glasgow during 1990 will help throw the city’s ideas about itself into clearer relief, and aid it in defining its own strengths and weaknesses” (Belcher, 1990a: 57). As alluded to above Glasgow was just one of a number of cities that began to view culture and the cultural industries as a “magic substitute for all the lost factories and warehouses ... a device [to] ... create a new urban image, making the city more attractive to mobile capital and mobile professional workers” (Hall, 2000: 640). Nonetheless, the scale and duration of Glasgow’s endeavours mark them out as exceptional. Glasgow was an example of a rare degree of ‘buy-in’ from multiple layers of government. This extended from the local and regional level – Glasgow District Council, Strathclyde Regional Council and the then Scottish Office – and subsequently the Scottish Parliament – through to the national and international level, as represented by the UK Government and the European Community. Despite differences in political affiliation within these legislative spaces, there was a broad consensus regarding the desire to promote a new vision of Glasgow as a culturally vibrant, leading service sector city. However, MacLeod (2002: 611), drawing on Harvey (2000), makes the point that it has been

a highly active local state that has borne the main risks in brokering a range of entrepreneurial projects that have helped to (1) establish designer retail developments like Princes Square and the Italian Centre, (2) promote gentrification and cafe culture within neighbourhoods like the Merchant City, (3) foster a thriving hub in the arts and culture, and (4) attract “hallmark” events like the 1988 Garden Festival and designations like European City of Culture in 1990.

Arguably, one reason why the civic authorities in Scotland’s metropolis took such risks and embraced the culture driven marketing approach to a greater extent than other British cities was that its ‘image problem’ was even more pronounced than that facing other conurbations. In a series of programmes broadcast on STV in 2011 to debate ‘Scotland’s best album’, The Blue Nile’s impact on reshaping Glasgow’s image was noted: “The Blue Nile helped lever the lid off the city that had kept Glasgow dark and violent and unpleasant and started turning it into the culture/aesthetic place that it is now.”<sup>1</sup> The cultural commentator Muriel Gray outlined the dominance of the old view of Glasgow when she interviewed The Blue Nile’s Paul Buchanan for BBC Radio 4’s ‘Down Your Way: Glasgow’. The programme was broadcast in the first week of 1990 to mark the start of the city’s reign as culture capital of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcDmdwgPMmY&feature=related> – Accessed 30.11.2011

Europe, and in it Gray reminisced that, in her youth, her home town of Glasgow “didn’t really have much of a reputation for anything than as a post-industrial mess and a city of enormous violence, but of course that reputation was based on things that happened back in the 30s with the razor gangs<sup>2</sup> and it held absolutely no sway with me back in the 60s and 70s.”<sup>3</sup> But this view of the city as “a post-industrial mess” has remained a pervasive one, and, for all the rebranding that has occurred in Glasgow’s city centre, it remains a perception with some basis in fact:

Greater Glasgow lost more than two-thirds (68%) of its manufacturing jobs between 1971 and 2001, down from approximately 291,000 to 94,000 full-time equivalent positions. In the early 1970s manufacturing provided two-fifths of all employment in the city directly. It was also a major market for many other local firms ... Manufacturing job losses were not compensated by an equivalent growth in services, which increased 39% or approximately 145,000 full-time equivalent jobs over the same period. (Turok and Bailey, 2004b: 39-40)

Coinciding with the emergent political paradigm in the early 1980s a change in policy took place with regard to how to tackle some of these significant challenges. The Labour dominated City Council embarked on a mission of “civic boosterism that placed Glasgow at the forefront of entrepreneurial cities in Britain” (*Ibid*: 35). The process of Glasgow’s rebranding began in earnest in 1983, and was propelled by a new willingness to exploit the city’s distinct cultural heritage and to engage with the notion of place marketing campaigns.

A manifest consequence of the former was the opening that year of the city’s Burrell Collection, acclaimed by the travel writer Bill Bryson (1995: 272) as “one of the finest museums in the world”. This eclectic assemblage of art, sculpture and antiquities, acquired by the shipping magnate Sir William Burrell, and placed in storage for decades, was finally housed in a modern purpose built building in Pollok Park. It proved an immediate success, providing, in the opinion of some guidebooks, “the principal reason for visiting Glasgow” (Berens and Cook, 1994: 167).

Also in 1983, the city’s annual ‘Mayfest’ festival was launched. This event, which had its origins in the Labour Movement’s May Day celebrations, rapidly “grew beyond its roots as

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<sup>2</sup> Gang related events depicted in Gillies Mackinnon’s film *Small Faces* (1996), set in Glasgow in the 1960s, suggests that, contrary to Gray’s view, gang culture remained active in parts of the city well beyond the 1930s.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Down Your Way: Glasgow’. Produced by Claire Whitehead. Broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 07.01.1990.

an annual community-based arts festival to achieve national prominence.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, that year also marked the first time in more than 100 years that housing had been re-introduced into Glasgow’s Georgian city centre district, where a third of all properties in the area, which had recently had been re-imagined as ‘The Merchant City’, were vacant. This shift in land use followed legislation in 1981 which allowed Glasgow District Council to “provide aid grant for the conversion of non-residential buildings to housing” (Jones and Watkins, 1996: 1132). It was an attempt to entice urban professionals to move into properties in the centre of the city and to stimulate gentrification. This is a process now associated with that district of Glasgow, a perception strengthened by the opening there of designer clothes outlets and by the subsequent enclosure of the nearby cobbled Princes Square and its transformation in 1986 into a glass-domed boutique retail emporium (Murphy and Boyle, 2006). Not only were such developments designed to encourage people into the city, they were also intended to try and stem a long term trend of out-migration by residents choosing to move from the City of Glasgow to outlying districts, over which the council had no jurisdiction, or choosing to leave the region altogether (Turok and Bailey, 2004b). This process of depopulation continued to erode the tax base on which the local authority largely relied, an authority already struggling to provide for many of its citizens who lived in a city that scored among the worst in western Europe in several indices for social deprivation and poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, 1983 was also when the ‘Glasgow’s Miles Better’ campaign was launched.<sup>6</sup> This branding initiative, which used children’s author Roger Hargreaves’ Mr. Happy character as its logo, was inspired by the perceived success of “the slogan with the heart which proclaims *I love New York*” (Jack, 1997: 205) which was designed by Milton Glaser in 1975, the year the city of New York defaulted on its debt (Greenberg, 2008). What this highlights is that in the 1980s Glasgow looked to New York not just for cultural guidance, as outlined in chapter 6, but also for assistance in reversing its own economic decline. Glasgow’s new catchphrase was a play on words, intended to suggest that Glasgow smiles and was miles better. But no-one was ever entirely sure what Glasgow was supposed to be miles better than. Better than

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theglasgowstory.com/story.php?id=TGSFBandPHPSESSID=73110930d7bd6dc32b> Accessed 19.10.2010. Mayfest, which many in Scotland viewed as a direct rival to the Edinburgh Festival, ran from 1983 until 1997.

<sup>5</sup> The ongoing nature of such problems was highlighted by Glasgow, as recently as 2001, being dubbed the ‘sick city of Europe’ “following several comparative studies of health conditions” (Turok and Bailey, 2004b: 36)

<sup>6</sup> ‘Welcome to Glasgow. Cultural renaissance: the 1980s and 1990s’;  
<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/AboutGlasgow/History/Cultural+Renaissance.htm> – Last updated 28.3.2007; accessed 29.3.2011.

Edinburgh? Better than visitors expected? Better than it was? Irrespective of its vagueness, the city continued to use the phrase until the mid-1990s.

Two years after the introduction of this tag-line, efforts to revitalize Glasgow's image expanded beyond the city centre, spreading two kilometres to the west, to a large expanse of wasteland on the north bank of the River Clyde. It was one of many such sites that scarred both banks of the river, a visible consequence of the erosion of the region's staple industry. Maritime historian Ian Johnstone recently noted "33 shipyards once supplied a quarter of the world's shipping from the banks of the Clyde ... These shipyards at times employed up to 100,000 people ... The majority of the old shipyards are now car parks, superstores or just empty wasteland."<sup>7</sup> The decline in the shipbuilding industry had accelerated from the 1960s onwards and was largely complete by the mid 1980s. It coincided with much of the industry moving to east Asia, attracted by lower costs and the availability of deep ports increasingly required in order to construct the larger ships needed as a result of the trend toward containerization. The Clyde was neither wide nor deep enough for this form of shipping, and, consequently, Glasgow, a place formerly lauded as being the 'Second City of the Empire', saw its role as a key port and dock city eroded.



Figure 9.6. Looking east along the River Clyde, March 1950. Top left is now the site of the SECC.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/glasgowandwestscotland/hi/people\\_and\\_places/history/newsid\\_8479000/8479647.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/glasgowandwestscotland/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_8479000/8479647.stm)  
– Accessed 6.7.2010.

The construction of the SECC (Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre) was an attempt to create jobs, utilise cheap vacant land and provided a highly visible manifestation of the desire

<sup>7</sup> 'The Men Who Built The Liners'. BBC production, 2009. Producer/Director: Jeremy Bristow.

by the civic authorities to reposition Glasgow away from being a place associated with heavy industry and production and to being, instead, a hub for conferencing, exhibitions and concerts, and a centre for leisure, tourism and cultural activities. Built on the former Queen's Dock on the north bank of the River Clyde (Figure 9.6), the SECC was comprised of five halls, two of which were capable of being converted into concert spaces. In 1988, the largest of these, Hall 4, was used as the Grand International Show venue for the Glasgow Garden Festival. The main site for this festival, which provided a landmark moment in the city's recent history, was situated on the opposite bank of the Clyde, on what was Prince's Dock, an area that has subsequently been re-branded as 'Pacific Quay' (Figure 9.7).<sup>8</sup>



Figure 9.7. Looking west along the River Clyde. Featured beside the SECC is the armadillo shaped Clyde Auditorium. On the opposite bank are the Glasgow Science Centre and the headquarters of BBC Scotland.<sup>9</sup> [http://www.glasgowarchitecture.co.uk/secc\\_glasgow.php](http://www.glasgowarchitecture.co.uk/secc_glasgow.php) – Accessed 2.9.2012.

Held in 1988, the Glasgow Garden Festival was an attempt by the city to replicate the perceived success of the Garden Festival in Liverpool in 1984. In both instances the principal purpose was to try and attract investment and visitors to the city and to assist in the resuscitation of the reputation of the two cities, which had been similarly blighted by images of urban decline and industrial unrest. The website, *The Glasgow Story*, a National Lottery funded historical digitisation project, makes claims for the city's Garden Festival as being an event "fondly remembered by Glaswegians as a shared experience of public leisure... continuing the tradition of the great Industrial Exhibitions of 1888, 1901, 1911 and 1938."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This site has become emblematic of inner-Glasgow's recent transition, evolving, as it has, from being a site solely associated with shipping, to a festival site in the 1980s, and culminating in its current incarnation as a site of cultural heritage and a centre for Scotland's media industries, by being the location of the Glasgow Science Centre and the new base for BBC Scotland and Scottish Television.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.glasgowarchitecture.co.uk/secc\\_glasgow.php](http://www.glasgowarchitecture.co.uk/secc_glasgow.php) – Accessed 12.11.2010

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theglasgowstory.com/story.php?id=TGSFBandPHPSESSID=73110930d7bd6dc32b> Accessed 10.11.2010

## 9.4 City of Culture: Frank Sinatra and The Blue Nile

At the start of 1990, fifteen months after the Garden Festival ended, Glasgow took on the mantle of 'European City of Culture'. The consequence of this was that,

under the terms of the European Community resolution, Glasgow, as the selected British candidate, was required to hold a festival, the form of which was to be determined by the national government and the host city; in Glasgow's case the celebration was almost solely financed by the local authority and held for the duration of an entire year. (Tretter, 2008: 91)

This landmark event in Glasgow's recent history was one which, both at the time, and subsequently, generated considerable debate. Boyle and Hughes (1991) questioned the extent to which any attempt was made to convey working class based representations of what they perceived as the 'real Glasgow'. This concern was also raised in the city during the year long festival: "The Scotia Bar, long an anchorage for the city's radical and unwashed, erected a sign boasting that it served 'Real Drinks For Real People'" (Brown 2010: 140). In addition, a book entitled *Workers City: The Real Glasgow Stands Up*, was published to protest against the City of Culture initiative. It asserted that "art to be valid in its day must be in revolt against the official mirage of its own day" (McLay, 1988: 3). Author and socialist, James Kelman, also dismissed the entire premise of the City of Culture event and chose to produce a series of "long, complex denunciations of the Glasgow culture hype ... in pamphlets and press articles" (Kane, 1992: 126), which were later collated into a single volume (Kelman, 1992).

Despite the fact that popular music had been ignored in the previous cultural regeneration efforts cited in this section (with the exception of the concert function of the SECC) its association with the city was seen as one of the reasons why Glasgow deserved the accolade of City of Culture and it was promoted as a central aspect of the year long festival.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the official book that accompanied the festival devoted four pages to popular music and boasted that,

as Liverpool was to British popular music in the sixties, so Glasgow would see itself being in the eighties and nineties, a seedbed for musical talent and a hothouse for achievement. Rock is the city's most recent, most apparent, most successful contribution to the performing arts, something for which Glasgow is becoming known world-wide. (Belcher, 1990a: 56)

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<sup>11</sup> Popular music played a similarly central role for Liverpool when it was 2008 European City of Culture.

Among the most eagerly anticipated musical performances that occurred as part of the festivities was a one-off show by Frank Sinatra scheduled for 10th July, 1990 at Ibrox Stadium (Figure 9.8), home of Glasgow Rangers football club and adjacent to the aforementioned Prince's Dock. Writing on the twentieth anniversary of the concert journalist Alison Kerr (2010) recalled that, "from the beginning of Glasgow's year as European City of Culture, a visit by Ol' Blue Eyes had been dangled tantalisingly before Glaswegians." Also writing in 2010, Allan Brown, another journalist based in the city, stated,

at this remove it's difficult to capture what it meant to Glasgow that, during the city's year in the sun, Frank Sinatra would perform there. No conjunction could more perfectly substantiate the city's favoured conceit of itself: that, somehow, it is a European outpost of America, particularly the bourbon-drinking, straight talking, roughly sentimental America of Sinatra: a city of guys and dolls, of wry stoicism and urban night. The same conceit informed at its deepest level the music of The Blue Nile. (Brown, 2010: 144)



Figure 9.8. Frank Sinatra performing at Ibrox stadium, Glasgow, 10 July 1990.

<http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts-ents/music-features/king-of-the-swingers-1.1040751>

Accessed 19.5.2011

To stress the rarity of this event, the Ibrox concert was the only non-London UK performance that Frank Sinatra gave between his sole UK tour in 1953 and his death in 1998.<sup>12</sup> The significance of it to Glasgow was again stressed in a radio documentary about the concert, broadcast on BBC Scotland in 2007, in a strand entitled 'Stateside to Scotland'.<sup>13</sup> Sinatra's Ibrox performance was well received by both audience and critics. Allan Brown described it in *The Sunday Times* as "a blend of high devotion and downright gallusness, like a bingo

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<sup>12</sup> Besides London, the only British towns Sinatra performed in more than once were Blackpool (1950 and 1953) and Glasgow (1953 at the Empire Theatre and 1990 at Ibrox); <http://www.silverclover.free-online.co.uk/sinatra.html> – Accessed 15.2.2011

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0084zjm> – Accessed 23.4.2011

night in the Sistine Chapel.”<sup>14</sup> The support act for the evening was the acclaimed Glaswegian jazz singer Carol Kidd,<sup>15</sup> who Sinatra proclaimed “the best kept secret in British jazz”.<sup>16</sup> Kidd, and not, as is often supposed, The Blue Nile, was the first artist to sign to Linn Records. Her pianist at the Ibrox show, David Newton, marvelled at the headline act’s rendition of the saloon song, ‘Angel Eyes’, and, specifically, at Sinatra’s ability to turn “a football stadium into a small nightclub. I don’t know if anyone else on the planet could have done that. It was remarkable” (cited in Kerr, 2010). The show was one of the few occasions during Sinatra’s career that he performed an encore, a fact that gives greater credence to the belief outlined in *The Glasgow Herald’s* review, concerning a possible special connection between the singer and the Glasgow audience:

At the end he [Sinatra] pledged to come back and see us next year.<sup>17</sup> Do you know why? I think he liked us ... Glasgow has to be his kind of town, doesn't it? The place where vagabond shoes are always longing to stray, the city that doesn't sleep . . . maybe one of only two cities in the whole world to know all the words to that ‘Nessun Dorma’ for the masses, ‘New York, New York’.<sup>18</sup> (Belcher, 1990b)

This belief was reinforced three years after the concert when a feature film, entitled *Strictly Sinatra* (Figure 9.9), was shot in the city by a long-time fan of the singer, director Peter Capaldi.<sup>19</sup> The film starred Brian Cox, Kelly MacDonald and Ian Hart, the latter cast as an aspiring singer whose set is entirely made up of Frank Sinatra songs. It is difficult to imagine a film with such overt Sinatra themed content being conceived and made anywhere in the UK other than in Glasgow. A possible explanation for the singer’s enduring appeal in that city was provided by research undertaken by Gans (1962) into his popularity in deprived areas of Boston in the late 1950s. This work concluded that,

Sinatra’s failure to comply with standard codes of behaviour consolidates his working-class image. His retention of this class persona at the peak of his success is identified as central to his appeal to a working-class audience ... [which] view[s] his displays of a working-class sensibility in the rarefied world he inhabits as an inspiring call to infiltrate the successful middle-class arena.

(McNally, 2007: 124-125)

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<sup>14</sup> Transcription of review emailed to me by Allan Brown.

<sup>15</sup> <http://sinatrafamily.com/forum/frank-sinatra-8/frank-ibrox-1990-a-31085/> – Accessed 27.5.2011

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.linnrecords.com/artist-carol-kidd.aspx> – Accessed 24.3.2011

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, particularly given the ticket problems associated with the event, Frank Sinatra did not return to the city the following year, or indeed, ever again.

<sup>18</sup> Whilst the concert was a critical success, for many a lasting memory of it was its poor organization. This resulted in many “from the city's Italian community, for whom Sinatra was a legendary figure, and the countless Glaswegians who would belt out Sinatra's best-known tunes on a Saturday night long before karaoke was invented” (Jack, 1998), being severely delayed in gaining access to their seats.

<sup>19</sup> Coincidentally, Capaldi attended the same school, St Ninian’s in Kirkintilloch, as Paul Buchanan of The Blue Nile, albeit three years behind; <http://www.themediabriefing.com/people/peter-capaldi> – Accessed 17.2.2011.



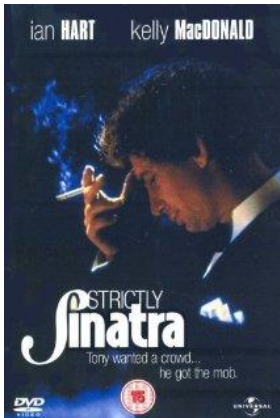


Figure 9.9. *Strictly Sinatra* DVD, 2001. Universal Pictures. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0219327/>  
Accessed 17.4.2011

The three members of The Blue Nile did not see the Frank Sinatra performance at Ibrox. Ironically, they were in New York, rehearsing for their first ever concert appearance. However, they did see the singer perform later that year at the Greek Theater in Los Angeles (Brown, 2010: 144). More importantly, The Blue Nile themselves soon became active participants themselves in City of Culture celebrations.

In the period following the announcement in 1986 that Glasgow would be ‘City of Culture 1990’, The Blue Nile contributed in minor ways to the city’s apparent cultural renaissance. For example, they supplied the music to *Halfway to Paradise*, a late-night arts programme made in Glasgow and first broadcast on Channel 4 in October 1988. An instrumental piece, it displays an overt urbanism, based as it is around “an ambient soundscape of found sounds, guitar and keyboard [with] an abstract melodic structure that involved a street recording of a hen night” (Brown, 2010: 141). Shortly afterwards, the group again provided theme and incidental music of an industrial sounding nature for another Glasgow based television programme, *Govan Ghost Story*. The drama, broadcast in March 1989 as part of BBC’s Play on One series,<sup>20</sup> centred on a redundant Clyde ship worker haunted by memories of both his life as a shop steward in the shipbuilding industry and of the cruelty he exacted on his daughter (Huntley and Hall, 2010). The evocative sound collages provided by the group were

situated within a film that dwelt upon [a] transitional phase in Glasgow’s history, between the past with its humble certainties and the aspirational certainties of the new city. It was a period during which the city and its citizens looked to the horizon, deep in collective reflection; the music of The Blue Nile was an ideal soundtrack. (Brown, 2010: 142)

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<sup>20</sup> Source: <http://www.robroyfilms.co.uk/?p=31> – Accessed 9.12.2010.

The Blue Nile have been characterized as a group who produced music which “makes cities sound beautiful”;<sup>21</sup> they have also been noted for their “role in the 1980s cultural awakening of Glasgow, the very bricks and mortar of which vocalist Paul Buchanan romanticised so evocatively” (M. Jack, 2010). But *Govan Ghost Story* was an example of a side project in which a darker strand of their music was used to accompany often bleak subject matter. The resultant work provided a soundtrack to lives in neglected Clydeside estates, a depiction of Glasgow absent from much of the promotional material produced by urban development agencies in the late 1980s.<sup>22</sup>

In August 1990, a month after Sinatra’s one-off Scottish concert, The Blue Nile contributed to a musical performance of a very different kind and scale in one of the city’s most respected cultural institutions, the Tron Theatre. ‘Performance’ was a dance piece put together by the Glasgow composer Craig Armstrong, specifically for the ‘City of Culture’. Armstrong, who is now best known for his Hollywood film scores, arranged The Blue Nile’s ‘Family Life’ (1996)<sup>23</sup> and together with Paul Buchanan, recorded a version of another song by the group, ‘Let’s Go Out Tonight’ for inclusion on his *The Space Between Us* album (1997). The Blue Nile assisted Armstrong’s Tron venture by supplying a seven-minute suite, ‘Our Lives’, which was split into three movements: I. Lost II. Bolivia III. New York. This instrumental piece,

can best be described as a soundscape, beginning with a simple, elegiac school assembly hall piano melody that segues into ... implacable car horns, traffic effects and urban commotion depicting the metropolitan hustle and bustle of the Big Apple. (Huntley and Hall, 2010: 65)

However, The Blue Nile’s biggest contribution to the City of Culture celebrations came via the concerts they performed as part of the festival which involved the unveiling of the most prestigious, ‘flagship’ structure associated with the festival. Alongside Sinatra’s performance

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<sup>21</sup> Quote by Stuart Maconie talking about the band on ‘The ‘Radcliffe and Maconie Show’. BBC Radio 2. Broadcast: 29.11.2010.

<sup>22</sup> A more recent example of their music being used to score Scottish social issues is ‘Can’t Get Over’, the last song Paul Buchanan and Robert Bell worked on together, in 2008. This “specially commissioned song forms part of the denouement” to 365, a National Theatre of Scotland production exploring some of the difficulties experienced by youngsters growing up in the UK care system. If this is to be the last piece written by Buchanan with a fellow member of The Blue Nile there is a certain synchronicity, given that, in 1981, he left his job as a press officer with the radical 7:84 Theatre Company to devote his time to being a member of The Blue Nile. Accessed 12.5.2011: <http://markgorman.wordpress.com/2008/08/23/365-by-the-national-theatre-of-scotland/>

<sup>23</sup> Craig Armstrong, in an informal conversation with me in London in July 2010, stated that he believed many of The Blue Nile’s problems with regard to maintaining career momentum arose from the fact that, rarely, among pop musicians, they arrived “fully formed” with a clearly defined sound and aesthetic, one which, subsequently, they struggled either to improve upon or depart from.

at Ibrox, another of the most eagerly anticipated events in the Glasgow City of Culture calendar was the opening of the new Royal Concert Hall (9.10). For nearly three decades, since St Andrews Hall was destroyed by fire in 1962, Glasgow had been without a substantial sit-down concert venue. Hence the erection of this building in a commanding position in the city centre was seen as a tangible symbol of Glasgow's re-birth and it continues to be viewed as the most visible legacy associated with the year-long festival.



Figure 9.10. Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. [http://uk.ask.com/wiki/Glasgow\\_Royal\\_Concert\\_Hall](http://uk.ask.com/wiki/Glasgow_Royal_Concert_Hall)  
Accessed 12.5.2011.

The Glasgow Royal Concert Hall was officially opened on 5 October 1990, with a performance by the Scottish National Orchestra, some of whose members had played on the Blue Nile's debut album *A Walk Across The Rooftops* (Brown, 2010: 145). However, two weeks before this, The Blue Nile delivered the first two public concerts to take place in the venue. It is an indication of the levels of devotion The Blue Nile had generated with the release of just two albums in the preceding six and a half years that "their long-awaited, long-overdue home-town debut" (Belcher, 1990c) occurred in the city's prestigious new 2,000 seat venue, one located at the top of Glasgow's main shopping thoroughfare, the appropriately named Buchanan Street.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of the evolution of this symbolic street since 1990 and its enrollment in geographies of exclusion and revanchism and in fantasies of consumerist citizenship, see MacLeod (2002: 612-613).

Although the length of wait for the concert had not been of the same magnitude as that which preceded Frank Sinatra's Ibrox show, the public and critical response was similarly rhapsodic. *The Glasgow Herald* ended its review by adapting and answering a call and response posed in The Blue Nile song 'Tinseltown in The Rain': "Do we love you, fellows? Yes, we love you" (Belcher, 1990c).<sup>25</sup> There is little reason to doubt the sincerity of Belcher's comments, given that in print and on television he was a staunch supporter of the group throughout their career. However, as the writer commissioned by the City of Glasgow to write the Popular Music chapter in the book commemorating The City of Culture one assumes he was keener than most for such high profile events to be viewed a success. After all, he had proclaimed in this official literature accompanying the festival that,

Glasgow presently likes to think of itself, with a measure of statistical justification, as the most musically-productive British city of the past decade. Glasgow-domiciled bands such as Wet Wet Wet, Hue and Cry, the Blue Nile,... Deacon Blue, and Texas, have all, along with exiled native sons like Simple Minds, achieved notable success in charts and concert halls. (Belcher, 1990a: 56)

Others meanwhile adopted a more sceptical view towards the City of Culture's engagement with popular music and of the worth of high visibility capital investment projects, such as the Royal Concert Hall. Much of the subsequent discussion in the city has been focussed on the legacy of the City of Culture in terms of practice, with Harvey (2005: 173) stating "how much the activity surrounding 1990 helped the grassroots artistic scene in Glasgow continues to be a favourite topic of debate over a pint of McEwans to this day, but it certainly stimulated activity". An example of the increase in activity impacting upon the city's cultural life occurred in 1990 when The Buck, a bar located in a genteel stretch of St. Vincent's Street near the city's banking district, was transformed into King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, a venue which quickly became a key performance space for new and emerging talent. Also launched in that transformative year was a club night, Atlantis, at Sub Club in nearby Jamaica Street, which "preach[ed] the word of techno" (Harvey, 2005: 174-175). Although not officially aligned with the City of Culture, the establishment of these two venues in 1990 had a pronounced and lasting effect on much of the music that Glasgow came to be associated with over the next two decades.

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<sup>25</sup> In another example of The Blue Nile's work being used in relation to their home city, this song was reworked and used as the main theme for *Tinsel Town*, "a fast-paced and uncompromising depiction of contemporary life, focusing on the club land of Glasgow's West End, broadcast in August 2000 on BBC 2" (Huntley and Hall, 2010: 115).

## 9.5 Conclusion

To conclude, Scotland's largest conurbation is an "oft-cited example of a city that managed to reinvent itself through culture and city marketing initiatives" (Cohen, 2007: 129). This chapter examined how music became enrolled, directly and indirectly, with culture-led regeneration in Glasgow, an approach that peaked, but by no means ended, when the city became 'European City of Culture' in 1990.<sup>26</sup> Glasgow was at the forefront of a global movement which saw post-industrial cities use culture and creativity to try and reverse economic decline. The city adopted place marketing tactics, hosted festivals, developed museums and invested in capital projects to remake its image. Popular music played a key role in this re-positioning.

The Blue Nile, one of the most respected groups in Scotland in the late 1980s when this activity was at its most intense, were associated with this re-imagining of the city, particularly by being the first band to perform in the most significant new building to be built in connection with the City of Culture. In addition, the sonic gloss of *Hats*, released two months before the celebrations, provided a sleek soundtrack that chimed with the modern narrative being promoted in, and by, the city. However, the material the group produced for other projects at this time, such as the Oscar Marzaroli tribute album and commissions for Glasgow TV and theatre productions, invited reflection on the nature and speed of change in the city in the late 1980s. Of course, the group's trademark romantic epiphanies and introspective questioning cannot merely be ascribed to their surroundings. The personalities of the members were also clearly important, as Paul Buchanan states: "if we were full of confidence the records wouldn't have had the ambivalence that attracts people" (Brown, 2010: 252). But their sound is still heralded for evoking their home town, with the group's biographer, Allan Brown, contending that it proceeded "from the raw materials of Glasgow: its rain, its traffic, its architecture, its bass note of defiance, amorous and spiritual ... As Glasgow, from the 1980s onwards negotiated the process of regeneration, The Blue Nile were integral; geographers of the city's new heartlands" (*Ibid.*).

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<sup>26</sup> The increased musical activity that writers such as Hamilton Harvey (2005) have attributed to the spark provided by the 'City of Culture' arguably came to fruition more than a decade later. In 2004, America's *Time* magazine declared the city to be 'Europe's Secret Capital of Music' (Seenan, 2004). Such attention was instrumental in Glasgow becoming a UNESCO City of Music four years later. On bestowing the accolade the United Nations organisation praised the attention Glasgow had given to live music when many venues in other UK cities had been neglected and forced to close: <http://www.glasgowcityofmusic.com/venues.asp> – Accessed 14.5.2011.