Glasgow’s live music venues – from a pub built in 1792 to King Tut’s Wah Wah Hut – are testament to the unbridled passion of the locals, writes Kate Hennessy.

Talking to strangers is easy here. Leading with a joke goes down great, too, and even better if it’s dirty. Your standard Glaswegian will sling one right back. At another pub, the bartender seems a little dour. “People’s kids get away with murder these days,” he says. “So do people’s dogs,” I say. “Aye,” he says. “We don’t let dogs in anymore. Well, only in the kitchen.”

I know I’m making sweeping statements about the locals of a place I’ve only been for a week. But is this not travel’s chief joy? Falling fast and hard, then leaving before the affair sours into marriage? I can generalise about the residents of Paris, Istanbul and La Paz. Ask me what typifies a Sydneysider, though, and I’ve got nothing. The truth is, you can see in a new city’s outline fades as it gets filled in.

Pentangle, a folk band from the 1960s I grew up listening to with my dad, used to play at The Scotia. Oasis fans pay homage at King Tut’s Wah Wah Hut instead. I pop by the next night. It’s busy but a manager shows me around anyway. The band room is half-frills with a wooden floor warped by Thunderous stomping. “Bands that play King Tut’s get big,” he says.

When Oasis drove up from Manchester in 1992 they came straight to King Tut’s and got on the bill. Alan McGee of Creation Records was here that night. “After one song he was interested, after two he knew he’d sign them, and after three he knew he’d do it that night.” The manager gestures to the bar. “Him and Noel sorted it out there afterwards. Blows my mind.”

I wonder how he spares to tell me, more than the story itself, that is most endearing. And it happens everywhere. People are hell-bent on persuading me of the city’s merits in a way I don’t imagine Edinburgh residents are. Perhaps it’s because Glasgow now is so different to its reputation as the glum post-industrial backdrop of a Ken Loach film. “Once you have a reputation, it’s hard to shake,” says a cab driver. “That’s my story.”

I front up unannounced at another legendary venue, Barrowland Ballroom, on a Sunday. In a musty office a tour is arranged by a huddle of men as old as time. My guide has worked here for 27 years. He trudges in front, thumping on heavy switches to light the unchanged 1950s decor, sends me onstage and hollers up. “Where you’re standing is where David Bowie’s顶点 *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* 1972 concert.” The show was filmed for the 1973 film *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*.

Last night’s Barra show was especially bountiful, he says. “The band play Irish Republican music and a lot of Celtic supporters come in jumping and shouting and banging on the walls.”

Nestled in a brick arch beneath some railway tracks is the Poetry Club. There, saxophonist Pete Brotzman is backed by an incandescent free jazz trio as trains rumble overhead, shaking the room. Afterwards, a local draws in my notepad maps of places I should go. He keeps flipping pages to draw more. “Where’ve you been so far, Keef?”

The Rs in his sentences are rolled and the vowels curl elaborately around the consonants. In Jonathan Glazer’s film *Under the Skin*, when Scarlett Johansson pulls up in her van to seduce blokes on the street, I couldn’t understand their Glaswegian patter at all. And occasionally here I don’t. It’s like being in a country where you don’t speak the language so you clock off and let it wash over you; voice devoid of meaning.

Still, though my face feels as though it may shatter in the icy air, I do the double-decker tourist bus twice because the accent of TV presenter Neill Oliver, who does the voice over, is such a delight. Even through the crummy bus headphones, his tone goes teary with pride as we glide by the SSE Hydro. The arena, which opened in 2013, is “made from space materials”, he boasts. It is “the third-biggest in Europe” and was “most stylish”.

Stadium concerts are not my thing but the restaurants in the nearby Finnieston district are. With thousands down to the area for concerts at the Hydro, a steady stream of eaters and drinkers quickened Finnieston’s gentrification. My meal at Ox and Finch near Argyle Street is one of the best I’ve had in any European city. Eating sea trout ceviche, I recall the suffocating of shows at Australian arenas where you’re cattle-prodded inside for a quick Snickers dinner and a beer in a plastic cup. The assumption that people who like contemporary music are bovines with no taste or tastebuds is a grievous misapprehension in Australia.

In Sydney, we’ve barely got any venues left, let alone nine in one neighbourhood, as Glasgow does around Sauchiehall Street. The family home of Chace Houston – founder of music platform Tenement TV, is a classic tenement house. In 2013 he started filming bands in its sitting room and the idea took off. Now he runs the Tenement Trail music festival, luring nearly 2000 people to Sauchiehall Street’s venues. The scene is just getting better, Houston says. “All the bands say it’s the best crowd to play on. We’re wild but we’re nice-wild.”

Actually, Glasgow crowds are known for being off-the-hook bananas. And in this case, the rep is deserved. We have many names in Australia for the dreary arc of emptiness that forms up the front at gigs. “Sydney Cove” is one; in Adelaide, they call it “the Bay”. There is no name for the “moat of indifference” or the “circle of fear” in Glasgow. It is a UNESCO City of Music – the technical term, perhaps, for gigs at which the men roar and the women scream. Applause is like that which follows curtains on a hit Broadway show – after every song. At a venue called Stereo a woman reaches up to ruffle the shirtless male singer’s belly fat, later a guy tweaks his nipples. Nice-wild, indeed.