



Hot Times in a Cool City

To Melbourne's Lord Mayor Robert Doyle, climate change isn't theory—it's an everyday reality. He discusses the power of cities, comedians at his door, and a strange ritual called Australian rules football (it's brutal!)

You work with cities around the world that are trying to mitigate climate change. Why is this a big idea?

When I went to the Copenhagen climate change conference in 2010, extreme weather was on my mind: My city had experienced one week of temperatures above 104 degrees and terrible wildfires—177 people died. What followed at the meeting was bickering between nations, no agreement, and disillusionment. But Copenhagen's mayor brought together 90 mayors, and I took from them real initiatives that I could apply back home. Dar es Salaam's mayor said, "We don't need to worry about national leaders signing anything—we'll go back home and do something. These might be small things, but they will add up." So while national leaders fail to agree on solutions, real action is taking place on the ground in cities.

So climate change is real in Melbourne.

Australia is a land of weather extremes. Events that used to occur at widely spaced intervals are now coming with a frequency we've never seen before. Over the last decade, we've experienced extreme drought in Melbourne and had to ration water, and then almost overnight the drought broke and for two years we faced dreadful flooding.

This month, world leaders are talking climate at the Rio+20 meeting. While they argue, what are you doing?

Our goal is to be a zero net emissions city by 2020. We initiated an ambitious program of retrofitting 1,200 commercial buildings to reduce energy use. We've just hit the 200 mark. Our Docklands project, which is drawing citizens to the waterfront, will set a new standard for environmentally responsible development. We are also working with other cities to develop a blueprint for sustainable living.

What's the best thing about your city?

We don't have the natural beauty of some parts of Australia, but we have culture and lifestyle. More than 200 nationalities live here and speak as many languages.

Is Melbourne, as The Economist says, really the world's most livable city?

Over the last 25 years, we have turned our little laneways into a cool subculture. If you leave the main streets, you might find the world's

best graffiti, or some of the best restaurants and hippest little bars, or an interesting bookshop or a gallery with avant-garde art.

Meanwhile, you're all crazy about this weird, violent sport—Aussie rules football.

Ha! When we watch your football, we can't quite understand it: We think, why are they wearing helmets and all that padding? Our blokes smash into each other. We make it as difficult as possible. It's like running a marathon with an oddly shaped ball, bouncing it the whole time. And you can't throw it—we make you punch it off your hand. All while very large opponents are trying to smash into you. What could be more fun than that?

Maybe that's why you've been called the comedy capital of the Southern Hemisphere?

We do have this amazing comedy festival. You might even see the most irreverent comedian performing in our formal council chamber.

What's the funniest thing about Melbourne?

The platypus. If God were making a joke in the animal kingdom, he couldn't do better than the platypus.

What's the funniest thing about being Lord Mayor of Melbourne?

Dressing in the formal mayoral robes with ruffled sleeves, the jabot at my neck, and the heavy million-dollar gold chain. And in case Her Majesty comes, I have a tricornered hat that I'm meant to wear in the presence of the monarch.

How do you stop yourself from giggling when you have to wear this stuff?

I don't.

—INTERVIEW BY DORINDA ELLIOTT

FROM JAZZ TO JONATHAN FRANZEN

Arts festivals in Melbourne this season

- **June 1-10** The Melbourne International Jazz Festival, showcasing McCoy Tyner.
- **July 20-29** The Gertrude Street Projection Festival, in hipster Fitzroy—new-media art projected on buildings.
- **August 1-5** The Melbourne Art Fair, with some 900 international artists.
- **August 2-19** The Melbourne International Film Festival (last year, China pulled out over a film about Uighur resistance).
- **August 23-Sept. 2** The Melbourne Writers Festival (Ann Patchett and Jonathan Franzen spoke in 2011).

