

TALKING IN CLASS

Scottish comic Kevin Bridges has come a long way from humble beginnings in Glasgow, writes **Jane Cornwell**



He's back ... Glaswegian comedian Kevin Bridges, left and above right

All the taxi drivers in Glasgow know Kevin Bridges. "Aye, I saw him when he played the Hydro a couple of years ago," says my driver, talking into his rearview mirror and name-checking the city's biggest arena. "He's a funny bastard. Big fan of Celtic FC. Grew up in Clydebank, over that way." He waves a hand towards the industrial towns perched on the River Clyde. "A wee bit different to around here."

We've pulled up outside a boutique hotel in Glasgow's West End, with its leafy trees, elegant villas and high-profile inhabitants, Bridges among them. I'm early but the Scottish comedian, 30, is already ensconced by the bay windows of a lounge cum library with polished wooden walls and sound-absorbing shagpile. He's wearing jeans and a T-shirt and his usual expression, a twinkly-eyed mix of boldness and vulnerability that makes you want to pinch his cheeks; onstage, with a mic and bundle of bright ideas added, it lifts the laughter higher.

"Hoo are ye," he says, standing to shake my

hand. Bridge's thick brogue can be confounding to English-speaking non-Scots, especially Australians. Previous routines have seen him riffing about how tricky it is to make small talk when he's outside his homeland.

He tells of being in a lift in Australia, drinking from a mini-carton of Ribena, when an Aussie at his elbow commented on the juice ("Aw, Ribena!") then couldn't fathom Bridge's sardonic riposte ("party time").

Like much of Bridges's material, the yarn is even funnier for details and — until the point where, boiling with frustration at having to repeat the phrase over and over again, he beats the guy to a pulp — the fact that it is true.

"That sort of incomprehension happened all the time in Australia," he deadpans. "People ask you how you are, and you go 'Ahm fayn'. They go 'Sorry?' 'What?' And you wish you'd pretended to be an ignoramus and not said a word.

"I went to the footie when I was there," he says. "I bought a Socceroos strip [kit] because they were in the World Cup and Scotland didn't qualify because they were rubbish. Scotland's a

tennis country now. Andy Murray has changed everything." The fellow Glaswegian is a mate: "Andy always takes the piss outta me for texting football expressions like 'What time's kick-off?' after he's got us tickets to see him play. Give me soccer, football, any day. Your Aussie rules has the widest skill set I've ever seen."

Bridges was last in Australia in 2014, and is back this month to headline the Just for Laughs comedy festival in Sydney, with extra dates in other capital cities. It's been a rollercoaster three years for the entertainer deemed "preternaturally gifted" by *The Independent* and "brilliant" by Billy Connolly. In 2015 he played a marathon 180 shows in big-seater stadiums — including a record 16 sold-out performances at the Hydro Arena — to 500,000 fans who had variously watched his live DVDs, read his autobiography, seen him on television and YouTube, or caught his mainstream TV break on *Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow* in 2009 — a five-minute slot that was watched by five million people and saw the cheeky-faced everyman hailed as Britain's next big thing.