

SCOTLAND at the SMITHSONIAN



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EVERY SUMMER for the past 37 years, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival has highlighted the culture of different states, nations, or other communities, with each program offering new challenges and opportunities to fulfill the Smithsonian's mission of increasing and diffusing knowledge. Sometimes the cultures that are the most challenging to present are not the most distant and least familiar—rather, they are the very ones that we think we know. Scotland is one of these.

Americans tend to have a very positive impression of Scotland. Many Americans—including a majority of our presidents and “Founding Fathers”—have claimed some Scottish or Scots-Irish ancestry. Most of the foundation stones of our political system—including our Constitution—owe a significant debt to the Scottish Enlightenment. And since the 17th century, Scottish engineers, inventors, educators,

by NANCY GROCE

Nancy Groce, curator of *Scotland at the Smithsonian*, is a folklorist, historian, and ethnomusicologist. She holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Michigan and has authored numerous books and articles on music, folklore, and culture.

scientists, naturalists, artists, and craftspeople have helped shape and guide America's industry, education, and cultural and social life. In recent years, huge numbers of Americans have flocked to films such as *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* and gone away duly impressed with Scotland's stunning Highland glens, mist-enshrouded islands, stately castles, and passionate patriotism. And the kilts, bagpipes, shortbread, and heather—it's not that they don't exist, it's just that the real Scotland is even more varied and interesting than the stereotypes.

Contemporary Scotland is a sophisticated, modern nation; its 5.1 million people are among the best educated and most widely traveled in the world. The majority of Scots live in urban areas along the Central Belt, a swath of land that runs from the ancient capital city of Edinburgh on Scotland's east coast to post-industrial Glasgow on the west coast. The Central Belt is only 40 miles wide, but the cultural gulf between Glasgow and Edinburgh and their respective coasts is as noticeable as any between New York and Los Angeles. In fact, the regional diversity of Scotland—a country slightly larger than Connecticut, but smaller than Hawai'i—is difficult for Americans to fathom. It's almost as if Americans think in terms of miles while Scots think in terms of centuries and, sometimes, millennia. Scots are deeply proud of their home region: be it the beautiful hills of the Borders Region, the broad, fertile farmland of Aberdeenshire, industrial mill towns like Dundee or Galashiels, the spectacular Highland glens of Wester Ross, the stark but stunning Shetland Islands, or the medieval cityscape of Edinburgh's Royal Mile. Each of Scotland's many regions has its own distinct look and unique history, dialect, folklore, and cultural traditions. We celebrate this diversity at this Festival.

There is room in this program book to touch upon only a few aspects of Scottish culture. Historian Edward Cowan gives a brief but enlightening tour through the complexities of Scottish history; folklorist Margaret Bennett provides an introduction to Scottish traditional music, Stephanie Smith to dance, and Louise Butler an orientation to traditional crafts in contemporary Scotland. Three languages (English, Scots, and Gaelic) have historically, if uneasily, co-existed in Scotland. Today, these have been joined by multiple other tongues—including Hindi and Chinese. We are delighted to have Hugh Cheape's essay to introduce us to Gaelic, and Billy Kay's to introduce us to Scots. Theater critic Joyce Macmillan writes on what is probably the least known and most urban of the Scottish traditions featured at the 2003 Smithsonian Folklife Festival—Christmas pantomime. If you've never heard about "panto," ask anyone from Scotland to tell you about this wildly popular form of folk theater.

Because of pragmatic constraints of funding and research time, this year's program focuses tightly on the culture of Scotland itself and does not attempt to address the important topic of the Scottish diaspora. Immigrant groups from Scotland (like those of other lands), whose families left their native shores generations ago, brought with them the culture that existed at the time of their departure. Over the years, they

(Facing page) *Ceilidh in Fiddler's Arms, Grassmarket, Edinburgh.* Edinburgh artist Michael McVeigh shows traditional Scottish music in a contemporary urban setting.
© Michael McVeigh

(Below) Outdoor cafés thrive on the Royal Mile, an ancient thoroughfare in the heart of Edinburgh. Photo by Paul Tomkins
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CONTEMPORARY
SCOTLAND
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Aberdeen Harbor is the gateway to the North Sea oil industry.
Photo by Paul Tomkins
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(Facing page) Urban Scotland—Princes Street in the heart of Edinburgh. Photo by Paul Tomkins
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Crofters' cottage near Glencoe in the Scottish Highlands. Photo
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and their descendants nurtured that cultural inheritance and strove to keep their family and community traditions as true and accurate to their memory as possible. At the same time, they became full participants in and valued contributors to America's evolving history and culture.

Inevitably, some changes—and perhaps a touch of romanticism—crept in, as happens with most groups. Scottish Americans made great efforts to retain and honor their heritage in the New World, but their story is not identical to that of the Scots who remained in Scotland. Many Scottish-American families migrated voluntarily or involuntarily—before the impact of the Industrial Revolution transformed much of Scotland from a rural to an urban society; before the political and social upheavals of the 20th century; before immigration from Europe, Asia, and Africa enriched Scottish cities; before the off-shore oil industry, “Silicon Glen,” and scientific breakthroughs like “Dolly the Sheep” had a major impact on the Scottish economy; and long before 1999, when the Devolution movement in the United Kingdom returned a parliament to Scotland for the first time in three centuries.

Scotland is still “Bonnie Scotland,” but the traditions that make Scotland Scottish and that we celebrate at this Festival continually grow and change, as traditions will do in any healthy, vibrant culture. This is a fascinating time in Scottish history, and aspects of this Festival reflect the ongoing debate about Scottish image and culture. Almost every Scot we consulted voiced concern that the outside world frequently equated



Scotland with the Broadway musical *Brigadoon* (which, they were quick to point out, was filmed in the 1950s on a Hollywood sound stage because the producers couldn't find anywhere in Scotland that was "Scottish enough"!)." Today, there is lively debate and no consensus about what comes next.

The Scottish Executive, the government of Scotland since Devolution, has an advertising campaign that uses the slogan "One Scotland: Many Cultures." To my mind, that nicely sums up both historical and contemporary Scotland. Successive waves of peoples—Picts, Angles, Saxons, Celts, Vikings, Irish, Jews, Pakistanis, and others—have settled in Scotland, and the Scots have shown a unique ability to combine their differences into a unified but not homogenized culture. Scotland's impact on world culture has been out of all proportion to its size and wealth. Little wonder, then, that Scotland continues to serve as an inspiration for the United States in so many areas of culture, technology, art, and education.

The 2003 Festival offers visitors a unique opportunity to listen to some of the many voices of contemporary Scotland. Being Scots, there is little danger that they will agree with one another, but all the participants invited—outstanding artists in music, song, narrative, and craft—play an integral part in sustaining and shaping the culture of contemporary Scotland. We are honored to have them as our guests. ■

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