Dear Vassar Traveler,

It gives me great pleasure to invite you to join a musical journey to the Scottish highlands and the city of Edinburgh, “yon Empress of the North.” The first few days of our trip we’ll be based in the stately country house outside of Inverness from which Bonnie Prince Charlie directed his final, ill-fated rebellion and failed to reclaim the English throne for the Stuarts. This region not only possesses great historical resonance; it is blessed with incomparable natural beauty. Its rugged, spectacular landscapes inspired Mendelssohn after his 1829 journey to write two of his most beloved works, the “Hebrides” Overture and the “Scottish” Symphony. Though highland culture underwent catastrophic change in the 18th and 19th centuries, its traditional folk music has survived and we will have the opportunity to hear some of it.

After enjoying the countryside, we will move to the city. Edinburgh is one of Europe’s great cities, preserving layers of the medieval town beneath its elegant Georgian architecture, and offering a rich cultural heritage within a highly accessible community; as Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, “Edinburgh is what Paris ought to be.” Named UNESCO’s first City of Literature in 2004 thanks to its astonishing array of fine writers (from Stevenson and Walter Scott through Ian Rankin and J.K. Rowling), it also supports a thriving concert life that is embodied in its annual Edinburgh Festival. Though we will explore Edinburgh’s museums and historical sites, including an excursion to the fabled Island of Inchmahome, whose priory sheltered the child Mary Queen of Scots, our primary focus will be on the musical treasures of this year’s festival. We will attend both opera and ballet, with a concert performance of Puccini’s Manon Lescaut and an exciting new choreography for Rite of Spring; we will also hear both refined early music by the Dunedin Consort and the full orchestral power of the Orchestre de Paris performing Beethoven and Berlioz.

I’ve learned from past experience that great music, combined with fine food and wine, lovely landscapes, and the intelligent, lively conversation of Vassar alums, adds up to a simply terrific travel experience. Please join us this summer!

—Kathryn L. Libin, Vassar Associate Professor of Music

August 17 – 27, 2019  Tour begins August 18 in Scotland.
Tuesday, August 20
Falcons and Folk Music
Fairyland Dunrobin Castle has been the family seat of the Sutherland clan for 700 years. We will tour the castle and take in an amazing falconry display! Lunch on your own in the village of Dornoch. A local distillery hosts an optional whiskey tour and tasting, before we arrive back at Culloden House. The evening features a concert of traditional Scottish folk music by the youthful group Feis Rois before dinner.

Wednesday, August 21
The Tattoo!
We bid *soraidh* (farewell) to the Highlands and head south to Edinburgh, lunch en route. Arriving in the grand city, check in is at the Kimpton Charlotte Square (ex-Roxburghe), a deluxe 4-star hotel in the city’s New Town, on an elegant square. Tonight revel in the spectacular Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, an evening of music, ceremony, theatre and dance with the Edinburgh Castle as backdrop!
Friday, August 23

Old Town Edinburgh & The Royal Mile

We circle back to where the city itself began—on Castle Rock—and a tour of Edinburgh Castle, a former medieval fortress, Renaissance palace, and Army barracks. Just off the Royal Mile which connects the two monuments, we find a private lunch. The afternoon might be a time to take in a theatrical or musical performance at the Fringe Festival, a huge panorama of activity, more than 500 performances day and night throughout the city! Tonight, Daniel Harding leads the fine Orchestre de Paris in a program of Berlioz and Beethoven, with Antonie Tamesit, viola soloist.

Saturday, August 24

Mary Queen of Scots and The Rite of Spring

Today we venture north to visit the bucolic and partially ruined Inchmahome Priory, set on an island in the Lake of Menteith, dating from 1238. Mary Queen of Scots found sanctuary here at age four. We’ll partake of a private lunch at Lake of Menteith Waterfront Restaurant, before returning to Edinburgh for a performance of Stravinsky’s seminal ballet The Rite of Spring. The choreography by Chinese dance legend Yang Liping is influenced by Tibetan and Chinese symbols of nature.

Sunday, August 25

Palaces, Portraits and Sir Ian

Our private guided tour of Edinburgh’s Old Town continues with a private tour, exclusive to the group, of Holyrood Palace, a longtime royal residence—the Queen resides here when she visits Edinburgh. At noon, the great actor Ian McKellen discusses and performs highlights of his preeminent career on the stage, With Tolkien, Shakespeare, Others, and You. After lunch, a visit to the excellent National Portrait Gallery features many of the historical figures you have met along the way. Tonight at the Festival, you have the option of attending a concert performance of Wagner’s towering opera Götterdämmerung, the last opera of his Ring cycle. Sir Andrew Davis leads the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, with the great Christine Goerke as Brünnhilde.

YOUR HOST, KATHRYN LIBIN

Professor Kathryn Libin teaches music history and theory at Vassar College. She specializes in music of the long eighteenth century, or the Age of Enlightenment, and is especially interested in the musical cultures of great cities that provided composers such as Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and others with fertile territory for their ideas and marketplaces for their works. In recent years Kathryn has been engaged in studying and cataloguing music in the Lobkowicz Library, one of the most significant private collections of Central Europe, and is working on a biography of Joseph Franz Maximilian Lobkowicz, a Bohemian prince and musical patron at the turn of the nineteenth century. She has also published numerous articles on Mozart, and on Jane Austen and music in Regency England. Kathryn earned her B.M. as a pianist at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and her M.A. in performance and Ph.D. in musicology at New York University. She has had the joy and privilege of teaching at Vassar for nearly twenty-five years.

Yang Liping’s Rite of Spring
Monday, August 26

Fireworks!
A free day in Edinburgh, a day for additional sight-seeing or shopping or just relaxing. Our farewell dinner takes place at a classic French bistro. Then fireworks explode above Edinburgh Castle as the Festival closes with a spectacular display accompanied to music performed by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. You have prime seats in Princes Garden.

Tuesday, August 27
The tour ends after breakfast before flights home.

Itinerary is subject to change. Meals in bold are included in the price of the tour.

Deluxe accommodations in Edinburgh and the Highlands
Private motorcoach transportation to activities in the itinerary
Plenty of free time to attend other performances or pursue your own interests

Tour Registration

Tour Cost: $5,875 per person, ground only, double occupancy.
Single supplement: $1,380
Deposit: $1000 per person first come, first served
Balance deadline: Friday, June 21, 2019. After that date, call for availability.

Contact: The Grand Tour, 800-727-2995 / info@thegrandtour, to reserve your place on the tour with a credit card deposit, or send a check for the deposit amount to: Vassar Scotland Tour, c/o The Grand Tour, PO Box 274, Peterborough, NH 03458. Registration materials can be downloaded from http://alums.vassar.edu/programs/travel.

Questions? Please contact The Grand Tour at 800-727-2995 / info@thegrandtour.com

The Vassar Travel Program Scotland tour is organized by The Grand Tour, Peterborough, NH.