

NACHWEIHNACHTSZEIT / POST-CHRISTMAS SEASON

zwölf Heilige Abende / 12 Holy Nights

to the Ebensee that they even gave the name of *Glöcklergasse* to one of the town's lanes.

During the night of January 5th, the day before Epiphany, some four hundred plus *Glöckler*, members of groups known as *Passen*, always in an uneven number, will file along the streets of the town and its surroundings. They represent many neighborhoods, Christian associations, and sport clubs.

The ultimate preparations before the long night race take place at their respective seats. According to tradition, shepherd songs should be sung while the candles of the *Kappen* are being lit, but few groups nowadays comply with this rule.

At 6:00 p.m. sharp, Ebensee's nineteen *Passen* gather on the town hall square, plunged into darkness (so as to emphasize the lights of the headaddresses), and go around it a couple of times at a smart pace before setting out for their tedious six- to seven-hour trek.

Each group includes about twenty to thirty members, adults and children alike, in more or less equal numbers. In Ebensee, boys only walk in procession as the tradition commands, but in some other places, less uncompromising as to the letter of it, now admit a few girls in the ranks of the *Passen*.

The *Glöckler*, dressed in white (there is no set costume, any white cloth will do), wear impressive headaddresses weighing up to twenty kilograms (approximately forty-four pounds) and measuring up to three and a half meters (over eleven feet) in length. Those of the children do not exceed five kilograms (eleven pounds).

They are led by a bareheaded "guide" or "spy" holding a stick, to recall the hard times the *Glöckler* encountered when they were fleeing the constabulary who were chasing after them.

A couple of cracked cowbells dangle from a leather belt on either side of the hips (but only one, of the flat type, when hanging from a strap, on the back).

The disharmonious sounds of the bells, the bizarre gesticulations of the *Glöckler* who, at regular intervals, indulge in zigzag-, eight-, circle-, or spiral-shaped figures, and the lights of the candles are all meant to bewilder and repel the evil spirits while placating the benevolent ones. The trampling of the feet is intended to awaken the dormant nature under the frozen soil, and the more the *Glöckler*, the better the harvest to come.

Each group has its own distinctive type of *Kappe*. The majority of them, however, are in the shape of *Sturmbut* (literally: Storm Hat), five-, seven-, or nine-pointed stars, wheels, and semi-circles.

They are made of a framework of wooden rods onto which the various parts of the picture are glued or stapled. It rests on a narrow base in the center of which is a fixed safety helmet for the bearer to place his head.

The themes of the compositions represented on the often round- or half-moon-shaped central picture, and on the triangles of the work, are drawn with a white pencil onto thick black paper, and then cut out with a utility knife while on the back of the now lacework-like sheets of paper, are glued pieces of colored paper. The *Kappe* is ultimately edged with white, frilled-silk paper. On the back of the *Kappe*, a part remains removable so that the candles can be easily lit and extinguished.

The iconography of these headaddresses, whose fashioning requires, for the largest of them, three hundred to eight hundred hours of work, can cost in excess of €400 or over