

Fasching und Karneval: Kostüme und Masken (costumes and masks)

der Brauch, die Bräuche: custom
das Kostüm, die Kostüme: costume
die Maske, die Masken: mask

The first prerequisite for taking part in Karneval is to don a costume. Costumes range from simple masks to elaborate costume ball wear, replete with masks, capes, and gowns. Elaborate make-up completes the look. Most common are the fools' costumes. Karneval has seemingly always been associated with fools, and the locals dress themselves in outlandish colors, crazy fools' hats, and generally outrageous garb usually meant to scare, shock or bring someone to laughter. Other costumes include clowns, various animals such as bears and boars, witches, devils, barbarians, and the like. Another favorite is to dress up like famous politicians as a way of mocking them. The most important thing in costuming oneself is to be somebody or something different.

With all this exuberance, it may be surprising at first sight that many of the masks have such an extremely grim appearance – distorted faces which seem anything but amusing. At second glance, however, there is some sense in it all: the word "mask" comes from Italian – here, the word "masca" literally means a net used to wrap people in when they die, but in the transferred sense refers to the dead person himself when he returns as an evil spirit.



On the contrary – why else did the people (as they still do today) put on fancy dress and masks? It is quite easy to shed one's own personality during the period of Fasching/Karneval by donning the costume of a clown or dressing up as a character with a large paunch or some other romantic figure. Indeed, in earlier times this was much more marked than it is today: in times of strong social ties and in a strictly authoritarian environment, it is understandably much more enjoyable to let off steam for once without being recognized, and to throw off the usual restraint.



The lower one's social position, the more glamorous his Fasching costume. Dr. Reba Campbell, a psychiatrist, says the Fasching pre-Lenten blow-off offers people "a chance to live deep in fantasy," fulfilling everyone's "need to be important." Adds psychologist Gibson, "Fasching is the only time of the year when the doorman or the janitor who has worked for the rich man all year long can dress up in the rich man's clothing and feel that the two of them have something in common."

The rich Germans, apparently not wanting to have too much in common with their inferiors, have in recent years been showing up in skimpier costumes at the official Fasching balls. They used to arrive dressed as caliphs and sultans, they now come as Tarzan, or clothed in even less.

From Napoleon to James Bond

Before the current trend toward Fasching nudity started, the popularity of particular costumes led to boom or bust among the rental houses which outfit revellers for \$9 a day. "You could stock up on a hundred Napoleon costumes," says one shop owner, "and not get a single taker. A couple of years ago, just about every male wanted a James Bond outfit – hat, turtle-neck sweater, shoulder holster, hand cuffs and trenchcoat. And the girls all wanted to look like Liza Doolittle in 'My Fair Lady' – big hats, long skirts, ruffles. Trying to figure out in advance who wanted what was a great big guessing game. Now I just stock a lot of fig leaves and know they'll all get rented."

Costumes. Since a Maskenball will follow the "ceremonies" of the Sitzung, everyone should come in a costume and a mask. The disguise plays a very important part at a Maskenball. In Germany, only very few costumes represent strictly German characters such as Eulenspiegel and Hanswurst. In general they are typical of any costume party in any western country, as a matter of fact, there are cowboy and Indian costumes by the dozens. Anyone can come up with SOMETHING, but masks ARE essential.