

## Fastnacht in Mainz

**Mainzer Fastnacht** (dialect, *Määnzer Fassenacht* or *Meenzer Fassenacht*)

Although the city of Mainz (capital of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate) is located on the Rhine, carnival there is known as *Fastnacht*. But in most ways carnival in Mainz is similar to *Karneval* in Cologne, Bonn or Düsseldorf. (The organization responsible for carnival in Mainz since 1838 is called the *Mainzer Carneval-Verein*.) The Rhineland military influence is definitely still there. The carnival *Reitercorps der Mainzer Ranzengarden* (guardsmen on horseback) wear colorful, stylized copies of historic Prussian and Austrian uniforms. (The colors of the *Mainzer Fastnacht* are red, white, blue and yellow.) Mainz's big Rose Monday parade is broadcast on national television in Germany to an audience of almost two million.



Carnival in Mainz



Carnival in Mainz



Prunksitzung in Mainz



Carnival in Mainz (11.11.11)



Some Rosenmontag faces in Mainz.

In Mainz, whose *Karneval* festival is second only to Köln's, its fevered partying culminates on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. Although second in size and popularity, Mainz's *Karneval* or *Fasnacht* festivities are televised throughout the country. In a marathon of performances, politicians are roasted, ridiculed and made fun of in witty satire. It's a bit difficult to grasp as an outsider, but the performances are humorous in their silliness, and it is fun to watch, nonetheless. Given its political slant, Mainz's parade includes costumers with oversized, distorted or caricatured heads of popular (and unpopular) politicians.

### Fastnacht in Mainz – Carnival with Political Elements

In Mainz Carnival is called *Fastnacht* and here too it has a very prominent place on the city's cultural calendar. The season is officially opened with the reading of the 11 *Fastnacht* Laws by the Lord Mayor from the balcony of the *Osteiner Hof* building on the *Schillerplatz*, which traditionally takes place at 11 minutes past 11 on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November. The carnival galas begin with the *Parade of Fools* on New Year's Day, continuing with growing intensity and frequency until *Rose Monday*. The roots of Mainz' *Fastnacht* traditions are very old; there are documented records of Carnival parades in the city dating back as far as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In its

present form the Mainz Carnival developed during the *Vormärz* period in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, when conservative forces were trying to restrict freedom of speech and the press to stem the growing power of the new bourgeoisie. Carnival provided an outlet for more unrestricted expression and many clubs and associations were formed during this period, including the *Ranzengarde* (whose pot bellies or *Ranzen* parodied the Tall Guards of King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia), the Mainz Carnival Association, the Mainz Carnival Club and many others.

### Mainz

usually has the longest of these prickly processions—close to 150 floats and 2500 slightly inebriated, uniformed musicians oomphing their way through streets packed with revellers dressed up as Mickey Mouse, astronauts, cowboys, acrobats — and sometimes (if a girl is shapely and the weather warm) as Eve without even a figleaf. Everyone is carrying a jug of something liquid, just in case there's a change in the weather and sudden fortification is needed, as it always is.