

Fassenacht

The most recent type is the one which is popular in the large Rhineland towns of western Germany — the “Fassenacht” of Mainz, the “Karneval” of Cologne and Düsseldorf — as well as the “Fasching” of Munich. These are typical big-city events, spectacular shows. The big Karneval parades with floats remind one of religious processions, or of the festive parades of the Baroque courts. This kind of Karneval certainly is the easiest to take: a limited number of people perform in it, making a spectacle of themselves in the parade, while an unlimited number of others can simply stand in the streets and look on, taking part only by cheering occasionally, or by buying and wearing medals or buttons, or by singing popular songs, and consuming alcohol. The millions who “participate” by only watching the Karneval on T.V. are of course even more passive. Public balls and private parties, however, are also important. — This “modern” type of Karneval is gradually supplanting the older forms, even in other areas.

Mainz Fassenacht

Carnival in the other Rhineland cities follows very much the same pattern, with local variations, of course. The Mainz variety, called Fassenacht, is considered by many to be the most distinguished in Germany. Especially renowned is the quality of the carnival Sitzungen in Mainz. Also, the Mainzers have an unusual number of very picturesque “Guards” in their big Rose Monday parade, wearing historical uniforms. All in all, their carnival seems to be more gemütlich than in other cities; there is an atmosphere of genuine, friendly merriness all over the place.



Carnival in Mainz



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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 11th 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 16th century. In its

present form the Mainz Carnival developed during the Vormärz period in the mid 19th 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.



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