

Fastnacht in Mainz

interpretation of the foolish cap as extended Phrygian cap, the colours blue, white, red, and yellow derived from the Tricolour, the committee as a „revolutionary council of the eleven“. During the revolutionary year 1848 itself, the carnival was cancelled, and the carnival gazette „Narhalla“ turned to a revolutionary flyer.

Starting in the 1840s, political commentary and critique had become much more common in carnival events, especially in the weekly club meetings that ostensibly existed to organize celebrations. Speakers would often have to be coy about their meaning, but nonetheless the carnival had become an outlet for political dissent. The ability to speak publicly about politics, however veiled the reference, made the events popular, and the 1840s saw the founding of a second carnival club. This one, founded by a chimney sweep and a paper hanger, had an inexpensive membership fee to allow working class citizens to participate.^[8]

During the years after the revolution, carnival activities declined briefly. By 1855, however, the tradition began to see a resurgence, leading to a rapid increase in the number of club members and to the foundation of new corporations (Kleppergarde, 1856). In 1857, events were cancelled due to the explosion of the powder magazine and in 1866 due to the Austro-Prussian War. The Rosenmontagszüge had also to be cancelled in following years due to single events. In 1884 the MCV took the opportunity to give a session in the newly finished guildhall, which they would continue to use for the next 50 years. In later years many new associations arose: the *Mombacher Carneval Verein* (1886),^[13] the *Gonsenheimer Carneval Verein* (1892) and the Carnival association „Eiskalte Brüder“ (1893). As Guards, the *Mainzer Prinzengarde* (1884), the *Prinzessgarde* (1886), renamed in 1933 as *Guard of the Princess*, the *Mombacher Prinzengarde* (1886) and the *Jocus-Garde*^[14] (1889) were added.

Theme and characters

Traditionally, carnival season in Mainz begins on November 11 at 11:11, and continues through Ash Wednesday. However, the event peaks in February or March in the days leading up to Ash Wednesday.^[11]

During the 19th century celebrants began using the carnival as an opportunity to mock the military forces occupying the city's fortress. The uniforms of the carnival guards are still reminders of the uniforms of the Austrian, Prussian, and French troops which were present in the town between 1792 and 1866.^[11] Others, like the Landsknecht uniform of the Weisenauer Burggrafengarde trace their lineage as far back as the middle-ages. Uniform parts of the electoral troops are also present. The guards, who spoof military habits and oaths, have a big role in the street carnival, making up large portions of the parades. The *Mainzer Rosenmontagszug* is the most renowned among the parades. It had been recorded since 1910 on film,^[15] and is often broadcast live nationwide. It is less formal than many parades, as celebrants can and often do join in to walk the parade route for a brief time. Marchers are often very informal about their roles, sometimes drinking beer as they ride parade floats.^[11]

Political commentary and caricature have become a notable part of the Mainz carnival, and especially of its parades. For example, floats during one parade in the late 1980s showed Uncle Sam and a Russian soldier climbing out of suits of armor, and portrayed Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in a bathtub.^[11]

The battle cry of the Mainz carnival, *Helau*, originates from Düsseldorf and was introduced in 1938 in Mainz.^[16]



Stamp commemorating 150 years of Mainz carnival: *The Bajass with his lantern.*



Drummer of the *Mainzer Prinzengarde*



A carnival float intended to come near the end of the parade that plays on the German words for closing (*Ende*) and duck (*Ente*)



Mainz: Die „Ranzengarde“ marschiert . . .

„Ranzen“ bedeutet „Gaudi“. Wer früher aufgenommen werden wollte, mußte zwei Zentner wiegen. Mit dem Gründungsjahr 1837 nimmt Mainz für sich den ersten Karnevalsverein in Anspruch. Die Kostüme – blauer Frack, weiße Hose, schwarzer Dreispitz – blieben die gleichen.