

“Bei uns ist immer was los!” Feste in Rheinland

„FASCHING IN MÜNCHEN“ / „CARNIVAL SEASON IN MUNICH“

Wie feierte man gestern Fasching? (How was Fasching celebrated in past?)

Dancing, processions, and the wearing of masks either because of the need to scare evil spirits away or driven by the desire to be someone else, to assume the role of some entity or a person more powerful than oneself, is a desire as old as mankind itself. As such, Fasching stands at the root of the Saturnalia, when the relationship between rulers and ruled, masters and slaves, men and women, was reversed. The usual order of society was temporarily suspended as men dressed as women and masters waited on their slaves. As the commonwealth was ruled by an elected regent, the forerunner of Prince Carnival, the Faschingsprinz, communities seemed full of fools. This is why some etymologists derive the term Karneval from the Latin *carrus navalis*, the ship of fools. As such, Fastnacht and its precursors served as a safety valve to help defuse real or potential tensions in society.

The beginning of our Munich Fasching goes all the way back to the old "Dance of the Weapons" and the games of medieval knights. In the year 1359, we hear the word "Fasching" for the first time. Then in 1515, it appears in a scroll, and finally in 1537 we find the first celebration which was officially recognized by the City Council. They honored the hammersmiths by celebrating a sword dance in their honor.

Considering its long history, it's not surprising that Fasching has carved such a place in the hearts of Bavarians.

Fasching came from the City Council in 1537, but the celebration goes further back at least two more centuries. It was first mentioned in German writings in 1359.

Early festivals featured sleigh rides, tournaments called "Lubgestach," in which knights jostled wearing small wooden barrels on their heads instead of helmets, and the first "fast night" dances in a special hall built by the council.

Masquerade balls began to bloom at the beginning of the 19th Century. The bulletin of St. Peter's Church mentions a ball in 1828 that attracted 5,000 costumed Bavarians. King Ludwig I was among those who attended.

Fasching traditions continued to be added: in 1894 the well-organized balls began, the first Fasching prince was enthroned and the first big Fasching parade was initiated, its floats bouncing through the decorated streets of the city. In 1908 an organization was founded to maintain the artistic standards of the event.

While the earliest Fasching rituals were performed to drive out the malevolent spirits of winter, carnival now serves to deflate pomposity, satirize celebrities and politicians, and present a caricature of contemporary German society.

During karneval time, the common people took a chance at "living it up" and "talking back to their rulers". They would make a mock government of eleven people, as well as other officials. A prince and princess were selected to rule the country during the Fasching season. Political authorities, high placed persons and sovereigns were the target of ridicule, and featured in humorous and satirical speeches. To avoid persecution and punishment, these antics were played out from behind masks and costumes. Parades, dancing in the streets, masquerade balls and comical skits filled the days and nights.