

Fastnachtzeit oder Fastenzeit: Carnival Season

Fasching und Karneval: Beschreibung (description)

MUNICH, Germany — In the Rhineland it's Karneval. In Bavaria they call it Fasching.

It's the German way of brightening up the back end of winter between New Year and Ash Wednesday when the beginning of Lent stops the bacchanalia in mid-swallow and the ompah bands pack up their brass until after Easter.

Described by some as a pagan festival in a modern idiom, it begins officially on Nov. 11 each year. Cities, towns and villages throughout Germany start planning in earnest for the binge to follow as Christmas and New Year are out of the way.

EACH community chooses a carnival prince and princess. Their "court" is formed — an honor guard for the prince, ladies-in-waiting and pages for the princess — and the party begins to warm up.

Carnival simmers quietly for a while, gathers momentum as more and more revelers get into the act, and finally explodes

into an "anything-goes" rout in the week before Lent.

The Thursday night before Fastnacht (Wives' Night) when wives, old and so-so-old, take off their wedding rings, put on long black dresses, poke bonnets and grotesque masks and roams the streets in commando groups in search of male victims.

It's Ladies' Choice. They may demand a drink, a dance or an evening's company from any man within hitting range of the heavy fans they use as painful attention-getters. The masks come off at midnight; some hosts have been pleasantly surprised.

The festivities go on over a weekend heavy on song, sausage, sex and sekt (German bubbly).

Come Rosenmontag (Rose Monday) — March 5, this year — the revellers have got to where they like it, although it hurts first thing in the morning, and the party moves into the backstretch.

It's a day of parades throughout the land. Bands, floats, uniforms, balloons and streamers. A flask of schnapps to keep out the chill, a kiss for the policeman at the barriers.

Karneval, Fasching — The Crazy Time



Mad, Mad
Time to
Arrive in
Germany

ALL parades have a tilt at authority. In cities such as Dusseldorf, Cologne, Frankfurt and Munich, political satire is aimed at state and federal politicians. In country towns and villages the humor, always blunt, gets across local civil complaints about, for instance, the absence of a municipal "comfort station" near the marketplace.

Fancy dress is the gear of the day, for marchers and spectators alike, and doesn't come off until the small hours of Tuesday morning.

Tuesday night brings the final run to the post and at midnight, with the arrival of Aschermittwoch (Ash Wednesday) coffins are carried on to dance floors for the mock burial of carnival for another year.

The party is over. The revellers troop out — to begin their weeks-long hangover until Easter.