

## Fasching in München

of the Viennese Fasching. By the mid-eighteenth century, Empress Maria Theresa forbade parades and masks in city streets outright. The cultural influence of Vienna spread beyond the city across southern Germany as far as Munich, where the "Rosenmontagsumzug" was canceled a few years ago for lack of interest.

Under the influence of the Protestant Reformation parades had disappeared in the 16th century as well and it was not until the mid-19th century that the protestant bourgeoisie in the cities began to once again stage masquerades and costume balls. Today almost all clubs in Germany, be that the local Soccer Club, the Singing Club, or the Volunteer Fire Brigade have their Costume ball and even primarily protestant cities such as Frankfurt have their parade as well. Nowhere, however, are these parades more colorful and elaborate than in cities such as Mainz, Cologne, Düsseldorf, or Würzburg, where hundreds of thousands of people will line the streets for the parades before they don their costumes and masks one last time to attend a ball or dance where they will enjoy their *vastschang* and say *carne valere* – Good-bye Meat! – as the *Fastnacht* turns into *Lent*. Or maybe not!

First used in the twelfth century already – Wofram von Eschenbach uses the term in his *Parzival* – *Fastnacht* became such an integral component of the year that it was even used to identify dates on documents. In 1295, a decree by the Duke of Bavaria ordering the reconstruction of a mint in Munich is dated on the "sunntag vor Vasaht." Other documents in City archives such as the Council Minutes of 1319 show that, by then, the *Fastnacht* in and around Munich was not only an occasion for merrymaking, eating and drinking and dancing in the streets but a popular date for marriage as well. Not even warfare could stop that merrymaking. Though Munich was under siege in 1403, the people are recorded to have danced in the market square before City Hall. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw growing strife in the cities of Central Europe between the poor and the established elites. Munich was not exempt from these troubles and the City Fathers there and elsewhere used Fasching as a safety valve for these tensions. In 1397, there had been an open revolt in the city that was suppressed by authorities. Part of the reconciliation process was the offer by the authorities to the populace on Fasching, in 1403, to come out of their homes to dance and celebrate in the streets.

*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.*