

Fasnacht

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FASNACHT

Means Carnival Time in Basle !

There must be remarkably few annual revels that start at the unearthly hour of 4 a.m., especially on a chilly Monday after Ash Wednesday in February or early March. The *Basler Fasnacht*, or Basle Carnival, is one of them. The Carnival, which dates back to at least the thirteenth century, lasts for three days and three whole nights, which is enough for anyone to let off steam, especially as drumming is prohibited in Basle during eleven months of the year. This fact may astonish the visitor who knows that drumming has been developed to a fine art there. But without drums and fifes there would be no carnival, so the "musicians" are allowed to practise for four weeks beforehand — on drums, and with piccolo flutes.

Long before the appointed hour, the inhabitants of Basle — old and young alike — converge on the city centre from the outlying suburbs. Coachloads of eager visitors arrive from across the nearby French and German frontiers. At the stroke of four, the city lights are extinguished, and the opening ceremony — the *Morgestraich*, or Morning Tattoo — begins. To the sound of drumming and the shrill tones of fife music, numerous carnival associations (called "Cliques") parade through the narrow streets of the old town. Wearing grotesque masks and with small lanterns perched on their heads, the pipers and drummers gaily advance, holding aloft huge transparent lanterns with the emblem of their particular "clique" in caricature. This curious parade lasts until dawn. Then everyone goes to the nearest café or tavern for the traditional carnival breakfast — thick flour soup, followed by cheese and onion flan. After that, Basle reverts to normal for a few hours. But on Monday and Wednesday afternoons, the "cliques", with their fifes and drums, again march through the streets.

The unwritten laws, by which the Basle carnival exists, are less ancient than most Baslers believe, but they are greatly respected. At the *Morgestraich* each "clique" marches through the blacked-out town in any direction. In the afternoon, a fixed route has to be taken, but the "cliques" interrupt their march whenever they wish. While they move, however, the wearing of masks is *de rigueur*.

If the drum-major, who marches at the head of each drum group, does not possess a respectably-sized belly, he has to wear an artificial one. He is a most imposing figurehead. With his baton he ceremoniously salutes the drum-majors of other "cliques" coming his way.

The costumes and masks worn by the "cliques" during *Fasnacht* are made afresh each year, for they have to represent the subjects chosen for ridicule by the "clique". The victims are generally Federal Councillors and other prominent people; often from Basle, sometimes from abroad. Any unfortunate who said or did anything silly — especially in the months preceding the carnival — can count on seeing a caricature of himself on huge lanterns — frames covered with linen and vividly painted. He may also find himself quoted on printed leaflets (called *Zeedel*), which are distributed by the "cliques", and in ditties and limericks sung in restaurants against a caricature backdrop. During the carnival, sexy beauties are frowned upon. A good costume and mask must be grotesque — even ugly. It is considered a serious breach of the rules to pull off a participant's mask, for the wearer of a mask and costume may torment with biting sarcasm anyone of prominence without fear of reprimand.

On Monday and Wednesday evening, costume balls are held. Tuesday is the day reserved for the children, and all the gigantic painted lanterns are on show at a special exhibition. After the afternoon processions and the evening revelries, the streets are covered inches deep in confetti, for pounds and pounds of them are thrown around, partly by the people in the streets, partly by masked figures on floats — for each "clique" is accompanied by one or more of these, and all in keeping with whatever subject a "clique" has chosen. But not only confetti is thrown from the floats, also bunches of mimosa and violets, oranges and — particularly unpleasant — chaff! But it is all in a day's fun, and the atmosphere throughout Carnival is so special that nobody would dream of taking umbrage. If any "foreigner", say from Zurich, did object, the remedy is an easy one: the next train back to the Limmat! The Basle citizens are reputed to be truly themselves for exactly one week every year — during Carnival. The rest, they remember and dream, prepare and look forward to the next one!

A MOTOR SHOW FOR ALL TASTES

This is in fact the most suitable definition of the 39th International Geneva Motor Show, which will be held from 13th to 23rd March. Thinking of the variety, volume and importance of this traditional event, featuring passenger cars, special body design, accessories and garage equipment, "two-wheelers", boats, caravans and camping articles, not to forget the special exhibition of racing and sports cars with their accessories and literature, there is no doubt that the 1969 edition of the Geneva Show will satisfy a wide and particular public.

Twenty-one countries will participate, representing an impressive number of over 1,220 products manufactured in all parts of the world.

In addition to the well-known centres of attraction, the return of cycles and motorcycles will be welcome. The fans of the "two-wheelers" will have a chance to make the point of a technical evolution which is due to the changing way of life and to the necessity of adaptation to the traffic on the roads today.

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