

Zeitschrift: SBB Revue = Revue CFF = Swiss federal railways
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Bundesbahnen
Band: 4 (1930)
Heft: 2

Artikel: The carnival at Basel : Switzerland's most original march entertainment
Autor: Dueck, Walter
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-780474>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

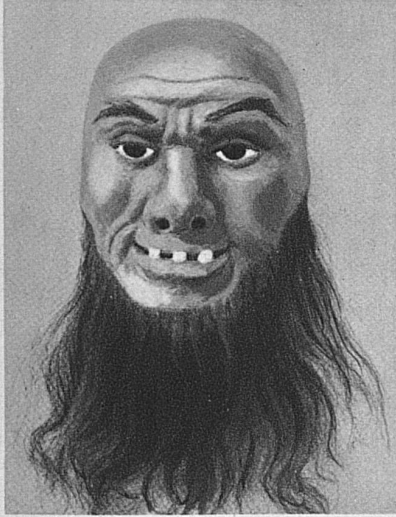
The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 30.01.2025

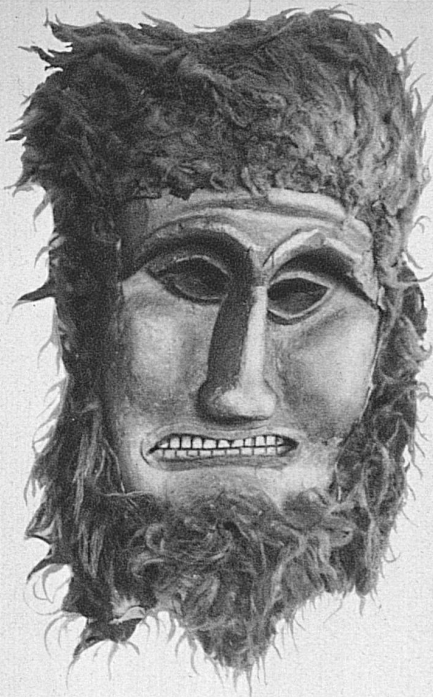
ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Fastnacht in

der Schweiz



Luzern



Lötschental



Berschis



Zug

Le Carnaval en Suisse



Altsätten



Laupen

Lötschental

Flums

THE CARNIVAL AT BASEL

Switzerland's most original March Entertainment

Much admired as the Basel people are by their contemporaries for their old-fame standard in all that is connected with art and science, there is another side in their character which comes into full swing chiefly at carnival time. It is their sense of satire, wit and frolic. The Basel "Fasnacht" is surely admitted by everyone in the country to be far and away the most original. Its fame, in fact, attracts streams of visitors not only from Switzerland itself, but they come from all over the Continent to see a town astir with the fever of carnival. Indeed, the whole population goes mad, young and old alike, and for three full days they abandon themselves to mirth and revelry. No one thinks of working, schools being closed for half the week and all offices and factories shut down for two half holidays. It is commonly known that the Basler must always have his own way in everything. If the carnival takes place on the same day all over the country, he, of course, has it a week later. If it is the accepted custom to make Tuesday the principal day of fun and folly, he must choose Monday and Wednesday. There is another accomplishment of the Baslers' which no one who knows would dare to gainsay: Their

Art of Drumming

The manner in which even the veriest youngsters handle their drumsticks arouses the admiration of every newcomer. Although I can scarcely credit their extravagant statement that nobody else in Switzerland has an idea of drumming, I must admit their supremacy in this art. At the Basel carnival, this proficiency is soon apparent to your ears, for the narrow roads of the quaint old inner city resound with the frantic roar produced by these picturesque drumming corps with their peculiar bulky Napoleonic instruments. They come to life on carnival only though being allowed to practise in the back-yards of their club premises one month before they appear. But when they are out and come rumbling down the streets, then the heart of every trueborn Basler leaps with joy, as it is the predominant sound of his beloved carnival.

The most original feature, perhaps, is the time of the beginning of Basel's great event: 4 o'clock in the morning. No genuine Basler would ever miss the great opening tattoo, what he calls the "Morgenstreich", of the three gayest days in the year. By four all the central streets and squares are packed with a thronging crowd. Thousands of old and young faces, carefully muffled up to keep out the wintry cold, are beaming with anticipation. On the stroke of four the lights are going out. And now, a performance is being enacted before the visitor's eye which has been preserved from the Middle Ages and is singular in its kind in the whole of Europe. The sound of piccolo players emerging from narrow side lanes is growing steadily louder,

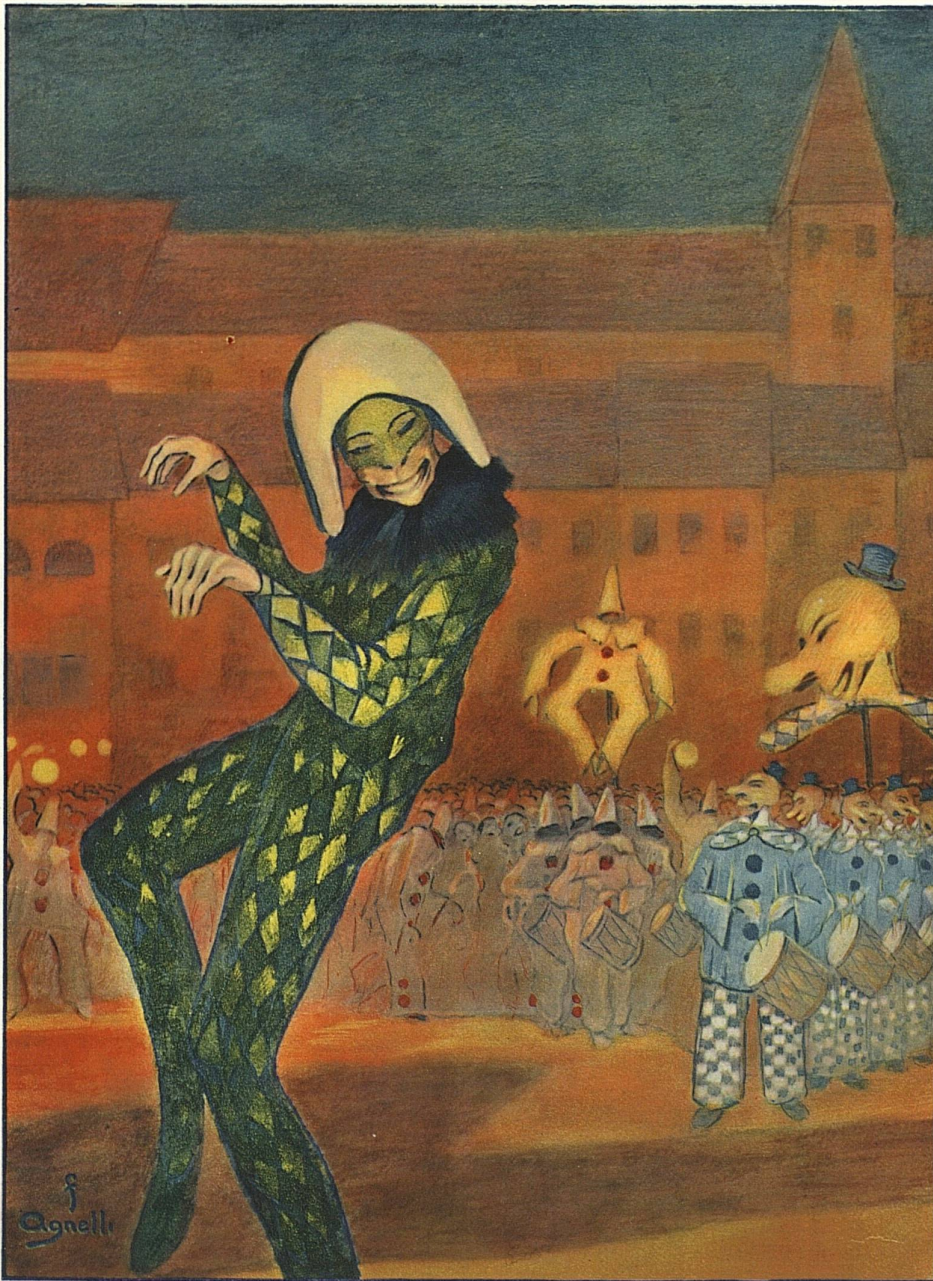
and a melody is heard through the subdued murmur of the crowd which to the Basler is familiar as a sacred tradition. He has listened to these tunes from childhood in this unique hour of a February morning. Between the many piccolo corps, dressed in century old uniforms

Huge Lanterns

in gay colours are carried by four men each, the four sides bearing pictures carefully painted by noted artists. These paintings and drawings attract the chief interest of the onlookers, as they make fun of all that happened within the walls of the town during the past year. Blunders of the City Council and of magistrates are revived, police regulations which met with the Basler's disapproval are ridiculed to the great satisfaction of the spectators—in short, whoever and whatever fed the gossip of the town or disturbed the peace of the citizens is sarcastically displayed on these giant lanterns and made the general laughing-stock. News editors never can please everybody, as we all are aware, and are favourite targets of the revengeful carnival-makers. The police, who prohibited perambulators being wheeled on the footpaths of certain streets, are none the better off. A law suit between the father of a leading politician and a schoolmaster, who had beaten his boy in school, provides ample scope for jokes and satire on various lanterns. The greatest amusement, however, seems to be caused at the expense of the local authorities who removed the girl's bathing establishment further down the Rhine to withdraw it from the glances of male onlookers from a Rhine bridge above. This year, I guess that an alleged ghost, who startled a whole district of Basel by strange knocks at midnight, will figure among the favoured subjects to provide fun and amusement.

Well over an hour elapses before the remarkably witty parodies with their flaring lights have passed through the darkness of the winter's night, and the final piccolo sounds are fading away. With profound satisfaction for the revenge taken on all those who stirred him from piece, the Basler returns—not home yet, but to one of the many restaurants, where two dishes are awaiting him which also belong inseparably to this hour of the year. They are a soup of thick roasted flour and a kind of tart filled with biting onions. Then all those masses rush back to bed.

In the afternoon, the second of Basel's traditional event is staged. There are scores of historical cliques in town who exist for carnival only, and who rack their brains months before to represent the most original group. And original they are all, those countless carnival clubs. This time they have carefully decorated cars as the main feature, preceded by drumming guards in their colourful historical uniforms. Often their vehicle is shaped



Ultima giornata di Carnevale
Quadro di Fausto Agnelli, Lugano

according to the particular subject of their sarcasm. Each time a car is passing people rush to obtain a leaflet bearing a funny poem, which explains in a jolly verse, in Basel dialect, the subject of their respective show. Later, prizes are given to the best groups by a select committee of judges.

In the evening, the wave of enthusiasm reaches its climax when hundreds of fancy dress balls are held, in which the whole population takes part. Here, too, a special spirit of Basilean piquancy prevails. For the whole year, the Basler has saved up his aggressive humour for this occasion, for he never dares to give samples of his biting wit of his unless he knows that he cannot be recognised in his masquerade. On Wednesday, after the procession from Monday has passed again, sometimes even in an improved and enlarged edition, a final rush to the many beautiful dancing places sets in. And—then, on the following morning, there are but a few odd masks left here and there—carnival spirits have ebbed out completely. It seems incredible that these reserved and seemingly unsocial people should be those sparkling merrymakers of yesterday. But it is so. Behind the scenes, however, the Basler's frantic love for their carnival is already directed to next year's grand event.

Walter Dueck.

MORGENSTREICH

(Elegie eines alten Baslers)

Einst, im versunkenen Jugendreich —
O magisches Wörtlein: Morgenstreich!
Das ganze Jahr voller Schulbanksorgen,
Aber ein Märchen war dieser Morgen.

Und noch heute, nach vielen Jahren ist's so:
Laternen, Trommeln und Piccolo
Machen mein altes Herze weich,
Machen mein altes Herze froh!

Niemand als nur ein Basler versteht,
Was da im Busen so vor sich geht
Beim magischen Wörtlein: Morgenstreich —
Gibt's wohl auch einen im Himmelreich?

Dominik Müller.