

Fastnacht / Karneval

Die fünfte Jahreszeit

Mardi Gras in Germany

An introduction to the “fifth season”



Masks are an important part of Karneval

Germans call the pre-Lenten Carnival season **die närrische Saison** ("the foolish season") or **die fünfte Jahreszeit** ("the fifth season"). Except for Munich's **Oktoberfest**, it is the one time of year when many normally staid Germans (and Austrians and Swiss) loosen up and go a little crazy. **Fastnacht** or **Karneval** is a "movable feast" (*ein beweglicher Festtag*) that depends on the date of Easter (*Ostern*). In 2007 **Fastnacht** falls on February 20 (**Faschingsdienstag**). The official start of the **Fasching** season is either January 7 (the day after Epiphany, *Dreikönige*) or the 11th day of the 11th month (*Elfter im Elften*, Nov. 11), depending on the region.

In the U.S., New Orleans is well known for Mardi Gras. While New Orleans is one of the few cities in the United States with a major Carnival celebration, almost all of the Catholic regions and cities across the German-speaking world (and the rest of Europe) celebrate Mardi Gras in a big way. Only a few Protestant areas in northern and eastern Germany also observe **Karneval**. Some of Germany's best known celebrations are held in Cologne (*Köln*), Mainz, Munich (*München*) and Rottweil. But Cologne's **Karneval** is not really the same as Munich's **Fasching**. Germanic Carnival celebrations vary from region to region, sometimes even taking place at different times!

Fastnacht is related to the Germanic word “fasten” (to fast, abstain from eating).
Karneval is related to the Latin “carnem levare” (to remove meat).

Carnival or Mardi Gras goes by many names in German, depending on the region and dialect: **Karneval** (Rhineland), **Fasching** (Austria, Bavaria), **Fastnacht** (Baden, Switzerland), **Fosnat** (Franconia) or **Fasnet** (Swabia). Whether it's **Fasching** or **Karneval**, it is a time to let off steam and live it up before the Lenten period that once called for fasting (**die Fastenzeit**). It is this fasting tradition that gave the celebration its **Fastnacht** name ("night before fasting"). In the 15th and 16th centuries, amusing plays known as **Fastnachtspiele** were performed during the pre-Lenten season. Today there are elaborate parades (*Umzüge*) in all the large and small communities where **Fasching** is celebrated. Floats and marchers displaying large caricature heads often lampoon regional and national politicians. Another part of the celebration involves Carnival royalty (princes, princesses) and a sort of "counter-government" during the season. The Rhineland *Rosenmontagumzug* is an event broadcast each year on German television, similar to the Macy's Thanksgiving parade in New York. It features colorful floats with caricatured figures mocking local and national politicians and other personalities or events.



Directions to make a Gipsmask

- Start by putting a wide head band on your partner (or yourself if your making your own mask). Try and cover the hair line all around face as well as possible. You can just tear an old piece of sheet and use that as a head band.
- Apply a good even coating of petroleum jelly to the entire face –being sure to put extra along hair line, on eyebrows, eyelashes, and lips.
- In one of your plastic bowls, put about 1/2C of warm or cool water and sprinkle in about 1/3c Plaster of Paris (Always add plaster to the water, not the other way around). This light plaster/water mixer makes a smoother finish (and a faster set time) for the plaster gauze strips. You can get Plaster of Paris or Paris Craft at any craft store. I would recommend Paris Craft.
- mold onto a surface and let dry before removing. Dip one plaster strip at a time into the water/plaster mixture and apply to face
- I start along outside of face.
- Make sure each strip overlaps with previous strip and smooth into close contact with face with your fingers.
- I put small pieces around nostril area early on (and while clients eyes and mouth are still free) so that your subject is certain of his/her ability to breathe. (that includes you, if you're doing yourself).
- Having the eyes and mouth covered with plaster depends on what you (or the client) wants for the finished mask. If you want a mask with a screaming mouth for example, you might want to leave the lips free of plaster. If you want an inner mask, often the eyes closed (covered) is more powerful. In either event, I save around eyes and mouth (if the subject wants these covered) for the end. Let the subject know when you are about to cover the eyes or mouth, taking care to smooth the wet strips into place so you get a good mold without poking too hard.) (If you are doing this on yourself in front of a mirror, I suggest you keep your eyes uncovered ...duh! – though I've done myself covered a few times).
- When all areas of the face have been covered (2 layers is usually fine for most places with a little extra layering along the outer face line and jaw line.. (This is because this is where the most stress is place when taking the mask off.)
- Finally, I add a little more plaster to the water bowl (so its a thick cream texture) and I work to really smooth and finish the mask.

Removing the mask

1. If you feel a little nervous or panicky (very few people have any problem with it at all, but its worth calming potential fears – without making them any bigger by "over doing" the discussion of potential panic attack) -- the mask can be taken off at any time (though it will probably mean ruining the mask so I recommend trying to relax into the fear and see how that goes first); and
 2. When you get ready to take it off, consciously avoid the inclination to get it off quickly, or the natural feeling that it's stuck. (I always encourage the person through the process of taking it off – helping them go slow, helping them realize that it is coming, and sometimes helping release a couple of hairs at the hair line (no big deal)).
- The mask becomes hard enough to come off (usually it gets a little warm as it sets and is rigid and ready to carefully take off in about 12-15 minutes or less).
 - The person under the mask is really the best person to take it off as they can tell what's going on, how they feel, etc. Start by having your subject move his/her mouth and face around inside the mask once it is set up and rigid (about 12-15 minutes or less); then untie the head band and slowly begin to rock the two jaw line sides of the mask with both hands, and gently (slowly) pull the mask down and away from the face. If you are facilitating, help mainly by encouraging, letting the client know it's coming off, keeping them from going too fast (often a tendency), and helping to release a hair or two at the hairline if need be