





DEAR VISITORS

The Basel Fasnacht is the largest carnival in Switzerland. Every year it starts at four o'clock sharp in the morning of the Monday after Ash Wednesday and goes on for exactly seventy-two hours.

Fasnacht, or the three best days of the year (die drei scheenste dääg) as the people here like to call it, is a bit like a family celebration during which everyone, young and old, enjoys fool's licence. Moreover, it is a hotchpotch of colours, costumes, and sounds and provides an opportunity to give vent to publicly perceived grievances.

Let yourself be carried away by the colourful hustle and bustle in Basel's streets, alleys, and pubs. Even if you're only a bystander you'll get to know a lot about local customs and traditions even though the Basel dialect and sense of humour might appear a bit confusing. But one thing is for sure: it's an event to remember!



BASEL FASNACHT IS DIFFERENT



The Basel Fasnacht is a mix of joie de vivre, melancholy, mummer's play, and Dance of Death. Drummers, pipers, Guggenmusik bands (brass bands that play slightly off-key and out-of-tune), huge floats, and elegant carriages (Chaise) parade through the streets playing music, creating a spectacle, and playing pranks on the onlookers.

Basel Fasnacht is different from many other carnivals in the sense that most of the action is outdoors. Moreover, each participating group chooses a specific theme, or issue, each year (called the Sujet), which it enacts in a variety of ways. Those cliques (as the "marching bands" are referred to) who are officially registered at the Fasnacht Committee and take part in the Cortège (parade) on Monday and Wednesday afternoons are subsidized by the Committee.

Unlike many other carnivals, the Basel Fasnacht commences on Monday after Ash Wednesday, that is, during Lent. The reason for this is that, in Basel, the people decided to stick to the original dates of Lent as decreed by the Church in the year 600. In other areas, the beginning of Lent was moved forward in 1091 because the six Sundays leading up to Easter were not counted as part of Lent.



> GÄSSLE: Piping and drumming and marching through the alleys of the old part of town, no fixed route

During the three days of Fasnacht everybody is on Du-terms (that is, on first-name terms) irrespective of nationality, class, age, or social status. Fasnacht is a great integrator and acceptor. It is a time of getting to know people and establishing long-lasting friendships. Thus, Fasnacht contributes to the spirit of peaceful and amicable coexistence in the city.





As you might have already noticed, the Basel dialect includes many French terms, which is why the Fasnacht theme a clique chooses is referred to as sujet.

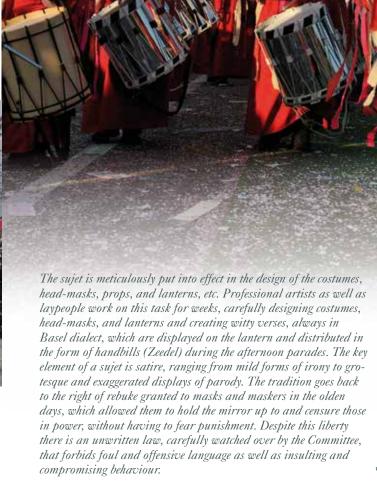
THE SUJET

Fasnacht is the time of the year to let off steam and the sujet provides the canvas to zero in on everything that has gone wrong in politics, sports, cultural life, and community affairs over the past twelve months, applying wit, irony, and razor-sharp humour in word and image. Under the impact of globalization, sujets now often also address issues of wider and international significance.





> RÄDÄBÄNG: The official Fasnacht guide in brochure form. In it the cliques present their sujets.





Active participation in Fasnacht wearing only make-up is an absolute no-go—an exception being made for small children. Many groups create and produce their own head-masks and costumes. Larve are made in the papier mâché technique, using a mould and applying consecutive layers of pasted paper. Basel also has a number of professional studios that take on the task of manufacturing and painting head-masks. While head-masks made of waxed cloth used to be quite common, synthetic material is used more often these days.



New head-masks and costumes are made each year according to the sujet the clique has chosen. This means that Basel carnivalists usually have at home quite a collection, acquired over the years. For cost reasons, people often reuse old costumes and head-masks, recombining the dress-up and repainting the masks. For the opening of Fasnacht on early Monday morning (Morgenstreich, see p. 18) and Fasnacht Tuesday – two occasions on which the cliques specifically do not play out their sujet – the participants wear old costumes and head-masks, often in new combinations, creating a colourful mix of styles and forms. This dress code is referred to as Charivari, which means as much as hotchpotch. Nevertheless, at the Morgenstreich and on Fasnacht Tuesday one also finds a wide range of very typical carnival figures.

These include some of Fasnacht's very traditional masks: the Waggis, probably the most famous Basel Fasnacht mask, is a parody of an Alsatian peasant; next we have the Alti Dante (an "old aunt" from the Biedermeier period), the Harlekin (harlequin based on the Commedia dell' Arte), the Dummbeeter (originally a trumpeter from the Rococo period), the Blätzlibajass (with a costume made of hundreds, if not thousands of scraps of cloth; a similar costume exists in neighbouring Southern Baden), the Pierrot with a peacock feather stuck to his hat, and the Ueli (figure in reference to a medieval court jester).

> CHARIVARI: French expression for a hotchpotch of costumes

PIPING AND DRUMMING

The Fasnacht drum marches go back to old military marches and tattoos. The frequent presence of foreign troops in Basel expanded the repertoire of marches over the ages. Napoleon's enthusiasm for drumming also left its mark on the Basel Fasnacht.

One of his drum majors was a man called Johannes Bühler from Wattwil who settled down in Basel in 1815. His musical textbook by the title of Tambour- und Pfeifferordonanz für eidgenössische Truppen, published in 1819, left a lasting imprint on the Basel Fasnacht. The first piccolo marches to be issued in print were published by the Fasnacht Committee in 1913. Others followed in the years to come, now also including polyphonic scores; since roughly the 1950s the piccolo marches have experienced a veritable boom. Over the years the tunes have become less military and more virtuoso and, therefore, more difficult to play, a development made possible by a number of technical innovations to the instrument.

> INTRIGIEREN: Very special form of taking the Mickey out of someone, practised by maskers on unmasked onlookers during the parade

Given the significance of Fasnacht, piping and drumming are extremely popular pastimes throughout the year, and many men and women practise almost daily. In addition, the cliques usually meet once a week to practise. Outside of the Fasnacht season the drummers have to play on a Böggli (a small, padded wooden block), for obvious reasons. Many cliques have so-called Junge Garden ("young guards") where children are taught either the piccolo or drumming.



Then, for three days the streets, alleys, and squares of the old part of town resound with the typical rhythms and tunes of the Fasnacht marches. Marching is done at the so-called "foot soldier pace" (Landsknechtsschritt), which means 90 paces per minute. Accordingly the cliques move through the streets quite slowly. On average, cliques have a repertoire of 15 to 25 marches, all played by heart.

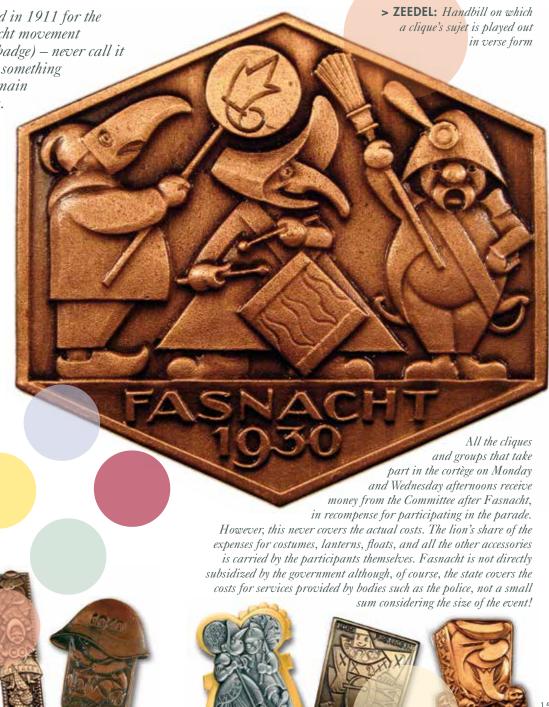
r drum practice outside Fasnacht season

BÖGGLI: Small, padded wooden block

The first Fasnacht badge was sold in 1911 for the purpose of supporting the Fasnacht movement financially. Today, the Blagette (badge) — never call it by any other name! — has become something of an icon, apart from being the main "source of income" for the cliques.

FASNACHT BADGES

Every year a competition is held in which artists are invited to create a design for a badge for the next Fasnacht. At the end of the summer, the Fasnacht Committee faces the difficult task of selecting the winner from a range of up to a hundred entries, many of them effectively small works of art. The theme depicted on the badge becomes the motto of the next Fasnacht. Sale of the Blagette commences on the first Saturday in January. All visitors to the Fasnacht should purchase a badge - although, of course, it's not compulsory – because it's the means through which the Fasnacht finances itself. In a way it's a like an entrance ticket to the Fasnacht. The net proceeds from the sale flow back to the cliques.





There were a few fancy-dress balls and parades put on by independent groups and associations, and a couple of Fasnacht societies and Schnitzelbank troupes (see p. 28) staged performances in the streets and in pubs and organized collections. But it was only in 1910 that an independent Fasnacht Committee was established to officially coordinate activities during carnival. A year later the Committee, as it is usually called for short, was granted the exclusive right of organizing collections and issued the first Fasnacht badge, the Blagette.

It also took over the task of putting on the Monstre drum concert, a major indoor event staged in the run-up to Fasnacht, and published the first guide to Fasnacht (the precursor of today's Rädäbäng) containing a short description of all participating groups and cliques.

> SUJET: Theme that is played out by a clique during Fasnacht

17

As the size and scale of Fasnacht grew over the years, so did the Committee's significance and range of responsibilities. Today the Committee understands itself as a service provider for the groups and cliques active in Fasnacht and as the hinge between the general public and the government authorities. In legal terms, the Committee is the body responsible for Fasnacht, which means it also has to deal with liability issues. Furthermore, the Committee is also responsible for the provision of finance and has the task of distributing the proceeds fairly among the roughly 500 officially registered groups.

The Committee is composed of ten to fifteen men and women who work on an honorary basis. Term-of-office is restricted, with new members being appointed by the Committee itself. A secretary's office handles the administrative work and serves as contact point.

16

FROM START TO FINISH: MORGENSTREICH TO ENDSTREICH

Fasnacht lasts seventy-two hours, commencing with a spectacular event and ending with an equally remarkable act.

> MÄÄLSUPPE (MEHLSUPPE): Roasted flour soup, typical snack before and after Morgenstreich

On Monday after Ash Wednesday the town rises at four o'clock sharp to the Morgenstreich (lit. early-morning stroke, military reveille), the impressive start to the Basel Fasnacht. Upon the fourth chime of St Martin's church, the oldest church in Basel, all the lights go out in the inner city, replaced by the glow of lanterns and the sound of piccolos and drums. At the command of the drum majors, all the assembled cliques start playing the Morgestraich, a very traditional and archaic marching tune, upon which the pipers and drummers get underway, marching slowly in step. The only light comes from the glow of the lanterns. A large lantern heads each clique in the procession, featuring the group's sujet for this Fasnacht. They are followed by stick lanterns carried by members of the Vortrab, that is, the clique's "vanguard", and the lanterns surmounted on the head-masks of the marchers, often providing the only clue in the eerie light as to the identity of the clique.

Pubs and street stalls offer traditional Fasnacht dishes such as roasted flour soup and onion and cheese pies. Piping and drumming continues until daybreak after which the people go home for a brief rest until its time for the afternoon Cortège.

Fasnacht ends with a similar ritual, precisely seventy-two hours later. Piping and drumming continues until shortly before four o'clock on Thursday morning, upon which each clique re-gathers at a chosen spot in town to perform a final piece. This moment is called the Endstreich and marks the abrupt close of Fasnacht. The people go home, tired but content, while dozens of street-cleaning teams with their big machines move in and return the city to its usual, everyday appearance within a matter of hours.

> RÄPPLI: Basel dialect term for confetti.
The term derives from the coin Rappen.



> REQUISIT: Prop which a clique uses during the parade, making reference to the sujet.

The Guggenmusik cliques, that is, the slightly cacophonous brass bands, march at a quicker pace than the pipers and drummers. They, too, are headed by a Vortrab and a drum major, and their costumes and head-masks again play out the group's sujet. The same goes for the cliques onboard the large floats. The surfaces of the float's cladding also serve as a display area for their current Fasnacht theme. The horse-drawn carriages (Chaise) from which elegantly dressed maskers hand out flowers and sweets have become less common in recent years.

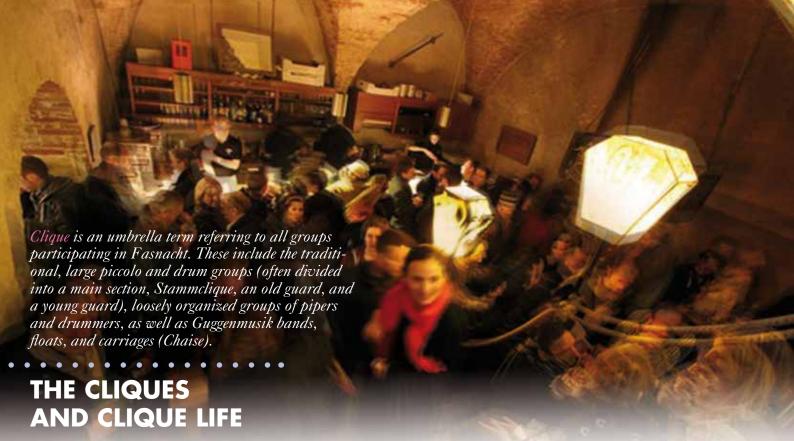
After a joint evening meal the cliques often break into smaller groups and set off again to join the nightly buzz in the streets and alleys of the old part of town, often playing on until dawn.

The Cortège, as this parade is called, comprises roughly 12,000 maskers. The colourful spectacle is not only a feast for the eyes and ears, it is also a feast of the wit, featuring no end of imaginative and satirical allusions in word and image that give expression to the cliques' sujets, that is, their Fasnacht themes. Every clique is headed by a Vortrab (vanguard); its members distribute Zeedel (handbills) on which the sujet is presented in witty verse form.

The medium that spells out a clique's sujet most spectacularly is the lantern. In order to be as up-to-date as possible, the lanterns are made only shortly before Fasnacht. These colourful, backlit works of art come in various shapes and sizes; some of them are huge and barely pass under the overhead tram wires.

Behind the lantern come the pipers, followed by the drum major and the drummers. The sections wear different costumes. Both make 20 reference to the clique's sujet but also bear upon each other.





In earlier days, Fasnacht used to be a completely male-dominated event. Today, most of the cliques – with a few exceptions – include both men and women, from all social strata and professions.

The first cliques grew from various local associations and societies around the middle of the 19th century. The first exclusively carnival-related association was founded around 1870. The early groups usually had their roots in distinct neighbourhoods as the names of some of today's cliques still imply (Spale, Stainlemer, Glaibasler, etc.). The cliques have their fixed meeting places, usually a cellar, often located in their original neighbourhood. This is where the clique practises throughout the year and where the young boys and girls receive their musical training.

The most important events in the course of the year include the preparations for the Drummeli (the traditional piccolo and drum concert), the weekly practice sessions, and the outdoor marching practices in the run-up to Fasnacht.

The cliques choose one of the three Sundays following Fasnacht to go on their traditional outing (Bummel); it is followed in the evening by a last, (unmasked) musical parade in town.



> BASEL LÄCKERLI (LÄGGERLI): Traditional Basel spice biscuit made of wheat flour, honey, candid orange and lemon peels, spices, almonds and/or other nuts. The flat rolled and still warm dough is glazed and cut into a square pieces. Oriental spices began arriving in Europe in the course of the 11th century. Among other things they were used to flavour various kinds of honey pastries, above all in rich monasteries. It is not clear when the first Läggerli were produced in Basel but the oldest recipes date back to the 17th century. New versions are being created all the time on the basis of the traditional recipe. What used to be a popular pastry during the Christmas and New Year season is now produced and consumed all year round. Apart from own tasty consumption, people often bring along Läggerli as a gift for the host when invited to someone's home. Today, the Basel speciality is famous well beyond Switzerland.

Undoubtedly drumming and piping are the most salient features of Fasnacht, but the large floats and the Guggenmusik bands are also part of it, in fact, a very popular part.

.





FASCHTEWÄÄIE: Pretzel-like pastry with caraway

In the middle of the 19th century, brass bands already performed in the parades, and in the early 20th century Fasnacht activities even included accordion and mandolin groups. The modern Guggenmusik bands grew from these early brass bands. Today roughly 70 formations with more than 2,000 active members participate in the Cortège and give concerts in the town squares, notably on Tuesday evening, but they are also found playing in the crowded downtown pubs and restaurants.



The huge floats equipped with fancy and elaborate structures that play out the clique's sujet are one of the main eye-catchers at the Cortège. The maskers that man the floats, very often Waggis figures, distribute flowers — usually mimosa, the traditional Fasnacht flower — oranges, and other edible sundries among the crowd, but, at the same time, they also love to shower the onlookers with a rain of confetti (Räppli).

FASNACHT TUESDAY

Fasnacht Tuesday is children's day and the day on which the lanterns, floats, and props are exhibited in special shows.

It is also the time of the Guggenmusik bands and the day of free Fasnacht. Again the inner city becomes a colourful hustle and bustle of Fasnacht activities, with countless troupes of masked kids parading through the streets, getting their first feel of Fasnacht, and equally countless small groups of adults piping and drumming through the narrow alleys of the old part of town, dressed in a staggering array of costumes and masks. This dress code is referred to as Charivari.

One of the main events on this day is the lantern exhibition on the Münsterplatz, featuring over 200 lanterns, each one a work of art in its own right. Some are created by professional artists commissioned by the respective clique, others bear the hallmarks of children's hands. The staggering open-air art show unfolds its true magic after dark when the lanterns are lit up like at the Morgenstreich.



> **SAUBLOOTERE:** Pig's bladder, used to taunt and beat unmasked onlookers

A further notable event is the exhibition of floats and props on the Kaserne Square in Kleinbasel. The event is often accompanied by spontaneous concerts and some of the floats are converted into temporary pubs.



Tuesday evening is the great moment for the Guggenmusik bands. By means of a gentleman's agreement reached many years ago, it is accepted practice that the Morgenstreich belongs exclusively to the pipers and drummers but, in return, the Guggenmusik bands take possession of town on Tuesday evening. The Barfüsserplatz, Marktplatz, and Clarplatz become venues for the extremely popular Guggenmusik concerts that carry on far into the night.

Schnitzelbank songs reach back to the old canta'storie (sung story) tradition. On Monday and Wednesday evenings Schnitzelbank singers — alone or in small troupes — go from venue to venue, dressed in costume and head-mask, and perform their witty and satirical songs: one of Fasnacht's true highlights!

SCHNITZELBANKS

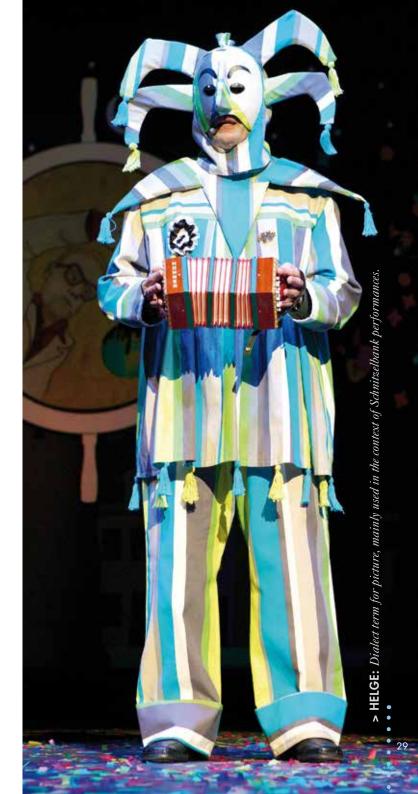


The songs tell of and satirize current affairs and people. Each verse tells a story of its own from the world of politics, sports, business, or celebrities. The verses are elegantly rhymed, witty, and usually very biting and satirical. The great art of Schnitzelbank is to hold the audience in suspense by interweaving several topics until the punchline reveals the parody's actual target, or victim. Schnitzelbank songs are usually accompanied by an instrument. Some of the tunes trace back to medieval ballads, others are taken from familiar folksongs or even pop songs.

Just as important as the verses are the illustrations that go with them; each verse has its own picture which is held up to the audience. A good illustration provides hints to the verse's theme, but without revealing the highlight. They can even be slightly misleading, leaving the audience in the dark until the final line discloses the quip.

Schnitzelbank singers perform in restaurants, theatres, clique cellars, and private houses (in so-called **Stubete**, parlour shows). Restaurants where Schnitzelbank singers perform are marked by special signboards.

As mentioned above, the Schnitzelbank songs trace back to the canta' storie tradition of the 17th century, ridiculing current affairs and people in word and image. They certainly represent the most dense and skilled form of Fasnacht wit, but they require from the listener full command of the Basel dialect.





For many people, the three days of Fasnacht with its typical music, colourful spectacle, and fine sense of humour, is far too short a time for such a unique tradition. To help them get over this, there are a number of pre-Fasnacht events that include all the salient features of Fasnacht, performed on stage in various theatres in town. They commence soon after New Year and go on until shortly before

Morgenstreich.

The oldest event is the Zofinger Concartli, a satirical show put on each year by the student association Zofingia. However, for over a hundred years now, the major event has been the Drummeli, previously known as the Monstre Trommelkonzert (Monstre drum concert). It is organized by the Fasnacht Committee and features piccolo playing and drumming, interspersed with short satirical plays (Raamestüggli), Schnitzelbank performances, Guggenmusik bands, and an act by a Junge Garde (junior section of a clique).



In the course of the seventies, the demand for tickets began to exceed the Drummeli's capacities. This led to the emergence of further, similar events, but each with its own specific characteristics and atmosphere. They help to bridge the long wait to Morgenstreich. Fasnacht as we know it today is a child of the 20th century, although its archaic nature conveys the impression that we are dealing with a centuries-old tradition. The only period when there was no Fasnacht in the streets of Basel was during the War.

A LOOK BACK IN HISTORY

Morgenstreich 1843 / Hieronymus Hess



Since then the event has grown continuously and the number of cliques and Guggenmusik bands has risen sharply. The quality of piccolo-playing and drumming has been more and more perfected, so has the art of mask making and lantern painting.

The roots of the Basel Fasnacht reach back to Celtic and Germanic times and grew from practices relating to ancestor worship, fertility rites, and the driving out of winter. It is also informed by a number of later military traditions such as musters and shows of arms organized by the town's guilds, as well as medieval jousts and religious feasts during Lent.



> SUNNEREEDLI: Typical salty Basel pastry

> KÄÄS-UND ZIIBELEWÄÄIE

IKÄSE- UND ZWIEBELKUCHENI:

.

Typical Fasnacht snack: cheese- and onion-pie

Basel was almost completely razed to the ground by an earthquake in 1356 during which most of the historical documents were lost to fire. The oldest reference to Fasnacht goes back to 1376 and a joust organized by the Duke of Austria on the day before Ash Wednesday. It became known as die böse Fasnacht, the evil Fasnacht, after a fight between local townspeople and some knights ended in a bloodbath.



Basel linen drum 1575 / Historical Museum Basel

During the Age of Reformation the merry feasting and frolics common to the period between Christmas and Lent were severely restricted. Later, carnivalesque parades were staged in the context of military musters organized by guilds and other town associations. These continued well into the 19th century and provided a model for the modern form of Fasnacht. For safety reasons burning torches were replaced by lanterns and, gradually, the pipers and drummers, maskers, and Schnitzelbank singers became what they are today. Moreover, the themes of the parades acquired a more satirical touch and began addressing political issues, leading to the birth of the modern sujet.

The Basel Fasnacht has something very mystical to it, but it is also the time of fun and merrymaking, and for many participants it is actually the best time of the year.

We want everybody in the audience to become part of this special and extraordinary atmosphere, but for this purpose we ask you to observe a few basic rules:

FOOL'S LICENCE -A FEW GROUND RULES



You can support this marvellous tradition by wearing a Fasnacht badge!



To each his own: painted faces, false noses, and wigs do not belong at the Basel Fasnacht, neither do bawling, swaying to music Bavarian style, and drunken behaviour. Please respect the local traditions.



Confetti lends Fasnacht a colourful touch. But please don't throw confetti at the maskers! It makes breathing under the mask extremely difficult.



Waggis figures on floats like to throw oranges and other items into the audience – much to the people's delight. Please do not throw them back or into the other parts of the crowd.



Enjoy Fasnacht with the respect it deserves. Remember, masked cliques always have the right of way, so please let them pass. Do not form human chains. But above all: drums and masks are valuable property and not a souvenir to take home!!

Complete darkness is a prerequisite of Morgenstreich. Brightly lit windows or even such things as fireworks would ruin the magic completely. Head-lanterns and the large procession lanterns are the only sources of light. Therefore, flash photography is an absolute no-go during Morgenstreich! It not only disturbs the atmosphere, it is also extremely irritating for the drummers and pipers under their masks. So, please refrain from taking flash pictures.



34 35



FASNACHT COMMITTEE | Office Blumenrain 16 | 4001 Basel Phone: +41 61 261 25 75 | Fax: +41 61 262 25 07 www.fasnachts-comite.ch

GUGGENMUSIK PARADE

Tuesday evening From Mustermesse through Clarastrasse, Mittlere Rheinbrücke, to Marktplatz and Barfüsserplatz, respectively Tuesday as from 18.30

GUGGENMUSIK CONCERTS

Tuesday evening, 19.30 – 23.00 Marktplatz, Barfüsserplatz, Claraplatz www.fg-gugge-basel.ch www.gugge-ig-basel.ch

SCHNITZELBANK PERFORMANCES

Monday and Wednesday evenings in downtown restaurants and theatres. www.schnitzelbankbasel.ch www.bsg-online.ch www.vsg-basel.ch www.bebbi-baengg.ch

BADGES

The golden, silver, and copper badges as well as the so-called Bijou are sold on the street and at various kiosks in the run-up to Fasnacht.

During Fasnacht they are purchasable at the COMMITTEE'S OFFICIAL STALLS: at Marktplatz and Claraplatz (on all three days); on Tuesday during the lantern exhibition on the Münsterplatz; on Monday and Wednesday at Barfüsserplatz.

The Committee's stalls also have on offer the official Fasnacht guide, Rädäbäng, as well as the handbills (Zeedel) issued by cliques and Schnitzelbank troupes.

CORTÈGE (Parade) Monday and Wednesday afternoons 13.30 – 18.15

LANTERN EXHIBITION

Münsterplatz

Monday evening through to Wednesday morning

EXHIBITION OF FLOATS AND PROPS

Kaserne Square, Kleinbasel (Lesser Basel) Monday evening through to Wednesday morning

Imprint

© Fasnacht Committee | Basel

Photos:

Markus Burla, Gabi Christ, Nicole Salathé, Ivo Birrer, David Wherry

Image source, picture p. 33 | Historical Museum Basel

Photo pages 22&23 | bz Basel, Andreas Maurer

Photos pages 10 & 11 | Ortsmuseum Binningen, Basler Künstlerlarven

Print: Steudler Press AG

Edition: 5,000 copies

Translation: Nigel Stephenson, St. Johanns-Vorstadt 15 / 4056 Basel

Published by: Fasnacht Committee | Basel

Visual design: Domo Löw





The Fasnacht Committee wishes to heartily thank the following sponsors for their support in this publication:











SPECIAL OFFER

- Stay at hotel of selected category
- Breakfast, visitor's tax, VAT, and service included
- Mobility ticket gives you unlimited travel on local transport network
- Original Basel Fasnacht badge in copper, silver, or gold
- Surprise gift

Information, prices, booking at Basel Tourism
Tel +41 (0) 61 268 68 68, Fax +41 (0) 61 268 68 70
info@basel.com | www.basel.com

Tourist & Hotel Information At Stadt-Casino, Barfüsserplatz, Steinenberg 14, CH-4010 Basel Railway Station SBB, CH-4010 Basel

