

The 2017 Rex Procession: “Carnival Fêtes and Feasts”

**Tuesday, February 28, 2017
New Orleans, Louisiana**

1. Rex, King of Carnival, Monarch of Merriment Rex’s float carries the King of Carnival and his pages through the streets of New Orleans each Mardi Gras. In the early years of the New Orleans Carnival Rex’s float was redesigned each year. The current King’s float, one of Carnival’s most iconic images, has been in use for over fifty years.

2. His Majesty’s Bandwagon From this traditional permanent float one of the Royal Bands provides lively music for Rex and for those who greet him on the parade route. One of those songs will surely be the Rex anthem: “If Ever I Cease to Love,” which has been played in every Rex parade since 1872.

3. The King’s Jesters Even the Monarch of Merriment needs jesters in his court. Rex’s jesters dress in the traditional colors of Mardi Gras – purple, green and gold. The papier mache’ figures on the Jester float are some of the oldest in the Rex parade, and were sculpted by artists in Viareggio, Italy, a city with its own rich Carnival tradition.

4. The Boeuf Gras The Boeuf Gras (“the fat ox”) represents one of the oldest traditions and images of Mardi Gras, symbolizing the great feast on the day before Lent begins. In the early years of the New Orleans Carnival a live Boeuf Gras, decorated with garlands, had an honored place near the front of the Rex Parade.

5. The Butterfly King Since the earliest days of Carnival, butterflies have been popular symbolic design elements, their brief and colorful life a metaphor for the ephemeral magic of Mardi Gras itself. The invitation to the 1882 Rex ball added butterfly wings to the King of Carnival, creating the enduring image of “The Butterfly King.” The Butterfly King float, introduced in 2012, is the first new permanent float to join the Rex Procession in many decades.

6. Title Float: “Carnival Fêtes and Feasts”

Carnival, celebrated in varied and colorful ways around the world, has deep roots. The Ancients celebrated the transition from Winter’s darkness to Spring’s light and promise with feasts and festivals. Early Christians incorporated many of these customs into their pre-Lenten revelry, and Shrove Tuesday marked the last exuberant celebration before Lent’s solemnity and fasting began on Ash Wednesday. The words “Carnival” (derived from the Latin words meaning “farewell to flesh) and “Mardi Gras”(“Fat Tuesday”) now describe celebrations which have evolved over the ages in creative ways in many cultures. These diverse and colorful traditions inspire the theme and float designs of the 2017 Rex Procession.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mardi_Gras

7. Saturnalia The Romans believed that Saturn ruled the Earth during a Golden Age when men did not have to work, so this celebration in his honor featured extensive and often licentious celebration. A “King of Misrule” was sometimes selected by lot, and costuming and masking were an essential part of the loud proceedings.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturnalia>

<http://www.ancient-origins.net/history-ancient-traditions/saturnalia-december-festival-joy-and-merriment-ancient-rome-004963>

8. Courir de Mardi Gras Southern Louisiana's Cajuns have long celebrated Mardi Gras in unique ways derived from ancient French traditions. The "Feast of Begging," celebrated in the Medieval French countryside, has its counterpart in the Cajun "*courir*" or ride as colorfully costumed riders collect chickens and other ingredients for a great gumbo pre-Lenten feast.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courir_de_Mardi_Gras

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/02/11/385480686/forget-beads-cajun-mardi-gras-means-a-grand-drunken-chicken-chase>

9. Las Fallas: Spain This celebration, unique to Valencia, Spain, is a festival of fire ("*fallas*" means "fires"). Neighborhood groups work throughout the year to create figures ("*ninots*") and constructions which, eventually, will be set ablaze. The festival lasts five days and nights, ending with the grand finale: "*La Crema*" ("The Burning").

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falles>

<http://www.donquijote.org/culture/spain/society/holidays/las-fallas>

10. A Streetcar Named Desire Streetcars are an important symbol of New Orleans, and this permanent float honors the best known of all of New Orleans' streetcar lines. This iconic float depicts "The Streetcar Named Desire," made famous by the playwright Tennessee Williams. It is the only Rex float not pulled by a tractor.

11. Venetian Carnevale Celebrated in Venice since at least the 12th Century, the Venetian Carnival is synonymous with masking and elegant costumes. The "*bauta*" is a full-face mask worn with a tricorn hat, while the "*colombina*" is a highly decorated half mask. Some elements of this float are inspired by NOMA's current exhibition of Venetian art.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival_of_Venice

<http://www.italyguides.it/en/veneto/venice/venice-carnival>

12. Diablada: Peru Dancers dressed in devil masks and suits perform the ancient "*Danza de los Diablos*" ("Dance of the Devils"), carrying forward an Andean tradition that predates the Spanish conquest. After the arrival of Christianity elements of the dance were incorporated in religious celebrations. Bolivia, Peru and Chile all claim the *Diablada*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Diablada

<http://www.aracari.com/blog/diablada-dance-candelaria-festival-puno/>

13. New Orleans Carnival While New Orleans did not invent Carnival, it is certainly synonymous with its celebration. Informal celebrations took place from the city's earliest days, but the organization of the Mystick Krewe of Comus in 1857 and the crowning of Rex, the King of Carnival, in 1872 made New Orleans a center of Carnival celebration and tradition.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Orleans_Mardi_Gras

<http://www.rexorganization.com>

14. Race of the Berber Horses: Rome From the mid-15th Century through the late 19th Century the celebration of Carnival in Rome culminated with a horse race on the city's streets. Rider-less Barbary

horses (also known as Berber horses, or Barbs) raced the length of the Via del Corso, sometimes colliding with spectators.

<http://www.welcometorome.net/en/about-rome/roman%20culture/roman-carnival>

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/87.15.47/>

15. Busojaras: Hungary This five-day celebration originated in the town of Mohacs, Hungary, where centuries ago the citizens bravely drove away the invading Turks. On a stormy night the "Busos" dressed in grotesque masks and costumes and, making lots of noise, materialized out of the forest. The terrified Turks fled.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Busójárás>

<http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/busojaras>

16. Navigium Isidis Ancient Romans honored the Goddess Isis and invoked her blessing as winter ended and boats again sailed off to sea. Celebrants carried a small boat with her image in a procession to the shore and launched it into the sea. This ancient procession included many elements of our Carnival parades.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navigium_Isidis

[http://www.academia.edu/5916064/Isis - the Sea Star and the Ceremony of Navigium Isidis](http://www.academia.edu/5916064/Isis_-_the_Sea_Star_and_the_Ceremony_of_Navigium_Isidis)

17. Rio de Janeiro Carnival Brazil's Carnival celebration is likely the grandest and most spectacular in the world, and its epicenter is Rio de Janeiro. Samba schools work year round to perfect glittering presentations combining dance, music, floats and dramatic costumes. The spectacle draws up to two million people per day to Rio's streets.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rio_Carnival

<http://traveltips.usatoday.com/history-carnival-rio-de-janeiro-11711.html>

18. The Mystic Memphi Until a devastating Yellow Fever outbreak in 1883 the Mystic Memphi and other Memphis krewes presented Carnival parades that rivaled those in New Orleans. Carnival Memphis continues that tradition and maintains close ties to the Rex Organization.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival_Memphis

<http://carnivalmemphis.org>

19. Maslenitsa Originally a pagan sun festival, this Russian celebration dates to the 3rd Century AD. Celebrants parade through town carrying Lady Maslenitsa, an effigy made of straw and dressed in rags. At sunset the figure is burned on a bonfire. Pancakes, symbolic of the simple diet of Lent, are also part of the celebration.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslenitsa>

<http://russiapedia.rt.com/of-russian-origin/maslenitsa/>

20. Mobile Mardi Gras Mobile and New Orleans have maintained a friendly rivalry over who originated Mardi Gras traditions. Mobile's Cowbellions did, indeed, begin parading in 1830, long before Comus's first parade in 1857. The Cowbellions, however, paraded on New Year's, not Mardi Gras.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mardi_Gras_in_Mobile,_Alabama

http://themobilemask.com/Mardi_Gras_History.html

21. Lupercalia Celebrated since antiquity in Rome, this February festival has roots even older than the legend of Lupa, the she-wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. By the 6th Century the modified celebration became part of the church calendar as the Feast of the Purification.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lupercalia>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lupercalia>

22. The Gilles of Binche: Belgium The march of hundreds of Gilles is the centerpiece of the Carnival of Binche, a city in Belgium. Traditionally the Gilles' dramatic clown-like costumes include wax masks, wooden shoes and plumed hats. Carnival throws? Oranges!

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival_of_Binche

<http://www.carnavaldebinche.be/the-gille.html>

23. Fasching: Germany "Fasching" comes from the German word for pre-Lenten feasting. Traditions vary in different German cities, but all involve parades, costumes, satire and excess. "Seine Tollität" ("His Craziness") rules over a celebration that reaches its riotous climax on *Rosenmontag* (Rose Monday).

<http://www.german-way.com/history-and-culture/holidays-and-celebrations/fasching-and-kaerneval/>

http://people.ucls.uchicago.edu/~mzemil/4thgerman/Fasching_intro_english.pdf

24. Bonhomme Carnaval: Quebec Held during the coldest months of the year, The Winter Carnival of Quebec is a season of balls and parades and is a tribute to the hearty spirit of the *Québécois*. Many balls are held outside, in ice palaces. "Bonhomme Carnaval," a colorful snowman, reigns as King of the Winter Carnival.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_Winter_Carnival

<https://carnaval.qc.ca/carnaval/who-is-bonhomme-carnaval>

25. Day of the Dead: Mexico Every culture has customs to remember and honor the dead, and Mexico's "Día de los Muertos" has evolved from ancient Aztec traditions into a colorful annual celebration. Altars, offerings and processions include skeletal figures, skulls and an abundance of marigolds, the flower of the dead.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Day_of_the_Dead

<http://www.art-is-fun.com/day-of-the-dead-facts/>

26. Patrino Karnavali: Greece Occupying French forces introduced Carnival traditions to the citizens of Patras, Greece in the early 19th Century. Grand parades and balls precede the culmination of the celebration when the sculpture of the Carnival King is burned in the city harbor.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patras_Carnival

<http://carnaval.com/greece/>

27. Burlamacco de Viareggio The clown Burlamacco presides over the famous Carnival celebration in Viareggio, Italy. Viareggio's float-building tradition influenced New Orleans' Carnival when float artist Raul Bertucelli came to New Orleans in the 1970's. His son, Jonathan, sculpted the figure on the Rex "Butterfly King" float.

<http://www.trustedtravelgirl.com/follow-the-latest/2015/2/4/carnevale>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival_of_Viareggio

28. The Royal Barge Reminiscent of a grand Viking ship, and complete with Royal Gryphon, the Royal Barge is one of Rex's iconic permanent floats. This float is the last remnant of the Royal Navy, once a feature of each Rex Parade.

His Majesty's Royal Calliope The Calliope provides a lively and traditional musical counterpoint to the brilliant array of bands in the Rex Procession.