

The 2020 Rex Procession: “Omens and Auguries”
Tuesday, February 25, 2020
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 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 fattened 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. The Boeuf Gras returned in 1959 as a magnificent papier mâché sculpture.

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: “Omens and Auguries” Throughout the ages, mankind has sought to divine the future, searching for portents of what is to come. The

ancients looked to the heavens and to the natural world to find prophetic signs and symbols, some hopeful and some dark and foreboding. The realm of prophets and oracles, with its colorful stories and images, inspires the 2020 Rex procession.

7. Hecuba was the wife of Priam, the King of Troy, and the mother of Paris. Before Paris was born Hecuba dreamed that she gave birth to a blazing torch covered with snakes. Troy's prophets interpreted this as a bad omen--if Paris lived he would bring about the destruction of Troy, a prophecy that proved true.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and-arts/classical-literature-mythology-and-folklore/folklore-and-mythology/hecuba>

<http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Go-Hi/Hecuba.html>

8. Ayeda-Wedo and Mami-Wata These African spirits are considered omens of healing and fertility. Ayeda-Wedo, the Rainbow Serpent, helps to support the heavens, while Mami-Wata is a water spirit. She is portrayed in many forms and is often accompanied by a large serpent.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayida-Weddo>

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

9. Aurora The Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, are named for Aurora, the Roman goddess of the dawn. Aurora, whose sisters were the goddesses of the sun and the moon, races across the sky in her chariot, painting the sky with the colors of the dawn, the herald of a new day.

<https://www.theaurorazone.com/about-the-aurora/aurora-legends>

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

10. A Streetcar Named Desire Streetcars are an important symbol of New Orleans, and this iconic 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. Chinese Bats The Chinese words for "bat" and "good fortune" sound almost the same, and bats are symbols of good luck. In Chinese mythology five bats together represent *wufu*, or the "Five Blessings": long life, wealth, health, love of virtue and a peaceful death.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wufu>
<https://www.chinasage.info/good-fortune.htm>

12. Zodiac Since at least Babylonian times astronomers divided the night sky into the Zodiac's twelve sectors, each with a named constellation. Over time, these constellations were assigned qualities and gave rise to the predictions of astrology and horoscopes—those born under the sign of Leo (the lion), for example, are fiery, outgoing and confident.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac#Table_of_dates
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrological_sign

13. Sibyl The Sibyls were ancient prophetesses. Though the Greek Sibyls might be best known--the Oracle of Delphi, for example--many ancient cultures claimed prophetic priestesses. Michelangelo painted five Sybils on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sibyl>
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/ancient-religions/ancient-religion/sibyl>

14. Lucky Ladybugs Colorful and harmless, ladybugs are helpful to farmers, consuming aphids and other pests. In the Middle Ages they were called "Our Lady beetles," their seven spots thought to represent Mary's seven sorrows. Seeing a ladybug, or having one land on you, is considered a very good omen in many cultures.

<https://animals.mom.me/ladybugs-considered-good-luck-5881.html>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coccinellidae>

15. 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.

16. Black Cat Black cats have long been associated with witches and witchcraft and are generally thought to bring bad luck. In some cultures they are considered good omens, and in yet others it all depends on whether the black cat is walking toward you or away from you, or in which direction the cat crosses your path.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_cat
<https://www.historicmysteries.com/black-cat-superstition/>

17. The Norns In Norse mythology our fates are in the hands of the Norns, mysterious female oracles with the power to determine when we live and die. Their name derives from the verb describing weaving or making twine and refers to how the Norns weave—and cut-- the thread of our fate.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norns>
<https://norse-mythology.org/gods-and-creatures/others/the-norns/>

18. The Hurricane Bird Petrels are commonly seen in rough seas, skimming along between the waves. Sailors saw them as an omen of approaching storms and named them storm (or stormy) petrels. “Petrel” comes from the Latin *petrus* for Peter who walked on water.

<https://oceanwide-expeditions.com/to-do/wildlife/storm-petrel>
<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=HTES18931012.2.19&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----1>

19. The Ides of March Plutarch wrote that a seer warned Julius Caesar to beware the Ides of March, and on that day he was assassinated. Four months later the Great Comet of 44 BC appeared in the heavens above Rome and was seen as a sign that Caesar had become a god. On early Roman coins a brilliant star often accompanies Caesar’s likeness.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesar%27s_Comet
<https://www.cybis.se/dendro/ancient-history/caesars-comet/>

20. The Albatross Sailors have long believed the albatross to be a good omen and that killing one would bring bad luck. In Coleridge’s poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a sailor kills an albatross with his crossbow and is forced to wear the dead bird around his neck.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rime_of_the_Ancient_Mariner
<http://world-bird-sanctuary.blogspot.com/2014/04/birdlore-albatross-lucky-charm.html>

21. The Raven With its dramatic appearance this glossy black bird has been assigned magical properties in many cultures as a harbinger of good or evil. Edgar Allen Poe’s poem, *The Raven*, perfectly captures the dark and haunting qualities of this striking bird.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_depictions_of_ravens
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Raven

22. Dream of Mahamaya Mahamaya dreamed that she was visited by a white elephant with six tusks and a lotus blossom in his mouth. This was a sign that she would give birth to a great ruler or a buddha. Her child was Gautama Buddha, the sage whose teachings are the core of Buddhism.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Maha-Maya>
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_\(mother_of_the_Buddha\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_(mother_of_the_Buddha))

23. The Tarot For many centuries tarot cards have been used to tell fortunes and to divine the future. The High Priestess card is one of 22 Major Arcana (greatest secrets) or trump cards and is associated with the female presence of the divine.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarot>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_High_Priestess

24. The Three Witches Three witches appear to Macbeth in the first act of Shakespeare's play, prophesying that he will be King and setting him on a path that leads to the murder of King Duncan. *"Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and caldron bubble."*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Witches
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43189/song-of-the-witches-double-double-toil-and-trouble>

25. The Promise of Peace The Old Testament account of a dove returning with an olive branch to Noah's ark introduced an enduring symbol of peace and promise. The olive branch is a symbol of peace in many cultures.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_symbols
<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/28/arts/28iht-design28.html>

26. Montezuma's Dream The 16th Century invasion of the Aztec empire by Spanish conquistadors was anticipated by their ruler, Montezuma. A number of dreams and omens may have convinced him that Cortez was the god Quetzalcoatl and that his arrival meant that his empire would be destroyed.

<https://mexicounexplained.com/8-omens-montezuma-end-aztec-empire/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moctezuma_II

27. The Fox Wedding Many cultures have stories and myths to explain the unusual condition when rain falls while the sun shines. In Japanese folklore it is called a “fox wedding”—the clever foxes wish to marry in the sunshine even while rain falls and keeps away unwanted visitors.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunshower>
<https://japanesemythology.wordpress.com/2014/04/19/the-foxes-wedding-a-weather-astronomical-seasonal-precession-or-ghostly-phenomenon-and-a-shrine-ritual/>

28. The Flowers of Spring After the cold and dark of Winter the appearance of colorful Spring flowers is a welcomed harbinger of renewal and rebirth. The narcissus has a special place in mythology, art and literature, and the Green Man is a perennial image of Spring.

<https://gardening.allwomenstalk.com/popular-spring-flowers-and-what-they-mean/2/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_in_culture

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