



THE 2026 REX PROCESSION

“REBIRTH AND RENEWAL”



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 more than 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, gold and green. The papier mâché 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 stately 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, was the first new permanent float to join the Rex procession in many decades.



6. ROYAL PROCLAMATION

Since 1872, Rex, The King of Carnival, has proclaimed the coming of Mardi Gras to the world. Residents of his Winter Capital of New Orleans along with her visitors from near and far are commanded to partake in the festivities, adorn their homes with the royal colors of purple, green and gold, and join Rex in celebrating the most glorious day of the year.



7. TITLE FLOAT: "REBIRTH AND RENEWAL"

Every culture since neolithic prehistory has told stories of rebirth, renewal and resurrection – from the great flood myths of almost all known civilizations to the narrative of Christian resurrection central to our own Carnival traditions. The 2026 Rex procession features a beautiful array of symbolically and artistically rich examples of revival stories and legends. These artistically striking examples illustrate not only cross-cultural differences, but also the universality of mankind's hopes for renewal and his focus on the eternal.



8. INANNA

The myth of Inanna's descent into and return from the underworld embodies the cyclical nature of death and rebirth that underpins many systems of renewal. Her journey mirrors the seasons, the passage of the year, and personal transformation - the stripping away of old identities, followed by return with new insight or power. The Babylonian tree of life is flanked with winged lion guardians, while Innana herself is accompanied by her owl companions.



9. EASTER

The story of Easter originates from the Christian tradition, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion. The resurrection symbolizes triumph over death and the promise of spiritual renewal, emphasizing faith's power to bring new life from suffering and loss. The central Crucifix is surrounded by Her Majesty's perennial white lilies, which every year die back and regrow in the spring in royal beauty. The white bird of peace and other Christian iconography adorn this beautiful float.



10. A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

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



11. OUROBOROS

The Greek ouroboros, a serpent or dragon eating its own tail, represents a circle with no beginning or end. It signifies the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth, echoing the rhythms of nature and time itself. Because the creature continuously consumes and regenerates itself, the symbol also represents self-renewal and transformation.



12. SEDNA

Sedna, the Inuit sea goddess, is revered as the Mother of the Sea and marine animals in the Arctic cultures of Canada, Greenland, and Alaska. In many versions of the myth, she is cast into the ocean by her father, and as her severed fingers transform into seals, whales, and other sea creatures, a new world of life is created from her suffering. This transformation links Sedna's pain to the ongoing renewal of life, since communities depend on the animals that continually arise from her body for survival.



13. MOON PHASES

The phases of the moon form a continuous cycle from new moon to full moon and back again, offering a visible pattern of endings and beginnings in the night sky. The full moon and its tidal influences signal many of the earth's creatures to begin feeding, reproduction and nesting. As the moon wanes and returns to darkness, it suggests release, rest, and the quiet preparation needed before the next cycle begins, making the lunar rhythm a potent metaphor for ongoing rebirth and renewal across all animal kingdoms.



14. PELE

Pele is the goddess of volcanoes and fire in Hawaiian religion, revered as the creator of the Hawaiian Islands through her fiery eruptions. In many stories, her lava flows destroy forests and villages, yet as the lava cools it forms new land, allowing fresh ecosystems, plants, and human settlements to take root. This continual cycle of eruption and renewal makes Pele a powerful symbol of how creation and destruction are intertwined, with new life emerging from apparent ruin.



15. 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. In 2025, the Royal Barge was rechristened "La Badine," the vessel commanded by French explorers and brothers Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville. This commemorated the 325th anniversary of the first celebration of Mardi Gras at Ponte du Mardi Gras in what would become the United States of America.

16. JACK IN THE GREEN



Jack in the Green, a leafy figure from English May Day festivities, arose in the 18th century from urban processions where chimney sweeps and others paraded in foliage-covered costumes. In these celebrations, Jack in the Green embodies the spirit of returning spring, the lushness of vegetation, and the reawakening of the natural world after winter. As a walking mass of leaves and branches, he symbolizes nature's capacity to renew itself, with greenery literally covering and animating a human frame.

17. PHOENIX



The phoenix is a mythical bird associated primarily with ancient Greek and later Roman tradition, though it may have earlier roots in Egyptian imagery of the Bennu bird. It is famed for living a long life, then building a nest or pyre, perishing in flames, and rising anew from its own ashes. This cycle of fiery death and reappearance makes the phoenix a powerful symbol of rebirth, capturing the idea that destruction can be the prelude to a new beginning.

18. SAMSARA



Saṃsāra is a concept from Indian religious traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, describing the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth that all beings undergo. In this view, each life is shaped by karma, and the soul or stream of consciousness moves through many existences until it attains liberation (moksha or nirvāṇa), which ends the cycle. Saṃsāra therefore ties rebirth not to a single transformative event but to an endless, repetitive process in which lives continually arise, pass away, and arise again.

19. RAINBOW SERPENT



The Rainbow Serpent is a powerful creator being in the dreaming stories of many Australian Aboriginal cultures, seen as one of the oldest and most important ancestral spirits. It is associated with waterholes, rivers, and rain, shaping the land as it moves and bringing vital water to a harsh environment. Through its connection to storms, flooding, and flowing water, the Rainbow Serpent embodies both destruction and the renewal of the landscape, since its movements can devastate but also make the land fertile again.

20. QUETZALCOATL



Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, is a major deity from ancient Mesoamerican cultures, especially the Aztec but also earlier Toltec and related traditions. As a creator god linked to wind, learning, and maize, he helps shape the world and brings vital sustenance to humanity, connecting him to cycles of growth and renewal in nature and society. In some myths, Quetzalcoatl descends to the underworld to gather the bones of previous ages and revives them with his own blood, symbolizing new life born from the remnants of earlier worlds.



21. PERSEPHONE

Persephone, an ancient Greek goddess, was the daughter of Demeter, whose abduction by Hades explains the cycle of the seasons. When Persephone dwells in the underworld, Demeter grieves and the earth grows barren, mirroring winter's dormancy and the apparent death of plant life. Her return each year brings Demeter's joy, restoring fertility to the earth and marking the rebirth of crops in spring.



22. OSIRIS

Osiris is a central god in ancient Egyptian religion, associated with kingship, the afterlife, and the fertile Nile. According to myth, he is murdered and dismembered by his brother Set, then restored and revived by his wife Isis, becoming lord of the underworld. This restoration makes Osiris a powerful symbol of rebirth, since his own death leads to a transformed, eternal life that guides the dead. His connection to the flooding and retreat of the Nile, which left rich soil for crops, further ties him to agricultural renewal and the yearly reawakening of the land.



23. BALDR

Baldr, a god of light, beauty, and purity in Norse mythology from Scandinavian traditions, is the beloved son of Odin and Frigg. Despite Frigg securing oaths from all not to harm him, Loki tricks Baldr's blind brother Höðr into killing him with mistletoe, plunging the gods into grief and marking the first step toward Ragnarök, a climactic series of wars and natural disasters. Baldr descends to Hel, where he remains until after Ragnarök, when he returns to the renewed world alongside Höðr to rule in harmony with the survivors. This prophecy of his post-apocalyptic rebirth underscores themes of renewal, portraying destruction as a necessary precursor to a purified, revitalized cosmos.



24. MANU AND THE FLOOD

Human culture has forever been shaped by ancient flood myths. The myth of Manu and the flood originates from Hindu texts, where Manu is the first man or progenitor of humanity. Warned by a divine fish - Vishnu's Matsya avatar - of a great deluge, Manu builds a boat, saving himself, the seven sages, seeds of life, and sacred knowledge as the waters destroy the corrupt world. After the flood, his vessel rests on a mountaintop, and from this remnant, Manu repopulates the earth, marking a complete renewal of creation.



25. METAMORPHOSIS

The butterfly's metamorphosis is a biological process where a caterpillar undergoes complete transformation inside a chrysalis, emerging as a winged adult after dissolving and rebuilding its body. This radical change - from crawling larva to flying beauty - captures the essence of rebirth, as the old form entirely gives way to a new, liberated state. Metamorphosis is a recurring theme throughout Rex's history, often representing the "Butterfly of Winter" which emerges from its float den to display its grace, beauty and pageantry for but a single day.



26. OYA

Oya is an orisha, a powerful deity from Yoruba mythology originating in West Africa, particularly among the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin. Known as the goddess of winds, storms, lightning, and the Niger River, she is a fierce warrior often depicted with a sword and a fan. She is the wife of Shango, the thunder god, and guardian of the dead. Oya sweeps away the old with her tempests and whirlwinds, clearing paths for new growth and fertility, embodying transformation through upheaval.



27. TALIESIN

Taliesin is a legendary bard from Welsh mythology, originating in medieval tales like Hanes Taliesin from the Welsh Celtic tradition. Originally a boy named Gwion Bach, he accidentally drinks a potion of wisdom brewed by the sorceress Ceridwen, sparking a chase where both shapeshift into various animals. Swallowed by Ceridwen, Gwion is reborn from her radiant child and is renamed Taliesin ("shining brow"). Taliesin becomes a poet of extraordinary insight. This story of ingestion, gestation, and emergence directly symbolizes rebirth, illustrating renewal through trials of transformation and the emergence of hidden potential.



28. OSTARA

Ostara, or Ēostre, is a Germanic goddess of spring and dawn mentioned by the 8th-century monk Bede as the namesake for the Anglo-Saxon month of April, celebrated in pagan festivals that presaged modern Easter. A popular myth recounts how Ostara transformed a frozen bird into a hare to save it, and in gratitude, the hare laid colorful eggs adorned with spring flowers. Rabbits, symbols of fertility due to prolific breeding, eggs representing new life, and blooming flowers are all symbols of her role in awakening the earth from winter.



29. WHOOPING CRANE

The whooping crane, North America's tallest bird, saw its population drop to just 21 wild individuals in 1941 due to hunting and habitat loss. Through dedicated conservation efforts, including captive breeding, cross-fostering, and reintroduction programs such as that done in connection with the Audubon Institute Species Survival Center, their population has climbed to over 800 today, a testament to human-led renewal. These elegant white birds with black wingtips and red crowns have reemerged from the brink, soaring across vital flyways from Canada to Mexico, finding respite and feeding grounds in many Gulf marshes.



30. 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.