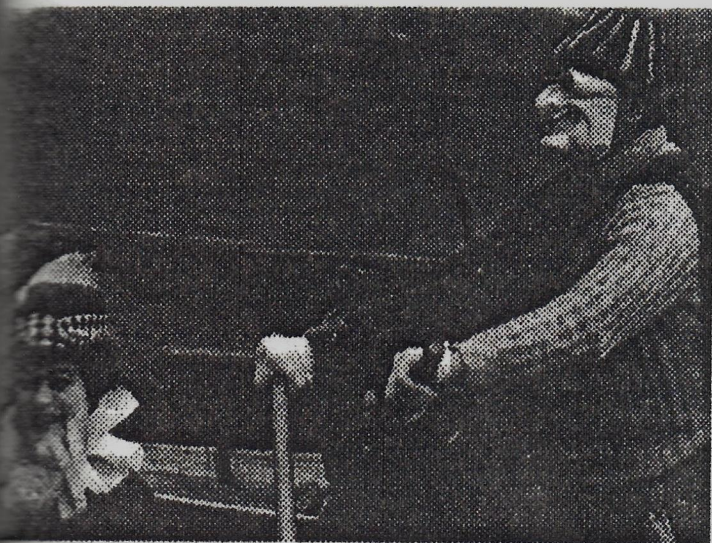


# Venice



A gondolier ferries a venetian lady to San Marco Square

Venice's carnival traditionally began on December 26 and continued on for six months. According to one account, a visiting Turkish sailor told his friends back home how the Christians of Venice were seized by madness for six months of the year until they found a gray powder (the ashes received on Ash Wednesday) that cured immediately for a period of forty days.

Once, when the doge himself died during carnival season, it was kept secret from the populace for several days so as not to spoil the festivities.

Today the citizens of Venice no longer celebrates for six months by going about their daily tasks in disguise, as they did then, but they do present theater, dance, art exhibit, and a grand ball in costumes that attracts hundred of thousands of visitors from all over the world.

***Il Carnevale* was an important part of the life of the city. It was heralded to celebrate Spring with ancient fertility rites, parades, and masquerades.**

The most impressive Carnival in Europe now takes place in Italy - Venice where jesters and courtiers, courtesans and noblewomen are often the theme of the exquisite costumes that the people of the city assume for the various functions connected with the celebration.

The *Carnevale* was an important part of the life of the city from the pagan times, when spring's approach was heralded with ancient fertility rites, parades, and masquerades - not to mention civil disorder and general uproar. The Catholic church of the middle ages accurately viewed carnivals as holdovers from the ancient celebration and did its best to stamp them out, which is hardly surprising since the highlights of medieval *carnevale* were the Feast of Fools (including a mock mass and blasphemous impersonations of church leaders) and the Feast of the Ass, which retained many pagan rites and celebrated the delights of the flesh. Eventually the church got rid of the offending rituals, and soon carnival was almost totally a religious festival. In time the Roman carnival became the most fashionable in Europe, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it was a required stop on the Grand Tour.

Children dressed up in costumes.



So, whether in New Orleans, Rio or Venice, the mood of the carnival is revelry, the action is heated and the overwhelming mood is riotous fun! Catch up on your sleep before you go, join the crowds and have a blast! ■



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And it is in New Orleans, that most European, most exotic of American cities that Carnival draws millions of people to participate in the glamorous street activities and the even more glamorous, grandiose, private masquerade balls that take place during the celebration.

The tradition of Carnival (or Mardi Gras... "fat Tuesday") came to New Orleans from Paris where it had been celebrated since the Middle Ages.

And, in New Orleans, Mardi Gras, which flourished under French rule of the Louisiana Territory, was outlawed by the Spanish during their reign and then reinstated several years later when Louisiana became part of the U.S. And so, the Mardi Gras party that the city had originally mounted primarily for its own pleasure developed over the next 170 plus years into the huge Mardi Gras festival as we know it now.

Actually, as it grew and prospered Mardi Gras became a major tourist event that draws national and even international attention to New Orleans, filling more than 95 % of the 25,000 hotel rooms in the city. It is a time when the gaudy and the gorgeous come together in one giant blowout! From the regal to the ridiculous, the New Orleans Mardi Gras has it all.

Mardi Gras is a legal holiday in New Orleans - - and it is said (with some ring of truth) that half the town turns out in costume to watch the other half parade - - in costume! And the half that parades engages in the charming custom of "throws"...trinkets tossed from the myriad floats that make up the stunning parade that is a high point of the festivities. "Throw me something, mister," is the cry heard all along the parade route, coming from the throngs who gather for the spectacle. And millions of hands reach eagerly toward any particular float hoping to catch some of the plastic beads, cups bearing the logo of the club sponsoring the float or, even colored aluminum coins (called doubloons) that are tossed at random to the crowds all along the parade route.

All the city's best restaurants are besieged with reservation-seekers - - from the traditional Arnauts, Antoin's and Brennan's to the newer "kids on the block" that have garnered their own stellar reputations in recent years - - Emeril's, Nola and others.

All are filled with people enjoying the distinctive New Orleans-style foods. Favorites include "traditional" (such as seafood gumbo, crayfish etoufee and eggs Hussard); or "new" renditions of old favorites (like homely bread pudding that has been updated (and enriched) with a shocking (but delicious) measure of unctuous white chocolate added to the already cholesterol-laden recipe.

Carnival in Rio is also a grand and glorious celebration - - larger, louder and more incredible than anyone can really imagine! It is, despite its reputation, not at all a festival for tourists, but, rather, a genuine national celebra-

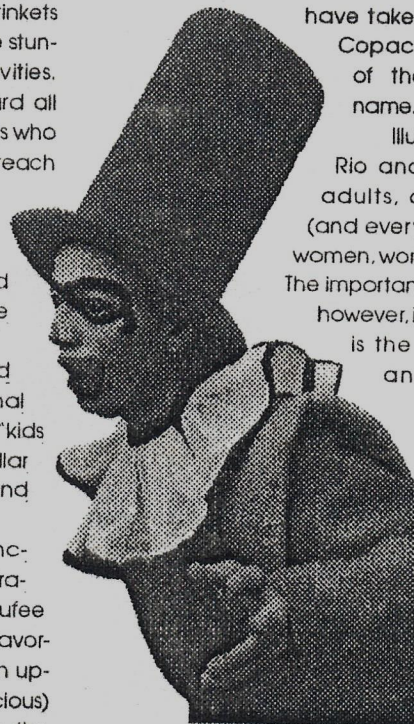
tion...actually the most important celebration of the year for many Cariocas (as the people of Rio are called).

Daytime activity (beginning at noon or later) revolves around street action and bandas (as bands are called in Brazil). The greatest concentration of music and the hilarious activity it generates is most often found in the area near beautiful Copacabana Beach. There are small bands on just about every street corner and some of the larger, more famous ones originate in this part of the city as well. People follow the bands and sing and dance and, whenever thirst overwhelms them, stop in a bar along the route for a beer or a caprinah (a local drink) or just a soda. (more likely, however, during carnival, one of the former. Other parts of the city also have their own traditions and activities.

The most exciting part of Carnival is, for many people, the action of the samba schools (which are actually working class social clubs, much like Philadelphia's Mummers). The people practice all year for this event - - a culmination of all the fantasy, all the beauty, all the tradition and pageantry that they can conjure up to compete with the other clubs. The competition of music, dance and costumes takes place on the Friday and Saturday nights before Ash Wednesday.

Also as part of the celebration, here are balls all over town and most of the top hotels have their own event of one kind or another, and, in fact, some of the best dressed balls in the past few years have taken place in the Hotel Copacabana, a mainstay of the area by the same name...

Illusion is the theme in Rio and children dress as adults, adults as children (and everything else); men as women, women as men etc. etc. The important thing to remember, however, is that February in Rio is the height of summer and many of the beautiful costumes are as skimpy as possible...partly out of deference to the heat - - and perhaps, partly because showing off one's beautiful body is part of Rio's culture! If, for some reason, people aren't in Rio at



Carnival time but want a taste of what it might be like, they can head for Plataforma I, a club that has the leggiest, most gorgeous, most flamboyant showgirls dancing the Samba with abandon.

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