

Transcript

Carnevale di Venezia

Alberto Toso Fei: In the past, the Carnival of Venice lasted up to six months. It started in October and, except for a short Christmas break, continued until Fat Tuesday. It was a time when anyone in the city, the rich and the poor, foreigners and locals, could walk around in a disguise.

Among the best-known masks of the Venetian carnival, probably the quintessential mask, is certainly the Bauta, a unisex mask that can be worn by anyone. Contrary to what is commonly believed, the name Bauta does not only refer to the mask, but to the entirety of the costume that I am wearing. In fact, it consisted of the white face, or “larva,” and the three-cornered hat that was used to hold the mask, as we'll see in a minute.

The Bauta does not have any ribbons or ties and pairs with the three-cornered hat and the decorative cloth made of silk or lace, like this one, used to cover the head and shoulders to make people unrecognizable. Moreover, the Bauta mask has another peculiarity: it has no mouth. This expansion on the base allowed the wearer not only to distort their voice, making the person even more unrecognizable, but it also allowed them to eat without having to remove the mask.

Centuries of the carnival celebrations and mask-wearing produced a new structuring of labor activities, and from here the Mascareri corporation was born. The Mascareri produced papier-mâché masks for the carnival and leather masks for the *teatro dell'arte*.

Among the various masks typical of the Venetian carnival, the plague doctor mask should also be mentioned. The doctors during plagues and illnesses actually walked around with this mask on: it has a big hat and an oilcloth to protect the wearer. This long beak was used to contain spices and herbs that were believed to shield from diseases. As you can imagine during a plague, it might not have been pleasant to see these strange birds dressed in black walking around the city. But the Venetians were not intimidated and, on the contrary, they made the plague doctor's mask a carnival mask, because, as is often the case, death needs to be exorcised.