

High Carnival of Costume Balls as Prohibition Draws Near: Oriental ...

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High Carnival of Costume Balls as Prohibition Draws Near

Oriental Note Dominates the Revels, Where Harem Girls, Dervishes, Geishas, and Maharajas Are the Order of the Evening—Midnight Festivities Attract Throngs to Hotels and Dancing Halls

MEPHISTOPHELES met a Red Cross nurse he knew and fell into conversation.

"Everybody is here," he observed.

"Not everybody," she retorted. "There are no shepherdesses, no nuns, and no Gainsborough ladies."

"But who misses them amid this eastern splendor?" he demanded, nodding to a passing Harlequin. "If that isn't an Emir of Bokhara at the table yonder, I miss my guess. There are so many harem girls I've lost count. I gave my heart to a Mamluke Sultana and had to reclaim it straightway to do homage to a geisha. Inconstancy is the order of the evening. The maharajah abandons his household to dance with a pajama girl."

Carmen and the Cardinal, arm in arm, joined the two.

"Mme. de Pompadour is here," Carmen announced. "I saw her a moment ago, pateshes and all."

"Perhaps," said the Cardinal, "she was looking for that Colonial Dame. I saw one, powdered hair and all."

"You don't say!" the Red Cross nurse exclaimed, waving her hand to a Roman Emperor. "I'll have to make their acquaintance. I feel so much more at home when there are petticoats other than my own in the scene. It begins to seem as though skirts were popular only with mandarins, Samurai and Hindu rajahs."

"This is a fox trot," said Mephistopheles to Carmen. "May I have it?"

That is a faithful report of a conversation which might have taken place at any one of the score of costume balls in New York during the dancing season which is about to close. Never have there been so many, within the memory of the Oldest Dancing Man. Heretofore artists and "the Broadway crowd" have been content with half a dozen masquerades during the winter, but this year, partly as a reaction from the war, partly because the advent of prohibition has cast its shadow before, the number of these gay fetes and the attendance at them have surpassed all records.

Never has Gotham abandoned itself to such a bacchanalia of jollity and nummery. The costume ball is a social melt-

ing pot, and has drawn Park Avenue equally with Broadway, Washington Heights equally with Greenwich Village, debutantes equally with chorus girls. Artists and brokers, writers and bankers, actors and merchants, those conspicuous in the fashionable world and those known best to readers of the 15-cent magazines have commingled in scenes of brilliant revelry with others inconspicuous in any walk of life.

Clowns in spangles and aborigines in tiger skins have adorned the dancing floors. Red Robin Hood has one-stepped with Astarte, the Toreador with a ballet girl, Pierrot with Maud Muller, the Red Indian with a Khorassan maiden, the acrobat with Gretchen, and all who could with the chorus girls who arrive after the theatres close, attired often in the abbreviated garments they wore on the stage. In consequence the spacious dancing rooms of Sherry's, the Commodore, Delmonico's, the Ritz, and at other halls to rent for these purposes have presented scenes of such color and charm and cinematographic movement as to astonish and delight even sophisticated New York.

All the world seems a-tiptoe for the dance. But the foreign colonies in Tokio and Shanghai trip the midnight fantastic in evening dress, and London, which is

reported to be captivated with the jazz, has found one big ball costume enough. It was given by the Chelsea Arts Club at the Albert Hall, and was called the "Dazzle." Berlin, the correspondent, is given to all-night devotions at Terpsichore's shrine, and even Paris can make merry now; but nowhere else, so far as can be learned, has the masquerade achieved such popularity as in Manhattan.

They are masquerades, to be sure, only in the sense that they present the habiliments of many times and climes, not in the sense that masks are worn. Even a Domino Girl is seen but rarely, and the features of the others are uncovered except for the necessary touches of grease paint, the eyebrow pencil, and the lip stick.

When a group of Ethiopians was required for the scenic effect at one dance, the members were recruited from a Harlem tenement and suitably attired without any necessity for facial adornment, serving as lay figures for a while and vanishing when the need for them had passed.

Oriental influences predominate at these carnivals. Countless are the harem girls in baggy trousers and waists so peck-a-boo that all but the openwork ap-

proaches the vanishing point, leaving nothing but the peek. But the fact that trousers are so much in the majority does not of itself indicate a strong feminine tendency to bifurcation: it only means, in the opinion of Penrhyn Stanlaw, (who is the acknowledged Petronius of such affairs,) that the Bakst decorative influence is making itself more and more felt.

At the Fakirs' ball, which drew 3,000 to the dancing hall at the new Commodore Hotel, one striking group in Egyptian costume did not dance, but served solely to enhance the beauty of the scene. Bakst might have painted such garments and such headdresses. And there were Oriental princesses, Syrian slaves, Persian merchants, and Turkish mahatmas galore. The costume of the Louis Quatorze period is passé. Even Pierrot and Pierrette are seldom seen. The West is East at costume balls.

One of the balls was called "East is West," and was given by the residents at the Hotel des Artistes. They gave also the Chu Chin Chow ball, at which Ben Ali Haggin impersonated that fabulous potentate in a costume reported to have cost \$2,000, and at which Stuart Travis, in the guise of an Arab beggar, wore a costume reputed to have cost next to

nothing. A gaudy bathrobe and a bath towel turban threw about him an authentic "atmosphere." At the Hotel des Artistes the Circus, the Artists', and half a dozen smaller dances have been given. Another group of artists, who make their headquarters at the Penguin Club, gave a masquerade named for the club. This was at the Yorkville Casino. The Kit Kat was at the Palm Garden. There have been several at Webster Hall. At the Palm Garden, more recently, was held "John Barleycorn's Funeral," advertised to continue until 7 A. M.; but those who attended in the expectation of an exceedingly wakeful wake were disappointed. It was tame. A bare-legged girl in costume decided she would be out of place there and departed hastily. And at 1:30 o'clock the lights were put out, with the explanation that no all-night liquor license had been provided by the men promoting the dance. Thus the funeral proved a sad affair.

For some, half the charm of a costume dance is lost unless it is seen double. At certain halls improvised bars have been stretched along one side of the ballroom, so as to be easily accessible between the fox-trot and the one-step; and perched upon them in the intermissions, hilarious couples have

pledged a toast to the oncoming drought; but for the most part the high prices charged for drinks have acted as a natural check on the bibulous. More than one reveler has been somewhat jingled, but few have been lit like a cathedral. There has been a lot of absorption but little saturation. Putting the charge at all the traffic would bear reduced the liquids to an amount which all—or nearly all—could carry.

The crowds really seemed more interested in exterior than interior decoration. Consider, for instance, the young woman whose costume was described as "The Orange Mist." The name was accurate. The costume was orange, and it was a mist, not a fog. Then there was the woman with the peacock headdress, who might have stepped the moment before from the court of Timur-leng at Samarkand. There was a Mephistopheles who, by an ingenious electrical device, was enabled to illuminate his horns in the most devilish fashion. There was a Persian swathed in batik and turbaned in gorgeous silk. There was a girl in bearskins, a painted youth in leopard skins, a priest, a Japanese wrestler, a convict in obsolescent stripes.

At the Chu Chin Chow ball Paul Chalfin wore a Chinese costume and painted the upper part of his face a bright crimson beneath the circular brim of his hat; and as the lower part of his face was whitened, he had the appearance, wherever he stood, of being in brilliant sunlight. It was at the Chu Chin Chow ball, reviving the fable of Helen and Paris, a golden apple was presented to Miss Edith Hyde as the most beautiful woman present.

Even to those unfamiliar with the modern dances, or with any dances, for that matter, costume balls afford divertissement. Even for those who do not care to drink they prove alluring; for they afford spectacles such as few stages can boast. From a box or a balcony the dancing floor presents fantastic pictures of Babylonian high jinks. In the land of the Chaldees worshippers of the sun god may have made merry in some such fashion, or in the fourth festival to Bacchus Romans may have masqueraded thus—as fauns and satyrs and wild beasts. Merchants borne to Bactria in camel caravans may have spent their nights in wine-bibbing and merriment, even as the Oshkosh buyer today in Gotham. Some of the spectators, never for a moment active participants in the jollity, have been among the most reluctant to quit the scene.



ILLUS. LONDON NEWS.
A SHOWER OF BOMB BALLOONS AT LONDON'S GREAT "DAZZLE" BALL.
To the Right and Left Are New York Costumes, Including Mephistopheles, With Electrically Lighted Horns, and the Presentation of the Golden Apple at the Chu Chin Chow Ball.

Photographs by Bradley Studios and International News Service