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The Mardi Gras evolution: See it in the second weekend of parades for 2019

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Flambeau march in the Krewe of Proteus parade on the Uptown route in New Orleans, Monday, Feb. Krewe of Orpheus rolled with 20 floats to the theme, "Graces of the Gods for New Orleans."

Advocate Staff photo by SOPHIA GERMER

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The final weekend of Carnival is here, kicking off on Thursday as the pioneering ladies' superkrewe Muses rolls down St. Charles Avenue.

It's hard to overstate the ways in which Muses has influenced Carnival. In entertainment, throws and philanthropy, the krewe's dazzling stiletto heels have broken new ground since it debuted in 2001, when the parade scene looked quite different from it does today.

Originally parading on Wednesday, Muses joined Ancient Druids and the Krewe of Saturn, the latter of which stopped rolling after Hurricane Katrina. Thursday night started to get lively after the Knights of Babylon parade, with the Krewe of Chaos making its inaugural parade appearance. Chaos was made up of members from other parading krewes and former members of the Knights of Momus, which rolled on Thursday nights, 1872 to 1991, when it was known as “Momus Thursday.”

Chaos inherited Momus' reputation for satirical themes. Muses, also known for its satirical floats, was to move to permanently to Thursday after Hurricane Katrina.

The krewes rolling Friday night – Hermes, d'Etat, Morpheus – and Saturday – Iris, Tucks, and Endymion – remained on their traditional routes. Sunday featured daytime parades from Okeanos and Thoth. The krewe of Mid-City was in Mid-City for one more year, and at night, Krewe of Bacchus parade dazzled crowds.

The Krewe of Proteus was back rolling on Lundi Gras for the second year, after it had not paraded for seven years (1993-1999). The Krewe of Orpheus, which first rolled in 1994, was co-founded by Harry Connick Jr. to bring some glitz and glamour to Lundi Gras.

Zulu and Rex, and of course, the “trucks” parades, closed out the Mardi Gras parade season in their own unique ways.



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But new ideas and attitudes were afoot that would cause Mardi Gras to evolve into what we know it today, when almost anyone can actively participate in an official krewe or organization. While the floats, marching bands and traditional throws of beads, cups and doubloons will always remain a mainstay, the years would see the rise of adult marching groups, walking parades such as Krewe of Chewbacchus and 'tit Rex, and signature throws such as the Muses shoe.

For Muses, "There were naysayers who thought a female krewe wouldn't work on a weeknight," said Arthur Hardy, Mardi Gras Guide publisher. Despite the doubters, organizers including Staci Rosenberg decided to think outside the box, particularly with its throws.

"In our early years, we were like, 'no one has done that!'" said Rosenberg. "We like to emphasize useful throws such as tote bags, eye masks, luggage tags, band-aids." The krewe also came up with the plush spear, courtesy of Virginia Saussy, chairwoman of theme and floats. Muses throws became wildly popular. (Rosenberg does admit to a few failures:

toothbrushes that were supposed to be in wraps, but showed up without them, and guest soaps “that smelled horrible.”)

While not “reusable,” the Muses shoe has been an iconic throw, creating a renewed interest in individualized throws from krewes. The first shoes are credited to Nicola Wolf, who was inspired to create an homage to the Zulu coconut — the original must-have throw — to glitter some shoes to hand out.

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From that moment, this specialized throw grew organically within the krewe, and then caught on with other krewes such as Nyx (purses), Iris (sunglasses), Alla (genie’s lamp), and Tucks (toilet brushes).

Muses also pioneered new types of entertainment elements in the parade — it wasn't just about amazing floats, high-school marching bands and throws. “We wanted it to be an all-out entertainment parade from

beginning to end,” said Rosenberg. “We have a funny theme, really great throws and adult marching groups, which is something Muses added.”

Rosenberg says the Pussyfooters first approached them to be in the parade, sparking a trend of marching and dance troupes forming to participate in Muses. There are now about 40 such groups who perform in Muses and at other parades. Many host their own events, as well.

The group also embraced and took the lead with community service early on with the cup decorating contest for high-school students. The winner’s school receives a \$1,000 donation to the school’s art department.

Mardi Gras has expanded in other ways in Orleans Parish, with Twelfth Night now featuring three streetcar parades and the Joan of Arc parade for the public to enjoy.

After the Krewe of Comus founded the framework of New Orleans Carnival in 1857, New Orleanians who made it what it is today, continuing its popularity.

Nowadays, thousands of ordinary New Orleanians suit up to join walking groups in parades, donate to krewe-led philanthropic causes, and scream for unique handmade throws. It's a vibrant celebration that continues to evolve.

PARADES

Thursday, Feb. 28

Knights of Babylon

5:30 p.m., starts at Magazine Street and Napoleon Avenue

This parade will mark the krewe's 80th anniversary. Starting the three-parade night, Babylon's tagline is, "Carnival Begins when Babylon Rolls."

Krewe of Chaos

6:30 p.m., starts at Magazine Street and Napoleon Avenue

A satirical parade with throws that are float-specific, the all-male group is made of up of members from the Krewe of Momus, which no longer parades, as well as other krewes.

Krewe of Muses

6:30 p.m., starts at Magazine Street and Jefferson Avenue

The theme this year is, “Muses the Musical,” with the Honorary Muse, actress and native New Orleanian, Patricia Clarkson. Be ready to get one of the krewe’s signature glittered shoes, as well as its other fun specialty throws.

Fri. March 1

Krewe of Hermes

5:30 p.m., starts at Magazine Street and Jefferson Avenue

Kicking off the Friday night parades is the Krewe of Hermes. It’s 2019 theme is “Court Music of Louis XIV,” and it has a number of new throws this year, including purple, green and gold wings that can attach via laces to sneakers.

Krewe d’Etat

6:30 p.m., starts at Jefferson Avenue and Magazine Street

This satirical parade is known for its raffish ways, setting its tone with the Skeleton Walking Krewe leading the way.

Krewe of Morpheus

7 p.m., follows Krewe d'Etat

Founded in 2000, this coed krewe's theme is "Morpheus' Dream Destinations."

Krewe of Centurians

7 p.m., starts at Bonnabel Boulevard and Nero Street, Metairie

The Archbishop Rummel Marching Band leads the start of this parade, themed "Festive at Forty!"

Sat., March 2

Krewe of NOMTOC

10:45 a.m., starts at Fiesta Street and Holiday Drive, West Bank

NOMTOC's 49th annual Carnival parade is "NOMTOC's Show house Showdown."

Krewe of Iris

11 a.m., starts at South Saratoga Street and Napoleon Avenue

Now the largest of Carnival krewes, this all-woman organization's floats will be themed, "Iris Through a Child's Eyes." Be prepared for a variety of throws, including its signature sunglasses.

Krewe of Tucks

Noon, starts at Magazine Street and Napoleon Avenue

Tucks marks 50 years of its trademark "potty" humor with its traditional throws of toilet paper, plungers and brushes, as well as items to go with its theme, "Tucks Get Sick."

Krewe of Endymion

4:15 p.m., starts at Orleans Avenue and City Park Avenue

The only parade in Mid-City, Endymion attracts a large crowd – yes, people (informally known as "Chads") do get there days before to mark off

spaces on the Orleans Avenue neutral ground. The theme this year is “Wonder Tales of Science Fiction.”

Krewe of Isis

6:30 p.m., starts at Veterans Boulevard and Clearview Parkway

Isis is the oldest parading Carnival group in Jefferson Parish, and this year’s theme is “Under the Sea.”

Sun., March 3

While some call this day “Bacchus Sunday,” in honor of the nighttime parade, the day starts off with a group of neighborhood parades and their accompanying house parties.

Krewe of Okeanos

11 a.m., starts at Magazine Street and Jefferson Avenue

This parade marks its 70th anniversary this year.

Krewe of Mid-City

11:45 a.m., follows Okeanos

“Mid-City Thinks Outside the Box,” with floats depicting box sayings, such as “Life is a Box of Chocolates.”

Krewe of Thoth

Noon, starts at State Street and Henry Clay Avenue

Thoth is famed for its route going by 14 institutions that care for persons with disabilities and illnesses, something the organizers designed this way. This year’s theme is “Thoth Salutes the Greats.”

Krewe of Bacchus

5:15 p.m., starts at Tchoupitoulas Street and Napoleon Avenue

Bacchus marks its golden anniversary with the theme “Starring Louisiana,” with throws and floats depicting movies set in the state.

Traditional floats such as the Bacchagator will also roll this night.

Krewe of Athena

5:30 p.m., starts at Bonnabel Boulevard and Nero Street, Metairie

A relatively new parade, Krewe of Athena will roll for the fifth time on a new route for the Metairie parades. Its theme is “Athena is All That Matters.” It also kicks off an all-female krewe doubleheader of parades, including the Krewe of Pandora, which follows it.

Krewe of Pandora

6:30 p.m., follows Athena

An offshoot of the popular Krewe of Nyx parade in New Orleans, the same organizers bring the fun to Metairie.

Lundi Gras (March 4)

Krewe of Proteus

5:15 p.m., starts at Magazine Street and Napoleon Avenue

Founded in 1891, Proteus is Carnival’s second-oldest parading organization. Krewe of Proteus theme is “Travel and Treasures of the Silk Road” and if you’re lucky, you may get one of the trident-shaped or sea-inspired throws.

Krewe of Orpheus

6 p.m., starts at Tchoupitoulas Street and Napoleon Avenue

Bold and brash, this krewe's theme is "Orpheus Imaginarium," with floats reflecting that, as well as the traditional floats of "Smokey Mary," "Leviathan" and "Trojan Horse."

Mardi Gras (March 5)

Walking krewes Lyons Club, Irish Channel Corner Club, Jefferson City Buzzards and Half-Fast Walking Club will be roaming the Uptown early morning. The North Side Skull and Bones Gang will be in Treme, starting their journey at around 5 a.m. Mardi Gras Indians will also be out in Central City and other parts of town, showing off their intricate suits.

Societe de Ste. Anne

6 a.m.

Bywater

Founded by Henri Schindler, Paul Poche and Jon Newlin, this informal walking parade starts at a home in Bywater and meanders through to the

Marigny and the French Quarter to await the arrival of Rex on Canal Street, then a ceremonial spreading of ashes in the Mississippi River. Anyone can participate, but costuming is required.

Zulu

8 a.m., starts at South Claiborne and Jackson avenues, New Orleans

For those not venturing into the French Quarter, the traditional way to start Mardi Gras is at Zulu, a favorite with crowds, particularly those who collect the decorated coconuts float riders hand out.

Rex

10 a.m., starts at South Claiborne and Napoleon avenues, New Orleans

This year's theme, "Visions of the Sun," has floats depicting figures from myths and legends of the sun from around the world. Traditional floats will include the Boeuf Gras and the Butterfly King.

Argus

10 a.m., starts on Clearview Parkway and Veterans Boulevard, New Orleans

This is the Krewe of Argus' 47th ride in Metairie on Mardi Gras. This year's theme is "Argus Goes Wild," and its grand marshal is Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser.

Trucks parades:

Elks Orleanians and Crescent City will roll after Rex in New Orleans, while Elks Jeffersonians and Krewe of Jefferson keep the party going for Metairie revelers.

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