

CARNIVAL AT LACOCK

A rare opportunity to photograph Venetian carnival costumes on home turf was carefully planned and expertly executed at Lacock Abbey by the Southern Region in July. Participants came away with an array of stunning photos, and nothing but the highest praise for the models and event organisers alike



Running for 40 days prior to the beginning of Lent, the annual Venice Carnival is a visually spectacular and colourful event, with origins dating back to the beginning of the 14th century. The carnival gradually declined in the 18th century, but returned in its modern reincarnation in 1979, when the Italian government decided to bring back the history and culture of Venice.

Today, some three million visitors head to the Venice Carnival every year, and unsurprisingly there are many photographers contribut-

ing to that impressive figure.

On 14-15 July this year, the Southern Region's *Venice in England* event at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire represented a rare opportunity to photograph carnival costumes without actually travelling to the carnival. Lacock Abbey provided a suitably impressive backdrop, and participants were allowed access to parts of the historic house and grounds not normally available to the public.

The event was a resounding success, and received nothing but the highest praise from par-

ticipants, such as Janet Haines ARPS, who said, "The models and outfits were out of this world, the organisation spot on, and the choice of venue inspirational. You gave us a day to remember, and a whole load of spectacular images to now go off and process for weeks!"

The costumes were modelled by Manuela Reichart, with her friends Karin Flieg, Claudia Wolber, George Golks, Peter Zuffinger and Udo Zuffinger. To ensure that each photographer got enough time to shoot throughout the sessions, numbers were limited to 40 per day.

The first four sessions had 10 participants per group, and photographed two groups of two costume wearers, and two groups of one costume wearer. The last two sessions had 20 participants per group, photographing three costume wearers per group. During each group shoot, participants shot simultaneously, to ensure maximum image capture.

The logistics of ensuring that each of the participants gained fair access to each of the costume wearers were clearly onerous, but Regional Organiser Mike Jones and his team carried it off with aplomb.

"It was an immense physical and emotional effort for Manuela and her team", says Mike, "and participants didn't see what went on behind the scenes. To keep them all on their feet, I had a team of helpers massaging their feet.

"Wearing these costumes for the period of time that they were wearing them puts an immense physical strain on the body, but despite the physical and emotional strain, they did all thoroughly enjoy themselves. They would like to extend a big thank you to all of the participants, having never experienced such courtesy and respect from photographers."

Enthusiastic participant Alan Landes was incredibly impressed with the organisation of the event and the amount of care that had gone into setting up the shoot, ensuring that the groups were rotated efficiently.

"The models were professional and charming, looking at us each in turn to allow us to make the most of our position in the group", says Alan. "They were very stoical and patient, and willing to help us get the best shots. The only way to obtain the shots is to communicate with them and get to know them - it helps them to relax and try different poses, while movement and the wind helped produce more dynamic results."

As the best position was often fairly limited, Alan found that it was easiest to take a few shots and move round to let others in. "This would allow for you to come back and interact more with the model to try different poses", he explains. "I found a little time to explore my ideas by nipping in between group rotations when the models were on their own."



The event provided a wonderful opportunity for photographers of all ages to capture some unique shots. Retired Western Region Treasurer John Hankin rated the day highly on his list of 'best lifetime photographic events'.

"The subjects were excellent - both visually and for their co-operation", he says. "I live in a retirement complex, and each month I try to produce, mount, and frame two photos to show in the communal area. Selection this month, thanks this event, was an absolute doddle, and both have attracted a lot of approval. All being well, they and others will go into competitions later!"

The impressive organisation that goes into hosting such a smooth event did not go unnoticed, and it is something that has been acknowledged and praised continuously, with many participants emailing and posting on Facebook after the event to express their appreciation.

"I've done a fair few shoots, and this was by far the best", says Kirsten French. The idea to do it was brilliant, but ideas are nothing if you don't have the organisation to make them happen. The logistics were great - I didn't notice I was being 'organised', and that's down to the very best of planning!"

Venice in England was clearly a great success, and Mike Jones and his team deserve all the praise they have received. Their hard work and planning paid off, and participants will long treasure their photographic mementoes of the taste of Venice they experienced at La-cock Abbey.

Opposite: © Alan Landes.

Above: © Janet Haines ARPS.

Right: © John Hankin.

Below right: © Dan Oliver.