



## **1-DON CARNAL**

Don Carnal is the character who represents partying, excess, joy, noise, colour and revelry, fully aware that his rein will soon be over and before long he will be ceremonially burned in the bonfire held on “Piñata Saturday”.

## **2-DOÑA CUARESMA**

Literally “Lady Lent”, Doña Cuaresma is the adversary of Don Carnal, an embodiment of abstinence, modesty and seriousness. After her initial defeat in battle she sentences Don Carnal to be burnt on the bonfire, but before that sentence is carried out she allows him and the people of Águilas a week of partying, joyful abandon and colour.

## **3-MUSSONA**

The Mussona is one of the oldest and most representative characters in our fiestas, a unique feature of the Carnival of Águilas, half human and half animal, half civilized and half savage, representing the duality of human beings in a wild creature which emerges from its hibernation at the time of Carnival to be released onto the streets of Águilas.

## **4-LA MUSA**

The Muse represents the spirit of Carnival, filling the town with colour, beauty, elegance and fantasy during the fiestas. She is the Muse who inspires the ingenuity and humour shown every year by the locals of Águilas to the entire world through their fantastic creations, and her opening speech is always one of the most exciting moments of the celebrations.

## **5-CHILDREN’S CHARACTERS**

There are also children’s incarnations of The Muse, Don Carnal, Doña Cuaresma and the Mussona and they enjoy their own special days, setting a high standard in every Carnival with their speeches, battles and the Release of the Mussona. But there is no disrespect towards their adult counterparts and every year the two sets of dignitaries form a family of characters.

## **6-THE ELEGANCE AND FANTASY PRIZES**

These are two of the most important prizes of Carnival, awarded by the peñas in recognition of the elegance and fantasy presented in the costumes and staging of the Carnival troupes during the parade. As many as five nominations are made and winning first place is always a source of great prestige for the victors.

## **7-THE ÁNGEL FERRER PRIZE**

This prize is awarded as a tribute to one of the greatest costume-makers and characters in the history of the Carnival of Águilas. It is given to the most original display in the parade by the “peñas” who take part and is one of the most coveted prizes, indicating respect not only for the ancient traditions of Carnival but also for the professional craft and artisanship and the creativity of the participants.

## **8-THE TOP CARNIVAL PRIZE**

This is the most prestigious award, given by the Town Hall of Águilas to the peña chosen by those who are best informed to decide on the Best of Carnival: the peñas themselves. The trophy is a Golden Eagle, the top prize given out by the Town Hall and the Federation of Peñas, and its

presentation and reception are always the highlight of an exciting evening and the prizegiving ceremony.

## 9-GALAS

The events known as the “galas” of Águilas Carnival are among its most important features. In summer a demonstration of the Carnival parades is held for the Benefit of tourists and visitors and during the Summer Carnival one of the most important galas takes place, signalling the start of the Carnival season: the “**Gala Elección de Personajes del Carnaval**”, where the identities of those representing the main characters are announced.

The week of Carnival itself begins with the “Cambios de Poderes”, the handing over of both adult and children’s roles for the main characters. These are very popular events in which those ending their rein bid farewell and the newcomers make spectacularly staged presentations while taking on their roles from their predecessors, who pass into the history of Carnival.

These are the most essential galas of the fiestas but there are others among the wide range of events which contribute to the enormous festive diversity of Carnival in Águilas, and one of the most eagerly awaited every year is the Paper Costumes and Body Make-up Gala.

The Paper Costumes Workshop is one of the pillars of the Carnival activity that supports the fiestas and consists of a large group of volunteers who meet in the period before the start of Carnival to create spectacular outfits made solely from paper, with infinite shapes and creative touches. The results are huge structures based on fantastic themes which are then worn by actors, dancers, Carnival characters and volunteers in an artistic display as they move the costumes and their structures to the rhythm of joyful Carnival music.

At the end of the exhibition a winning costume is chosen from among the creations presented.

The same gala also features another artistic competition which has risen in popularity in recent years. Body make-up offers true works of art painted on the skin of the models who display it, complete with accessories and headdresses, as they present a spectacular show backed up by dance groups and expressive lighting effects.

This form of artistic expression overcomes the difficulties of converting the human body into a canvas painted in beautiful and expressive colours, giving the impression of added volume as fantastic landscapes are created.

Another of the most eagerly awaited shows during Carnival is the Drag Queen Gala.

The Carnival of Águilas has been awarded International Tourist Interest status and competitors from all regions of Spain and from overseas sign up for this Gala, which attracts an endless diversity of participants. The show manages to be original and attractive every year and features guest stars and popular media personalities: the determination of competitors to carry off the most difficult costumes guarantees a highly original talent show full of art and surprises.

The Águilas Carnival is filled with all kinds of events and activities, which explains why it is referred to as the “Carnavales” de Águilas, in plural; this reflects the proliferation of different experiences. Other highlights of the fiestas include:

- The “Chirigota” competition in which groups in costume perform satirical folk songs
- The Carnival Music Festival
- The National Cuerva Competition (“cuerva” is an alcoholic beverage typical of the Carnival of Águilas)
- Literature prizes

- Sports competitions and activities
- Schools drawing and essay-writing competitions
- A window-dressing competition for the shops of Águilas

And a host of other activities and events which mean that this Carnival is without parallel in the world!

### **10-COMEDY AND CRITICISM PRIZES**

Ever since its origins one of the basic elements of the Carnival of Águilas has been the combination of parody, satire and an ingenious sense of humour.

Hence, two of the most hotly disputed categories in competition are those for Comedy and Criticism, and they are among the most important prizes.

Both the Carnival troupes and the crowds enjoying the parades greatly appreciate the friendly but caustic humour included in the staging created by the peñas competing in these categories, usually accompanied by carefully worked dance routines and surprise special effects.

### **11-FLOATS**

The Carnival floats are one of the core elements of the parades in Águilas and are as important an area of competition as the costumes. Each float is carefully themed and requires a great deal of work to prepare, enabling the “peñas” (groups) to round off their original participation.

The tradition of floats is as old as Carnival itself: at first they were hand-built by the peñas themselves and created along with the costumes. Some of the great floats created by the peñas of the past are still remembered, belonging to groups like “Relámpago” and “Los Chachis”, while others are still in existence, such as “Pizarrón”, “Matalentisto Boys”, “Amantes del Chichi” and many more.

As more options opened up, including businesses specializing in the construction and decoration of floats, the creative possibilities of appearance and decoration have become more sophisticated, making the parades more and more spectacular. It is important to mention in this section not only the floats, but also the huge number of carts, mobile street furniture and sensational backdrops with which many peñas add effect to the staging of their procession, making the numerous parades of our Carnival a true SPECTACLE.

### **12-CARNIVAL NIGHT**

Carnival Night is the very essence of the fiesta in Águilas, and without any doubt it takes the originality of all the dressing-up to its absolute limit.

While enjoying the night air of Águilas participants can admire hugely original costume designs, many of them home-made by the locals or those visiting for the event, and some of them are veritable works of art, demanding a long time to fully appreciate them: of course, they are just one of the factors contributing to the splendour of the fiesta.

Reviving the spirit of old costume balls, the people of Águilas go out into the streets with the sole intention of having fun and enjoying Carnival for as long as they possibly can.

The hub of Carnival Night is the Plaza de España and the streets around it, and here there are spectacular, original, fun, colourful costumes, both large and small, to be seen at every step.

Nobody can be found out of costume and without a mask, a *de rigueur* complement even if it doesn't consist of much. As the great Paco Rabal said, “Águilas is a town of artists”, and he wasn't wrong: here you can see that joy and fun are absolutely guaranteed. In this context there is a saying in

Águilas which is used all year round but which at this time of year can be seen to be true more than ever: Águilas is where “el forastero deja de serlo” – roughly translated, where strangers are no longer strangers.

In 2018 Carnival Night was awarded the Caracola de Oro (or Golden Conch) in recognition of the hard work, originality and dedication of the townspeople of Águilas in creating the costumes which can later be seen on the Monday of Carnival.

### **13-MURGAS-TROVOS**

Águilas has an ancient tradition concerning “trovos”, improvised folk ballads which have been popular in south-eastern Spain since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The trovo combines literary and musical elements and the word is derived from the Vulgar Latin “tropare” (to make verses) and the Classical Latin “tropus” (melody or tune).

Among the Carnival “murgas” (theatrical groups) this tradition is treated with jovial satire, becoming a spontaneous musical genre with critical and satirical lyrics fitted to melodies which are well-known to audiences. Carnival has that ability to turn the world inside out, making it possible to poke fun and criticise without reprisals, as this is the time of year when freedom rises above the limits of convention and political correctness.

Various murgas have become popular in Águilas, and these days the “Los ciegos, ciegos perdíos” group enjoy undisputed popularity with the public. In addition, the tradition was reinvigorated in 2020 with the formation of a new female murga, “Las Esturreás”, who succeeded in making a place for themselves in the Carnival atmosphere and promise to be one of the great innovations within the genre.

### **14-ESPARTO GRASS AND THE MUSSONA**

The Mussona is one of the chief protagonists in the Carnival of Águilas, which has recently been awarded International Tourist Interest status, and is one of the oldest characters to feature in the fiestas. It is an ancestral figure, half man and half beast, representing the duality of civilized Man and the wild side which all human beings have inside.

Documented evidence suggests that the figure of the Mussona comes from a travelling circus which visited Águilas early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The circus owned a bear, which at that time of the year awakened from its winter slumbers and began to frighten the public, leaving a lasting impression on the locals, and from then on they included it in their annual fiestas.

Apart from esparto, the costumes also usually include other natural material from the countryside (including seeds and the bark of trees) and the sea (sponges, shells and the like). Every year the Mussona chooses an animal, beast or mythical creature on which to base their interpretation of the character. In addition, the Mussonas help to publicize the esparto grass heritage of Águilas, some of them including decorative esparto elements in their costumes, and teach other people how to create them. For my part I have seen how my companions loved learning how to work with this material.

The actual Suelta de la Mussona consists of shutting it in the castle and then releasing it to roam down to Plaza de España, haranguing people and giving them a scare along the way. Before this, all the Mussonas from previous years get together with the presiding official and perform the ritual of the release, along with the tamer and the Mussona.

Following this, the new tamer places the medallion on the Mussona and when this is done conch shells are sounded: as a result of tradition and the efforts of the Mussona these have been gathered to celebrate a union of land and sea. In the past conches were sounded on the eve of the feast days of San Juan and San Pedro to signal the lighting of bonfires, as well as to warn of imminent danger

and to advise the townspeople of baptisms, weddings and the like. Fishermen also used them in foggy conditions to guide them through the mist.

The Mussona is accompanied on its way down to the town by members of its court, dressed similarly and sounding conches – until recently they also carried torches and flares, but these are now seen as too much of a risk to the costumes being worn. Spectators taunt the Mussona with cries of "Mussona na, mussona na no vales na" while the creature gives free rein to his inner beast, running, jumping, climbing railings and rubbish buns, entering buildings and throwing things out of windows. In the meantime, the tamer plays his tambourine and tries to guide the Mussona and bring it under control.

### **15-EGGSHELLS**

Throughout the year the bars and restaurants of Águilas, along with many others who support the Carnival festivities, keep the shells of the eggs they cook. Instead of breaking them in half the shells are opened at one end and the contents drained out, and the shells are then stored until a few days before Carnival. They are then filled with coloured confetti, covered with coloured tissue paper and sealed with a little glue.

One of the nicest events of the Carnival related to the eggshells, is when the weapons are handed to Don Carnal and Doña Cuaresma in the Centro Ocupacional Urçi, where the participants deliver the eggshells they have made in the previous months so that they can be used as "weapons" by the followers of the two protagonists on the day of their battle. More shells are handed over for use in battle during a subsequent visit to the AFEMAC centre.

### **16-CUERVA**

Cuerva is the typical Carnival drink and is often referred to in Águilas as "La bebida de los Dioses" or "the drink of the Gods". This is the beverage which provides those who take part in Carnival, both members of the Peñas and other participants, with the strength to withstand the duration of the fiesta with very little sleep or rest: since it contains sugar, it even helps to prevent cramps and stitches despite all the dancing!

Carnival veterans maintain that it should be prepared using the leftovers from Christmas, although like so many other things there are countless ways of making it. Numerous recipes exist for the preparation of this wonderful concoction, a classic of our fiestas.

### **17-PAPER COSTUMES AND BODY MAKE-UP**

Paper costumes are works of art made from paper to create stunning costumes, surprising the public year after year. They are made entirely from paper (apart from a metal framework which is needed to bear the weight of the costume), and this makes them even harder to put together.

The costumes are designed and made by groups of people who almost become extended families, spending months on their projects designing, building and shaping the costumes which we then see at the gala and in the parades, asking for no compensation for their time and effort. Seeing the quality and spectacular results, created from paper alone, it is hard not to see these people as true artisans in the difficult field of sewing on paper.

For 20 years now we have been admiring these wonderful hand-made works of paper art.

The gala of the paper costumes also includes the body make-up competition, featuring more works of art on the skin of those taking part, always accompanied by highly original staging.