# EARLY RUSSIAN ECOSSAISE
## Improvised Contradance
### (Russian-German-English-French-Scottish)
#### Richard Powers

This is the Russian version of the Ecossaise from the Regency Era, as described by Louis Petrovsky, Kharkov, 1825.  It was a popular dance at the time.  Petrovsky wrote, "There is no one who has not seen this dance."

It also presents a wonderful new variation for today's contradancing.

This is a **Russian** version of the **German** way of dancing the late 18th century **English** version of the Ecossaise, which was a **French** version of a **Scottish** country dance.  Petrovsky wrote, "It seems that Ecossaise, as the name implies, had its origin in Scotland," but by the time it reached Germany and Russia, it had lost its Scottish character.

This is my *interpretation* of Petrovsky's description.  He said that the head couple of the set chooses the figure, and that the dancers below observe the figure, then dance what they saw, when the head couple progresses down to them.  He did *not* say that each couple reaching the top then invents their own new figure, but the Ecossaise figures are very short—only a quarter the length of a typical contradance—short enough to be easily observed then danced by the third couple.  And the third couple is truly inactive in the Ecossaise, without anything to do while standing inactive, so they are free to observe a new figure that is approaching them, then dance it.  The idea of new figures from each top couple is easy, and obvious, so I'm assuming that this must have occurred to them.  Therefore this version was likely done by some dancers at the time, in my opinion.

MUSIC:         Contradance music.

RHYTHM:     Historic Ecossaise music was duple (reels), but 6/8 (jigs) also work well.

TEMPO:        112 to 118 BPM is an ideal range.

FORMATION: Proper longways set, with W on the right side as you face up. Triple minor sets were most common at this time, with spacer couples between the two dancing couples.  "1" is the Active couple, "2" is the Inactive couple, "3" is the inactive Spacer couple:

(Top of hall)    <u>1  2</u>  3  <u>1  2</u>  3  <u>1  2</u>  3      Cpls 1 and 2 are dancing.  Cpl 3 is standing and watching.

As Inactives progress up the set (toward the left in these numbers), they alternate between being Spacers 3, Inactives 2, Spacers 3, Inactives 2, etc., until they reach the top. Wait out two rounds then become an Active couple 1. Actives remain Active until they reach the bottom, wait out twice, and become Spacer or Inactive.
At the top, new Actives must wait until they have a set of three couples.  But Actives reaching the bottom of the set still dance if there is only one couple below them (i.e., you don't need a set of three couples at the very bottom).

STEPS:  Ftwk in 1825 was primarily 3 chassés, jeté and assemblé, beg. with the R foot.

**Chasse**:  Step fwd R, close L to R, step fwd R. (Ct 1&2).  Repeat beg L. (Ct 3&4).  Repeat beg R. (Ct 5&6).

**Jeté**:  Softly leap fwd L. (Ct 7).

**Assemblé**:  Throw the R ft fwd and softly land on both feet closed in 3rd pos. (Ct 8).

But Petrovski wrote, "Others...saunter around safely in the first figure, and in the second," implying that some dancers just walked the figures, as most dancers began to do five years later, around 1830.  So **walking**, as in today's contras, is fine.

THE DANCE:

**Part 1**: The top Active cpl invents a short 8-bar figure (see options below) and dances it with the second (Inactive) cpl.  For instance, that's the length of time for a Right Hand Star and Star Left back.

**Part 2**: The top cpl promenades down the set for 4 bars (see options below), turns singly, promenades up the set for 4 bars as the second cpl walks up one space, ending with the head cpl one place below where they began.

The Active cpl then dances the same figure with the next cpl below them, who was formerly a Spacer cpl, so they had seen the figure and now know what to do (that's the beauty of Spacer cpls).

At this same time, there are two cpls standing out at the top of the set.  So while they are standing out, the new top cpl tells or shows the 2nd cpl what their new figure will be.  When a 3rd cpl reaches them, they commence dancing.

Active cpls must dance the same figure with every cpl down the set, without changing it.

When the Active cpl reaches the bottom of the set, they wait out two rounds, then start back up the set as an Inactive or Spacer cpl.  Note: when an Active cpl is almost to the bottom, and there is only one cpl left, dance the figure with them.  You don't need a third Spacer cpl at the bottom of the set.  Thus after dancing with the last couple, the Actives will reach the very bottom of the set.

While they are progressing up the hall, the Inactive M (or W) is thinking ahead, planning what the next figure will be when they reach the top.


POSSIBLE FIGURES FOR PART 1:

1) Moulinet (Star) R-hands around, then circle 4-hands to the R on the return.  Or Circle Left then Star L.

2) Taking hands-4, 2 M pull 2 W to advance and dive under arches arms formed by the 2 M, casting away to places; 2 M then dive under the W's arch.

3) Taking hands-4, circle left all the way around; 2 M pull 2 W dive under the M's arch.

4) Active M and Inactive W dos-a-dos by the R shoulder, back to places. Active W and Inactive M do the same.

5) Active M and Inactive W turn by open 2 hands, circling CW to places. Active W and Inactive M do the same.

6) Active M and Inactive W advance with 2 setting steps, then quickly turn by R hands.  Other diagonal the same.

7) Taking hands-4 do 4 balancé steps (pull in, push back, pull in, push back), then a full circle to the L.

8) Do a Petit Chain (a Grand Chain for 4 in a square).  R hands to ptnr to cross over, L hands up and down the set with the next, repeat to finish the square.

**9) Invent your own.**  It should be a **short** 8-bar figure, that involves the Inactive cpl (not just dancing around them), and that remains generally in your space without crashing into the next set below.  And probably different from what the previous Active cpl did.   Use elements of the above figures, or borrow short figures that you may already know from contras, English country dancing, Scottish country dancing, etc.

POSSIBLE PROGRESSIONS FOR PART 2

1) Promenade down the center of the set, turn alone, and come back up the center.

2) Promenade down the center of the set, cast away, come back up the outside of the set.

3) Cast down the outsides and come up the center.

4) Parallel tracks: W promenades down the center as the gent M down behind the M's line, then M up the center as the W comes up behind the W's line, to places.  Or vice versa.

5) Cross over and cast down the outsides, then come up the center, crossing over.

6) Figure-8.  Head cpl goes down the center past cpl 2, goes "out the windows" behind cpl 3, circles toward the center to meet and promenade up two cples, casts around cpl 2, circling around into final position.

7) Promenade down the center of the set, turn alone, galop up the center with longer steps, then cast around the cpl you had danced with, to finish one place below.

8) Pousette down the center backing the W; pousette up the center backing the M.  Pousette can be traveling with an open 2-hand hold, or solo without touching ptnr.

9) Same, with W turning under M's raised arm (like a solo polka).  Possibly reverse the turn coming back up.

**10) Invent your own.**