

RØROS POLS (Norway)

Røros pols (approx: RUHR-ohs pols), a couple dance from eastern Norway, is as genuine a "folkdance" as can be found in all of Scandinavia, yet there are no published descriptions nor printed instructions in Norwegian on how to dance it! For Røros pols is one of those ethnic terpsichorean survivals known in Norwegian as "bygdedansar" (country-, local-, or village-dances). Unlike the "turdansar" (figure-dances) such as Reinlendar med turar, Seksmannaril, and Attetur, which are thoroly documented in the official Norwegian folkdance manual, the ethnic country-dances have not passed thru a "formal" stage of development, but have evolved independently among the folk, varying from district to district. Among them are: Pols and Springleik (both close cousins of the Swedish Polska), Springar, Gangar, Rull, and Halling. No other Scandinavian land has anywhere near as rich a living tradition in native dance forms as Norway.

Besides being a delightful and exhilarating dance in its own right, Røros pols is of unusual interest to the folklorist. Among the art treasures preserved in the Gripsholm castle near Stockholm, Sweden, there is a wall textile from around the year 1500, showing a fiddler, a bagpipe-player, and four couples in various dance positions. It is entitled "Bonddans" (Farmer or Peasant Dance). The remarkable thing is that the dancers are pictured in four sequences in which every detail corresponds to the figures of a dance found in Norway in the area of the town of Røros, exactly as it is danced today! The musicians' instruments, however, are not the same as those used nowadays. The bagpipe (once widespread in the Northlands) has disappeared, and the fiddle pictured is quite different from the violin types now played by Scandinavian country fiddlers. But the most intangible aspects of the dance, the dance figures themselves, are still there. Thus the Swedish tapestry indicates that this most ancient of couple dances, once common thruout northern Scandinavia (it was danced in western Sweden up to a generation ago) has managed to survive up into our day, a span of four to five centuries, in Norway -- without any perceptible change!

The area of eastern Norway between Oslo and Trondheim is typical Pols country. There the ordinary fiddle, and not the unique Hardanger-fiddle, is the prevailing folk instrument. A driving rhythm frequently broken by subtle syncopations, and oftimes a strange mixture of modal keys, characterizes the music. Although the Pols has lost much ground the last few decades, its former popularity is attested to by the vast number of Pols tunes which have been handed down thru the local fiddlers.

Among Norse wedding customs was a widespread tradition of a Bride's Dance done to special music, namely Pols. The male guests (including the minister, by the way!) all took turns dancing with the bride -- clearly a pre-Reformation custom. The dance seems to have had two parts: a slow, dignified polonaise-like opening, followed by a fast, gyrating "round-dance". Scholars point out a definite similarity to the combination of Pavane - Gallard, so common at the time of the Renaissance. Quite likely the Gammal polska of Sweden and the Sønderhøning of Denmark are remnants of this same tradition. However in all of these dances the slow fore-dance music has given away to the livlier after-dance music, leaving the introductory figures to be done to the same rhythm as the following fast turn. In most areas of Norway the latter fast part, mostly in closed position, is the only figure still danced (for example, Springpols, which is similar to the Hambo). Only in the district of Røros has the entire "original" sequence of figures, in suite form, survived.

It should be pointed out that Røros pols is no easy dance, even though the

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figures may appear simple enough. The accomplished Pols dancer employs a lot of "tricks" that the outsider easily overlooks, for example, subtle syncopations. This gives the dance a fascinating character, that certain "something" that is difficult to describe or learn, but infinitely rewarding once it is mastered. Only thru long exposure can an outsider become a true Pols dancer. It is hoped that the introduction of this native Norwegian dance to American folk-dancers may, despite all the inevitable shortcomings of such transplantation, serve to provide an insight into the genuinely traditional aspects of Scandinavian dancing.

Source: As observed and danced in Norway by Gordon E. Tracie. Notes and description prepared with the assistance of Anders Andersen.

Music: Record: NGK TD-7.

Formation: For any number of cpls moving in LOD (CCW). Pos described in text.

Steps: Special for this dance, as described in text.

Character: With spirit and agility; flowing, not tense.

NOTE: To conform to descriptive techniques understandable in the USA, delinlation of the various components of this dance must needs be based upon arbitrary phrasing and use of terminologies of which the "native" dancers are of course unaware.

In a sense, the following is a kind of little dance suite, with a series of figures done in a given order but with no fixed phrasing or precise number of meas for each fig. The changes from part to part are pretty much left up to the whim of the male ptr, but not without respect to the "flow" of the cpls dancing in a given space.

While dance style and exactitude of the figures varies considerably between areas, groups, and dancers in Norway, the order and general form of the dance remains constant. In the case of exhibition, a certain concession to the exigencies of performance must be granted: all the dancers should be coordinated so that the figures and transitions are uniform and synchronized.

Introduction:

M initially takes his ptr by inside hand (M's R, W's L), and they begin moving out to floor and fwd in LOD, with open L Pols step, both dancing as follows:

- ct 1 - step L (natural walking step, heel contacting floor first)
- ct 2 - hold pos (L in front of R)
- ct 3 - step R

After a couple of meas or so, W begins to trail behind M, and M changes handhold (behind his back), taking her L hand in his L, and cpl continues several meas (to end of a musical phrase, for example) with same step. Gradually, W comes up alongside M's L side.

Transition:

W crosses over in front of M as she twirls CCW 2 or 3 times, under joined hands. Dance pos now changes so that M still holds W's L hand

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with his L, but directly out in front of him, in addition to which he places his R hand under her L forearm and grasps her L wrist with his R hand.

Open Step I:

In this new pos, cpl moves fwd LOD, both dancing open L Pols step as before, for some meas.

Transition: (This preferably occurs on the last meas of a phrase).

M stamps L ft (ct 1) and stops in place, as he simultaneously pulls W completely across in front of him to his L, W turning a half-turn CCW. Hold (ct 2). Then step R (ct 3), assuming new dance pos as follows: R arm sharply bent, holding ptr's L upper arm, and L hand around ptr's waist. W is thus a bit to the L of the M in this pos.

Closed Step I (Reverse Turn):

In this pos, cpl turns CCW with same basic L Pols step, but in the following manner, making one full revolution for each 2 meas (6 cts):

	<u>Men's step</u>	<u>Women's step</u>
ct 1	- Fwd on L ft. in order to begin a CCW pivot.	- Bwd. on L ft.
ct 2	- Hold pos.	- R up to L
ct 3	- R up to L, continuing CCW pivot.	- Turn CCW on L, L turned LOD.
ct 4	- Bwd on L, " " "	- R fwd LOD
ct 5	- Hold pos.	- L fwd. L past R turning ft 90° CCW
ct 6	- R up to L, continuing CCW pivot, to complete one full revolution.	- Turn so back is LOD, R ft turned opposite LOD.

Above figure repeated several times.

Transition:

As M steps back, he grasps W's L hand with his R, and twirls her one turn CCW under her arm, to take a semi-closed waltz pos (but with M's L hand grasping W's R fingers lightly, rather than palm-to-palm hold as in ordinary dance pos), facing fwd LOD.

Open Step II:

In this semi-closed pos, cpl moves fwd LOD with open Pols steps, M dancing as before (with L ft lead), but W dancing with R ft lead this time (W's steps: R-hold-L, instead of L-hold-R), for some meas.

Transition:

Cpl now takes "half shoulder-waist" pos as follows: own R hand on ptr's waist, and own L hand on ptr's R shoulder. W is thus a bit to the R of the M.

Closed Step II (Pols Turn):

In this new closed pos, cpl turns CW with Pols steps, progressing fwd in LOD, for several meas, making one revolution for each meas of music (3 cts). This step is very similar to that found in the Swedish "Gammal polska" turn, except that the Pols is considerably livelier, largely due to a much faster tempo.

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- M's step: 1 - pivot on L with slight dip, leading around CW.
ct 2 - continue pivot on L, while keeping R close by so that it trails around in contact with the floor (i.e. "both").
ct 3 - leap lightly onto R, pivoting enough to complete a full revolution around, landing on R in fwd LOD.

W's step: W retains same rhythmic pattern of ft movement on the turn as she did in Open Step II (R-lead Pols). Thruout the M controls the turn with a firm lead, so W need only "follow".

Conclusion:

After completing a number of closed Polø turns, cpl separates, M turning to his own L (CCW), W to own R (CW), while dancing basic Pols ftwork. As they turn away from each other, W likely holds her skirt, M may raise both hands and snap his fingers, or stamp one or both ft -- but this should be "spontaneous" and not "prescribed".

Then entire sequence is begun anew at Introduction.

Obviously there is no fixed number of times the sequence is to be danced to the music available, for this depends on how fast the M wish to progress.

Gordon E. Tracie

These instructions by Gordon E. Tracie are the most extensive, if not the only written information available on this dance and its background.

It is therefore a privilege to be able to include his material in our notes.

Ingvar E. Sodal