



**LOCATION** Doon, Cappamore, Moroe, Co. Limerick; Cappawhite, Newport, Rear Cross, Kilcommon, Dundrum, Co. Tipperary

**SOURCES** Willie Ryan (b. 15 August 1928) and Lena Ryan (b. 4 May 1926, Shanaclune, Cappamore), Commonaline, Doon, Co. Limerick; Thomas Ryan (b. circa 1905), Mansell's Cross, Cappamore, Co. Limerick contributed the **SIXTH FIGURE**; Michael Slattery (b. 1919), Croughmorka, Doon, Co. Limerick last saw older people dancing a **SIXTH FIGURE** when he was ten years old.

**MUSIC** Thomas Ryan says that the music for the set was "a plain tune. They more often played polkas, but sometimes they played a slide for the **THIRD** and **FIFTH FIGURE**. The one tune would carry you through the Ballycommon Set, if one was badly stuck for tunes." Willie Ryan remembers that polkas were always played for the Ballycommon Set, even though he saw his father dance it to hornpipes once. "If you get good polka music for the Ballycommon Set, you couldn't beat it. I saw my father dance it to a hornpipe because the player played hornpipes." The polka for the **FIFTH FIGURE** was always played a little bit faster than the other polkas. Willie Ryan does not remember the names of tunes played long ago, but popular tunes that are currently played in the Doon area for the Ballycommon Set are: polkas, *Bansha Peelers*, *My Bonnet Trimmed in Blue*, *Moroe Polka*, *Road to Garravane*, *Kerry Polka*, *Cups and Saucers*, *My Britches Full of Stitches*, *Nellie in the Wood*, *Rakes of Mallow*, *Ballydesmond Polka*; slides, *Murphy's Porter*, *Kerry Slide*, *Up the Ladder and Down the Wall*. According to Willie Ryan, the dancing speed of the music today at two beats per measure is: polkas, 144 beats per minute; slides, 153 beats per minute. The dancing speed of the music at two beats per measure for competition today is even faster: polkas, 153 beats per minute.

# The Ballycommon Set

## The Set in Local Tradition

Thomas Ryan remembers, "they used to dance the set on the two flags." A man played the melodeon with three buttons on top and there was a fiddler. Willie Ryan learned set dancing at home from his father, Cornelius Ryan. "I danced it in the kitchen nearly every night for the whole winter to the music of an old gramophone. These old-timers were very keen set dancers. There was no jumping and no leaping, just nice low dancing all the whole time around. Oh, they were all low to the ground. They didn't consider themselves professional. They'd dance with the hobnailed boots. They never went out of time. Any one of them people had time and they understood the music. If they went out of time they would pause one second and come back into time. They would drill that into your head, if you went out of time to pause for a split second and you'd be back into the music. There was no battering in the Ballycommon Set. If a man started doing a batter, others said there's no batter in the Ballycommon Set. When you'd see them fellows dancing there we wanted to dance our set. We'd be told no, to sit down."

Dancing stopped in the Ryan home about 1940 when Willie's grandfather died. Everyone then went to the neighbour's house, Mrs. Kennedy's, down the road in Croughmorka. Thomas Greene from Gurtnagera and Tom Quinlan from Cappawhite played the accordion. After a couple of years the Ryans again started dancing sets and playing cards. In the 1940s, platforms started for the summer down beyond the cross at Croughmorka Cross. "There was dancing on a Wednesday and Sunday evening for nine or ten years." At this same time, the Crystal Ballroom in Doon opened up and set dancing lasted for nine or ten years in the hall.

There was no more dancing in the halls in the 1950s. Willie Ryan recalls, "Modern dancing started and finished old time dancing. Set dancing was not done in the homes either except the occasional party with a couple of certain people dancing them. Ballad sessions in the pubs and Irish nights in the pubs started up and finished dancing in the homes. It died for a good number of years only just the occasional set would be danced in the hall." Until about 1970 it was more common to do a half set than a full Ballycommon Set.

"*Scór* started it again about 1969 or 1970, but what it done in the finish, it only killed it. *Scór* would say they revived the sets, but they only killed them. The only way you can revive the set is to finish out the set. But *Scór* won't do that because they have only a certain length of time in the programme. If you didn't break the parts apart you wouldn't win. There was still a bit of tradition in the set for the first year or two, then the competition took over and changed it. After the second year of *Scór* starting you could see a change in the step not alone in the parts. And now with these competitions the set is ruined altogether. When they started *Scór* competitions they considered traditional sets nothing. In order to win competitions you had to change your dancing. All that was required was three figures. That went on for three or four years. Then they only looked for two figures. And now the younger generation only knows two figures. Now they have tillies [frills] put on to the end of it. You have bits of figures brought in. Young judges know nothing at all about traditional set dancing.

"The competitions destroyed set dancing. The young set dancers haven't a clue about the traditional sets because it was never taught them. Today if dancers go out of time they keep dancing away. A lot of them set dancers are dancing fierce high. They're throwing their legs this way and that way. You very rarely see the set danced the old way today.

"Today it is hard to get one full set in this area. You would get four fellows in this area to do it."

The **SIXTH FIGURE** is no longer danced today.

*Continues next page*



## The Set in Publication

The Ballycommon Set has been published in *An Authentic Guide To Set Dancing*. The book does not include the SIXTH FIGURE. The book describes the Ballycommon Set as it is done today, except for the following differences: the book states that slides are played for the FOURTH FIGURE, when in fact, traditionally and today, polkas are played. The book also states that a polka, slide or hornpipe is played for the FIFTH FIGURE. In the East Limerick and West Tipperary area hornpipes are never played for the FIFTH FIGURE today. A hornpipe has been introduced into some Ballycommon Set dance competitions, but it is a figure similar to the hornpipe of polka sets from Kerry, not a figure of the traditional Ballycommon Set. The terminology in the book is different from the words used locally to describe the set. Willie Ryan says that competition set dancing over the last ten years has changed the words for the movements. "House around" and "all house" have become standard terms used by some dance teachers. Locally, Willie Ryan says people always used the term **Around the house**. "House to opposite positions" was never used for two couples dancing. Willie Ryan also says that the term "wheel" was never used by local people. Local people always used the word **Swing**. "Wheel" was used in other parts of Ireland.

## SET DANCES OF IRELAND TRADITION & EVOLUTION

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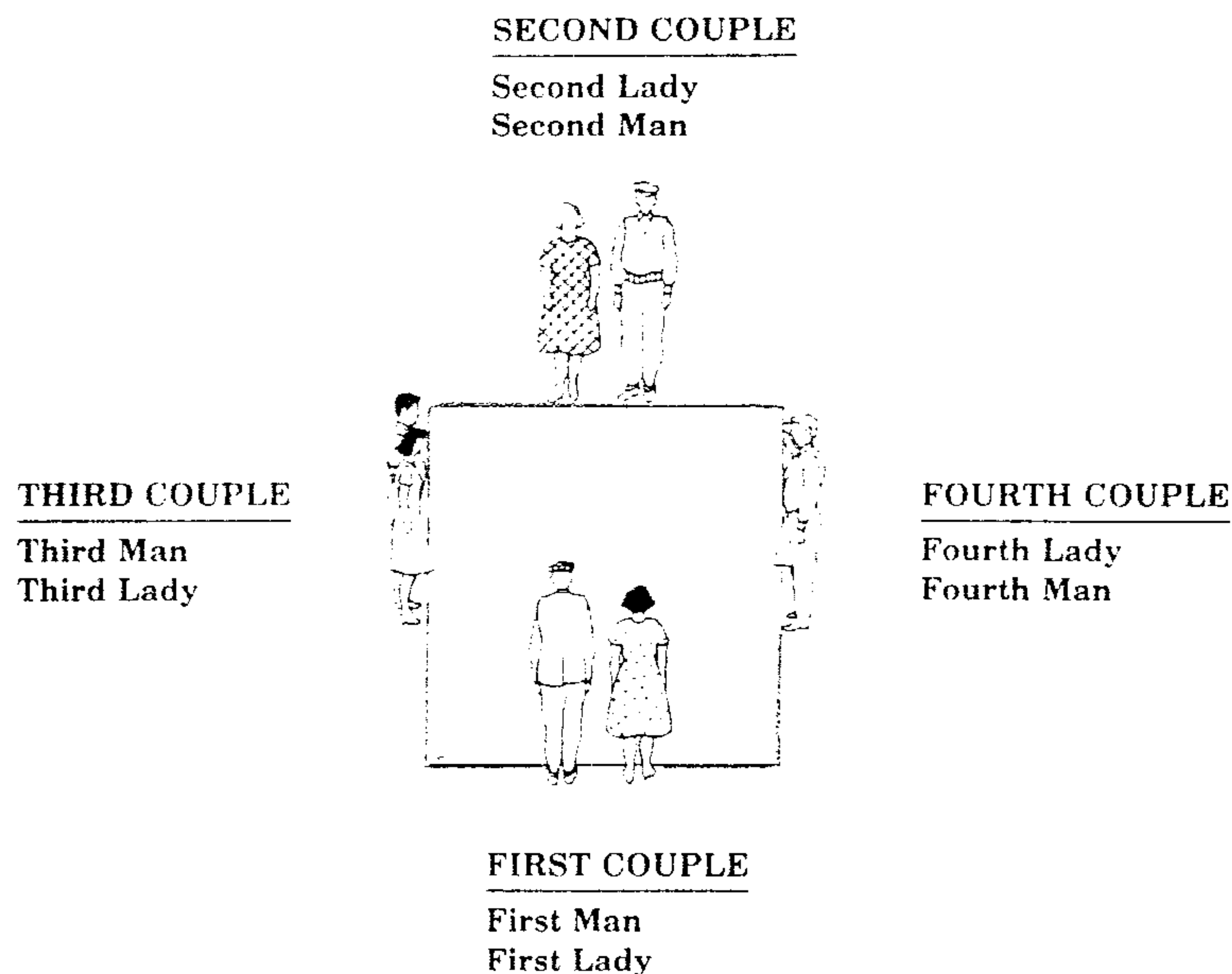
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# Let's Dance a Set.

Remember:

*It was a mad man thought of it first.*<sup>1</sup>

- The names of the movements, bolded and underlined, are those of the local resource person.
- If there is no description after a movement, that description can be found previously in the set the first time the movement occurs.
- Illustrations occur the first time a movement is danced in a set. The older couples are the lead or head couples; the younger couples are the side couples. The darker older couple is the lead couple; the darker side couple is the first side couple. Couples and starting positions are numbered as in the example.



- The battering symbols represent the following:
  - symbolises weight is placed on the ground without making a sound
  - symbolises that no weight is placed on the ground and no sound is made
  - ★ symbolises that weight is placed on the ground and a sound is made
  - ☆ symbolises that no weight is placed on the ground but a sound is made
- In most cases dancers can simply dance threes instead of battering, if they so choose.
- Italics refer to movements danced today instead of, or in addition, to movements that were danced in the past. If dancers ignore the italics, they will dance the set in its oldest remembered form; if dancers dance the movements described in italics, they will dance the current form of the set. The type of music in italics represents a change in music from the past.

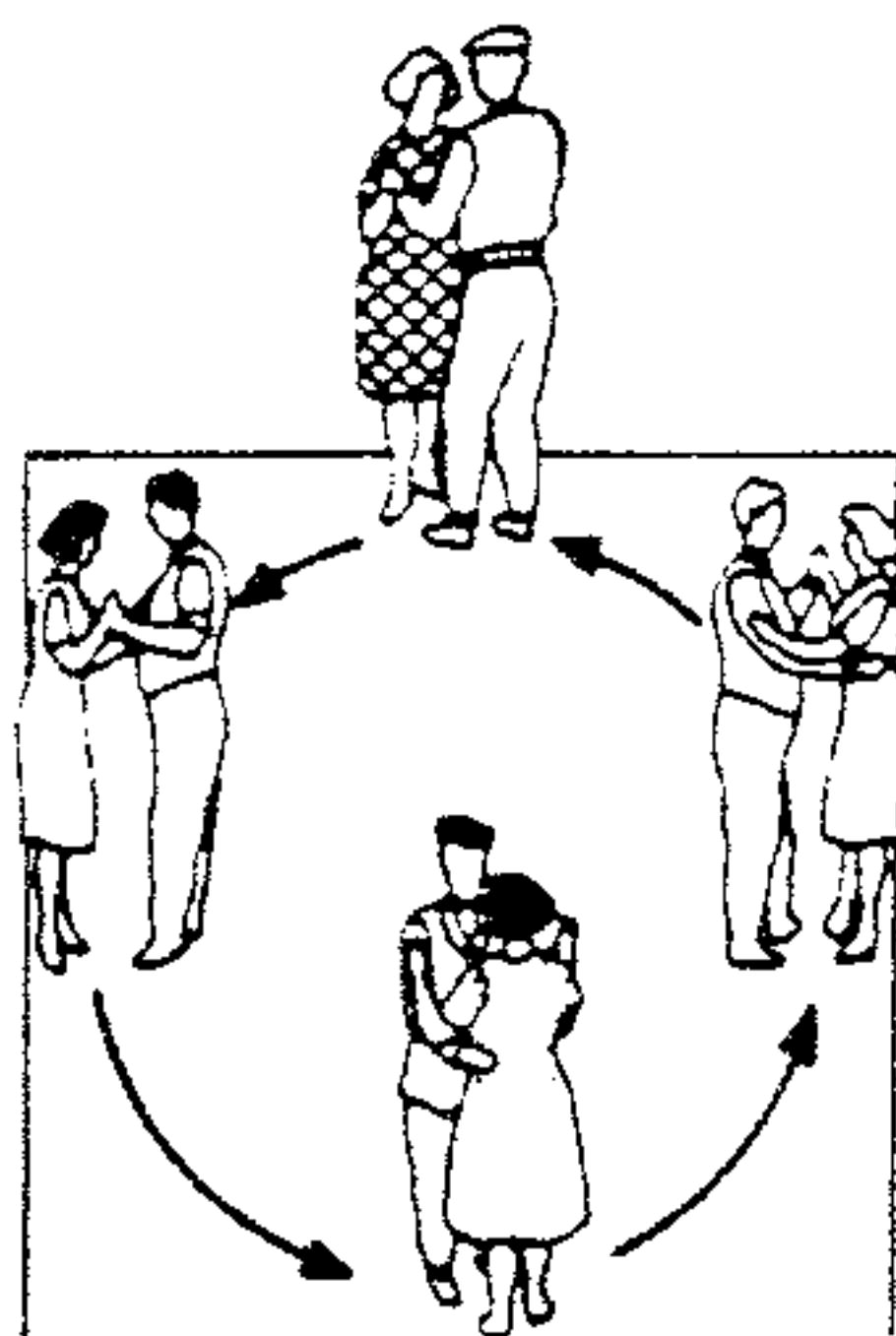
<sup>1</sup> Jer McAuliffe, Glenlara, Newmarket, Co. Cork



# THE BALLYCOMMON SET

## FIRST FIGURE

## POLKAS



### Around the house 8 All four couples.

(2) All four couples dance step, step, and one three turning clockwise in an anti-clockwise direction toward positions on their right.

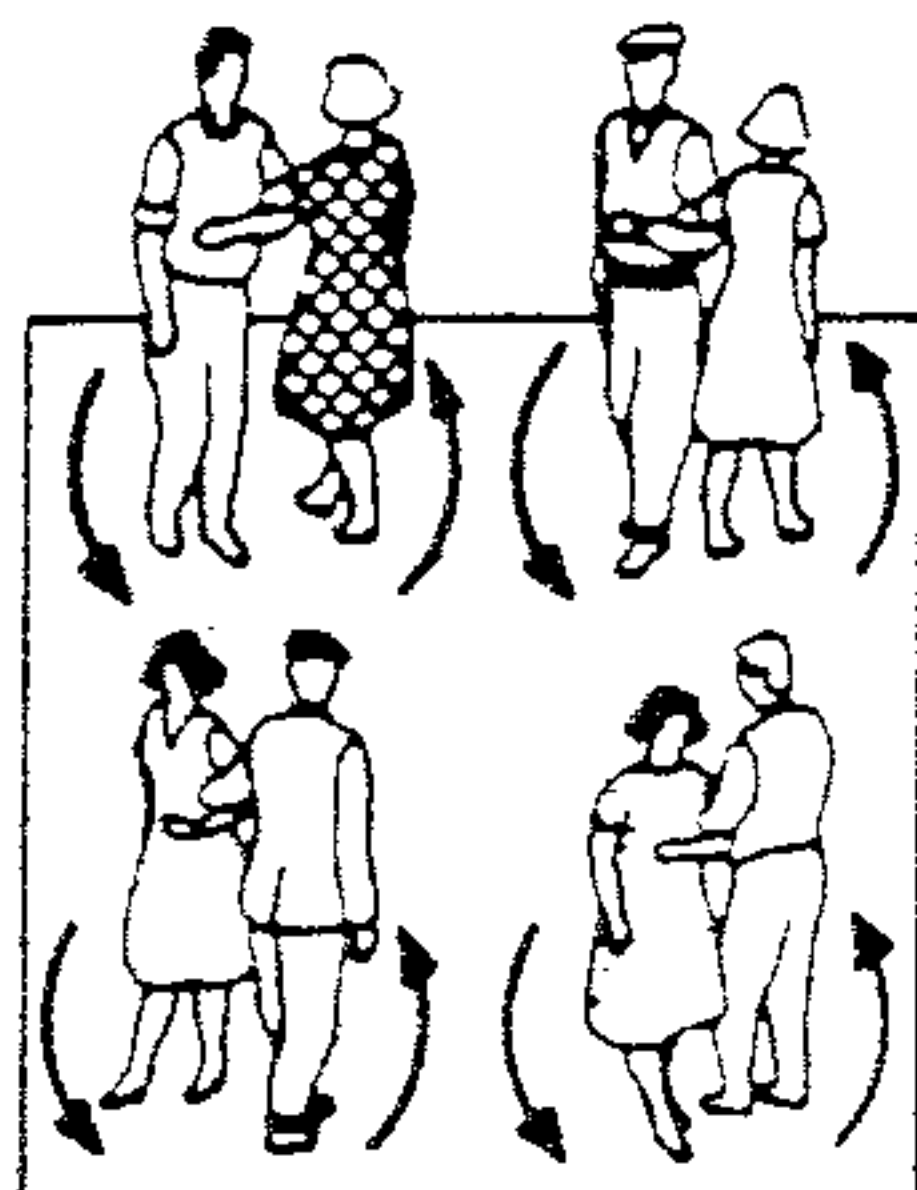
(2) All four couples repeat. This time men start with right feet while ladies start with left feet. All four couples end in positions opposite starting positions:

Ladies	R - L -	R L R -	L - R -	L R L -
Men	L - R -	L R L -	R - L -	R L R -
	■ - ■ -	■ ■ ■ -	■ - ■ -	■ ■ ■ -
Beats/Measure	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &

(4) All four couples, beginning in positions opposite starting positions, dance four threes in an anti-clockwise direction around the set turning clockwise two times until all four couples are back in starting positions.

*Today, all four couples dance:*

Around the house 8 All four couples dance eight threes in an anti-clockwise direction around the set using two measures to turn clockwise into each succeeding position to their right until all four couples are back in starting positions.



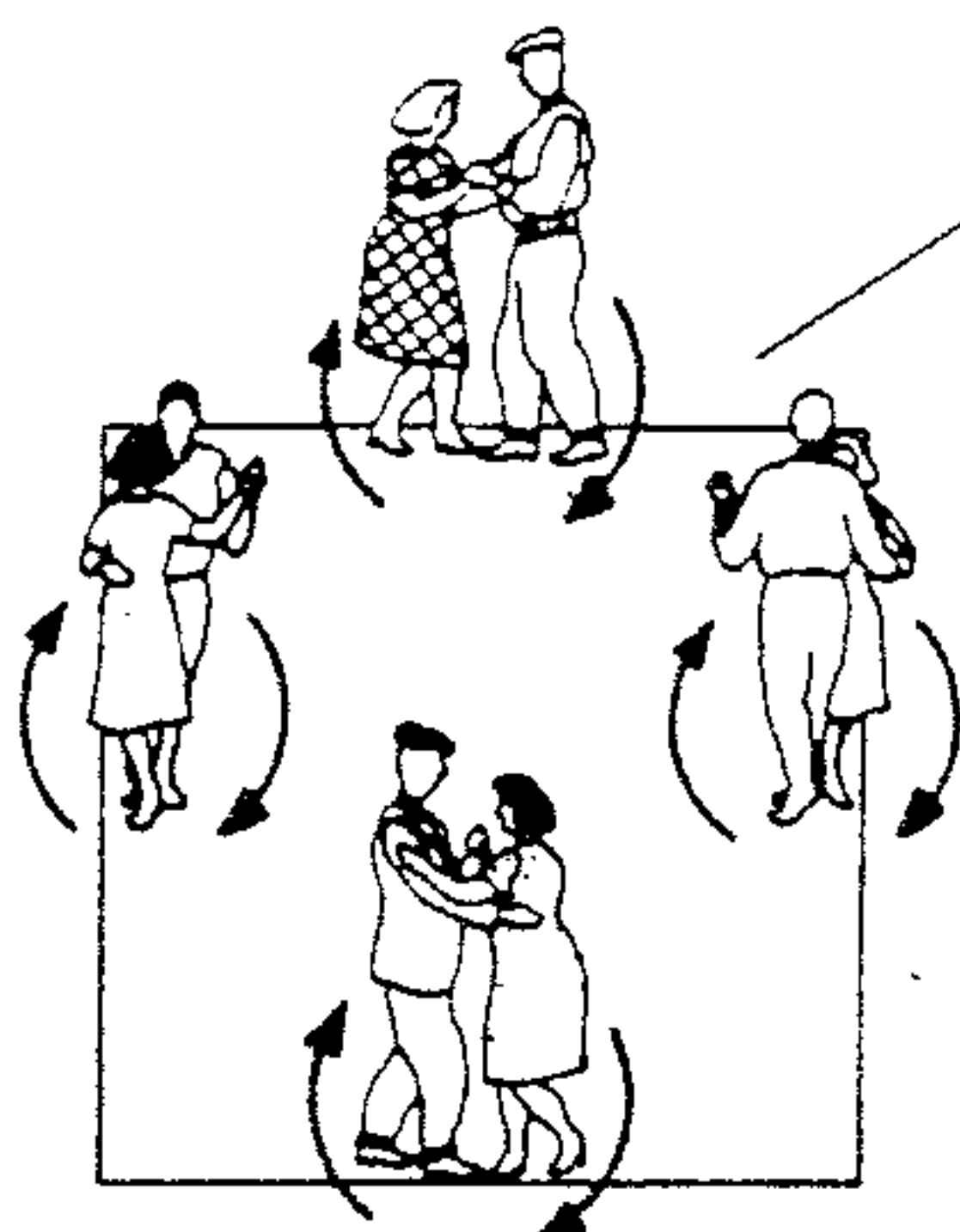
Link off 8 All four couples. All four men face in a clockwise direction while ladies face in an anti-clockwise direction. Men link left elbows with ladies on their left and dance eight threes in an anti-clockwise direction (making two complete revolutions) to each person's starting position: first man with third lady, third man with second lady, second man with fourth lady, and fourth man with first lady. During the eighth measure all walk to starting positions to be ready to begin swing with original partners. *Today, couples sometimes grab left elbows, hold left hands, or hold left hands wrapped around the thumbs.*

Swing 8 All four couples in "waltz position" with original partners in starting positions.

Link off 8 All four couples with new partners.

Swing 8 All four couples.

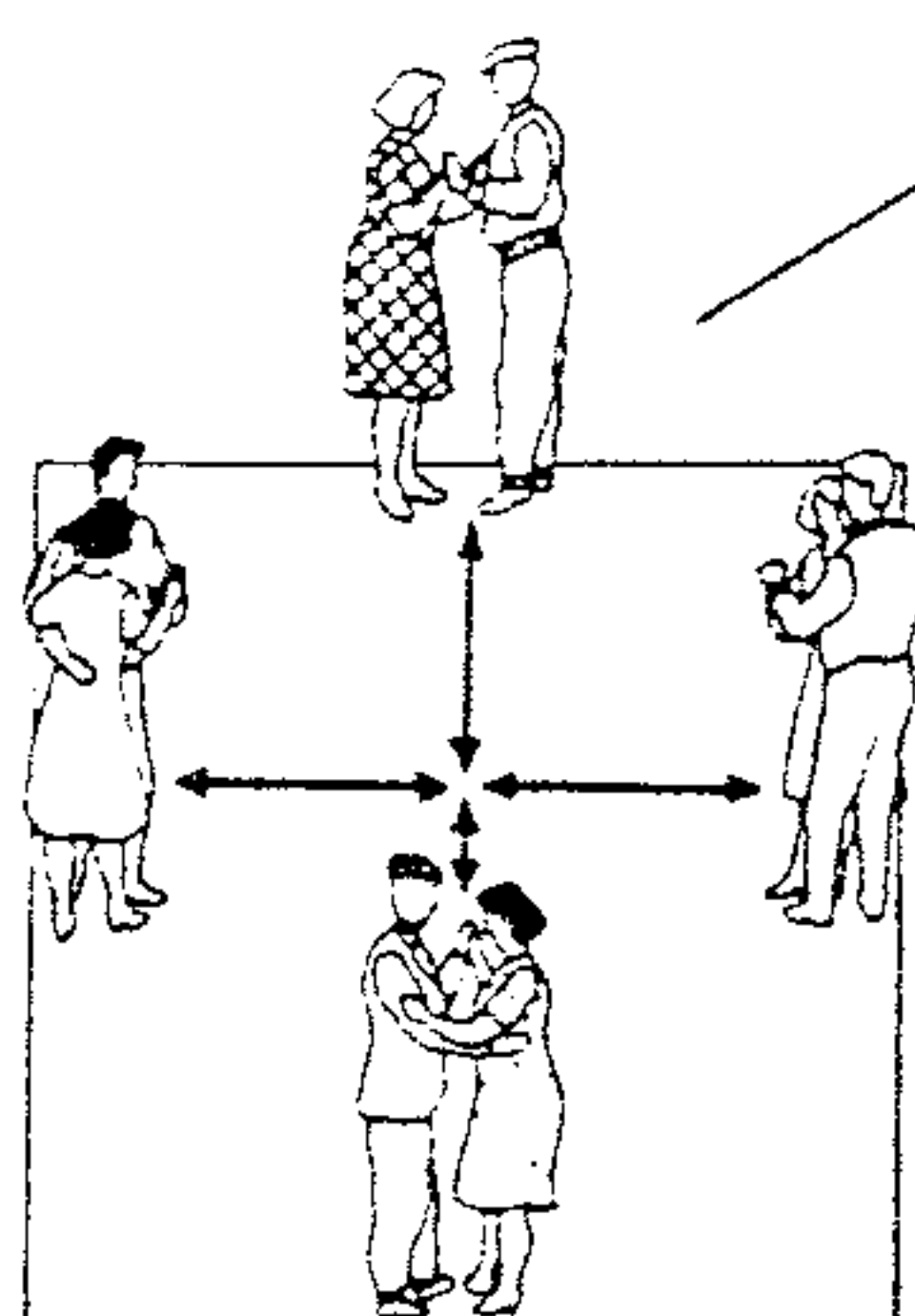
Around the house 8 All four couples. Men slap the ground in front on the second beat of the eighth measure to end the FIRST FIGURE.



# THE BALLYCOMMON SET

## SECOND FIGURE

POLKAS



### Around the house 8 All four couples.

Advance in twice 8 All four couples dance the slide step twice into the centre of the set and back to starting positions:

Ladies	R - L -	R - L -	L - R -	L - R -	R - L -	R - L -	L - R -	L - R -
Men	L - R -	L - R -	R - L -	R - L -	L - R -	L - R -	R - L -	R - L -
	■ - ■ -	■ - □ -	■ - ■ -	■ - ☆ -	■ - ■ -	■ - □ -	■ - ■ -	■ - ☆ -
Beats/Measure	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &

The man slides into the centre with his left foot, slides his right foot along the floor to the heel of his left foot, slides into the centre with his left foot again, and lifts his right foot low in front while raising and lowering the left heel still keeping the ball of the left foot on the ground. The man then slides back out starting with his right foot, slides his left foot along the floor to the heel of his right foot, slides into starting position with his right foot, and on the second beat of the fourth and eighth measures slaps the ground in front with his left foot without putting weight on the foot. The lady does the same only she starts in with her right foot. Men then turn anti-clockwise to face in a clockwise direction and swing with ladies on their left while ladies walk anti-clockwise to swing with men on their right.

Swing 8 All four couples. First man with third lady, third man with second lady, second man with fourth lady, and fourth man with first lady.

Advance in twice 8 All four couples with new partners.

Swing 8 All four couples. First man with second lady, third man with fourth lady, second man with first lady, and fourth man with third lady.

Advance in twice 8 All four couples with new partners.

Swing 8 All four couples. First man with fourth lady, third man with first lady, second man with third lady, and fourth man with second lady.

Advance in twice 8 All four couples with new partners.

Swing 8 All four couples with original partners in starting positions.

Around the house 8 All four couples. Men slap the ground in front on the second beat of the eighth measure to end the SECOND FIGURE.



# THE BALLYCOMMON SET

## THIRD FIGURE

## SLIDES

**Around the house 8** All four couples.

**Link off 8** All four couples with new partners. At the end of the eighth measure men take ladies' left hands in their left hands.

**Form a ring 8** All four couples. Still holding left hands, men take partners' right hands in their right hands while all face in an anti-clockwise direction forming a circle. Men are facing slightly toward the centre of the set while ladies are facing slightly out from the set. Men are holding left hands low with ladies on their left and right hands with partners on partners' right shoulders. Ladies bend their right elbows so as to rest their right hands, palms up on their right shoulders while men hold the ladies' right hands on the ladies' right shoulders. All four couples dance eight threes in an anti-clockwise direction back to starting positions.

**Advance in twice 8** All four couples, partners facing each other, hold right hands in front like a handshake at chest level and dance the slide step twice into the centre and back to starting positions.

**Advance in and half the house 8** All four couples.

(4) All four couples in "waltz position" dance the slide step into the centre and back to starting positions. Instead of slapping the ground on the eighth measure, all dance one three:

Ladies	R - L -	R - L -	L - R -	L R L -
Men	L - R -	L - R -	R - L -	R L R -
	■ - ■ -	■ - □ -	■ - ■ -	■ ■ ■ -
Beats/Measure	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &

(4) All four couples dance four threes in an anti-clockwise direction around the set using two measures to turn clockwise two times: once through positions to their right and once into positions opposite starting positions.

**Advance in and half the house 8** All four couples, beginning in positions opposite starting positions and ending in starting positions.

**Around the house 8** All four couples.

**Link off 8** All four couples with new partners.

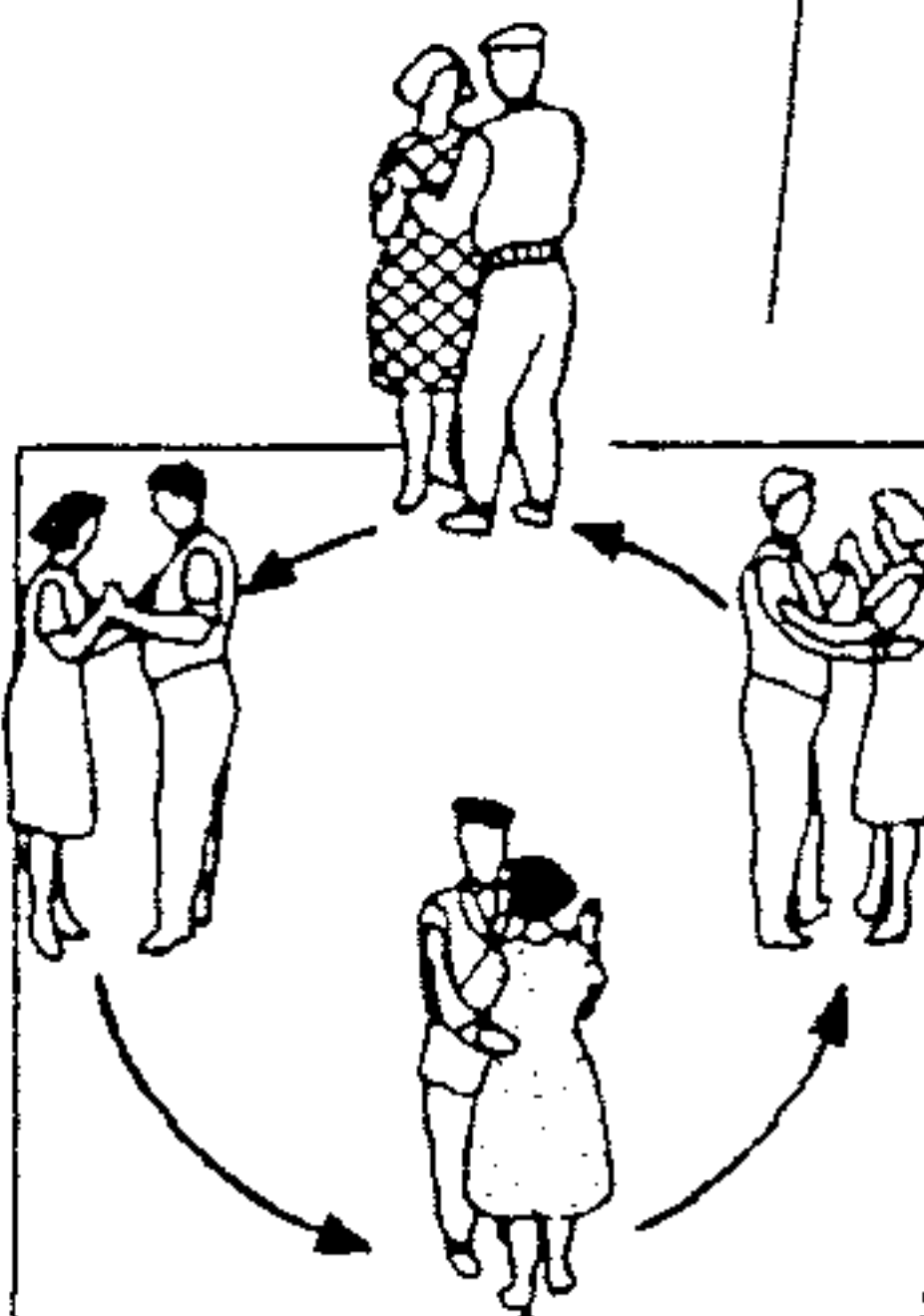
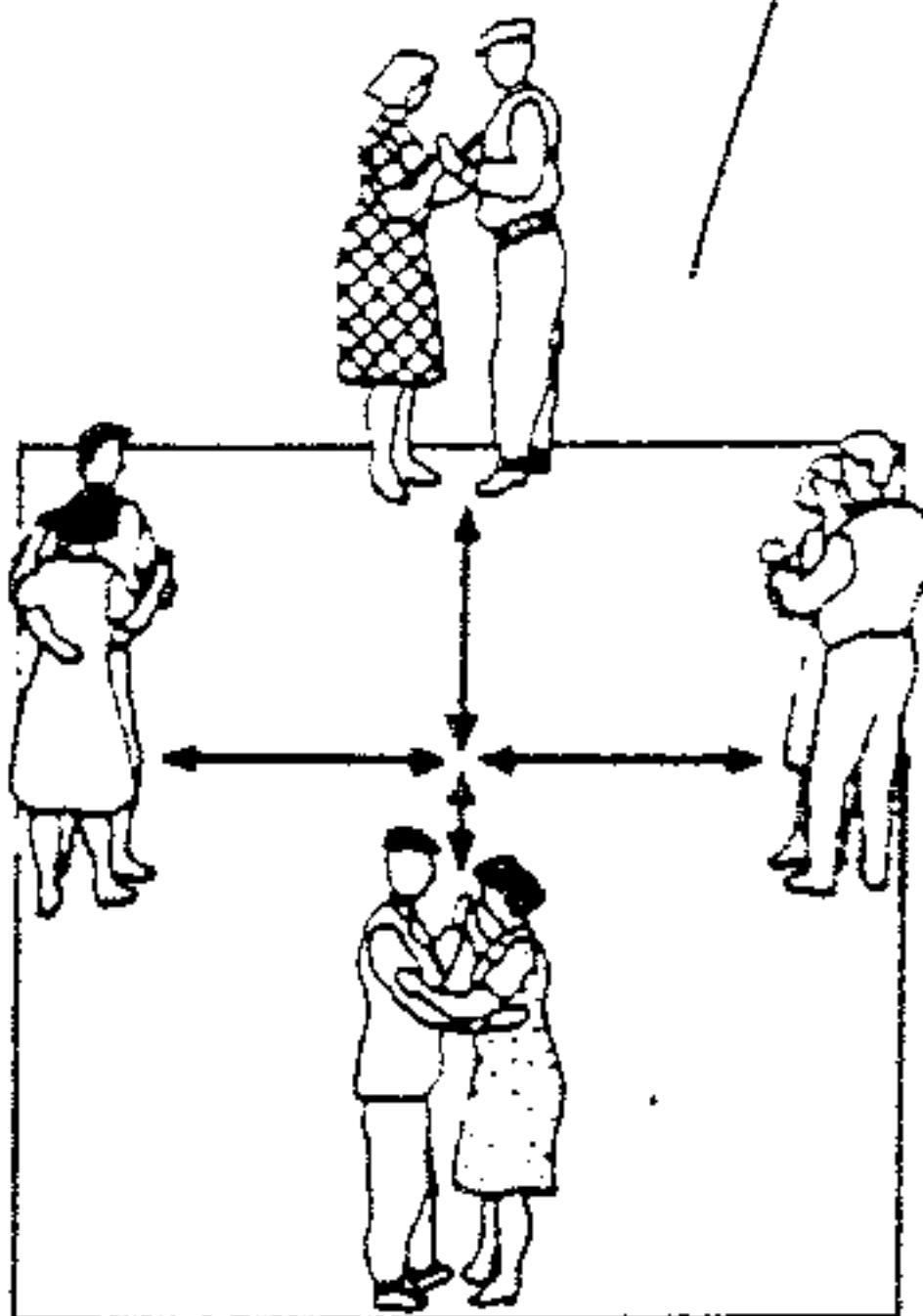
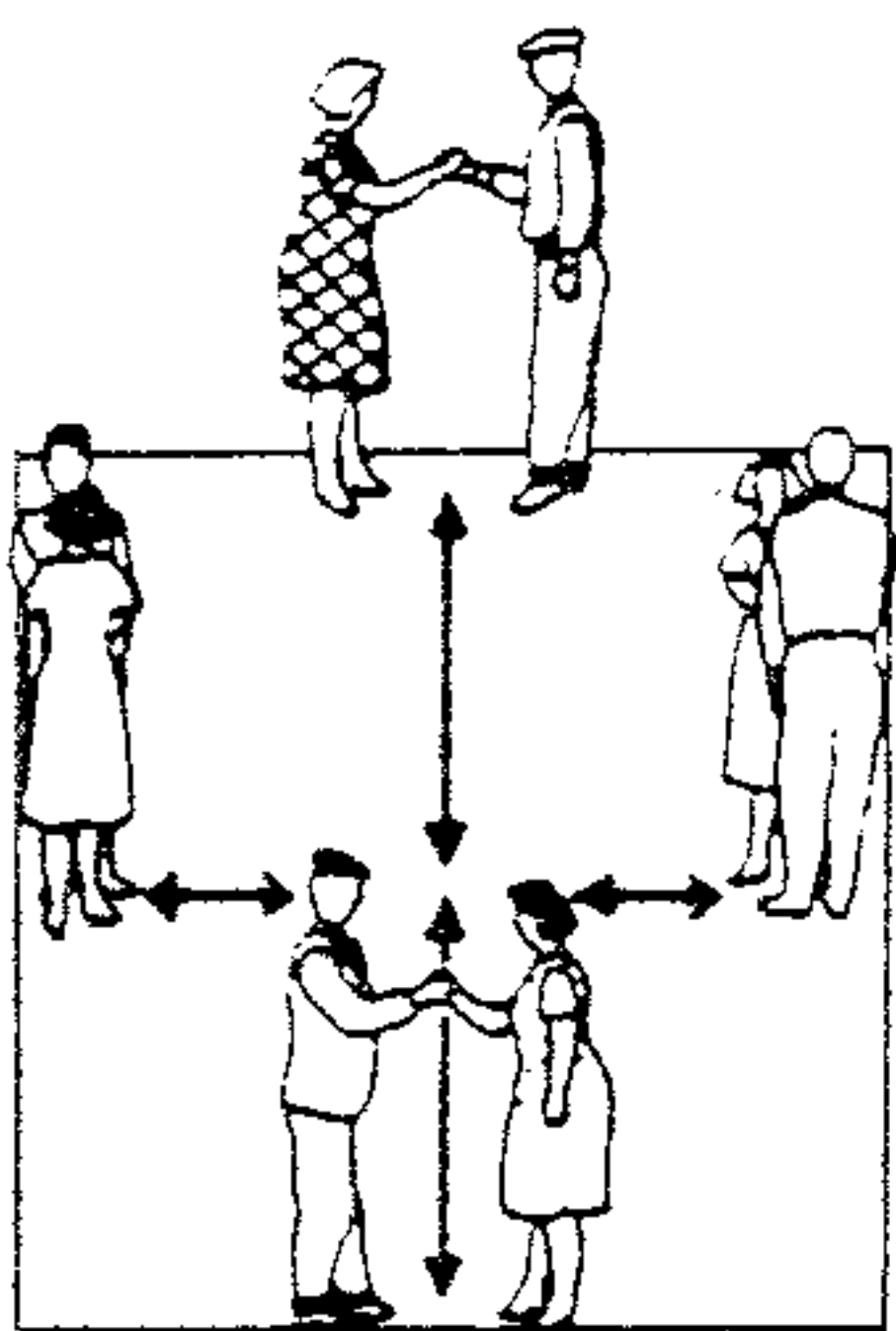
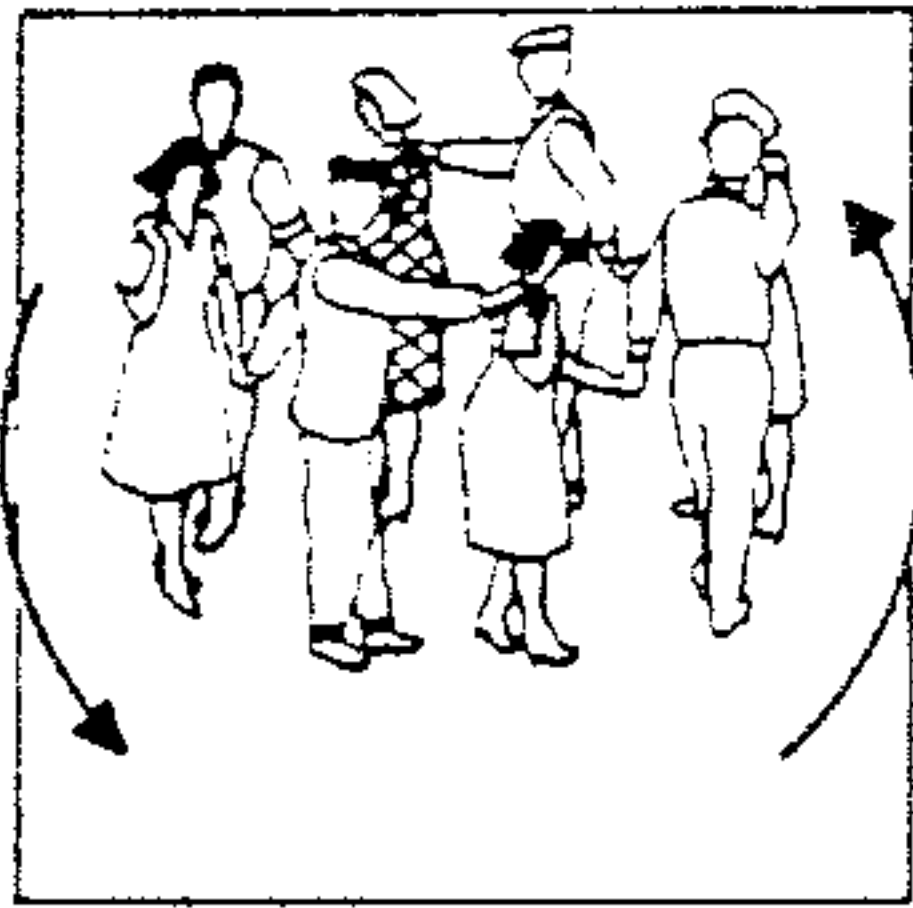
**Form a ring 8** All four couples.

**Advance in twice 8** All four couples holding right hands.

**Advance in and half the house 8** All four couples in "waltz position."

**Advance in and half the house 8** All four couples in "waltz position."

**Around the house 8** All four couples. Men slap the ground in front on the second beat of the eighth measure to end the THIRD FIGURE.



THE BALLYCOMMON SET  
FOURTH FIGURE

POLKAS

Around the house 8 All four couples.

Link off 8 All four couples with new partners.

Swing 8 All four couples.

Advance in 8 First and second couples.

(4) First and second couples dance the slide step into the centre and back to starting positions. Instead of slapping the ground on the fourth measure, all dance one three:

Ladies	R - L -	R - L -	L - R -	L R L -
Men	L - R -	L - R -	R - L -	R L R -
	■ - ■ -	■ - □ -	■ - ■ -	■ ■ ■ -
Beats/Measure	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &

(4) Both couples dance four threes in an anti-clockwise direction using two measures to turn clockwise two times: once crossing the set and once into positions opposite starting positions.

Advance in 8 First and second couples repeat, beginning in positions opposite starting positions and ending in starting positions.

Around the house 8 All four couples.

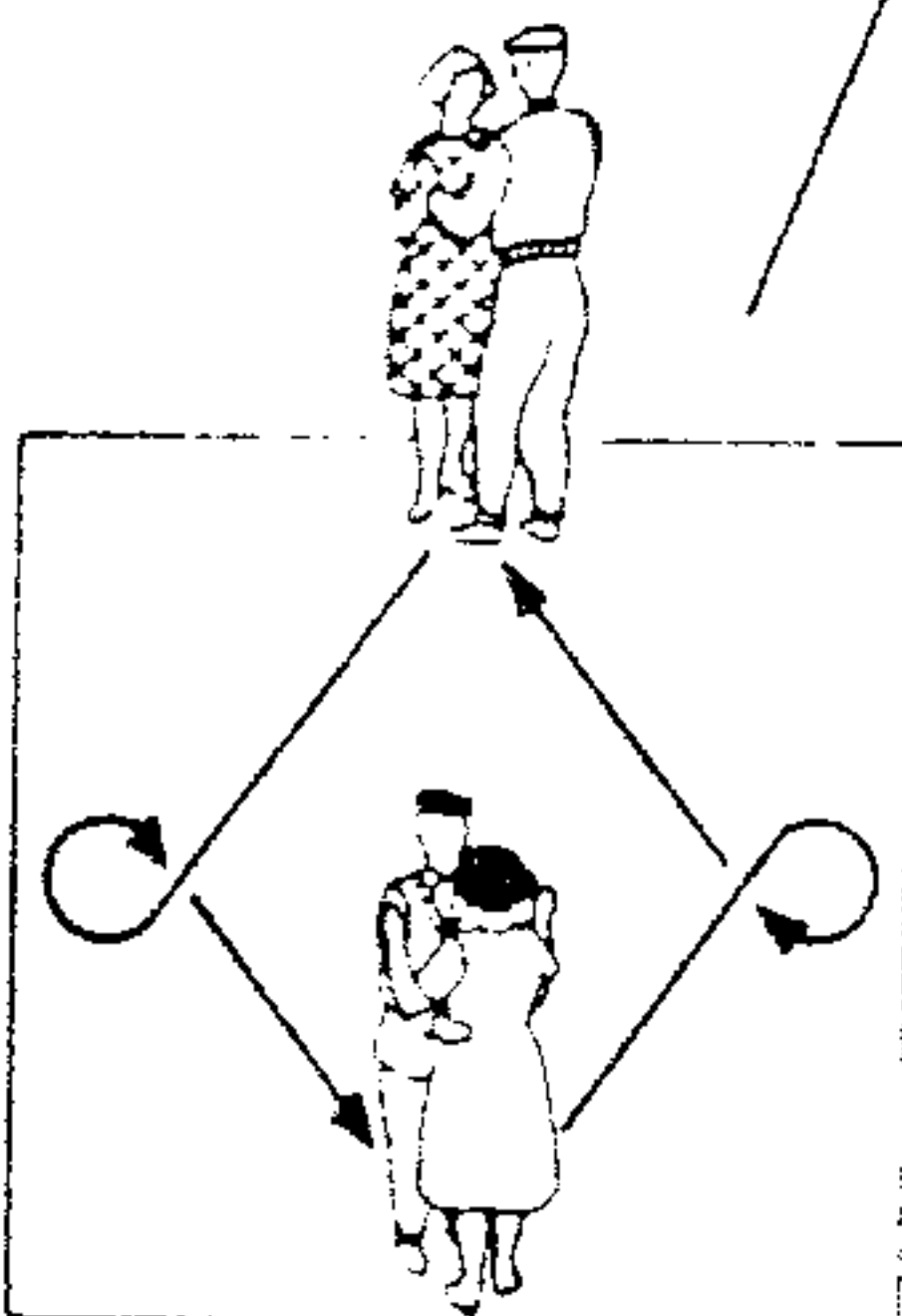
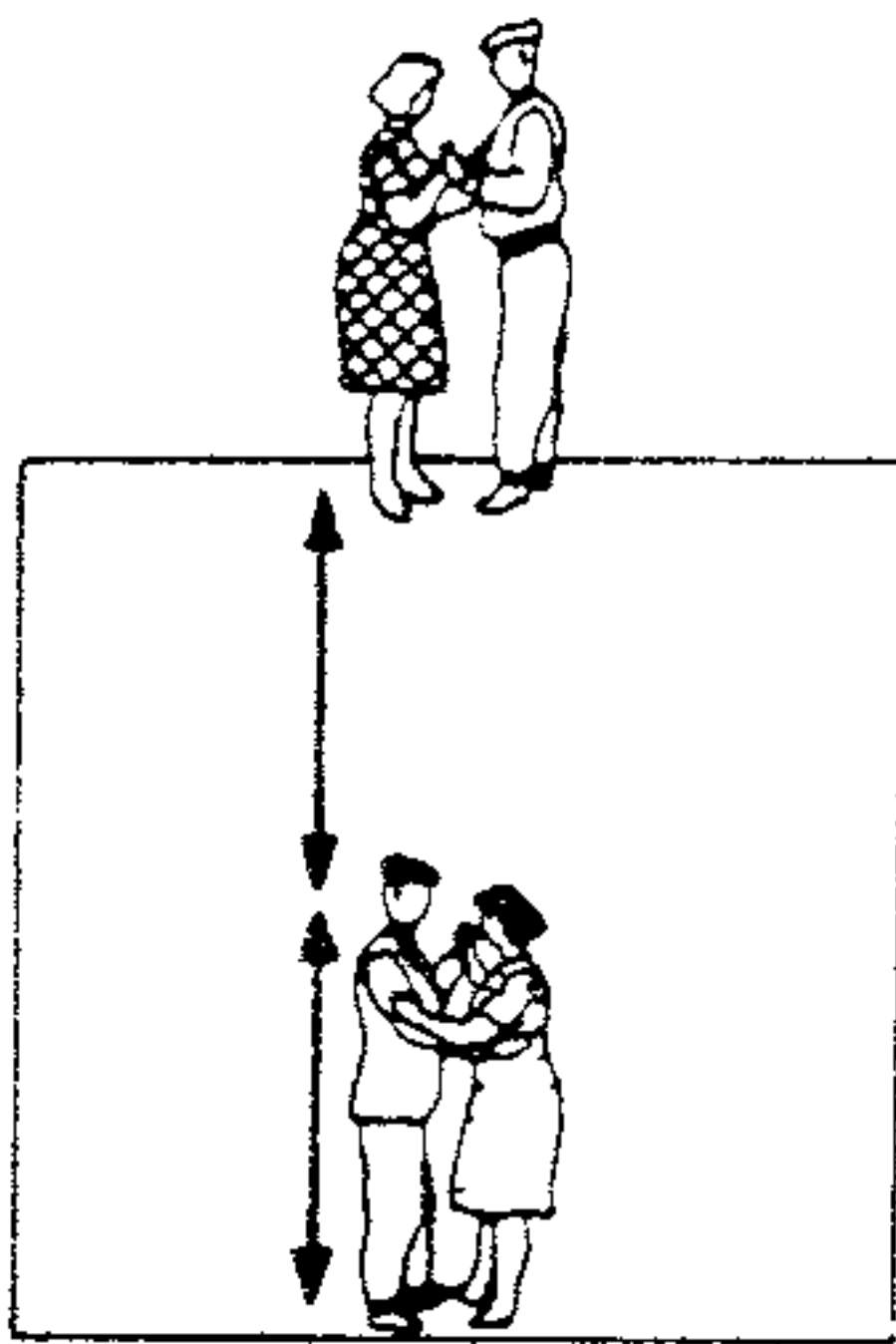
Link off 8 All four couples with new partners.

Swing 8 All four couples.

Advance in 8 Third and fourth couples.

Advance in 8 Third and fourth couples repeat, beginning in positions opposite starting positions and ending in starting positions.

Around the house 8 All four couples. Men slap the ground in front on the second beat of the eighth measure to end the FOURTH FIGURE.



THE BALLYCOMMON SET  
FIFTH FIGURE

SLIDES

Around the house 8 All four couples.

Advance in 8 All four couples.

(4) All four couples dance the slide step into the centre and back to starting positions. Instead of slapping the ground on the fourth measure, all dance one three:

Ladies	R - L -	R - L -	L - R -	L R L -
Men	L - R -	L - R -	R - L -	R L R -
	■ - ■ -	■ - □ -	■ - ■ -	■ ■ ■ -
Beats/Measure	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &	1 & 2 &

(4) All four couples dance four threes in an anti-clockwise direction around the set using two measures to turn clockwise two times: once through positions to their right and once into positions opposite starting positions.

Advance in 8 All four couples repeat, beginning in positions opposite starting positions and ending in starting positions.

Around the house 8 All four couples.

Advance in 8 All four couples.

Advance in 8 All four couples repeat, beginning in positions opposite starting positions and ending in starting positions.

Around the house 8 All four couples. Men slap the ground in front on the second beat of the eighth measure to end the FIFTH FIGURE.

