

# Powolniak

Pronunciation: poh-VOHL-nyahk

Record: ZM-46729 "Tańce ludowe z Polski - Volume 2" (Folk Dances from Poland), side B, band 3, available from Ada Dziwanowska. *Adele & Jas and the cassette "Favorite Polish Dances" presented by Dziwanowska.*

Powolniak is a couple dance from the region of Kurpie zielone [KOOR-pyeh zyeh-LOH-neh], in northeast Poland, in the part of the country, called Mazowsze [mah-ZOHF-sheh] (Mazovia). This part of Kurpie is called "zielone" (green), because of the swampy, green undergrowth of its once dense virgin forests (puszcza - POCSH-chah), in contrast to Kurpie białe (BYAH-weh - white), the southern part of the Kurpie region, where forests grew on drier, sandy ground. The inhabitants of Kurpie zielone, until the end of the XIX century, were engaged in forest and river industry: pitch burning, digging iron ore and amber from bogs, hunting, fishing, and collecting wild bees' honey. Later, when the swampy grounds were drained and the thick forests cut down, farming became their main occupation. However, the soil was not very good, and cultivating it did not provide enough of a livelihood. As a result, a lot of Kurpie people have emigrated, some to the United States.

These special geographic conditions created an isolation of the Kurpie zielone region, delaying the process of modernization. This, in turn, helped to preserve the old folklore. That is why, even today, the old costumes are worn in some villages (mainly by women), and old customs, old ways of speech, and old songs and dances are still alive. The isolation of the villages also encouraged the preservation of local variations in the costumes and dances. There are, for instance, several ways of dancing the Powolniak. There are many tunes to which it can be done, some in 3/4 and some in 2/4 time. The tune used here is in 2/4 time, which makes it more challenging to dance to, as the turning pattern uses 3 beats. The name of the dance means "a slow dance," which it is not at all. Traditionally, it would start with all the cpls lined up against a wall, dancing the preparatory, warming-up stamps and steps in place; then cpls would take their turn in doing the quick turns around the room, and then returning to the "resting-up" spot against the wall. This, however, is not practical in the American folk dancing situation.

In Kurpie dancing many steps are done on springy knees, with torso erect and a straight neck. This may be because the woman, when in full costume, is wearing on her head a "czołko" [CHOOW-koh], an 8-in high crown, tied in the back, made out of cardboard, covered with black velvet and ornamented with colored tapes, flowers and sequins, and she has to dance carefully so that the "czołko" does not become displaced. The "czołko" is worn by unmarried girls only, while married women wear a starched kerchief tied in a very special way. While wearing the "czołko," the girls get so used to that rigid posture, that they keep it even when they start wearing a kerchief.

One cannot help but notice the similarity of the Powolniak with some of the Swedish turning dances. During the XVII century, after their invasion of Poland, the Swedish soldiers brought home some of the Polish dances, steps, and tunes, and there are many other examples of cultural interaction between the two countries. This also resulted from the fact that Poland, at that time, had 3 kings from the Waza dynasty of Sweden.



(cont.)

The Powolniak Turning Step - one full CW turn takes  $1\frac{1}{2}$  meas. Step is done on slightly bent knees. M: step R ft fwd through the heel, starting a CW turn (ct 1 of 1st meas); step L ft bkwd, continuing the CW turn (ct 2 of 1st meas); place toes of your R ft on the floor behind your L heel and complete the turn (ct 1 of 2nd meas). Repeat of step is done on ct 2 of 2nd meas and cts 1,2 of 3rd meas. W: do the step identically to the M, except start the sequence by stepping L ft bkwd (ct 1 of 1st meas), then placing toes of your R ft behind your L heel (ct 2 of 1st meas), etc. (Note: the cue is M: R - L - touch R, W: L - touch R - R, see diagram on last page of the Powolniak.)

Formation: Cpls around the room in open shldr-waist pos, both facing LOD and slightly twd ptr; M is slightly leaning twd ptr and his free (L) hand is in a fist, placed on the fwd part of his own hip, elbow slightly fwd; with her free (R) hand W holds her skirt, spreading it out to the side. (Note: ptrs may also join the outside hands at waist level, elbows slightly bent.)

MeasuresPATTERNINTRODUCTION

1-4 No action.

I. PREPARATION (Mel A - 6 meas played twice)

- 1-11 Beg M-L, W-R, move smoothly in LOD with 11 small, sliding, flat two-steps.  
12 With 2 accented steps (M-RL, W-LR) ptrs face each other and assume closed social dance pos, straight arms joined and extended to sides.

Variations to Fig I

- 1-11 Done in place - be careful not to be in the way of the moving cpls:  
1. With wt on inside ft, both knees bent, do a wtless stamp with outside ft on ct 1 of each meas.  
2. Beg outside ft, with bent and springy knees do 2 steps per meas.

Done moving in LOD:

3. Beg with outside ft, move in LOD with 2 small steps per meas, done on bent and springy knees, barely lifting the soles of your ft off the floor.  
4. For M only: still in original pos move in LOD with 11 small sliding step-together's, with L ft facing in LOD and accenting with it on each ct.  
12 In all 4 variations, with 3 steps (cts 1,&2, M-LRL, W-RLR) or with 1 step-hold (ct 1-2, M-L, W-R) get into the pos of meas 12 (Fig I).

Note: ptrs do not have to move with the same step-variation; for instance, M can use the polka step (meas 1-11, Fig I), while W uses the walking step (nr. 3), or M can use the sliding step (nr. 4), while W uses the polka step.

(cont.)

II. TURNING AROUND THE ROOM (Mel B - 16 meas, see diagram below)

- 1-12 Dance 8 Turning Steps, moving in LOD, but make only  $3/4$  of a turn with the first one, as M is facing out of circle instead of LOD.  
 13 Start one more Turning Step (M-R, L; W-L, touch R).  
 14 Complete the last Turning Step (M-touch R; W-R) (ct 1); releasing hold of inside arms (M-R, W-L), raise the joined outside hands (M-L, W-R) overhead and step M-R ft, almost in place, W-L ft, starting to turn CW under the joined hands (ct 2).  
 15-16 With 4 more steps M (LRLR) move slightly in LOD, helping ptr to turn, W (RLRL) continue and complete 1 or 2 CW turns.

Variations to Fig II

1. For M only: On 3rd beat of Turning Step place R ft further in back of L heel and momentarily kneel, R knee close to floor; do this not more than 3 times per set of Turns; ptrs continue holding the outside hands, or they may release them, placing fists on own hips, W may support ptr by placing her L hand under his R arm.
2. In  $7\frac{1}{2}$  meas dance 5 Turning Steps; move out of the way of turning cpls and with the remaining  $8\frac{1}{2}$  meas turn CCW in place with 17 steps, beg M-R, W-L; you can move either with a step (M-R, W-L) bending the knees as you step, followed by a step (M-L, W-R) or with scissors-kick steps.

Repeat the whole dance 5 more times (6 times in all).

Diagram

\*) place R ft behind L heel

Dance introduced in June 1977, at a workshop with the Univ. of Cincinnati International Folk Dancers, by Ada & Jaś Dziewanowski, who learned it from Teresa Stusińska, dance teacher of the Regional Ensemble "Kurpie" from Ostrołęka, and from the local people in Myszyniec and Kadzidło. Do not reproduce these directions without the Dziewanowskis' permission.