

VÄSTERDALSK BAKMES
(Sweden)

Västerdalsk bakmes, a restored regional ethnic dance, comes from the western district of the province of Dalarna, specifically Särna and Transtrand. Gordon E. Tracie learned it in Sweden in 1951 and taught it at Skandia Folkdance Society, Seattle.

Pronunciation: vest-ehr-dahlsk BAWK-mehs

Records: Viking V-821a
Viking SMF-200, side A, band 4. 3/4 meter.

Formation: Cpls in open shldr-waist hold facing LOD, ready to move fwd.

The following parts are not figures in the regular sense, but merely non-turning and turning segments which can be alternated at will, with no fixed number of meas for either.

OPEN POLSKA FWD ("försteg")

In open shldr-waist hold, beginning on L ft, take three (or more if desired) L-ft open polska steps fwd in LOD.

TRANSITION TO REVERSE-HALF-TURN POLSKA

Whenever desired, cpl assumes reverse-sidecar polska hold, as follows:

ct

- 1 M steps L into LOD with emphasis (usually a stamp), while W steps on L to begin cross-over in front of M;
- 2 no wt change: M holds L on floor, while W continues turn on L;
- 3 M steps R into LOD, while W steps on R to complete cross-over to reverse-sidecar polska hold.

REVERSE-HALF-TURN POLSKA ("bakmes")

Cpl turn with L-ft (reverse) half-turn polska steps, completing one full revolution CCW per two meas, thus:

ct

- 1 M leads diag fwd L on L ft to initiate CCW, while W steps on her L ft around behind her R ft;
- 2 hold (no wt change), allowing R leg to reach around CCW, in front;
- 3 M sets R ft in front of L ft, forming a "T" (L toe at R ft instep), while W brings her R ft up alongside her L and takes wt on it.
- 4 M steps L ft around behind so as to form an "L" (L toe adjacent to R heel, at R angle), while W steps diag fwd L into LOD on L ft;
- 5 hold (no wt change), allowing body to continue to turn CCW;
- 6 M brings R ft up to his L and steps on it; W steps on R ft beside her L ft.

As will be seen from the above, the 6-ct turn is such that the M starts the pattern on ct 1 directly after the transition, while the W simultaneously starts the same pattern on ct 4. Thus the M steps fwd as the W steps bkwd, and vice versa.

Whenever desired, cpl can break out into open shldr-waist hold again, and repeat open polska steps fwd, followed by transition and turn, etc., to end of music.

VÄSTERDALSK BAKMES (continued)ALTERNATE "FÖRSTEG"

Cpl moves fwd in LOD with L-ft open polska steps, as above, but in reverse-sidecar polska hold, with M facing fwd, W bkwd, or vice-versa, as desired.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

"Bakmes" is a Swedish dialect word implying "baklänges" (backwards), hence its reference to the reverse- or backwards-turn in certain dances. Most of these dances are found in western and northern Sweden, but one also survives in the Swedish districts of Finland (Finländsk bakmes-polka). The same reverse-rotation form is found in Norway in one of the figures of Rørospols where it is called "vrangsmu" (literally, "wrong-turn"). The form described here is from the western districts of the province of Dalarna which border Norway's Østerdalen (the East Valley), home of Rørospols, so it is not surprising that there are similarities. Compared with the Norwegian Pols, however, it would appear that over the years the Swedish counterpart polska has fragmented, so that some parts of the full "suite" as still danced in Røros today (and can be traced back to the 16th century in Sweden) are found in some places, others in other places. As an example: when the Hambo began to replace the "rundpolska" (as in Gammal polska) in the Transtrand area, the half-turn "bakmes" outlived the full-turn L-ft polska.

As danced in the "old days," the polska and bakmes were far from mundane. To quote from J. D. Lamb, who did research in Western Dalarna recently: "The dance lends itself to show-off figures. It is usual for the man to slap the outside of the right boot from time to time during the bakmes turn, on ct 2. He can also drop to the R knee on ct 1, the L knee on ct 4, or even do both in succession. Another characteristic stunt is called "kasting" of high kicking. Here the man kicks his feet over his head on ct 2 and clicks his heels, or kicks the ceiling if it is low enough. A good dance used to be considered one in which there were as many footprints on the ceiling as on the floor! "Kasting" is easier in closed position with the man's R arm reaching under the woman's arm to grasp her shoulder. The man uses her for support as he jumps. In modern Sweden it is not unusual for young women to do all the slaps and "kasts" alternately with the men."

Presented by Gordon E. Tracie