

RØROS-POLS

(Norway)

Røros-pols (approx: RUM-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 "turkansar" (figure-dances) such as Reinlendar med Turar, Seksmannsril and Attetur, which are thoroughly documented in the official Norwegian folkdance manual, the ethnic country-dances have not passed through 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 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 4 couples in various dance positions. It is entitled "Bonddans" (Farmer or Peasant Dance). The remarkable thing is that the dancers are pictured in 4 sequences in which every detail corresponds to the figures of a dance found in Norway in the area of the town 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 throughout northern Scandinavia (it was danced in western Sweden up to a generation ago) has managed to survive up into our day, a span of 4 to 5 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 of times 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 through 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 Sønderrhoning of Denmark are remnants of this same tradition. However in all of these dances the slow fore-dance music has given away to the livelier afterdance 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 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" 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 Norwegian dance to American folkdancers 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 Anderssen.

MUSIC: NGK TD7, LPNES 65, Polydor 2382 018. , Viking 307

FORMATION: Any number of couples moving 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 the USA, deliniation of the various components of this dance must and need 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 M, 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 may be granted; All the dancers may be coordinated so that the figures and transitions are uniform and synchronized.

INTRODUCTION:

M initially takes his ptr by inside hand (M R, W 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 (down and 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 L side.

Transition:

W crosses over in front of M as she twirls CCW 2 or 3 times, under joined L hands (W ends on M R side). Dance pos now changes so that the M still holds W L hand with his L, but directly in front of them, 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 and to his L side. W turning 1/2 turn CCW with L Pols step, assuming new dance pos for both as follows: R arm sharply bent, holding ptr upper arm, and L hand around ptr waist. W is to L of M in this pos (L shldr to L shldr).

Closed step I (Reverse turn)

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

<u>MEN'S STEP</u>	<u>WOMEN'S STEP</u>
Ct 1 - Fwd on L in order to beg CCW pivot	Bwd on L ft
Ct 2 - Hold pos	R up to L
Ct 3 - R up to L, cont CCW pivot	Turn CCW on L, L turn 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, cont CCW pivot, to complete one full revolution	Turn so back is LOD, R ft turned opp LOD.

Repeat above figure several times.

Transition: As M steps back, he grasps W L hand with his R, and twirls her one or more turns CCW under her arm, to take a semi-closed waltz pos (but with M L hand grasping W R fingers slightly, 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 L Pols step for several meas.

Transition: For the M, the transition from the L Pols step to the Pols turn is direct without pause, starting on L (ct 1). W holds (ct 1) while M steps in front and they assume the following pos: R hand on ptrs back, slightly above waist, and own L hand on ptrs R shldr. W is a bit to the R of M.

Closed Step II (Pols Turn) In this new closed pos, cpls turn CW moving 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 but the Pols is considerably livlier, largely due to a much faster tempo.

MAN'S STEP

Ct 1 - Step on L, leading around CW
Ct 2 Continue turning L while keeping R close by so that it trails around in contact with floor, dip slightly
Ct 3 Step onto R, turning enough to complete a full revolution, landing on R in fwd LOD

Ct 1

Cts 2-3-

W ftwork is very close tog and low to the floor

WOMAN'S STEP

Ct 1 Hold (only done during transition)
Ct 2 Step on R between M ft (dip slight)
Ct 3 Step L

Ct 1 Retain wt on L, touch R

Cts 2-3 Repeat above cts 2 & 3

Conclusion:

After completing a number of closed Pols Turns, the cpl separates, M moves LOD while dancing basic L Pols step. As M lets the W go, she continues to make 1 turn CW and then falls behind the M in the L Pols step. Then the entire sequence is begun anew.

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 wishes to progress.

The background by Gordon E. Tracie is the most extensive, if not the only written information available on this dance. It is therefore a privilege to be able to include his material in our notes.

Ingvar and Jofrid Sodal