

POLS / RØROSPOLS

(Pohls / RUHR-ohs pohls)

Skandia CD, track 21

NOMENCLATURE

Credible English Title Pols dance, this version from Røros.

ETHNO-CULTURAL ATTRIBUTES

Heritage Norwegian.
U.S. Source Ingvar Sodal in the 1960's.
Category Regional ethnic couple dance.
Motivation and application Recreational, non-performance-oriented.

MUSICAL ATTRIBUTES

Type Triple-meter (3/4) pols rhythm.

CHOREOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTES

Function Individual couple dance.
Character and form With spirit and agility. Flowing, not tense.
Footwork Parallel, opposite.
Specific steps Open pols step, closed pols turn, [*vrangsnu*](#) ("wrong turn," described in text).
Dance holds Described in text.
Formation Any number of couples moving LOD (CCW).

THE DANCE ROUTINE

Note: Please read all of the Background Information section, particularly the Comments portion. To conform to descriptive techniques understandable in the USA, delineation of the various components of this dance must be based upon arbitrary phrasing and the use of terminologies of which the "native" dancers are, of course, unaware.

A. Trailing (Introduction):

M initially takes his partner by inside hand (M's R, W's L), and they begin moving out to the floor forward in LOD (CCW) using open L pols step for both M and W (as follows):

- Count 1: Step L (natural walking step, heel contacting floor first).
Count 2: "Hold" position (L in front of R, this is not a sudden stop, the natural forward flow of the body continues).
Count 3: Step R (another natural walking step, as above).

The procedure also could be described as: Count 1, step on L heel. Count 2 step on L sole. Count 3, step forward on R.

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

Transition to open hold:

Still facing forward in LOD, W crosses over in front of M, under joined L hands, so as to end up on M's R side. Dance position now changes to open hold: M continues to hold W's L hand with his L, but directly in front. He then places his R hand under W's L arm (cradling her arm), grasping her R wrist with his R hand.

B. Open pols forward (Forward Step I):

In the open hold (above), couple moves forward LOD, both dancing open L pols step until M decides to transition.

Transition to reverse-sidecar hold:

This preferably occurs on the last measure of a phrase.

- Count 1: M stamps L foot and stops in place, while he simultaneously pulls W completely across in front of him and to his L side. W begins a ½ turn CCW by stepping on her L foot.
Count 2: M holds position. W continues to pivot on L foot.
Count 3: M continues to hold position, shifting weight to R, while W completes her pols step (and ½ turn) by stepping on her R foot. Couple is now assumes closed reverse-sidecar hold: W to the L of M (L shoulder to L shoulder), W facing approximately RLOD; for both M and W: R arm sharply bent, holding partner's upper arm, L hand around partner's waist.

C. CCW *Vrangsnu* ("Wrong turn," Turning Step I):

In reverse-sidecar position, couple turns CCW in the following manner, making one full rotation CCW for each 2 measures.

Man's step:

- Count 1: Forward in LOD on L in order to begin CCW pivot.
- Count 2: Hold position, continuing CCW pivot on L).
- Count 3: R up to L, continuing CCW pivot.
- Count 4: Backward in LOD on L (feet appear to form a capital "T").
- Count 5: Hold position.
- Count 6: R up to L, continuing CCW pivot, to complete one full rotation.

Woman's step:

- Count 1: Backward in LOD on L foot.
- Count 2: R up to L, beginning CCW pivot.
- Count 3: Forward slightly in LOD on L foot.
- Count 4: R forward in LOD.
- Count 5: L forward, past R, continuing CCW pivot.
- Count 6: Step R, turning so facing RLOD, to complete one full rotation. Above figure is repeated for as long as M desires.

Transition to semi-closed hold:

As M steps back (count 4), he grasps W's L hand (which is on his waist) with his R and twirls her one or more turns CCW under his arm, to take a semi-closed waltz position (but with M's L hand grasping W's R fingers slightly, rather than a palm-to-palm hold as in ordinary waltz hold) facing forward LOD.

D. Semi-closed pols forward (forward step II):

In this semi-closed waltz position, couple moves forward LOD with open L pols step for as long as M desires.

Transition to closed hold:

For the M, the transition from L pols step to the pols turn is direct without pause. On count 1, M steps in front of W while she steps L in place, and they each assume the following position: R hand on partner's back, slightly above waist, and own L hand on partner's R shoulder. W is a bit to the R of M (an "equilateral" hold).

E. CW *Rundpols* ("Round dance") turn (Turning step II):

In this equilateral hold, couple turns CW moving forward in LOD, making one rotation for each measure of music (3 counts). This is very similar to that found in the Swedish *gammal polska* turn, but the pols is considerably livelier, largely due to a much faster tempo.

Man's step:

- Count 1: Step on L, leading around CW.
- Count 2: Pivoting CW on L while bringing R close by so that it trails around in contact with floor. Dip slightly.
- Count 3: Step forward in LOD onto R, turning enough to complete a full rotation.

Woman's step:

- Count 1: Hold, weight on L (only done during transition).
- Count 2: Step forward in LOD on R between M's feet, dip slightly.
- Count 3: Step L (around M), turning enough to complete a full rotation.
- Count 1: Retain weight on L, place R on floor near L ("Both").
- Count 2: Step forward in LOD onto R between M's feet, dip slightly.
- Count 3: Step L (around M), turning enough to complete a full rotation.

Steps should be small, feet close together and close to the floor at all times.

Transition to trailing, Version I:

After completing as many closed pols turns as M desires, M stops the rotation by dancing basic L pols step forward in LOD. He picks up W L hand in his R, while W takes three quick steps (RLR) to free her L foot. Then the entire sequence (A - E) is begun anew.

Transition to trailing, Version II:

After completing as many closed pols turns as M desires, the couple separates: M moves forward in 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 (A - E) is begun anew.

Note: Whether the W turns CW (as in version II) or does not turn is more or less up to the W and how crowded the floor is at the time of transition.

There is no fixed number of times the above sequence is to be danced, for this depends entirely on how quickly the M wishes to progress and which sections of the dance the M prefers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History.

Rørospols 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, Seksmannsril and Åttetur, which are thoroughly documented in the official Norwegian folk dance 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 near as rich a living tradition in native dance forms as Norway.

Besides being a delightful and exhilarating dance in its own right, Rørospols 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 almost 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 in Norway, a span of four to five centuries - 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 oftentimes 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- Galliard, so common at the time of the Renaissance. The many forms of Polska found throughout Sweden (Gammal polska, Boda polska, et al) are remnants of this same tradition. However in all of these dances the slow fore-dance music has given way to the livelier after-dance music, leaving the introductory figures to be done to the same tempo 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.

Comments.

It should be pointed out that Rørospols is no "easy" dance, even though figures may appear simple enough. The accomplished Pøls 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" difficult to describe or learn, but infinitely rewarding once it is mastered. Only through long exposure can an outsider become a true Pøls dancer. It is hoped that the introduction of this 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.

In a sense, the Pøls described here 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 measures for each figure. The changes from part to part are mostly left up to the whim of the M, but not without respect to the "flow" of the couples 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 remain constant. In the case of exhibition, a certain concession to exigencies of performance may be granted: all the dancers may be coordinated so that the figures and transitions are uniform and synchronized.

This Version.

It should be pointed out also that the version of Røros pøls described here dates from the 1960's. It does not include updates from later dance workshops taught in the Pacific Northwest by several respected dance instructors from the Røros area and by others well known for their careful documentation.

Because the dance is so old it can properly be considered to have more than one "correct" version. Particular areas of difference may involve the woman's footwork, the number of her turns and the timing in the *vrangsnø*.

Whatever version you use, know from whom you learned it (especially if you are a dance teacher) and enjoy that version!