

SHER -- Jewish (Poland)
(shair)
(Square dance or quadrille)

Translation: Shears.

Record: Folkraft LP-36 (side B band 3).

Formation: Quadrille: four couples form a square, each woman on right of man. Couple 1 has back to music and couples are numbered clockwise 1-2-3-4.

Note: Walking Steps are used throughout, two Steps per measure as described below. (Also possible: Two-Steps throughout, one per measure.)

Music 2/4
Measure

FIGURE I - Circle

1-4 Join hands and CIRCLE LEFT (counts 1-8).
5-8 CIRCLE RIGHT similarly, to place (counts 1-8).

FIGURE II - Exchange places

9-10 Couples 1 and 3, inside elbows bent and hands joined with partner at shoulder level, pass face-to-face (man leading woman) and exchange places (counts 1-4).
11-12 Couples 2 and 4 the same; exchange places.
13-16 REPEAT measures 17-20 to original place.

FIGURE III - Sher for Man 1

17-24 Man 1 and woman 2 move forward toward each other until right shoulders are adjacent (counts 1-4), move backward two Steps (counts 5-6), move forward and pass left shoulders with each other (counts 7-12), man 1 turn clockwise with man 2 (each holding other's upper arms with both hands) while woman 2 turn clockwise with woman 1 (elbows bent, hands joined at shoulder level (counts 13-16)).
25-32 REPEAT measures 17-24 and return to original position where man 1 and woman 2 each turn clockwise with own partner (elbows bent, hands joined at shoulder level).
33-48 REPEAT measures 17-32, man 1 with woman 3, etc.
49-64 REPEAT measures 17-24, man 1 with woman 4, etc.

REPEAT Figures I-II-III except Man 2 lead in the Sher.

REPEAT Figures I-II-III except Man 3 lead in the Sher.

REPEAT Figures I-II-III except Man 4 lead in the Sher.

REPEAT Figures I-II and finish with a bow to partner.

ADDITIONAL FIGURES

Thread the Needle: All join hands in a circle, except for man 1 and woman 2. Man 1 lead the other three couples moving clockwise under an arch formed by couple 2 then back to place (man 2 turn clockwise 3/4 so his right hand rests over his own left shoulder); man 1 lead the remaining two couples under an arch formed by woman 3 and man 2 (woman 3 turn clockwise 3/4 around as did man 2), and continue similarly until entire square is in a "threaded" formation. Man 1 then joins his left hand with woman 2's right hand on her own left shoulder and all circle clockwise moving forward for sixteen Steps (or until end of a musical phrase). Note: The traditional Sher always ended

continued...

SHER - (Cont'd)

with this Figure, but it is optional and nowadays it is omitted or replaced by a simple Hora (see below).

Unthread the Needle: Man 1 release his left hand from the right hand of woman 2 and man 1 turn left once around then move backward in a series of small counterclockwise circles, first under the arch between woman 1 and man 4, then under the other arches similarly until all have unwound. Then man 1 lead others in a serpentine, anywhere, until the music ends. Note: This Figure is optional, also.

Hora: In "T" position: STEP sideward left on left foot (count 1), STEP on right foot across in back of left (count 2), STEP sideward left on left foot (count 3), HOP on left foot and swing right leg across in front of left (count 4), STEP sideward right on right foot (count 5), HOP on right foot and swing left leg across in front of right (count 6). Note: The Hora ending to a Sher is an American Jewish innovation used also by the international folk dance groups.

"T" POSITION. Arms extended sideward, hands on neighbors' shoulders, resembling the letter "T".

Note: The Sher is a Hassidic square dance for which there are dozens of tunes and figure variations. This version is from Poland. It seems that if a dance was in square formation the Jews called it a Sher, which means Scissors or Shears.

Since many East European Jews were tailors, a dance with the "shears" figure seems logical; however, the Sher is a wedding quadrille and not a craft (occupational) dance. For the East European Jews a wedding was about the only outlet for dancing. As the Sher was usually danced by both the newlyweds and the aged relations it was at once a joyous and a sedate dance.

The passing of right shoulders and the backing away and passing of left shoulders indicated the blades of the shears, hence the name. A handkerchief is used to prevent bodily contact with the bare flesh of a woman, tabu among the Orthodox Jews. Originally such a handkerchief was held by the man, only; he held it by the top corners, and as he approached a woman, she took the bottom corners and folded the handkerchief upward so the couple could press firmly against each others' fists through the handkerchief as though holding hands. Nowadays man and woman each hold a handkerchief separately.

This recording has enough music to include the threading and unthreading figures which seem typical of most Shers, though not enough music for the dance in its most complete form.

As presented by Vyts Beliajus, Summer of 1975
at Lighted Lantern Folk Dance Camp