

## VIRGINIA REEL

American

- PRONUNCIATION:** vr-DJIN-yuh REEL
- TRANSLATION:** Reel from Virginia
- SOURCE:** Dick Oakes learned this dance from folk dance groups in the Los Angeles, California, area. This dance routine by Fenton "Jonesy" Jones, was popularized in the folk dance arena in the United States by Olga Kulbitsky. Bob Brown taught it at the 1973 Idyllwild Folk Dance Workshop in Idyllwild, California.
- BACKGROUND:** The Virginia Reel, named after the state of Virginia, is an American dance in contra formation. The dance was first published in England in 1695 in John Playford's "English Dancing Master" by the name "Sir Roger De Coverly." It was danced by New World colonists. Perhaps because movie directors have used the Virginal Reel in many films portraying early American life, it has often been thought of in Europe as "THE" American folk dance. A similar Greek Pontic dance / game is called Miteritsa, whose origins, however, are thought to be Russian.
- Billy Burke says, "I refer to it in class when I teach "Bow Belinda" a dance that is almost the same and often called Virginia Reel. I do the Virginia Reel you describe, which has all of the couples moving as opposed to diagonal opposites. Sir Roger is cool because it is mentioned in "A Christmas Carol" by Dickens in the Fezziwigs warehouse scene. The 1936 Alistair Simms version on film actually includes the correct dance."
- The dance may be done to a live caller, a recorded caller, or according to the dancers' memories to strictly instrumental music. The Virginia Reel is a "living" dance, and as such, has developed several variations. The one described here is a popular one with folk dancers in the United States.
- MUSIC:** Folkraft (45rpm) 1342;  
MacGregor (45rpm) 7345;  
or any good "Turkey in the Straw" music.
- FORMATION:** Column of four, five, or six cpls, ptrs facing across from each other. M are in one line with L shldr to music (or head of hall); W in a line facing M. Hands hang freely at sides. The lines should be approximately six feet apart.
- METER/RHYTHM:** 2/4
- STEPS/STYLE:** WALK: Step L (ct 1); step R (ct 2). The movement is smooth and flowing and resembles an ordinary, natural walking step with the heel making contact first and with the wt rolling fwd onto the ball of the ft. More recently, a gliding step on the balls of the feet is being danced in Contra and Square Dances.
- SASHAY (from the French: Chasse): Step L<sup>R</sup> swd (ct 1); close R<sup>L</sup> to L<sup>R</sup>, taking wt (ct &); repeat action of cts 1& (cts 2&).
- SKIP: Step L<sup>R</sup> (ct 1); low, scooting hop L<sup>R</sup> (ct &); repeat action of cts 1& (cts 2&).
- Style is relaxed and easy but with verve and zest.

## INTRODUCTION

1-4 No action. Wait through 4 meas of foot tapping.

### I. FORWARD AND BACK

1-2 Walk fwd three steps (cts 1,2,1); touch free ft to floor and bow to ptr (ct 2);  
3-4 Walk three steps bwd to place and touch free ft next to supporting ft on last ct;  
5-8 Repeat action of meas 1-4.

### II. ELBOW SWINGS

1-4 Hooking R elbows with ptr, walk 8 steps CW around ptr;  
5-8 Hooking L elbows with ptr, walk 8 steps CCW around ptr back to orig pos.

### III. TWO-HAND SWING AND DO-SI-DO

1-4 Joining both hands straight across with ptr, walk 8 steps around ptr to orig pos;  
5-6 Do-Si-Do: Dropping hands, walk fwd, passing R shldr with ptr and, without turning, exchange places with ptr;  
7-8 Walk bwd, passing L shldr with ptr, returning to orig pos.

### IV. HEAD COUPLE SASHAY DOWN AND BACK

1-4 Head cpl joins hands straight across and moves down the ctr to the foot of the set with 8 Sashay steps;  
5-8 Head cpl dances 8 Sashay steps back up the set to end in original pos.

### V. ELBOW-REEL DOWN AND SASHAY BACK

1-4 Head cpl starts a reel by swinging ptr a full CW turn with the R elbow, dancing 4 Skip steps. Continuing on, head cpl separates and each swings the next dancer in the opp line with the L elbow, dancing 4 Skip steps.  
5-20 Repeat action of meas 1-4 until head cpl has reached the foot of the set, using any left over meas in R elbow reel with ptr at foot of set.  
21-24 Joining hands straight across with ptr, head cpl move back up the ctr of the set with Sashay steps, separating and ending in orig Formation pos.

### VI. HEAD COUPLE CAST OFF AND FORM AN ARCH

1-12 Head M and W turn to the outside of their respective lines and lead their lines to the foot of the set. Head cpl joins both hands across and raises them to form an arch at the foot of the set. The second cpl joins inside hands and leads the other cpls under the arch and the set to become the new head cpl.

Repeat entire dance from beg until dancers are all back to their orig pos or until music ends.

---

CALLS BY FRANK L. KALTMAN  
(on Folkraft recording)

Everybody, forward and back,  
Once more, forward and back.  
Once around with the right elbow.  
Two-hand swing and around you go.  
Head couple sashay down,  
And sashay back.  
Head couple, the elbow reel.

A right to the middle and a left on the side,  
A right to the middle and a reel on down.  
Now meet in the middle and a sashay back.  
Cast off and down you go.  
Now raise that arch and raise it high,  
Duck through and away you fly.

---

Copyright © 2012 by Dick Oakes