

Presented by Jerry McCulloch

THE DOUBLE SHORT POI

(Maori)

**SOURCE:** Other Maori dances have their equivalent elsewhere in Polynesia, but the poi is distinctive to New Zealand. There are two types of poi dance--that using the long poi and that using the more familiar short poi. It is said that in days of old, the long poi was one of the arts taught only to the women of high rank. Its technique was jealously guarded and not passed on to the lower classes. These less-fortunate maidens in the end devised the short poi and perfected the art of twirling it for their own amusement and as a counter-attraction to the dance done by their betters. The short poi is of pre-European origin.  
This version of the double short poi was taught to the women of the Kia Ora Club of BYU by Arapata Whaanga of Nuhaka, New Zealand.

**THE POI BALL:** For practical purposes it is best to make a poi which will stand considerable use. The usual method is to bunch paper into a ball about 4 inches in diameter and cover this with unbleached calico or even plastic. The string of the handle should be thick fishing cord, or string of a similar thickness, with a reasonably sized knot at the far end to facilitate holding. The string for short poi is about 9 inches long and that of the long poi, the length of the user's arm.

**MUSIC:** In pre-European times, the poi was accompanied by a rhythmic chant or the men shouting a haka. These are still used, but it is more common nowadays for a European-type tune in 2/4, 3/4 or 4/4 time, to be used. Best example is the tune included with this description.

To be sung to the tune of "Little Brown Jug"

"hoki hoki tonu mai  
Te Wairua o te tau.  
Kite awhi reinga  
Kite nei kiri e  
Kite nei kiri e."

(This is a very simple chant and more exciting melodies can be learned for variation.)

**THE DANCE:** The dance consists of a number of different figures. Each of these figures is performed for the length of one verse of the song and the song is sung as many times as is necessary to carry out all the figures of the particular dance. Usually the last line is repeated and during this, the leader (who also controls the rhythm of the dance) will do the next action to show the group what is to follow.

LEARNING THE POI: Nothing should be attempted until the poi twirl is thoroughly mastered. The patting of the poi in movements is done with the fingers and the back of the hand. It is a light tap only, designed to arrest the poi ball and change its direction of swing.

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PATTERN

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TWIRLING THE POI

- 1 The poi is suspended
- 2 With a quick wrist movement, the hand is flicked up and the poi follows in a circle until it smacks against the back of the hand
- 3 The poi bounces off the back of the hand and as the ball swings down, the hand twists over from the wrist so that the palm is facing up. Thus the poi describes a circle and comes up to hit the back of the hand from beneath.
- 4 Bouncing off, the poi swings back to the starting position and the movement begins again.

SET NO I: FORWARD AND BACK

- 1 Using the basic twirling movement the poi is first twirled down from a palms down position and bringing the R hand fwd and the L hand back--just about waist high.
- 2 As poi bounces up, the arms begin to reverse position
- 3 The poi is brought down as in meas 1 with L arm in a fwd pos, and R close to the body.
- 4 As poi bounces up, the arms again begin to reverse position to start over again. (Repeat to end of verse)

SET NO II: DOWN AND UP

- 1-4 Using the basic twirling movement, both pois are held at waist level for down figure.
- 5-8 Arms come fwd and up to head height and continue the basic twirl going out and back instead of down and up.  
(Repeat 1-4 and 5-8 until end of verse)

SET NO III: FORWARD AND BACK CLICKS

(Note: "Clicks" are performed by bouncing poi ball off of back of hand and palm in rapid succession.)

- 1& Click with R arm fwd and L at body
- 2& Click with arms even
- 3& Click with L arm fwd and R at body
- 4& Click while moving arms even
- 5& Basic twirl with R arm fwd and L at body
- 6& Basic twirl with L arm fwd and R at body

Repeat full set until end of verse.

SET NO IV: DOWN CLICKS

- 1-4 Click with both arms held close to body and head down
- 5 Basic down pattern beginning of twirl
- & Bring arms up high and face up
- 6-8 Twirl back and fwd with hands held high.  
Repeat : full set until end of verse.

SET NO V: OPEN CROSS

- 1 On twirl to back of hand cross R arm on top of L
- & Move arms together and meet in front of body
- 2 On twirl to back of hand, open arms
- & Begin cross
- 3 On twirl to back of hand cross L arm over R
- & Begin open movement
- 4 Return to open position.  
Repeat, alternating crossed arms until end of verse

SET NO VI: CONTINUOUS CROSS

- 1-40 Similar to Set No V, but a continuous crossing of arms instead of going into an open position. All performed while using basic poi twirl.

SET NO VII: BODY TURN

- 1-2 Same as Set No I, but leading with R ft and R side of body fwd.
- 3-4 Arms together, facing front
- 5-6 Same as 3-4, Set No I, but leading with L ft and L side of body fwd
- 7-8 Arms together, facing front  
Repeat full set until end of verse. Basic twirl of poi used throughout.

SET NO VIII: ALTERNATING\*\*

- 1-2 R hand does one basic twirl while L hand does one click
- 3-40 Continue, resulting alternate twirls until end of verse.

SET NO IX: TWIRL AND SPIN\*

RIGHT HAND

- 1 Hit outside of R leg with poi, as it bounces
- 2 Twirl across body to L leg and
- 3 Hit outside of L leg with poi, as it bounces
- 4-40 Twirl across body to R leg. Continue pattern to end of verse.

LEFTHAND

- 1-40 Held high while executing basic twirl--bouncing off back of hand and palm.  
Continue to end of verse.

\*These two patterns are rather difficult and take practice. However, they are a lot of fun and develop coordination and concentration, much like patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time!

Variations to these patterns may be developed.