

## GAMMAL POLSKA (Sweden)

*Gammal Polska* (Gahm-mahl Pohl-skah) is a traditional couple dance from Sweden and is the predecessor of the well-known Hambo. It is the most basic and ancient form of the couple-dance *polska*, and today is called *Gammal Polska* (Old Polska). Through the initiative of certain Swedish country fiddlers and folk dance instructors, a number of all-but-forgotten *polska* dances have been "reborn" in Sweden in just the last few years. Each area of the country, of course, has had its own special brand or brands of the dance, differing to some extent in footwork and pattern, but especially in character and styling, depending upon the music typical of that district. But whether these dances come from the southern, central, or northern parts of the land, certain similarities and underlying fundamentals seem to be evident. For one thing, a *polska* step in a couple dance nearly always takes one full revolution in one measure (unlike the waltz, polka, and two-step, which take two measures per full turn). Consequently, each step begins on the same foot (also differing from other dances). Furthermore, the W step is consistently a "follow up" of the M, so that in effect they dance the same step, but each at a different point in the music. Almost all *polska* steps, regardless of which foot or point in the step-pattern they begin on, follow a consistent, nearly rigid order of progression. Thus, by knowing that the M begins on his L foot, for instance, one can predict not only the rest of his step, but the W step as well. This "rule of foot" has proved very helpful in reconstructing nearly vanished *polska* dances.

The dance described here, which can have no specific name other than "Old Polska" (*Gammal Polska*), contains the most basic of the *polska* steps as used in a partner turn. Actually, this turn is but an extension of the straight walk forward, all in syncopated *polska* rhythm; one merely adapts the open step to provide for easy, natural balance in the closed turn, without ever losing the basic "one, —, three, one, —" weight-shift pattern. Actually, the whole thing is extremely simple.

*Gammal Polska* is a prototype of the many *polska* steps and dance forms that developed in northern Scandinavia over the centuries. Alert dancers will recognize it as containing essentially the same footwork as that used in the *Snurrbocken* turn, a step sometimes called *Delsbo-polska* (after a

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district in Hälsingland), or simply *L-foot polska* (referring to the M step). The same step is found in a *Bakmes-polska* from western Dalarna in Sweden, and in the exhilarating "Røros pols" from Osterdalen in Norway.

As in all couple polskas, the M is the master of the dance, and he must lead it firmly, thoroughly, and unerringly. The W in effect gets "a free ride." If the M knows his steps well, the W need only "let him drive," and the result will be a satisfying one. *Gammal Polska* is not a complex dance, but, like the Viennese waltz, it is something that craves patience and practice, for it is subtle. Once mastered, it can be one of the most relaxing yet satisfying of the couple dances, and the conscientious dancer will be amply rewarded for his time.

This dance was personally observed and danced by Gordon E. Tracie through research and field work in Sweden in 1950-51, 1955, and 1960-61.

**MUSIC:** *Record:* Aqua Viking V 830, "Polska from Bingsjö" (45); Sveriges Radio RAEP 2, "Malungnsleken" (45 EP).

**FORMATION:** Cpls in open pos facing LOD. Free hands hang naturally at sides (*not* on hips).

**STEPS AND** Syncopated walking step, Swedish polska step.

**STYLING:** Danced in a relaxed but firm manner, with flowing motion, ft close to the floor, natural walk, heels touching floor first. *Note:* The 2 parts of the dance are not figures in the regular sense, but merely 2 dance pos utilizing essentially the same step, in 1 case open fwd and the other closed turning, alternated at will, with no fixed number of meas for either.

#### PATTERN 3/4

##### I. *Rest steps forward*

In open pos, free hands naturally at sides. Beginning ML-WR, take any number of syncopated walking steps fwd in LOD in time to the music as follows:

M	Count	W
step L	1	step R
hold pos (leave R in place)	2	hold pos (leave L in place)
step R	3	step L

The "ps on "3" and "1" come in immediate succession, but there is a pause between "1" and "2." These should be completely natural, as in a natural walk (the heel making contact with the floor before the rest of the ft), not slides or ballroom "dance-walk." Though somewhat syncopated, the movement should be smooth and flowing, not in any way jerky or military.

##### II. *Closed polska turn*

*Swedish folk dance hold:* This closed pos is common to a great number of older cpl dances throughout Sweden. It combines the best features of the

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conventional closed pos and the shoulder-waist pos; thus: M R arm around W waist, W L hand on M R shoulder; M L arm sharply bent at R angles, forearm parallel to floor with hand open upward; W R arm held straight out from shoulder and resting in M L hand (near her elbow), her R hand holding M L arm just above his elbow. Exact location of M L and W R hand is contingent upon relative arm lengths, but essentially M L arm is bent while W R arm is straight. This allows for M R ft to come between the W ft and her R between his ft, while at the same time providing the solidity of the shoulder-waist hold.

Taking Swedish folk dance hold, cpls turn CW with any number of polska steps, making 1 full revolution for each meas of music while progressing fwd in LOD. The turning step:

M	Count	W
step L in LOD, pivoting CW on L, "leading around" on it	1	step R heel fwd (between M ft)
continue pivot on L (touching R ft to floor near L)	2	roll wt onto ball of R ft
step R in LOD with slight pivot	3	step L fwd on outside of M R, "leading around" on it

W follows M lead. Throughout, the steps should be smooth, but with a certain lilt, which expresses the polska's distinctive rhythm (no dip or bounce as in the hambo). The turn may be continued indefinitely, using the rest steps only when desired.

LOD                    ct 1                    ct 2                    ct 3

