

The Polka Set

(Ireland)

Jeremiah Clifford remembered dancing every night growing up in his home in Killurly East. Every Sunday night there was dancing at a different house. “They used to come eight or nine miles a night. They were all for dance then.” There was no step dancing or *ceili* dancing. People danced the Polka Set and the Right and Left (included in this book). The old crowd danced the Right and Left. Jeremiah last saw the Right and Left danced when he was eighteen years old, but he never learned it. “I danced twenty-two sets one night at Foilmore School and I fell on the last one. I was mad for music and dance and that's what's keeping me alive today. I'm happy after a night's dance for another week or so.”

Matt Joe O'Neil first remembers seeing the Polka Set as a child in his home, but “the priest stopped them and brought it into dance halls.” In the early 1940s there were raffles and all-night dances. Some of the musicians, all accordion players, were Brendan Garvey, Deelis; Danny Riordan, Dooneen; and Danny O'Shea, Ballydarrig. In 1945 the Gaelic League taught *ceili* dancing in Foilmore School, but “the locals mixed in and taught the Polka Set”. There was a dancing master, John Cahill, in the area from North Kerry about 1946-1947 but he was only around for a short time. Sets were popular in the dance halls in the 1950s until rock and roll came in about 1957-1958. “If girls heard a set announced, they would run to the cloakroom or downstairs and now the same ones want to learn it again.” There was the odd set at weddings and house parties. Pubs started set dancing during the summer and Christmas in the late 1970s. *Comhaltas Ceoltóiri Eireann* and *Scar* started set dancing competitions in the area about 1977. Jeremiah Clifford's daughter, Josephine, says, “We used to try to keep the old style, but we would never win. Judges like the tapping and the new style.” Jeremiah Clifford said, “There is too much jumping in the new style. The old style was very smooth around. You wouldn't hear any noise. They might tap a little bit when finishing off. That's all. Today, a lot of them don't have any step. They only fly around.” Bernie Moran states, “The music was started to be played faster about twelve or thirteen years ago (c. 1976) by *Scar* and the young crowd practised the sets and danced it much faster and it caught on. The young crowd wants it as fast as you can play; the old crowd wants it much slower.” Dan McCrohan states, “The Foilmore lads always struck me as people who need it fast. When I played for them for competition, they told me, 'If you err, err on the fast side rather than the slow side.'”

On March 19, 1988 the Foilmore Set won the All-Ireland Final for Set Dancing in Thurles, Co. Tipperary sponsored by *Cheal an Gheinhrih (Comhaltas Ceoltairi Eireann)*. Dan McCrohan of Valencia Island, Co. Kerry played the accordion and the Set was comprised of the following members: Mattie O'Neil of Deelis, Tim Coffey of Kells, John O'Donnell of Bahaghs, Pdraig O'Sullivan of Kippaghs, Eileen Griffin of Coulagh, Mary Clifford of Cahirciveen, Breda Murphy of The River, and Nora Stretton of Laham, Co. Kerry. The Foilmore Set danced the SECOND, THIRD, and FIFTH FIGURES of the Polka Set.

Matt Joe O'Neil says, “The set was slightly lengthened in some figures and shortened in the last figure for competition. It had to be changed in order to give it a chance in competition.” In the FIRST FIGURE, Around the house was added two times and men chain with opposite W replaced Rights around. In the THIRD FIGURE, in place of Walk around the house, a sixteen meas invented figure called Step Around the House was added. Step Around the House was added again in the FOURTH and SIXTH FIGURES. Matt Joe says, “This is not a permanent change.” An adjudicator told the Foilmore dancers to dance in a CCW direction in the FOURTH FIGURE, instead of CW. The FOURTH FIGURE is danced in a CCW direction only in competition. Around the House was added at the end of the FIFTH FIGURE.

The Polka Set (South Kerry)—continued

The first Rights around, Swing, Step around the house, and Dance around the house were removed from the SIXTH FIGURE shortening the SIXTH FIGURE by forty measures.

Matt Joe O'Neil adds, "Set dancing must be practised for social dancing where people can dance in the old style if it is to be kept alive. In that way younger people will have a chance to start and get interested in it." Today, according to Matt Joe O'Neil, about two hundred and fifty people can dance the Polka Set in Foilmore parish.

The Polka Set as danced in Foilmore and surrounding areas has not appeared in publication.

Music: Polkas, for example, *Maggie in the Wood*, *Julia Daly*, *The Girl I Left Behind Me*. 159 beats per minute. 2/4 meter
 Jigs, for example, *Haste to the Wedding*, *Geese in the Bog*, *My Darling Asleep*, *Munster Buttermilk*. 159 beats per minute.
 Slides, for example, *Billy O'Rourke Is the Boy*, *Denis Murphy's Slides*.
 Reels, for example, *Miss McLeod's*.
Set Dances of Ireland, vol V, last six cuts.

Formation: Square set of 4 cpls.

FIRST FIGURE (polkas)

Rights around 8: 1st and 2nd M face in a CW direction and give R hands across low below the waist so that M hold R hands like a handshake in the ctr. M walk for six meas in a CW direction to each M's starting pos: step fwd on L ft and slide R ft to heel of L ft and step fwd on R ft and slide L ft to heel of R ft for each two meas:

M L - R - R - L - L - R - R - L - L - R - R - L -
 Beats/meas 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 1 & 2 &
 M begin to swing with ptrs during the 7th and 8th meas.

Today, M dance six threes in a CW direction to each M's starting pos and begin to swing with ptrs during the 7th and 8th meas.

Swing 8: 1st and 2nd cpls swing in "waltz pos."

Today, some cpls hold hands differently for the swing. In getting into pos to swing ptrs face each other and place R hands on each other's waists. Ptrs place L arms outside and underneath each other's R arm so as to hold L hands like a handshake in front at the waist. All proceed to swing as described above. This variation is not done on Valencia Island.

Change hands 8: 1st and 2nd cpls dance.

(2) While 1st and 2nd M remain in starting pos, 1st and 2nd W dance two threes across the ctr passing each other R shoulder to R shoulder without taking R hands as they pass.

(2) W take L hands like a handshake below the waist with opposite M and dance two threes turning CCW ending facing into the ctr and releasing L hands. W and M turn (one half turn).

(2) While M continue the turn another one half turn ending in place facing into the ctr, W dance two threes across the ctr again passing R shoulder to R shoulder without taking R hands as they pass.

(2) W end with original ptrs in starting pos.

Dance around each other 8: 1st and 2nd cpls dance eight threes in a CCW direction around the ctr of the set and back to starting pos using two meas to turn CW four times: once crossing the set, once through pos opposite starting pos, once crossing back, and the last time into starting pos.

The Polka Set (South Kerry)—continued

On Valencia Island, dance around each other starts differently: 1st and 2nd cpls dance one three into the ctr of the set and one three directly out toward pos to the R of starting pos. W dance backward and M dance fwd. Then, 1st and 2nd cpls dance six threes in a CCW direction around the ctr of the set and back to starting pos using two meas to turn CW three times: once through pos opposite starting pos, once crossing toward starting pos, and the last time into starting pos.

Advance and dance around 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

(4) 1st and 2nd cpls dance four threes: two threes advancing into the ctr and two threes backing into starting pos.

Today, some cpls face into the ctr of the set and M place R arms around W's waists while W place L hands on M's R shoulders.

(4) 1st and 2nd cpls dance four threes in a CCW direction (completing a circle once) turning CW in the space between starting pos and the ctr of the set. Cpls end in starting pos.

Rights around 8: 3rd and 4th M.

Swing 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Change hands 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Dance around each other 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Advance and dance around 8: 3rd and 4th cpls. M slap the ground in front with L ft on the 2nd beat of the eighth meas to end the FIRST FIGURE.

SECOND FIGURE (jigs)

Around the house 16: All four cpls dance sixteen threes in a CCW direction using four meas to reach each succeeding pos to their R:

(4) All four cpls dance two threes in a CCW direction (M fwd and W backward) toward pos on their R and dance two threes turning CW into new pos. (Some cpls dance one three slightly into the ctr, one three toward pos on their R, and two threes turning CW into new pos.)

(4) Again, all four cpls dance two threes in a CCW direction (M fwd and W backward) toward pos on their R and dance two threes turning CW into pos opposite starting pos.

(8) All four cpls repeat, beginning in pos opposite starting pos and ending in starting pos.

Slide in and dance around 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

(4) W dance four threes: two threes advancing into the ctr and two threes backing into starting pos while M dance hop step, hop step, hop step, step step advancing into the ctr and hop step, hop step, hop step, step step backing into starting pos:

W	-----	R - L R - -	L - R L - -	R - L R - -	L - R L - -
M	-----R	L - L R - R	L - R L - L	R - R L - L	R - L R - -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6

The hop is not a leap into the air. Sometimes the hop is simply a lifting of the heel off the ground and dropping it again without raising the ball of the ft. Some W accompany M dancing hop step. *Today, some cpls face into the ctr of the set. M drop L hands and W drop R hands. M keep R arms around W's waists while W keep L hands on M's R shoulders. Some M batter advancing in and dance two threes backing out:*

M	L R R L R R	L R R L - -	L - R L - -	R - L R - -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6

The Polka Set (South Kerry)—continued

(4) 1st and 2nd cpls dance four threes in a CCW direction (completing a circle once) turning in the space between starting pos and the ctr of the set ending in starting pos.

Slide in and dance around 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Around the house 16: All four cpls.

Slide in and dance around 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Slide in and dance around 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Around the house 16: All four cpls.

Slide in and dance around 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Slide in and dance around 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Around the house 16: All four cpls.

Slide in and dance around 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Slide in and dance around 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Around the house 16 All four cpls. M slap the ground in front with L ft on the 4th beat of the last meas to end the SECOND FIGURE.

On Valencia Island, slide in and dance around is danced only once by 1st and 2nd cpls and once by 3rd and 4th cpls.

THIRD FIGURE (polkas)

Around the house 16: All four cpls.

Change hands 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Swing 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls face in a CCW direction in the set (M in the ctr with W on the outside). Ptrs hold R hands in front at W's waist level. All four cpls dance eight threes in a CCW direction around the set passing through each succeeding pos and back to starting pos. *Today, some cpls face in a CCW direction in the set (M in the ctr with W on the outside) and M place R arms around W's waists while W place L hands on M's R shldr.*

Dance around the house again 16: All four cpls.

(8) All four cpls dance eight threes in a CCW direction around the set turning CW four times until all four cpls are in pos opposite starting pos.

(8) All four cpls starting in pos opposite starting pos dance two threes in a CCW direction (M fwd and W backward) toward pos on their R; dance two threes turning CW into new pos; dance two threes in a CCW direction (M fwd and W backward) toward starting pos; dance two threes turning CW into starting pos.

On Valencia Island, dance around the house again (following walk around the house) is replaced with around the house 8 danced two times as follows: All four cpls dance one three into the ctr of the set and one three directly out toward pos to the R of starting pos. W dance backward and M dance fwd. Then, cpls dance six threes in a CCW direction around the set using two meas to turn CW three times into each succeeding pos to the R until all four cpls are back in starting pos.

The Polka Set (South Kerry)—continued

Change hands 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Swing 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls.

Dance around the house again 16 All four cpls. M slap the ground in front with L ft on the 2nd beat of the last meas to end the THIRD FIGURE.

FOURTH FIGURE (jigs)

Around the house 16: All four cpls.

Slide in and cross over 8: 1st and 2nd cpls. Ptrs hold R hands in front at W's waist level.

(4) W dance four threes: two threes advancing into the ctr and two threes backing into starting pos while M dance hop step, hop step, hop step, step step advancing into the ctr and hop step, hop step, hop step, step step backing into starting pos:

W	-----	R - L R - -	L - R L - -	R - L R - -	L - R L - -
M	----- R	L - L R - R	L - R L - L	R - R L - L	R - L R - -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6

The hop is not a leap into the air. Sometimes the hop is simply a lifting of the heel off the ground and dropping it again without raising the ball of the ft. Some W accompany M dancing hop step. *Today, M drop L hands and W drop R hands. M keep R arms around W's waists while W keep L hands on M's R shoulders. Some M batter advancing in and dance two threes backing out:*

M	L R R L R R	L R R L - -	L - R L - -	R - L R - -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6

(4) Ptrs hold R hands in front at W's waist level. 1st and 2nd cpls dance four threes in a CW direction around the ctr of the set turning CW into pos opposite starting pos. *Today, some M place R arms around W's waists while W place L hands on M's R shldr.*

Slide in and cross over 8: 1st and 2nd cpls repeat, beginning in pos opposite starting pos and ending in starting pos.

Swing 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Slide in and cross over 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Slide in and cross over 8: 1st and 2nd cpls repeat, beginning in pos opposite starting pos and ending in starting pos.

Swing 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Slide in and cross over 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Slide in and cross over 8: 3rd and 4th cpls repeat, beginning in pos opposite starting pos and ending in starting pos.

Swing 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Slide in and cross over 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Slide in and cross over 8: 3rd and 4th cpls repeat, beginning in pos opposite starting pos and ending in starting pos.

Swing 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls.

Dance around the house again 16: All four cpls. M slap the ground in front with L ft on the 4th beat of the last meas to end the FOURTH FIGURE.

The Polka Set (South Kerry)—continued

On Valencia Island, dance around the house again (following walk around the house) is replaced with around the house 8: danced two times.

FIFTH FIGURE (slides)

Around the house 16: All four cpls.

Slide in and dance to opposite side 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

(4) 1st and 2nd cpls, ptrs facing each other, dance the slide step into the ctr of the set and back to starting pos:

W	R - - L - -	R - - L - -	L - - R - -	L - R L - -
M	L - - R - -	L - - R - -	R - - L - -	R - L R - -
Beats/Meas	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6

The M slides into the ctr with his L ft, slides his R ft along the floor to the heel of his L ft, slides into the ctr with his L ft again, and slides his R ft along the floor to the heel of his L ft. Sometimes, the M ends the 2nd meas by lifting his R ft low in front while raising and lowering the L heel still keeping the ball of the L ft on the ground. The M then slides back out starting with his R ft, slides his L ft along the floor to the heel of his R ft, and dances one three into starting pos. The w does the same only she starts in with her R ft.

(4) Both cpls dance *four* threes in a CCW direction using two meas to turn CW two times: once crossing the set and once into pos opp starting pos.

Slide in and dance back to place 8: 1st and 2nd cpls repeat, beginning in pos opp starting pos and ending in starting pos.

Slide in and change partners 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

(4) 1st and 2nd cpls slide into the ctr and back out again.

(4) While 1st and 2nd M remain in starting pos, 1st and 2nd W dance *four* threes across the ctr passing each other L shoulder to L shoulder without taking hands as they pass. W end in pos opposite starting pos.

Dance around each other 8: 1st M with 2nd W and 2nd M with 1st W.

Slide in and change partners 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

(4) 1st M with 2nd W and 2nd M with 1st W slide into the ctr and back out again.

(2) While 1st and 2nd M remain in starting pos, 1st and 2nd W dance two threes across the ctr passing each other L shoulder to L shldr without taking hands as they pass..

(2) W take L hands like a handshake below the waist with original ptrs and dance two threes turning CCW ending facing into the ctr and releasing L hands. W and M turn (one half turn).

Change hands 8: 1st and 2nd cpls. M continue the turn another one half turn ending in place facing into the ctr while W begin change hands. Both cpls end in starting pos.

Dance around each other 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Slide in and dance to opposite side 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Slide in and dance back to place 8: 3rd and 4th cpls repeat, beginning in pos opposite starting pos and ending in starting pos.

Slide in and change partners 8: 3rd and 4th cpls. 3rd M ends with 4th W and 4th M ends with 3rd W.

Dance around each other 8: 3rd M with 4th W and 4th M with 3rd W.

Slide in and change partners 8: 3rd M with 4th W and 4th M with 3rd W. Cpls end in starting pos with original ptrs.

The Polka Set (South Kerry)—continued

Change hands 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Dance around each other 8: 3rd and 4th cpls. M slap the ground in front with L ft on the 4th beat of the eighth meas to end the FIFTH FIGURE.

SIXTH FIGURE (polkas)

All loin hands 8: All four cpls facing into the ctr of the set join hands with each other in a circle (R hands in L hands and L hands in R hands) elbows slightly bent with hands a little below shoulder height (W's hands on top of M's hands). All four cpls dance eight threes: two threes advancing into the ctr, two threes back out, two threes into the ctr again, and two threes backing into starting pos. All drop hands. On Valencia Island, M's hands are on top when joining hands.

Swing 8: All four cpls.

Rights around 8: All four M dance while W wait in starting pos.

Swing 8: All four cpls.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls.

Dance around the house again 16 All four cpls.

On Valencia Island, dance around the house again (following walk around the house) is replaced with around the house 8: danced two times.

Rights around 8: All four M. Meanwhile W walk in a CCW direction advancing one pos to wait for M on their R.

Swing 8: 1st W with 4th M; 3rd W with 1st M; 2nd W with 3rd M; 4th W with 2nd M.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls with new ptrs.

Dance around the house again 16: All four cpls with new ptrs.

Rights around 8: All four M. Meanwhile W walk in a CCW direction advancing one pos to wait for M on their R.

Swing 8: 1st W with 2nd M; 3rd W with 4th M; 2nd W with 1st M; 4th W with 3rd M.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls with new ptrs.

Dance around the house again 16: All four cpls with new ptrs.

Rights around 8: All four M. Meanwhile W walk in a CCW direction advancing one pos to wait for M on their R.

Swing 8: 1st W with 3rd M; 3rd W with 2nd M; 2nd W with 4th M; 4th W with 1st M.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls with new ptrs.

Dance around the house again 16: All four cpls with new ptrs.

Rights around 8: All four M. Meanwhile W walk in a CCW direction advancing one pos to wait for original ptrs in starting pos.

Swing 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Walk around the house 8: All four cpls.

Dance around the house again 16 All four cpls. M slap the ground in front with L ft on the 2nd beat of the 8th meas to end the SIXTH FIGURE.

Presented by Larry Lynch