

Name of dance: Shifers Tants

Pronunciation: **shiff-uhrrs tants**

Place of origin: southern Moldova, once known as Bessarabia, particularly from the town or *shtetl* of Akkerman

Source of music: *Klezmorim: Streets of Gold (Arhoolie LP 3011, Side A Band 5)* – ‘A Glezele Vayn’; *Shura Lipovsky: Moments of Jewish Life (Syncoop 5753 CD 153, track 4)* – ‘A Freylekhs fun der Khupe’. These are only two of very many possible tunes for this dance. Any slow to moderate klezmer tune in 2/4 time will do, though the best ones have 4-bar melodies to fit the step and a heavy or even a drunken swing to the tempo. Jewish tunes used in the Greek *hassapikos* repertoire (of which there are also many) work well for the dance.

Learned from: Michael Alpert, 1990, who learned it from Ron Wixman.

About the dance: The structure of this dance makes it a very slow version of the klezmer/Romanian dance *Sirba*, done moving forward and back rather than side to side. Ron Wixman learned this dance from his family, who came from the south Bessarabian *shtetl* named Akkerman. Southern Bessarabia or Moldova is close to the Black Sea and also full of navigable rivers, so the dance’s geographic origins may help explain its name: *Shifers tants* means ‘boatman’s’ or ‘sailor’s dance’. This area has had quite a bit of Greek cultural influence, and influence has gone both ways; Jewish butchers there were important exporters to the Ottoman Greeks over a century ago. Is there any connection between this dance and the origins of *hassapiko* dancing among butcher’s guilds? I don’t know. Another interesting connection is the similarity of the name *Shifers tants* to a tune recorded by clarinetist Dave Tarras called *Shifra tantzt* (‘Shifra dances’), which fits the dance quite well. Michael Alpert says this dance is almost identical to the Romanian *boiereasca* (‘boyar’s dance’), but there are many versions of *boiereasca*, and the ones I know are not like *Shifers tants*.

Rhythm: 2/4

Formation: Circle dance, hands clasped at waist height, with forearms overlapped and shoulders touching, if possible, depending on relative heights and friendliness of neighboring dancers. Face center with L foot free to move. The dance gradually progresses CCW around the circle, both when the circle shrinks and when it expands.

Direction	Measure	Step
⊥	1	Step in toward center onto L (ct. 1), with full weight on L and perhaps leaning slightly toward center, flex L knee and either leave R in place or touch it behind L (ct. 2).
	2	Step back onto R in place (ct. 1), and perhaps leaning slightly back, flex R knee and either leave L in place or touch it in front of R (ct. 2).
↑	3	Moving slightly to the R of center, step L (ct. 1), step R next to L (ct. &), step L (ct. 2).

Shifers Tants (continued):

<u>Direction</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Step</u>
⊥	4	Repeat Measure 2.
	5	Repeat Measure 1.
↓	6	Moving away from center diagonally to your R side, step back R (ct. 1), step on L next to R (ct. &), step back on l (ct. 3).
		<u>Variation 1:</u>
↑	1-2	Repeat Measures 1-2, possibly replacing touches with weightless stamps.
	3	Moving slightly to the R of center, step L (ct. 1), stamp without weight on R next to L (ct. 'uh'), step with weight near R (ct. &), stamp without weight on L next to R (ct. 'uh'), step with weight on L toward center (ct. 2), stamp twice on R without weight next to L (cts. 'uh' &).
	4-6	Repeat Measures 4-6.

dance notes by Erik Bendix
based on those by Michael Alpert

