

SVATBENI REJC / SVATBENA POLKA
(Slovenian wedding couple dances from Carinthia)

Svatbeni rejc (SVAHD-beh-nee RAYTZ, 'wedding dance') was an integral part of wedding celebrations up until the 1890's in the region known as Carinthia (in Slovenian: Koroska). Carinthia is now a part of Austria (in German: Karnten), and the Slovenes who live there no longer do this dance. France Marolt, prominent Slovenian musicologist, researched the dance in 1934/35 in the villages of Blace and Melvice in the Zilja (ZEEL-yah) valley, known in present-day Austria as Gailtal. He reconstructed the dance from information supplied by old-time local musicians. I learned it from Marlot's widow, Toncka Marlotova, in 1954.

According to custom, the final phase in the long wedding scenario was the banquet held at the groom's home after the church ceremony. Once the guests had arrived and been seated, the **mendirar** (literally 'flag-bearer', the general 'organizer' or 'director' of the proceedings) offered several toasts, after which the orchestra struck up **Svatbeni rejc**. The **mendirar** sprinkled wine in the sign of the cross on the dance floor, and proceeded to dance with the bride, then with the **rjusna** ('sheet-preparer', one of the bride's relatives and member of the wedding party) and the maid-of-honor, in turn relinquishing each to another male member of the wedding party, until finally the whole wedding party was involved and the groom was dancing with the bride. General dancing followed this ceremonial performance of **Svatbeni rejc**, and it was the task of the **mendirar** and the best man to see that all women present had the opportunity to dance. While the former were busy at this, it was customary for mischievous male wedding guest to kidnap the bride and hold her for ransom in a local tavern. The **mendirar** had to find her, bargain for her return, pay the ransom, and bring her back to the groom's house accompanied by the musicians.

RECORDING: Folk Dancer MH 3033, **Svatbeni rejc**; Folkraft F-1543x45, **Svatbeni rejc**; Helidon FLP03-005, Side 1, band 5, **Svatbeni rejc/Svatbena polka**; Helidon K97 005-03 (cassette), Side 1, **Svatbeni rejc/Svatbena polka**; Slovenian Traditional Dances 104 (cassette), **Svatbeni rejc/Svatbena polka**.

METER, TEMPO, RHYTHM: The meter of **Svatbeni rejc** is 6/8, and the tempo ranges from slow and majestic (Part I) to quick and lively with sudden retards (Part II). When learning the dance, it is useful to accustom oneself to counting 6 beats for each pattern, and be ready to count them very unevenly during Part II.

INITIAL POSITION: In Part I, couples in a circle facing CCW around the floor. Woman is on inside (on Man's Left), and their hands are joined in front in Skater's Waltz position (Left in Left, Right in Right), with Man's Left arm over. Both face LOD. For Part II, see below.

Meas Count

ACTION

PART I

(upbeat) Raise joined hands high, about 45 degree, forward (no footwork).

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Both step forward with Right foot. |
| | 2 | Both step forward with Left foot and pivot immediately on it, making a 1/2 turn Left to face opposite direction. This is an individual turn, hands kept joined high. Woman is now on Man's Right. |
| | 3 | Flex knees in this position, feet sharing weight. Joined hands are still high forward. |
| | 4 | Moving in this new direction (reverse LOD), both step forward with Right foot. |
| | 5 | Both step forward with Left foot and pivot immediately on it, making a 1/2 turn Right to face original position, feet sharing weight. Joined hands are still high forward. |
| | 6 | Flex knees in this position, feet sharing weight. Joined hands are still high forward. |

- 2 1-6 Beginning with Right foot and using 6 walking steps, the Woman walks around a small circle CCW in front of Man. Hands still kept joined and up. While the Woman is tracing this circle, Man follows her movements with 6 comfortable steps beginning with Right foot, gently leading her with his raised hands. Note that the Man faces the same direction during this part, whereas the Woman is walking around a small circle, turning, as it were, under his raised arms. At the end the Woman returns to the Man's Left side, hands are lowered (still joined) **very briefly** in a position identical to the beginning of the dance, except that Man's Left arm is now crossed **under** Woman's Right arm. On count 6 (now an "upbeat"), joined hands are again raised high in front.
- 3 1 Both step forward with Right foot.
 2 Both step forward with Left foot and pivot immediately on it, making a 3/8 **turn Right**. In doing so, Man passes under joined Right hands. Both dancers are now facing "southeast", Woman squarely in back of Man, looking at the back of his head, Left hand in Left hand, Right hand in Right hand.
 3 Flex knees in this position. Hands are still joined high.
 4 Moving in this new direction, both step forward with Right foot.
 5 Both step forward with Left foot.
 6 Both step with Right foot, Man making 1/2 turn Left, backing under joined Right hands to face Woman.
- 4 1-6 Beginning with Left foot and using 6 walking steps, the Woman walks around a small circle CW in front of Man. Hands still kept joined and up. While the Woman is tracing this circle, Man follows her movements with 6 comfortable steps beginning with Left foot, gently leading her with his raised hands. At the end bring hands down, release Left hands and place Left hand on own hip, facing each other in such a way that Man's Left shoulder is toward center of circle, Woman's Right shoulder is toward center (Man is facing CCW around the floor, Woman CW). Joined Right hands are held out to Man's Left (i.e., toward center of circle), in preparation for Part II.
- PART II**
- 5 1-6 2 waltz balances (Man: RLR, LRL; Woman: LRL, RLR) in place, swinging joined Right hands away from center and back again. Steps are light, and done on toes.
- 6 1-3 As Man does a waltz balance RLR, swinging joined hands away from center and up, Woman does a quick single turn Left (CCW) in place under joined hands with one waltz step LRL. Joined hands end up extended toward center.
 4-6 Keeping joined hands extended toward center, both do one waltz balance in place (Man: LRL; Woman: RLR).
- 7 1-6 2 waltz balances exactly as under measure 1 of this Part.
- 8 1-6 (Music retards). Beginning with Left foot and using 6 walking steps, Woman walks around a small circle (CCW) in front of Man. Keep Right hands joined up so Woman may pass under during circling. Man follows her movements with 6 comfortable walking steps beginning with Right foot. End in same position as before circling.
- 9-10 Repeat movements of measures 7-8.
- 11-16 Now repeat all of Part II.

On all the recommended recordings, the entire dance is followed by a brief break in the music and then the dance *Svatbena polka* begins.

To get into position for *Svatbena polka* (open ballroom position), modify the movements of part II, measure 10, counts 1-6 the last time through *Svatbeni rejc* as follows:

- 10a As Woman is halfway through her walk-around, Man advances to her Left side, passes Woman's Right hand from his Right to his Left hand. His Right hand goes to her waist, their joined hands are held straight forward (elbows straight) in LOD.

S V A T B E N A P O L K A

PRONUN: SVAHD-beh-nah POHL-kah

METER: 2/4

Measure

ACTION

Man and Woman use opposite footwork throughout.

- 1 Couple moving forward in LOD, step-close-step beginning Man's Left foot (Woman's Right foot), dipping straight joined hands downward and bending slightly forward.
- 2 Continuing forward in LOD, step-close-step beginning Man's Right foot (Woman's Left foot), raising straight joined hands up high and bending slightly backward.
- 3 In place, with 3 steps, Man pulls joined straight hands to point to center (this time joined straight hands are horizontal) as couple makes 1/4 turn Left to face center.
- 4 In place, with three steps, couple makes 1/4 turn Right to face in LOD, joined straight hands still horizontal.

Notes by Dick Crum, revised 12/89

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Presented Pally Dickinsen

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