

Pols (Rørspols)

(Norway)

Pols belongs to the bygdedans category of Norwegian dance. Just before 1900, nearly every community in Norway had a bygdedans. In the north and east the dance was called pols and in the south and west it was called springar. To distinguish among the different kinds of pols (and springar) it is common to put a geographical name in front. For example, Nordlandspols and Inherredspols are from further north, while Elverumspols is from further south.

The Rørspols type of pols is found in a large area that includes Rørø and the northern part of Østerdal. The basic form has four parts: the couple dances forward side-by-side, then turns slowly CCW with a special step, dances forward as an interlude between turns, and does a fast CW turn. It is distinguished from other types of pols by the fact that there are two alternating, different kinds of turns within the dance. The CW turn is thought to be quite new (after 1800 at least), while the CCW turn technique may be older. Bygdedans arrived in Norway together with the fiddle, starting in the mid-1600s. Rørø had special contact with Europe as a mining town and may have received impulses much earlier than other parts of rural Norway.

Unlike most bygdedans, Rørspols has been widely taught and danced in all areas of Norway. The dance spread mostly in the 1960s and today it occupies a place in the "gammeldans" part of the evening. In the process of spreading the dance acquired many local variations; in Oslo, our way of dancing is so different that I am tempted to call it "Oslopol".

As the dance spread through Norway, it was taught in a standardized form. This is the form that was taught in the U.S. by Ingvar Sjødal. The standardized form seems to have appeared in Trondheim around 1960. In recent years, people from Rørø (especially Peder and Randi Gullikstad) have held courses to try to change and enrich Rørspols. In addition, some nearby groups such as the one from Brekken, a few kilometers to the east, have cultivated their own forms. The result is that it is difficult to know what to teach and what dance name to use.

Sources: Like most bygdedans, the dance is not written down in Norway to my knowledge. My main sources are: Ingvar Sjødal, from whom I first learned pols in San Diego in 1970; Sigurd Bretteville Jensen, who had danced in Trondheim and taught pols in Sarpsborg; Peder Gullikstad, at courses in Oslo, particularly September 1985; written notes by Anders Drøyvold from the 1930s that Gullikstad brought with him. In addition, I have danced pols in Oslo and at various festivals for nearly 20 years.

At Stockton, I am presenting the standardized pols along with Rørø variations as learned from Peder Gullikstad. I have called them the *standardized form* and the *Gullikstad form*, although I am quite sure that Gullikstad would say that his is the Rørø form and the other isn't. If you dance in Norway, you will almost certainly see the standardized form.

Pronunciation:

Music: The music is 3/4. There is considerable discussion about whether the three beats are the same length, or whether the first is somewhat shorter. Traditionally, the music consists of two phrases played AABBAABB; that is, the melody is played exactly twice through. Usually, several melodies were played in succession with a short pause in between. Today, it is common to hear one melody played for a long time. Earlier, it was common to dance only to fiddle(s), but Sven Nyhus has popularized the band arrangements that are the most common today.

Pols—continued

There is also a special kind of music called gammelpols (old pols). Because the melodies contain notes tied from beat 3 through beat 1 of the next meas, often at the beginning of a phrase, they can be difficult to dance to.

Recordings: There are many good recordings by groups from the Røros area, particularly Sven Nyhus Kvartett and Dalakopa. The melodies are labeled "pols" or have "pols" as part the name. (Watch out: "pols" by fiddlers or groups from other areas can be a completely different kind of music.) The traditional recording used in the U.S. by Sigbjørn Bernhoft Osa is *not* to be recommended. Osa himself was from the western part of Norway, and the recording lacks the Rørospols feeling.

The following are available at Stockton:

Norwegian Dances, Stockton '95 (included primarily for those who do not want to invest in one of the other recordings).

Livat i lag, Spelmannslaget i BUL i Nidaros, 12 different pols melodies.

Heilo 7043 cassette, Dalakopa, side 1 bands 3, 6, 7 and side 2 bands 1, 3, 6, 7. (Side 2 bands 6 and 7 are gammelpols.)

Formation: Couples dance around the room CW. In former times, the couples would walk slowly around the floor between melodies. When the music began, they would dance, then walk after it stopped until the next melody began.

Sequence: The dance has four parts as described below. These four parts follow each other in the sequence described. It is said that the best dancers use an 8 meas phrase for each part of the dance, so that they make transitions near the phrase boundaries. In this way, they dance through the dance once when the melody is played once through. In Norway today, the dance is usually done so that the man does each part as long as he likes. In some places, the dance has become rigid and must follow the music.

Steps: Basic step: Step fwd on L (ct 1)—earlier taught as only on heel; bend L knee sharply (ct 2); step on R (ct 3). Step repeats on same ft. A special aspect of the step is the sudden lowering on ct 2; this has often been lost in teaching. Variations: hop or skip on R before ct 1; leap onto R in ct 3. This alternates ft. W can also do a 3-step variation: Step fwd on L (ct 1); "skate" fwd on R (ct 2); step fwd on L (ct 3). M can slap R ft on ct 2, or L on ct 3.

W solo turn: When W turns alone, she usually uses the basic step, turning once to her own L on each meas. Step fwd in LOD (ct 1); lower wt and turn (ct 2); step bkwd in LOD on R (ct 3). The turn is continuous. An alternate step: Touch L beside R (ct 1); step L fwd in LOD (ct 2); step R bkwd in LOD (ct 3).

Slow CCW turn - use two meas, or 6 cts. M usually does: Step fwd on L (ct 1); lower wt (ct 2); step fwd on R (ct 3); lift or hop on R (ct 4); step bkwd on L (ct 5); step fwd on R (ct 6). Variations: slap R heel with R hand to R side on ct 2, L heel to R side with R hand behind R leg on ct 3, or do both. W usually does: step bkwd on L (ct 1); step fwd on R (ct 2); step fwd on L (ct 3); step fwd on R (ct 4); step fwd on L (ct 5); step fwd on R (ct 6). Some rhythmic variations are possible from one person to the next; 1 2 3 a 4 6 is particularly common.

Pols—continued

Fast CW turn, use one meas, or 3 cts. M: step on L fwd around ptr (ct 1); close R to L and bend knees (ct 2); step fwd on R twd ptr (ct 3). It is very common to add a small hop just before ct 1. He can also slap his L ft with L hand on ct 3. W: close R to L with wt on both (ct 1); step fwd twd M on R (ct 2); step fwd on L around M (ct 3). The very first time, ct 1 may be a special transition.

PART I: OPENING - DANCE FORWARD SIDE-BY-SIDE

As described above, this usually takes about 8 meas. Today, it is often danced longer than 8 meas. Face LOD, M holds W L in his R. He is on the "inner track" while she is on the outer. He is often slightly in front of her, although it is common to begin side-by-side the very first time.

Standardized form:

Part 1a: Dancing fwd in LOD with basic steps, M leads W to opp side behind him, changing from R hand to L hand. W is now on inside track while he is on outside. W comes up beside M while he lifts joined hands. When she is in front, he crosses behind her to the inside track.

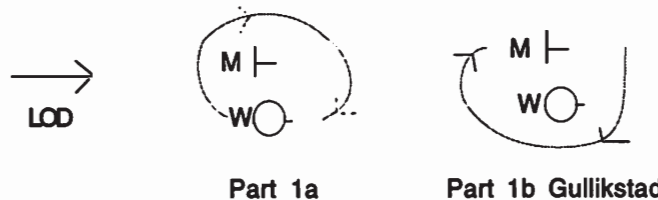
Part 1b: Then, he turns her to her own L under the joined hands 1, 2, 3, or 4 times. To stop her, he lowers the joined arms, and holds her L forearm with his R hand (from underneath). Dance fwd with the basic step.

Gullikstad form:

Part 1a: Do Part 1a as in the traditional form.

Part 1b Gullikstad: Without changing hands, M leap across in front of W on L (ct 1) to end facing ctr. At same time, W dances fwd in LOD and passes M. M waits on ct 2; then steps in place or slightly fwd on ct 3. Then, with basic steps, he dances around behind W to inside track, while she passes to the outside under the joined hands. W does not turn at all: she is facing LOD throughout. Finally, lower arms to get into the standard ending pos.

In the Gullikstad form, the W usually uses the 3-step variation of the basic step. (However, she needs to know that her ptr will use the Gullikstad form because it is quite difficult to do the W solo turn with the 3-step variation.) At the end, when the arms are lowered, she usually changes back to the basic step.



This diagram shows the paths of the W and M in part 1. In addition, the couple is moving continuously in LOD (twd the R of the page). Also, whenever one person changes track (to inside or outside), the ptr also moves to compensate. In this way, the couples dances in an envelope where they change places between the inside and outside tracks.

PART II: SLOW CCW TURN

Transition into: The transition into the turn takes one meas. M lets go with L hand and pulls with his R, placing W L arm around his waist. W crosses in front of M and ends facing RLOD; ptrs are side-by-side facing opp directions, L hip to L hip. Ending cpl pos: L arm around ptr's waist, R hand rests on ptr's L upper arm. M uses one basic step in the transition. He may stamp on ct 1 and/or step slightly bkwd to make room for W. W uses one basic step if her L ft is free; if her R ft is free, she uses one 3-step variation.

In most bygdedans, transitions usually occur at the beginning of a musical phrase. In the standardized pols, however, the transition is usually taught at the end of the phrase.

The turn: For the actual turn, the cpl rotates CCW once every 2 meas. At the start of every other meas, a step bkwd is taken. The bkwd step alternates between the M and the W. They usually turn about 8 meas.

PART III: INTERLUDE BETWEEN TURNS

Standardized and basic Gullikstad Forms: M slides R hand down W's L arm to take her L hand. When he is facing RLOD, he lifts the joined hands and turns her solo once to L. As she moves in LOD, he turns to face LOD, dancing in somewhat behind her.

He continues to dance on the inside track somewhat behind her, and turns her several more times. Then, to stop the turn, he lowers the joined hands as W turns to face LOD. Join in Norwegian ballroom pos, both facing LOD: M places R arm around W's waist, W L hand on M R shldr. Join M L and W R at chest height in front of cpl. Dance fwd with several basic steps.

Variations: In this part of the dance, there are many possible variations. Variations from Gullikstad and from Drøyvold's description:

- (i) Turn W CW as described about 4 times. Then, dance part 1b Gullikstad from the opening.
- (ii) Hold both hands with ptr and turn about 4 times, W CW and M CCW. Then, dance either part 1a or 1b Gullikstad from the opening.
- (iii) Hold both hands with ptr and turn about 8 times, W CW and M CCW. Gullikstad said that this was his personal special way of dancing (a show-off variation).

PART 4: FAST CW TURN

Transition into: The transition into the turn takes one meas. In the standardized pols, the progress in LOD nearly stops. M stamps with wt on his L (ct 1), step on R and turn to face ptr (ct 3). W step on L (ct 1), close R to L to end on both (ct 3). In the Gullikstad form, M simply starts turning, moving in front of W. In the first meas, the W dances a 3-step variation to "change feet".

The turn: The turn itself lasts about 8 meas, one turn per meas. Cpl pos: hold R arm around ptrs waist or on L shldr blade, L hand rests on ptrs R shldr. Ordinary shoulder-waist pos may also be used.

Pols—continued

Transition out of: Transition out of turn in “old” standardized pols: M “rolls” W off his R arm, turning her once CW. He does this as he dances one basic step fwd in LOD (or almost in place) on the inside track. W must change ft during the turn, usually by stepping on each ct. Then, she extends her L hand fwd to M R.

A simpler transition that is more common today (both in standardized and Gullikstad form): Stop on both ft facing ptr, M on inside (ct 1), lower wt (ct 2), step on R in LOD while letting go to resume original pos (ct 3). M can also simply start dancing basic step without any transition. W do transition as described.

OTHER FORMS

There is a historical basis for believing that pols could be danced with 1 M and 2 W, as is common with springars.

To have some fun, you can dance pols to polka music. This is called skotsk or busserull. Everything that was previously done in one 3-count meas is now done in one 2-count meas. The basic step turns into walking. Where you must use 3 movements, such as W step in the CCW turn, count a-1-2, a-1-2. In the final turn, you can just pivot or try to dance all three parts. Gullikstad counted 1-&-2, with wt on both ft on the &.

Presented by Alix Cordray