

FREESTYLE OBEREK
(Poland)

Pronunciation: oh-BEH-rek

Record: Any one, with a good oberek on it, or best, live music.

Oberek, a cpl dance in 3/8 time, has its origin in the villages of Mazowsze (mah-ZHOV-sheh) in central Poland. It also used to be called obertas, wyrwas, drygant, zwijacz, drobny, or okrągły, names which describe the character of the dance. The name "oberek" is derived from the verb "obracać się" (oh-BRAH-tsach sheh) (to turn, to spin), and truly so, as it is composed mainly of spinning and twirling around the room. It is a joyful, exuberant, noisy, and sometimes acrobatic dance, with stamps and shouts, the most popular of which are: "oj, dana, dana" (oy dah-nah, dah-nah), "ucha" (oo-hah), "ucha cha" (oo-hah-hah), or "oj dziś, dziś" (oy jeesh jeesh) which means "oh, today, today," which either is an imitation of a percussion instrument, or conveys the typical trait of the Polish character, that today we live and are merry, and who cares what tomorrow might bring. From Mazowsze the oberek spread all over Poland by the end of the XIX century. It thus became one of the five national dances, not only being common all over Poland, but also danced by all the social stratas. Different regions, however, still retain their local variations and the specific music, but, as Ryszard Kwiatkowski -- a noted Polish authority on the national dances -- remarked, many of the most beautiful and interesting regional steps and figures have been incorporated into the national oberek.

The dance usually starts with cpls running around the room, as if they wanted to outline the space in which they will be dancing, or, if danced in the fields, to flatten down the grass. Although done in a group, each cpl may dance it in their own fashion, ornamenting the spins with different embellishments. The W's role seems less important, as the M has harder feats to accomplish, but he cannot do them without her help. The M try to outdo each other, and the whole group might stop to admire a "show-off."

The oberek is danced to this day in Poland, together with regular ballroom dances, by both country and town people. It is also presented on stage by numerous amateur ensembles, both in Poland and abroad. A most artistic, but stylized, rendition may be admired as performed by the two State folk ballet companies, "Mazowsze" and "Śląsk." It is also popular in the recreational folk dance circles all over the world, done, however, usually to a definite pattern and to a definite piece of music. The following list of steps and figures, compiled by Ada and Jaś Dziewanowski, based on their studies in Poland, is a guide for international folk dancers to do the oberek as an improvised dance, as it used to be done, and, to a lesser degree, is still done today in Poland. Choose steps and figures with which you are most comfortable, which you like the best, or which challenge you the most. Do not try to execute all

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the steps and figures in one dancing of the oberek. As pointed out before, the most traditional order would be to start the dance by running around the room, then to start turning, and then, if you like, to intersperse various figures with the turning oberek. You may finish with fast spinning in place. Note: If a figure is to be done in place, to avoid collisions first move into some clear area, for instance the center of the circle.

Happy Oberek Dancing!

Steps, Figures, and Styling

I. HAND POSITIONS.

1. Fist on Own Hip: Place closed (not clenched) hand on own hip, slightly fwd, with wrist straight and elbow also slightly fwd. Unless otherwise indicated, free hands should be in this pos, or for the W, holding skirt.

2. Shldr-Waist Pos.

3. Closed Ballroom Pos.

4. Kujawiak-Oberek Pos. (in this description will be called "Kuj-Ob Pos") - a typically Polish style of open ballroom pos: Facing slightly twd ptr, bend knees and keeping torso straight, bend slightly fwd from waist; outside hands can either be placed (1) on own hip; (2) joined fwd, arms rounded, palms facing in, M's hands on outside of W's (sometimes called "round pos"); or (3) extended to sides, slightly fwd, arms rounded, and palms facing fwd and in.

5. Supporting Pos: In open ballroom pos, facing slightly twd ptr, M: place L fist on your L hip, or extend L arm to side straight; W: support ptr by holding his R upper arm with both hands, or by holding his R hand in your R hand on back of your R hip, and hold him under his R upper arm with your L forearm or hand; or support him under his R upper arm with your L forearm, while clenching together both your fists; always lean slightly away from ptr and during cpl turns try to face his R side.

II. STEPS.

1. Basic Oberek Step (in this description will be called "Ob Step") can be done: (1) in place or turning in place; (2) running fwd or bkwd in any direction; or (3) turning CW or CCW while moving in LOD or RLOD. It can be danced with ptr in any of the above pos, or with ptrs about 2 - 3 ft apart, facing each other, or with W turning. Do a small leap onto R ft, bending knee slightly (ct 1); step on ball of L ft next to R ft, or in the direction you are moving, momentarily put wt on both ft, bending knees some more (ct &); push off the ground with both ft -- if anything, more with L ft (ct 2); land on R ft, flicking L ft up and back, L knee bent (ct 3). Repeat of Step is done with opp ftwk.

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2. Flat Oberek Step (interchangeable with Basic Oberek Step): Same as Ob Step, but the leap is smaller (ct 1); the bend of the knees is less (ct 2); and there is no flick back of the ft (ct 3). This style is more folksy and is often associated with the regional obereks.

3. Step-Hop: Can be alternated with Ob Step, while cpl either moves fwd or turns.

4. Small Hołobiec (hoh-WOO-byets) (interchangeable with Ob Step, except not used moving bkwd; often danced by M only): Make an accented step with R ft in front of L ft, knee slightly bent (ct 1); brush L heel diag to side, straightening L knee, ft flexed (ct 2); do a small hop on R ft, clicking heels in the air, feet flexed, knees straight (ct 3). Repeat of Step is done with opp ftwk or can be alternated with Ob Step.

5. Krzesany (ksheh-SAH-nih): Same as Small Hołobiec, but do not click heels on ct 3, leaving L ft flexed, L knee straight.

6. Double-Stamp Oberek (interchangeable with Ob Step while cpl is turning; often danced by M only): Do a small leap onto R ft, bending knees slightly (ct 1); do a weightless stamp with L ft next to R, bending knees some more (ct &); do a small hop on R ft (ct 2); do a weightless stamp with L ft next to R (ct 3). Repeat of Step is done with opp ftwk.

7. Oberek Step with Stamp (done in place, not turning, in Kuj-Ob Pos, or ptrs facing 2-3 ft apart): Do a small leap on R ft to R, bending knees slightly, turning upper body slightly to R (ct 1); do an accented step on whole L ft, toe facing fwd, in front of R ft, momentarily leaving wt on both ft and bending knees a little more (ct 2); push off with both ft -- if anything, more with L ft -- and land on R ft, turning slightly to L to face fwd (ct 3). Repeat of Step is done with opp ftwk and direction.

8. Running Step (can be done in either Kuj-Ob, Closed ballroom, or Shldr/Waist Pos, with both ptrs moving in the same direction, or one moving fwd and the other bkwd): Three long steps, done smoothly on very bent knees, with no up-and-down motion; the first step (ct 1) is longer and done with an accent; the next two steps (cts 2,3) are slightly smaller. Repeat of Step is done with opp ftwk.

9. Small Steps (used mainly by W, while supporting ptr in his Show-Off Figures): Three small, even steps (three per meas), done on slightly bent knees.

10. Stamps (usually done on the last meas of a musical phrase): All stamps are done with knees slightly bent and minimal flexing or straightening of the knees during the stamp; they can be done with one ft or with both ft (ft together); on ct 1, or cts 1,2, or on cts, 1,2,3.

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III. REGULAR FIGURES. In cpl CW turning, moving in LOD, usually begin by facing M LOD, W RLOD; make 1/2 turn with each meas; on ct 1 of each meas when stepping fwd use R ft and L ft when bkwd; reverse ftwk when turning CCW.

1. Turn with Leans: While turning with Ob Step in Shldr/Waist Pos, lean upper body from the waist to side, in the direction of the step.

2. W Turn Under Joined Arms (done progressing around the circle, or in place): While M does Ob Step, or stamps with R ft on ct 1 of each meas, facing ptr, W: turn with Ob Step one or more times under the joined arms, either CW or CCW. M may extend free arm to side straight, palm up.

3. W Changes Sides (done in place): Starting from Kuj-Ob Pos, both ptrs begin L ft, M: dance one Ob Step in place, leading W to your L side; W: while dancing one Ob Step, cross to M L side, making one full CCW turn; end in Kuj-Ob Pos on M L side (1st meas); dance one Ob Step or any Stamp (2nd meas). Repeat with opp ftwk and direction (3rd and 4th meas).

4. Odsibka-Dosibka (oht-SHEEP-kah doh-SHEEP-kah) (done in place or moving fwd): Start the Figure facing LOD and 45° twd ptr, holding inside hands, or in Kuj-Ob Pos. Beginning on outside ft, make a 1/4 turn away from ptr with one Ob Step (1st meas). Reverse ftwk and direction (2nd meas). Outside hands can be placed on own hips or swung out, arm straight, palm up (1st meas), and in, palm down (2nd meas). Arm motion can be at waist level or in a large figure "8" pattern, starting downward. This Figure is often used during any four introductory meas of the music; it can also be done for up to eight meas.

5. Changing Places (done in place): Facing ptr 2 - 3 ft apart, hands on hips, beginning R ft, dance two Ob Steps With Stamp in place (1st and 2nd meas). Grasping ptr's R hand, fingers up, elbows down, do an accented step on R ft twd ptr, R knee bent and jump up to exchange places with ptr, together turning CW (ct 1 of 3rd meas). Land on both ft, ft together, with a stamp (ct 1 of 4th meas). Repeat of Figure is done with same ftwk and direction.

6. M Low, W Turns (done in place or moving in LOD): Face ptr, W: hands on own hips, turn with Ob Steps; M: facing W and following her (if she is moving), dance Ob Steps with knees deeply bent, bending slightly fwd from waist, back straight, straight arms to side and slightly fwd, palms up.

7. Spinning on a Taler (an old German silver coin) (done in place, usually at the end of the dance): In Shldr/Waist Pos turn CW in place as quickly as you can, with the Small Steps. Changing into Open Ballroom Pos, end with two stamps, extending outside arm diag up and yell "ucha" (oo-hah) (last meas).

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Usually cpl prepares for M's Show-off Figures by turning CW with Ob Steps in place for two or four meas, beginning on inside ft, and acquiring Supporting Pos. All the Figures are done in place.

1. Kneels: First Kneel (done from standing pos): From L ft do a small leap onto R ft, bending knees fully and keeping them almost together, L knee slightly lower than R knee, top of L ft flat on floor near R ft, wt shared by both ft, torso erect (cts 1,2); rise slightly by straightening knees a little bit (ct 3). Consecutive Kneels: Exchange pos of the two legs, stepping slightly fwd onto other ft (cts 1,2); rise slightly by straightening knees a little bit (ct 3). Kneels can be done either facing ptr, 2-3 ft apart, or with ptr in Supporting Pos, M turning around W. W: Turn CW with Small Steps, while supporting ptr. This Figure can be done one to sixteen times in a row, or combined with other Show-Off Steps.

2. Large Hożubiec (hoh-WOO-byets): M: Step on R ft in front of ptr, knee bent, as you begin to strongly swing L leg straight, ft pointed fwd and slightly to R (ct 1); continuing swing of L leg as high as you can and using its momentum, jump strongly from R ft and either: (1) bring R ft to back of L knee, R knee bent; (2) bring R straight leg together with straight L leg; or (3) both knees bent, legs turned out, flex ft, and click heels together, forming a diamond shape with legs (ct 2); hold pos in air (ct 3). W: Turn CW with Small Steps, supporting ptr and helping him in his elevation (1st meas). M: Land from your jump either: (1) in a Kneel; (2) with an Ob Step; or (3) with a Single Stamp on both ft, ft together. W: Do either three Small Steps, or hold (2nd meas).

3. Swishes: Cpl continues turning CW throughout this Figure, making approximately 1/2 revolution per meas. M: Drop onto ball of R ft, R knee fully bent, torso erect, as you extend L leg straight, ft pointed, knee facing ceiling, fwd and diag (45°) to L; L ft should not touch floor (ct 1); sweep L leg fwd as you pivot on R ft (ct 2); continuing pivot, rise a little by slightly straightening R knee (ct 3). W: Turn CW in place with three Small Steps, supporting ptr (1st meas). M: either rise and dance one Ob Step, or step fwd and around ptr onto L ft into Kneel (ct 1); hold (ct 2); begin to rise by slightly straightening knees (ct 3) and prepare to continue a series of Swish-Kneels. W: Dance three Small Steps, continuing to support ptr (2nd meas).

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1. Solo Fast Turns: W: With Ob Steps turn CW or CCW, making more than 1/2 turn with each meas. Place hands on own hips, or extend straight arms overhead and slightly to sides, palms in. M: Facing ptr, do either: (1) M's action of M-Low-W-Turn-Figure; - (2) Kneels in place, clapping hands vertically on ct 1 of each meas; or (3) stand in place clapping hands, or slapping ptr's skirt in direction of turn.

2. Basic Lift: Dance two Ob Steps in Shldr-Waist Pos, bending knees deeply on the last ct of the 2nd Ob Step (1st and 2nd meas). W: Jump strongly off both ft, bending knees so that shins are parallel to floor, thighs vertical, and lift yourself up on M's shldr, straightening arms. M: Lift ptr straight up, bringing knees and elbows straight (3rd meas). M: Lower ptr to floor; W: land with both ft together, knees bent (4th meas). Note: You may complete a 1/2 CW turn during this lift, if you like.

3. Side Lift: Prepare for this lift by doing two Ob Steps in Kuj-Ob Pos, bending knees deeply on ct 3 of 2nd meas (1st and 2nd meas). M: Grasping outside of ptr's L thigh with L hand, lift her sideways to R and up, and straighten knees and L elbow (ptr's feet should end facing diag up to R). W: Jump up and to side, bending knees fully so that thighs are parallel to floor; W may raise R hand overhead (3rd meas). M: Lower ptr to floor in orig pos; W: land with both ft together, knees bent (4th meas).

4. Over Shldr Lift: Prepare for this lift by doing two Ob Steps in Open Kuj-Ob Pos, beginning L ft (1st and 2nd meas). W: While stepping across and in front of ptr with L ft, knee bent, swing straight R leg strongly up and across to L in front of ptr, and jump off L ft, bringing extended L leg to R leg, as you are lifted by ptr. M: Catching ptr in back of knees with inside of L forearm, throw ptr straight up above shldr level, as you do a quick full CCW turn with three Small Steps (3rd meas). M: Lower ptr to floor in orig pos, supporting her to prevent her from losing balance; W: land with both ft together, knees bent (4th meas).

Freestyle Oberek introduced at the 1982 Buffalo Gap Labor Day Camp in Capon Bridge, West Virginia, by Jaś and Ada Dziewanowski. Please do not reproduce these directions without the Dziewanowskis' permission.

Presented by Ada Dziewanowska