

Finnskogspols Polsdans fra Finskogen Norway & Sweden

This is a pols dance from an area northeast of Oslo (and east of Elverum), called *Finnskogen* meaning "the Finnish forest". This huge wooded area on both sides of the Swedish-Norwegian border was settled by Finnish immigrants around 1600. The dance is usually called *polsdans* locally, and both dance and music are found on both sides of the border. One of its main features is the distinctive rhythm, with 2 long cts and a short 3rd ct.

Around 1980 a dance called Everumspols was introduced in the USA by Sverre Halbakken. His reconstruction took elements from the whole area to create a relatively rich dance. He also insisted on very short tunes (as in the source material), with walking in LOD between tunes. His source material has recently become available on the DVD *Østerdalens rumba*, which contains 12 of the original film clips.

Finnskogspols is a newer reconstruction of essentially the same dance, originally based on a single film clip, but recently revised based on Halbakken's films. The foremost practitioners are Bjørn Sverre Hol Haugen and Veslemøy Nordset Bjerke. The dance has succeeded wildly, especially in Sweden where many musicians have learned the music largely from Mats Berglund.

In older times, the dance was performed in a very small area with small steps. The best dancers could perform the entire dance in a few square meters! Performing the dance in a large circle changes quite a few characteristics, so you might want to dance in small circles.

The description below is a highly standardized way of doing an improvised dance – be aware that many variations are possible.

Pronunciation: Finn-skoogs-poles' Poles dance frah Finn-skoogen

Music: Many tunes can be used for the dance. The CD *24 Polsdanser frå Finnskogen*, www.fik.no, FKCD 1960 contains 24 dance tunes. The double CD *Så surr nå kjerring* by the Halbakken family (Ælvesus) contains many short melodies under the names *polsdans* and *polsk*, most played on solo fiddle. *24 Polsdanser fra Finnskogen* is available on Amazon.com as digital music

Meter: 3/4 with a short 3rd beat. (Halbakken prefers to write 2.5/4).

Formation: Couples facing LOD, join nearer hands. M hand is usually over W, grasping her L in his R with a "heavy" handhold.

Steps: Basic pols step:
step fwd on L (ct 1), step fwd on R (ct 2), step on L slightly behind R (ct 3). Repeats on opp ft. The essence of the step is that the two large steps occur first, then the closing on the 3rd ct (unlike an ordinary change-of-step where the closing is on the 2nd step). There is a pronounced bounce (svikt) on each ct. Many W do not close on ct 3, but dance fwd on all 3 cts.

Fast turn, 1 turn per meas:

M step: step/or slight leap on R twd W (ct 1), step/leap on L around W (ct 2), place R on floor beside L or in slightly open pos (ct 3).

W step: step on L around M (ct 1), step on R twd M (ct 2), step on L toe slightly behind R (ct 2&), step on R twd M (ct 3).

Part Movement

I ***Dance fwd, and ~open and close***

Starting M L and W R, dance basic pols steps fwd in LOD. Open slightly in 1st meas, close slightly in 2nd meas, and so on. You do not have to start at any particular time in the music. Usually, the M waits a couple of meas until he feels the rhythm, then starts. The length of this part is up to the M, usually 4-12 meas.

II ***W turn under***

M releases hands and offers his R hand to W, who takes it with her R. This is most elegant if done as she turns twd outside. He then turns her to her L (CCW), all the while progressing in LOD. She uses 2 meas to turn, with the same technique as the slow turn (see slow turn below). She usually starts by stepping L fwd (ct 1), then R sideways in LOD (facing ptr) (ct 2), close L to R continuing to turn.

M turns W a few times, usually 2-3, under the joined hands. He stays diagonally behind her, continuing to do the basic pols step fwd in LOD. He can bring his hand down slightly after each turn – a "beater" action is not usually highly regarded in Norwegian dance, meaning turning the W.

III ***Lausdans – separate from partner***

As W turns to face LOD, M moves in front of her, brings down the joined hands and lets go. He is now dancing bkwd in LOD, W fwd. He turns slightly from side to side, as does she. After a very few meas, he may clap. She answers with a clap.

IV ***Two meas turn, Slow turn***

M slows down, and takes ballroom pos or shldr-**waist** pos with ptr. It works best if he does this on a L-footed step as he turns twd ctr, taking his ptr with him. They then continue turning CW. The turn is a 2-meas turn using the basic pols step. Ct 1 is very slightly fwd or bkwd, ct 2 is to the side in LOD, ct 3 steps beside supporting ft. This turn can be regarded as a transition into the fast turn – a sort of preparation.

V ***One measure turn, Fast turn***

The M simply starts the fast turn when he has his R ft free. This will usually NOT coincide with a phrase change in the music. The W feels the increase in rotational speed and follows. Turn for a while, ~ 5-16 meas.

Release ptr and start over. The M will have his R ft free, and the W L. Thus the 1st meas will be somewhat "face-to-face".

In Elverumspols (and source material), the dance never starts over. Once you have started the fast turn, you must continue to the end of the melody. (Most Elverumspols melodies are only 16-24 meas, the longest are 32 meas.) Between melodies, walk hand-in-hand with ptr in LOD.

Most of the variations occur in part II (the "vendingsdel"). One of the most common is a two-hand pancake turn. Another is for the M to dance around the W. Part II and/or part III (the "lausdans") may be left out entirely. Part III may be extended with claps, leaps, and turns done by M. The dance may conclude with the M lifting the W.

Addendum 1: In the 2-meas turn, there are some slightly different turning techniques. Bjørn Sverre Hol Haugen dances distinctly fwd or bkwd on ct 2, while Sverre Halbakken dances more sideways. These differences seem to be individual.

Addendum 2: The CD *24 Polsdanser frå Finnskogen* contains two video clips of Bjørn Sverre Hol Haugen and Veslemøy Nordset Bjerke dancing at competitions. In their original reconstruction, the 1-meas turn for both M and W was step-step-hop (i.e. the step variation with 2 weight changes). The hop, however, was large and very pronounced. Since their reconstruction was from a single film (analysis work done by Heidi Arild and Sinnika Langeland), their interpretation was based on a single execution of the dance. Later, when more material became available, they reviewed it and revised the way of performing the 1-meas turn. Today they teach the way described in the main description above.

Addendum 3: Sverre Halbakken is still active and has moved on to a form of the dance that he calls *gammelpols*. In this form, he replaces the walking between the dances with a gangar (or halling), as it perhaps was danced in earlier times. Thus, there is a "before-dance" and an "after-dance", which alternate in rather quick succession.

Sverre has published documentation, consisting of a book, double-CD and DVD. The book, *Så surr nå, kjæring*, ISBN 82-462-0024-0, contains considerable background material, dance descriptions of many different variations, and notation for a huge number of melodies. The double-CD contains both music for gammeldans and polsdans. The DVD contains a film describing the dance and the reconstruction process (a sort of "marketing" of the dance), and 12 original film clips. Newer editions also contain a sequence of 7 before-and-after dances performed by Sverre himself.

Description by Alix Cordray

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