

Polsdans fra Finnskogen (Finnskogspols)

Polsdans fra Finnskogen is a pols dance from an area northeast of Oslo (and east of Elverum). Although this huge wooded wooded on both sides of the Swedish-Norwegian border area (*Finnskogen* or "Finnish forest") absorbed Finnish immigrants starting around 1600, the dance is not particularly associated with Finnish culture. It was certainly part of the regular Norwegian and Swedish culture, into which the Finns eventually became assimilated. 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 an unusual rhythm, with 2 long counts and a short 3rd count.

The dance was introduced by Sverre Halbakken around 1980 under the name Elverumspols (he taught it at Scandia Camp Mendocino in 1980). His reconstruction took elements from a very large area to create a relatively rich dance. He also insisted on very short tunes (as in the source material), with non-rhythmic walking in LOD between tunes. Some of his source material has recently become available on the DVD *Østerdalens rumba*, which contains 12 of the original film clips. He also created 5 half-hour TV shows with his sources, and these have recently become publicly available in the NRK archives (<http://tv.nrk.no/serie/pols-og-spell-i-oesterdalen/FMUS50004875/02-04-1976>).

Polsdans from Finnskogen is a newer reconstruction of the same dance, originally based on a single film clip (of Hans and Astrid Kørre, from Gravberget), but recently revised based on more material. The foremost practitioners today are Bjørn Sverre Hol Haugen and Veslemøy Nordset Bjerke. The dance has succeeded wildly, especially in Sweden where many musicians had learned the music from Mats Berglund.

In the living tradition of earlier 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.

Although many aspects of the dance are improvised, there are certain stylistic ideals. Foremost among these is constant movement through the space, usually in LOD. This is a dance answer to the drone qualities in the music. Punctuations and variations of the music are answered by variations in the bounce (*svikt*), which may be sharp and pronounced.

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

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 kjæring* by the Halbakken family (*Ælvesus*) contains many short melodies under the names *polsdans* and *polsk*, most played on solo fiddle.

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

Formation: Couples facing LOD, join nearer hands (or skater's position). Many starting positions are possible. One commonly used is M's hand over W's, grasping her L in his R with a "heavy" hand hold.

Steps: Basic L: step fwd on L (ct 1), step fwd on R (ct 2), step on L slightly behind R (ct 3). Repeats on opp foot. The essence of the step is that the two large steps occur first, with a 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 on R twd W (ct 1), step 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 &), step on R twd M (ct 3). An alternate W step is: step on L around M (ct 1), place R ft on ground beside L (ct 2), step on R twd M (ct 3).

Part Movement

I *Dance fwd, open and close*

Starting M L and W R, dance basic 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) under joined hands, all the while progressing in LOD. She uses 2 meas to turn, with the same technique as the slow turn (see 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 step fwd in LOD. He may bring his hand down slightly after each turn – a "beater" action uncommon in Norwegian dance.

III *Lausdans – separate from partner*

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

IV *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 ptr, taking his ptr with him. They then continue turning CW. The turn is a 2-meas turn using the basic step. Ct 1 is diagonally fwd or bkwd, ct 2 is fwd or bkwd in LOD (perhaps sideways instead, see addendum), ct 3 is a step beside supporting ft. This turn can be regarded as a transition into the fast turn – a sort of preparation.

V *Fast turn*

The M 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, say 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 "face-to-face" when the dance repeats.

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

In the film material, part IV is used very little. In fact, when it is used, it is only for a few measures as a transition into the fast part. There is reason to believe that this was regarded as a necessity for those unable to start the fast turn immediately.

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 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.

Many of the variations can be combined and mixed. In tradition, each M composed his dance from a subset of the variations. Looking at the material as a whole, it is not always clear which variations are personal and which are regional. It is also sometimes unclear whether regional variations should perhaps be regarded as separate dances.

Some variations in form:

- **Simple dance.** When teaching, we often use a simplified form of the standard dance described above – we leave out the W turning under and the lausdans altogether, that is, we dance Parts I, IV, V.

- **Two-hand pancake turn.** At the beginning of Part II, the M joins both hands with the W in a "skater's" hold. Then M and W both turn, usually 2 meas per turn, M CW and W CCW. Start moving hands away from LOD. Turn face-to-face on M R step and W L, then continue around back-to-back in the next meas. After one or 2 turns, release L hands and continue with Part II "*W turn under*" as described above.

- **Double pancake.** This is a more complex variation of the two-hand pancake. It be done holding both hands or just one (or first with both, then with one). In this variation, the M and W dance once around each other CCW around a common center. They also turn twice individually in pancake turns . At the beginning of Part II, M lead W across in front of him (1 meas). While she is near the inside track, they turn once around nearly on the spot passing back-to-back (meas 2). M and W continue dancing around each other – W behind M, so that M moves to inside track and W to outside track (meas 3). Turn around once nearly on the spot passing back-to-back (meas 4). When passing back-to-back, lift the hands high and bend slightly backward to avoid "scraping" your partner.

- **W in front of M.** After Part I, M turns W CCW once or twice under joined hands, then lets her go in front of him. (He may also turn once CW under his own arm or dance around the W as she turns.) Do a short lausdans (Part III) with the W in front of the M. Go straight into the fast turn (Part V).

- **Halbakken's simplest.** After Part I, M turns W CW (or CCW) once or twice under joined hands. Stop the W by bringing her arm down, then dance forward in open shoulder-waist position. After this, go right into the fast turn. (Transition can also use 1-2 meas slow turn.)

- **W around behind.** After the Part I, M lift R arm and turn W once to her own R. Lead her around behind M, up on the inside, and then in front. Turn her several times to her L (CCW) under joined MR-WL. Although it is possible to continue with lausdans, it is more common to stop the W by bringing her arm down, then dance forward in open shoulder-waist position. After this, continue by going directly into the fast turn. (You can do a few meas of slow turn first if you prefer.)

- **M cross in front of W.** Start with Part I. M dances in front of W so that he has his back to her. He then leads her up beside him on the inside track, leads her under his raised R arm to the outside track, and turns her once or twice CCW under the joined hands. This is usually followed by dancing fwd in open shoulder-waist position.

One of Halbakken's informants dances this variation with his L hand in his pocket throughout. Since he doesn't hold the W with his L in the 1-meas turn, she doesn't hold him with her R either. (In the 1-meas turn, both the M and the W use the step with only 2 weight changes, M on R and W on L.)

- **Halbakken 1980.** Here is a short excerpt from the 1980 Scandia Camp Mendocino syllabus. "Generally, the man and woman dance on opposite feet; the man starts with his outside foot and the woman joins him with her outside foot. Then the man may turn the W around CCW under his R arm while continuing the fwd progression; he may dance around the W as she turns and/or turn CW under his own arm. He may also dance backward facing her as she dances fwd with or without holding hands. When not hands, he is free to do his "lausdans", this might include turns, claps, leaps, slapping heel &/ thighs. The character of the "lausdans" should be a reflection of the man's mood and sprit (-- which of course may be inspired by the woman). Some alternative conventional patterns may also be used here such as a pancake turn." The syllabus goes on to describe how to perform the pancake turn. It also describes the use of open shoulder-waist before the final turn. The final turn is described as the 1-meas turn, with a possibility of preceding it using the 2-meas turn.

Some step variations:

Basic with only 2 weight changes. Step fwd on L (ct 1), step fwd on R (ct 2), bounce on R while swinging L fwd (ct 3). Can also be done on R. Most often done by M, but can also be done by W. Most commonly done on L for M, R for W. For example, the *W around behind* variation might be done using this step for both M and W. Both may also use this variation in the final 1-meas turn, but here the M does it on R while the W does it on L. Some M use almost exclusively this step, some use it very little.

Lausdans. In the lausdans the M is expected to show off – with turns, squats, claps, and slaps. He can draw inspiration from the music and from his partner.

Turning step. Some variations of the turning step in the fast turn are also possible. One of the more interesting is the use of a 4-change-of-weight turn for the M. He steps fwd on R (ct 1), around W on L (ct 2), then on R toe beside L (&), then bkwd on L (ct 3). In this way, he moves his L foot "out of the W's way". He usually holds the W closer when doing this variation.

Forward and back. Halbakken demonstrates the use of a 2-meas turn using the step with 2-weight changes. Both partners use a L-footed step, one meas fwd and then one bkwd, with turning technique similar to the first turn in Rørospols. This comes after Part II and

before Part IV. Although the turn itself is documented from the Swedish side of the border, it is unclear how much it was actually used in the polsdans.

It is common for the M to thank the W at the end of the dance. Many melodies have a "tag" for this purpose. M stops 1-meas turn with W on the outside track, He uses his L arm to turn W once CCW, then takes R in R and "claps" over her R with his L while she curtsies and he bows.

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 Sinika 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.

Presented by Alix Cordray and Bjørn Ove Opheim