

Reinlender and Polka, improvised

In Norway, especially the eastern areas, it is very popular to dance improvised reinlender and polka that include walking steps in various patterns. This way of dancing has been common at community dances at least since the 1950s. Many areas had a dance every Saturday and most people attended from the time they were confirmed (14) until they were married. Those who really enjoyed dancing might continue throughout their lives.

When I first arrived in Norway in the 1970s, these improvised forms were not highly regarded in the folk dance community, since they are a mixture of older gammeldans and newer foxtrot (often called "ordinary dance"). However, in recent years this way of dancing has surged in popularity, and some young dancers have become very adept at complex improvisations.

Source: On various dance floors, especially north of Oslo.

Music: 2/4. Any reinlender or polka. This way of dancing is especially well suited to tunes that are "crooked", having extra measures or half measures in a phrase.

Formation: Couples around the room. They generally progress in LOD, although not in a strict circle formation. Ballroom hold is common, although you can also hold ptr with both hands – either shoulder-waist or R arm under-L over.

Steps: Reinlender step: step on L (ct 1), step on R (ct &), step on L (ct 2), hop or lift (ct &). Repeats on opp ft.
Step-hop: step on L (ct 1), hop or lift (ct &). Repeats on opp ft.
Walk: A gliding walking step (ct 1). Repeats on opp ft.

Meas Pattern

I Promenade

1-2 M does two reinlender steps L-R moving fwd in LOD. W dances bkwd. M may swing W slightly twd center on his L step, and slightly away on his R step.

II Slow CW turn

1-2 Using 2 reinlender steps, turn once CW.

III Slow CCW turn

1-2 Using 2 reinlender steps, turn once CCW.

IV Fast CW turn

1 Using 2 step-hops, turn once CW.

Simple closed reinlender.

Using only these "ordinary" reinlender motifs, you can dance an "ordinary" closed reinlender. If you want, you can start with the regular reinlender pattern: 2 meas of motif 1 (promenade), and 2 meas of motif 4 (fast CW) turn.

Then, you can turn longer CW. You can add a phrase of slow CCW turn, as a sort of "rest".

You can do several CW turns slowly (motif II), before moving into the fast turn. The slow CW turn was often regarded as a transition into the CW turn.

Here are also some show-off steps, occasionally used by good dancers:

- A - Full extra-quick turn during fast turn*
- 0.5 While turning fast (motif 4), insert a full quick turn with two walking steps – the whole turn taking only 1 ct..
- B - Fast turn CCW*
- 1 Do fast turn (motif 4) CCW. In Norway, cps does not usually adjust position to have L ft between ptrs ft – that is, we stay on the same side as before, with R ft between ptrs ft.
- C - Several side steps*
- 1+ M can take several steps to the side, usually L: step on L to L (ct 1), step on R beside L (ct &). Repeat for several cts. (In the polka, he can also walk fwd several steps in a row.)

Patterns with walking steps. W follows M with opp ftwk.

- V Single walking step to change directions from CW to CCW*
- 1 M walk diagonally bkwd on R, pulling W closer to him (ct 6). His position and movement diagonally back in LOD are the signal to the W that a walk is coming.
- VI One reinlender step plus one walking step*
- 1-3 This is the “foxtrot” pattern. M does 1 reinlender step L, turning CCW to face LOD (cts 1 & 2). Step fwd on R (ct 3). M does 1 reinlender step L, turning CW to nearly face RLOD (cts 4 & 5). M walk diagonally bkwd on R, pulling W closer to him (ct 6).
- VII Two reinlender steps plus two walking steps*
- 1-3 M does 1 reinlender step L, turning CCW to face LOD (cts 1 & 2). M does 1 reinlender step R turning CW to face out (he may also move away from ctr). M walk diagonally bkwd on L then R, pulling W closer to him (cts 5-6).
- VII Three reinlender steps plus one walking step*
- 1-3.5 M does 1 reinlender step L, turning CCW to face LOD (cts 1 & 2). M does 1 reinlender step R turning CW to face out (he may also move away from ctr). M does 1 reinlender step L, moving sideways L while facing out (cts 5-6). M walk diagonally bkwd on R, pulling W closer to him (ct 7).

Including walking patterns in your dance

The walking patterns are most often used as the “promenade”. A common way to dance is to use one walking pattern repeatedly, then turn fast CW (motif 4), then perhaps a single walk transition (motif V), then turn slowly CCW (motif 3).

You can also combine walking patterns, or use different ones at different times.

You can start or end walking patterns in the middle.

You can turn CW using the 1 reinlender step plus one walking step, 1 1/2 meas per turn.

You can walk forward several steps in a row, with the W walking bkwd.

Developing your dance

Start simply, with only a few patterns, and build complexity little by little. Many M only used a few patterns.

M must be clear about what he wants to do. He signals W using body language, mostly rotation speed and exact position with respect to LOD. When M wants to do a reinlender step to the side, he should move his whole body sideways on the 1st ct. Dance close to your ptr, with a fair amount of body contact.

Using improvisation (leading and following) makes it fun to do the “same” dance many times during the evening. Try to shape your dance to the music as well as your partner. In Norway, usually each M has a repertoire of figures he likes to do. The W must be chameleons, able to follow any M.

To W: make sure you follow! He will not learn to lead unless you follow.

Polka

The same basic patterns apply to polka, but now the music is faster. Step-hop turns become pivot turns. Other than adaptations because of tempo, it is the same dance as the reinlender.

It is most common to use walking steps in the galopp type of polka with 2 svikts (down-up-down) rather than the hamborgar type with 3 svikts (down-down-down).

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