

These descriptions of old-time Norwegian dance were written for the North-South Teacher's Conference in 1991. I decided to leave them unchanged, since the descriptions also have a certain historical value. The references to Jostedøl'n are to the Heilo 7012 album that I used extensively for teaching (also contains Stabberinglender). – Alix in 2021.

Vals

(Norwegian waltz)

The waltz is the oldest of the gammeldans dances, having appeared in Norway right around 1800. It is still very popular today, and is the dance most likely to be known by the general public. One special characteristic of the Norwegian waltz is the pattern of down-up-down; that is, the weight is lowered on the 3rd count as well as the 1st. Good dancers will often “svikte bort” the 2nd and 3rd counts by taking only one step (on the 1st count) during the measure. This is especially prevalent on the right-footed measure when turning clockwise.

Another characteristic is that while rotating, you should think of the steps as going forward and backward, rather than side to side. In the normal clockwise rotation, you dance forward on the right foot and back on the left. In the reverse rotation, you do not “change sides” with your partner: your right foot remains between your partner's feet, and you dance forward on the left and back on the right.

The dance normally begins with the man facing LOD. He usually dances a few measures forward, then begins turning clockwise. After a while (say 8-24 measures), he stops turning and again dances forward in LOD. He may dance only one measure, and then begin to turn counterclockwise. He may dance several measures. He may turn clockwise again. Thus, the whole dance consists of the man dancing forward, turning one way, and turning the other way, put together in any order that the man wishes. (He must dance forward at least one measure in order to change directions.) This is also the basic pattern of other gammeldans dances such as polka and the turning masurka.

The following description of how to teach the dance is based on Noregs Ungdomslag's recommendations in their teacher training.

Do as I do

Begin with the dancers in a circle holding hands. The fiddler (or the record player) plays a waltz. You demonstrate in the middle and the dancers follow. The exact sequence will probably depend on whether you are teaching generic waltz, or a specific dance, but all the steps have the same svikt (down-up-down).

- Bounce down-up-down on both feet
- *Step on R, swing L across. Then do the opposite. (This is called slengsteg and is used in many dances.)
- Do as above, but place free foot on floor beside supporting foot: Step on R, set L toe beside. Then do the opposite. (This is called stoppesteg. If you are going to do a dance that uses this step, you need to practice doing several of them forward and several backward.)
- Do as above, but step forward on the right and back on the left. If the dancers seem to be having trouble with the svikt, you can swing the free foot as in the slengsteg. Norwegian teachers will not normally go on to taking 3 steps per measure; they assume you'll take the 3 steps when and if you need to. I sometimes go on to this 3 steps per measure, but only after they have been dancing for several weeks.
- If you are going to go on to stegvals, change to stepping on 1 and 3, right foot forward and right foot backward.

This sequence, or a variation of it, is repeated every week for the first several weeks of a beginner's course.

Turning as a couple

Join in shoulder-waist position. (Various ballroom positions can also be used, but they are usually more difficult in the beginning.) Make sure the partners are facing: you can usually get them to face one another if you demand that they look at each other. Put your right foot between your partner's feet. Together they do: forward on the right, back on the left. The man starts with one of these, usually forward on the right, while the woman starts with the other.

In the beginning, the couple does not try to rotate. Gradually, they rotate clockwise more and more. In the Norwegian theory, they will eventually manage a half turn per measure. (In my experience, this usually requires dancing at least once with someone who already knows how.) It is important to change partners

often. The dancers won't get build in habits at the beginning, and the faster learners will help bring along the slower ones. The ideal situation is to have a number of assistants in the class: people who already know how. (But they should not be allowed to talk too much theory to their fellow students.)

It is extremely rare to hear anyone talk about counterweight or leading in Norway. I think most teachers feel that these are best learned by experience, rather than intellectualizing about them. (Degree of intellectualization is one of the major differences between the way Norwegians learn to dance, and the way Americans approach folk dance.)

Generally, turning in the reverse direction is not taught. This is something learned on the dance floor after you have mastered turning clockwise.

Some simple mixers are useful in beginning classes. Here are two. Both might be called "Familievals", meaning "Family Waltz". We also might call them "Waltz Mixer".

FAMILIEVALS #1

Begin in a circle of couples, W on M's right. Hands are joined at shoulder height.

Meas Movement

- 1 Man steps on L, swings R over (slengsteg), to face corner. W steps on R, swings L over.
- 2 Man steps on R, swings L over (slengsteg), to face partner. W steps on L, swings R over.
- 3-4 Repeat meas. 1-2.
- 5-8 Drop hands with partner. Take ballroom position with corner (in Norway, M holds on top of W's R hand). Dance 4 waltz steps with corner, turning once and a half clockwise. At end, M puts W on his R and they rejoin in a large circle. The W that started on the M's left is now on his right.

FAMILIEVALS #2

Begin in a circle of couples, W on M's right. Hands are joined at shoulder height.

Meas Movement

- 1 M starting on his L, W on her R, dance one waltz step (or stoppesteg) forward.
- 2 Dance one waltz step backward, M on his R, W on her R.
- 3-4 The M drops hands with the W on his right, and leads the W on his L over to his R side. She turns once around to her R while doing 2 waltz steps. Man does 2 waltz steps in place (actually, it is best if he moves slightly backward on the first, and forward on the second). Rejoin hands in the circle.
- 5-16 Repeat measures 1-4 three more times, but don't open into the circle the last time. Instead, take ballroom position.
- 17-32 Dance waltz with the new partner, turning clockwise. At the end, M places W on his right. All join in a circle. (If you use Bakkedalsvalsen on Jostedøl'n, there are only 14 measures here instead of 16.)

Presented by Alix Cordray

Reinlender

(Norwegian schottische)

This is the newest of the gammeldans dances, having appeared in Norway sometime after 1850. Professional dance teachers showed very little interest in this dance, and it was only after it had become quite common that the teachers saw fit to use it. In the beginning, it was mostly seen in "less fashionable places". Names like "ringlender" and "rinlendar" are dialect words for reinlender. In southern Norway, it is often called polka or German polka.

There are two basic forms: open and closed. The open form is the one that corresponds to the international form. I have not seen parallels to the closed form in other countries. I often use the closed form as an introduction to improvisation in couple dances. Normally, an individual dancer uses one form or the other, but not both. Around Oslo, the open form is dominant.

Any Norwegian reinlender music can be used (2/4 meter). A characteristic of the dance is that the svikt is always "up and over", never the under-and-up ice skating sort of movement. (In fact, this is a characteristic of nearly all Norwegian dance.)

Reinlender step: Step fwd on L (ct 1), step fwd on R (ct &), step fwd on L (ct 2), lift (ct &). There are four even bounces. (The preceding description is the "official version". Sometimes people close on 1&. In Oslo, it has become fashionable to leave out the bounce on 1&; that is, dance down-up-down-lift.)

Reinlender turn: Step on L (ct 1), lift (ct &), step on R (ct 2), lift (ct &). (An alternative turn is fast two-steps: Step on L (ct 1), step on R (ct e), step on L (ct &), step on R (ct 2), step on L (ct e), step on R (ct &). Turn around once per measure. When turning CW step fwd on the L and back on the R.

Laus reinlender (Open reinlender)

Begin with couples facing LOD. M has R arm around ptrs waist, she has L hand on his R shoulder. Free hands hang. (Sometimes, the couple maintains ballroom position throughout.)

Meas Movement

1-2 Two reinlender steps fwd, beginning M L and W R.

3-4 Turn twice CW with 4 step-lifts.

Variations

•Drop hands, and turn away from partner on measure 1 (M to L, W to R). With both hands hanging at sides, dance forward on measure 2.

* Turn the whole four measures once in a while. Since you are also turning meas 3-4 of the previous set, this makes 6 measures of turning altogether.

•Turn CCW during meas 3-4.

Lukket reinlender (Closed reinlender)

Couples in shoulder-waist position or ballroom position. M faces LOD. The dance has three parts, and the man can vary freely among them. A common pattern is to dance them in the order shown, with the third part rotating CCW.

Part Movement

I Man dances forward with reinlender steps, usually starting with the L. He swings the girl slightly in and out of the circle (in when he does a L reinlender step). She does most of the turning, he dances almost straight forward.

II Turn CW with the reinlender turn (fast turn). One turn per measure.

III Turn CCW or CW with reinlender steps (slow turn). One turn takes two measures. It is usually the step on ct. 2 that is forward or backward.

Teaching tips: reinlender and polka

Open Reinlender

The standard teaching method begins with everyone in a circle. Alternate between two types of steps: single svikt (almost running) and double svikt (step-lift). Alternate more and more often. Then explain that you are to do two singles and one double. This is the basic reinlender step. (Personally, I have not had much success with this method. I prefer the straightforward approach: begin with step-step-step-hop.)

Once they can do the reinlender step alone, ask them to make couples as for the open reinlender. Get them to dance on opposite feet, M starting L and W starting R.

Next, you need to get the pattern that is used in the open reinlender: two reinlender steps, and four step-lifts. Some teachers like to go back to the big circle, some like to do it in couples dancing forward, and others just add the turn. I think the latter often works surprisingly well; it is somehow easier to grasp the pattern when there is a turn than when dancing straight forward.

The men have to “cheat” at the end of the second reinlender step, and get in front of their partners. It is important to change partners often. Since there are only two turns, it is not usually necessary to talk much about how to actually accomplish the turn. Let them struggle with it themselves. If you and other experienced dancers change partners along with everybody else, you can give some individual guidance. Here it is crucial to be helpful, not just to correct.

One dance we often use in conjunction with teaching is called Byttereinlender (changing [partners] reinlender). Dance the open reinlender twice with your partner. Then change partners every other time. Change partners by W dancing almost in place during the reinlender steps, while the M dances forward to the next W.

Closed Reinlender

Begin as for open reinlender. When they can do the reinlender step alone, dance with M moving fwd and W moving bkwd. Next, turn slowly. Finally, add the fast turn.

Polka

There are two main polka forms, which we distinguish as galopp (2 svikt) and hamborgar (3 svikt). Both follow the same pattern as the waltz, but are done to polka music. It is difficult to learn to do both: in particular, people who have first learned galopp have a very difficult time with hamborgar. You might be doing beginners a favor by teaching them hamborgar first.

There are a number of standard methods for teaching hamborgar, but none seem to work very well. Most begin by running (jogging around the room). Then, you try to get them to jog in rhythm: short-short-long. On the long, they must bend deeply, but the movement must not stop. Next, try to get them to move in space on the last count: place-place-move. Then, begin with the M dancing fwd and the W bkwd. Turn slowly, then faster (as in the waltz teaching).

For galopp, there is a simple method (but it leads to people dancing sideways rather than forward and back, so it has been the subject of some debate). It can be done in a single circle, or in a circle of couples. Do slide steps one way, then the other. Alternate directions more and more often, until you finally get a polka step. You can then repeat the process, turning around 1/2 at each change of direction, so that the circle always rotates CW. Then, hold hands in couples and try this. The finished Norwegian galopp does not have a hop. It should also be done so that movement in LOD (forward or back) occurs at the end of each measure.

For children, it is useful to remember that you can substitute slides to the left or right for polka turning steps.

In many places in Norway, they may dance the polka “backward” to the music: that is, start the step on count 2. They dance on cts 2, &, 1 instead of 1,&,2. Often, the dancers do not distinguish between one and the other - both are accepted equally. Some older music does not seem to accent the 1 significantly over the 2 - and one of the polkas on Jostedal'n even has an extra 1/2 measure in one of the phrases.