

## BAKMES (polka)

(Finland)

Bakmes (BAWK-mehss), as a dance term, essentially means "backward". A Swedish dialect word (occasionally spelled bakmäls), it is used to describe certain steps in which the dancers rotate in a contrary or backward direction, that is, a reverse turn. There are numerous forms of Bakmes (see \* note below). Done to polka music, the dance by this name is today found mostly in Finland, but only in the Swedish districts thereof. Although also known by some Finns, they attribute its origin to their neighbor across the Baltic. In Sweden itself, however, the polka Bakmes seems to have been completely forgotten except for one Stockholm folkdance society (see Source note below).

Inasmuch as this Bakmes is built upon polka rhythm, a knowledge of the Baltic-style polka -- which as a simple couple dance is called Polkett in Sweden -- is most desirable (see description of Suomalainen polka, the Finnish Polka). In Finland, where Bakmes still survives in living tradition, it is not such much a "dance" as it is a way of dancing to certain music -- in this case, polka. Just as in an ordinary waltz American dancers may turn L or R, perhaps balance, or dance grapevine steps, the Finland dancers, it was observed, changed "at will" between Polkett, walking steps, and Bakmes -- all during the same tune. It was clearly up to the whim of the dancers, and of course the space available on the floor at the moment. While the following description does not incorporate a polka step, but only the walk and turn -- which is the way the Stockholm society dances Bakmes -- one may keep in mind that a proper Polkett, or Finnish Polka, is also an appropriate step for a "total response" to this Baltic polka music.

- Source:** As learned at Svenska Folkdansens Vänner (The Friends of Swedish Folkdance, oldest folkdancing society in Sweden), by Gordon E. Tracie, and first brought to USA in 1951. Also danced and discussed a decade later with both Finnish and Swedish groups in Helsinki, Finland.
- MUSIC:** Record: Swedish RCA FAS-665 (Finnish Polka). Same also on RCA LPM 9910.
- Formation:** For any number of cpls, moving in LOD (CCW) around the room, W on M's R, her L hand on his R shoulder, his R arm around her waist. As a matter of courtesy and traffic convenience, turning cpls have floor right-of-way; walking cpls should keep out of their path.
- Steps:** Walking steps; polka Bakmes step (described below).
- Character:** Sprightly, yet both relaxed and controlled; posture erect but not stiff; dancing is light on the feet, with a "spring" due to being up on the toes somewhat.

This is a freestyle dance, in which Part A (walk) is simply a rest step affording the dancer an opportunity to get his breath or equilibrium before and/or after Part B (turn), which can be quite vigorous. Thus the two parts are not figures in the regular sense, but merely two responses to the music, alternated at will, with no fixed number of measures for either. (For esthetic reasons the break between the two parts is preferably made on an even musical phrase, though this is not necessary).

## BAKMES (cont)

**A. WALK**

In open pos, beg on outside ft, cpls move fwd in LOD, one step to each beat of the music, with light, springy walking steps, knee slightly flexed, for as many meas as desired. Free hand may hang naturally at side, or be on hip Swedish style (fingers fwd, thumb back).

**B. TURN**

M beg with lusty stamp on ct 1, cpls turn with polka Bakmes step (as described below). This may be danced either in closed waltz pos (with hands extended at arm's length straight out from shoulder), or in open pos as in the walk (in which case it is helpful to keep hands firmly on hips). Cpl turn CCW (i. e. L-hand turn), progressing fwd in LOD, for as many meas as desired, after which open pos walk is resumed.

Polka Bakmes step: In the logic of its step pattern, the polka Bakmes bears a resemblance to the Polska in that each step is repetitive (that is, not alternated to the other ft as in polka, waltz, etc), and makes a complete revolution in each full ct. Furthermore, like the cpl Polska turn, the W's step is basically the same as the M's except that it begins one ct later in the sequence. But unlike the typical Polska, which is in 3/4 meter, this Bakmes is in common time, both as to music and step ct.

One full step pattern of the polka Bakmes takes 2 meas of music. For convenience, however, it is best treated as a 4-ct step.

M's step:

Jump onto both ft, bending knees slightly (ct 1); step L, R, L, turning CCW (cts 2, & 3); leap twd LOD on R, completing full turn (ct 4). The jump is taken in place, the 3 quick steps turning L are very small, and the leap onto R is a big step in LOD. On the 4th ct, if the step is danced in closed pos M's L ft is brought around behind R in direction of motion, to assist in the turn; if step is danced in open pos, M's free L ft is projected slightly fwd (toe down). This, rather than merely lifting L ft in place.

W's step:

Step L, R, L, turning CCW (cts 1, & 2); leap R onto R (ct 3); jump onto both ft (ct 4).

Following is a step-pattern chart for both M and W, which should facilitate interpretation of the polka Bakmes step:

M's step					W's step				
Count:	1	2 and 3	4		Count:	1 and 2	3	4	
Dance:	Both	L, R, L	R		Dance:	L, R	L	R	Both

It will be noted that although dancing together, M and W are in effect performing a different rhythmic pattern. In learning, it may help for the M to count "1, 2 and 3, 4", and for the W to count "1 and 2, 3, 4".

\*NOTE: There is also a "Bakmes" found in western Dalarna, Sweden, but it is danced in 3/4 Polska rhythm, and has an entirely different reverse step, closely paralleling that in one of the figures of Røros pols from Norway.

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