Romany Polka
by Richard Powers

This polka is choreographed to the music Romany Life by Victor Herbert, from his 19th century opera The Fortune Teller. The choreography is named after the music, just as Durang's Grand Baden Polka sequence was named after the Baden Polka.

The elements in this choreography are from 19th century dance manual descriptions, from polka descriptions accompanying sheet music, and some are from period illustrations (for instance, the opening promenade position is from two illustrations of Jules Perrot dancing a polka). These variations continued into the late 19th century. By the time Melvin Ballou Gilbert wrote Round Dancing in 1890, he and other dance masters had collected several decades of variations, keeping all of them in their repertoire. So this polka sequence could have happened anytime between 1844 and the 1890s.

Introduction

Phrase 1  Take partner's R hand in R hand.
Phrase 2  Honor partner.
Phrase 3  Lady turns CW under gent's R arm, then both face LOD on the final note.

meas
4    Walk LOD 8 slow steps in shoulder promenade position, gent beginning L, lady beginning R foot. R hands are held extended forward; lady places her L hand on the gent's R shoulder.
1    Rock forward acknowledging partner and replace back. You may bob forward as in La Polkinade.
3    Cast away 6 walking steps to take open 2 hands.
4    Face-to-face polka, back-to-back swinging held hands forward, face-to-face, back-to-back.
2    Holding 2 open hands, do La Polkinade (by Henri Boizot, 1858): Gent glissé side L, chassé (close) R to L, Jeté L LOD while lifting straightened rear leg R LOD, close R to L. Accent count 3. Lady steps opposite.
2    Gent does a small L Pas de Basque in place then step R and lightly stamp L without weight, as lady does a CW Allemande turn under the gent's L arm, with a two-step, then step L and close R.

Chorus

4    4 turning polka steps traveling LOD. 19th century style is to lean toward the direction of travel.
2    Heel & Toe toward LOD, then half-turn polka. (This is D'Albert's Figure 7 in the above example.)
2    Heel & Toe on opposite feet, toward LOD, then second half-turn of the polka.

Charles D'Albert's polka choreography said that dancers "may adopt the figures in the order here laid down" or they may dance the figures "as the fancy may suggest." So continue with 4 polkas, or do this:
2    Optional variation: 2 turning polka steps, then releasing waltz position handhold.
2    Non-turning Polka step sideways toward LOD, releasing waltz position handhold. Gents half-turn left (CCW) as ladies half turn right (CW) and do a back-to-back turning polka toward LOD.
2    La Polkinade, taking open 2-hand position. Or keep waltz position if you are doing 4 polkas.
2    Ladies CW Allemande underarm turn, as above. The gent lightly stamps L at the end, as the lady closes R without weight (although some of the more spirited women would have stamped).
Part 1  Galop

2  Zig: Galop 4 slides diagonally LOD toward the center. (All three of Durang's polka sequences included a gallopade.)

2  Zag: Turn halfway CCW and Galop 4 slides diagonally out beginning with opposite feet.

4  Polka in a Square. This is Charles D'Albert's Figure 10 from the above examples. Polka step toward LOD (gent facing out) and quarter-turn CW*. Polka step "over the elbows" toward the center and quarter-turn CW. Polka step RLOD and quarter-turn CW. Polka step toward the outside and quarter-turn CW. Keep the original style of leaning toward the direction of travel on each polka step.

Then to fit the accent of the music, replace the first polka step with a schottische step-hop, leaning toward LOD. Charles Durang's "Butler Trot" style of polka (jété polka) works best with this variation. Clearly mark the timing of the fourth polka step, to accent the music.

* D'Albert wrote "half a turn" but he clearly meant a quarter-turn, to form a square pattern.

8  Repeat the Zig-Zag Galop and Polka in a Square.

Chorus  As before. On the last measure ladies take 2 steps L-R instead of a step-close. Ladies only half-turn under this time, to end facing RLOD.

Part 2  Separate from Partner, Tour sur Place

2  Beginning L foot, Galop Chassé 4 slides away from partner, gents separating toward the center, ladies outward.

2  Double heel-toe R toward partner, folding arms crossed low in front.

2  Return to partner with 1 polka, R-L-R, and 2 walks, L-R.

4  Coup de Talon Tour sur Place: both partners place lowered extended R arms around partner's waist and raise L arms, as shown in the photo on the previous page. 1) Click heels to the left, 2) step side L, 3) close R (or cross R slightly over L), in QQS timing, four times, turning in place.

4  Slip away to take R hands and Moulinet circle around partner CW 8 pas marché walking steps. Try to walk faster (i.e. farther) with the walking steps than you did with the Coup de Talon steps. Take waltz position on the last 2 walking steps for a polka, gaining your first foot free.

Chorus  As before, faster. Note in Durang's Grand Baden Polka that the polka music was "played very quick" at the end.

Coda

2  Galop 4 slides as a couple LOD.

2  Double Heel & Toe toward RLOD.

2  Galop 4 slides as a couple to RLOD. (D'Albert's Figure 9 also retraces a step in reverse LOD.)

2  Double Heel & Toe toward LOD.

4  4 turning polkas traveling LOD.

3  5 Pivots in place then Assemblé, keeping held hands, releasing and raising rear arms.