



DESCRIPTIONS OF MID 19th CENTURY COUPLE DANCES

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There are often many ways of executing 19th century couple dances, sometimes differing widely from source to source. Here are some of the variations found in dance descriptions in 65 mid-19th century couple dances, 1840-1880.

● = very common ○ = somewhat common ◆ = least common or rare

The Mid 19th Century WALTZ

also called the Valse, Valse à Trois Temps, Waltze, Plain Waltz, Common Waltz, Three-Step Waltz and Old Waltz

54 references

3/4 time

MM: ♩ = 144 to 198 bpm

Here we find that the differences are not as much in the execution of the step as in the choice of words used to describe it. It's possible that each of the following can describe the very same waltz, but since the dancers are rotating as they step, the first step is perceived as either a preparatory movement, a step in motion, or a completed step.

- Man steps left across in front of his partner on count 1
- Man steps diagonally forward left on count 1
- Man steps left back diagonally to the left on count 1
- Man steps to the left side (2nd position) on count 1
- ◆ Man steps straight back left (4th position) on count 1
- ◆ Man steps forward with his left foot on count 1 (into 4th position)

None of the 54 sources have the man starting with his right foot on count 1. All of the descriptions call for a clockwise turn. None describe deep (or even visible) pliés on count 1. Some waltz descriptions rise on counts 2 & 3.

THE POLKA

63 references from 1844 on

4/4 time

MM: ♩ = 104 to 116 bpm

- Hop-glide; close; leap; rest. ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩
- Hop-glide; close; glide; rest. ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩
- Hop-glide; jeté; jeté; rest. ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩
- Glide; close; leap; hop. ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩
- Glide; close; glide; hop. ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩
- Glide; close; glide; rest. ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩
- ◆ Hop-glide; rest; close; glide. (rare) ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩

Note: These just describe the basic polka step.

Early polka descriptions include many variations.

The Mid 19th Century SCHOTTISCHE
Often spelled Schottisch, sometimes Der Schottische

52 references from c. 1850 on 4/4 time MM: ♩ = 72 to 84 bpm

- ❶ The first part is done sideways, back and forth, without turning ("Balancé"). The second part turns around twice with step-hops ("Voltes").
- ❶ The step-hop (volte) is described as a leap-hop, jeté -hop or spring-hop.
- ❶ Second part is a Valse à Deux Temps (next page).
- Advised to vary with reverse turns on the second part (step-hops or deux temps).
- Double the length of both first and second parts.
- The first part turns, as a slow Polka.
- Advance and retire on the first part.
- Travel forward without turning on the first part, similar to later Military Schott.
- Replace the first part with 4 galop steps (slow chassez).
- Second part may turn around only once instead of twice.
- ♦ Count 4 of the Balancé has the free foot crossed behind the supporting foot.
- ♦ Back the lady or gent in pursuit on the first part.
- ♦ Schottische described as only the "second part" step-hops. (rare)
- ♦ Balancé in and out of the room on the first part.

THE GALOP

also Le Galop, Gallopade, Galopade, Galloppade and La Coquette

53 references from 1826 2/4 time MM: ♩ = 126 to 152 bpm

- ❶ Chassez 4 or 8 slides in a straight line before making a half-turn to recommence with the other foot.
- Only 4-slide galop described.
- ❶ Chassez for as many slides as you wish.
- ❶ Alternate the chassez with a turning Galop (Valse a Deux Temps in 2/4 time)
- ❶ For variety, reverse the direction of both the half-turns and full turns.
- Galop described as the turning step (Deux Temps) only.
- Begin or alternate with a promenade.
- ♦ Galop straight 6 slides then make a full turn on counts 7 & 8. Repeat, same foot.
- ♦ Back the lady or gent in pursuit.
- ♦ Follow the lead couple anywhere in the hall.
- ♦ Dance in contra lines exchanging ladies with opposite couple.

THE VALSE À DEUX TEMPS

also The Deux Temps, Two-Step Waltz, Two-Step, Waltz in Double Time and Galop

52 references from 1843 on 3/4 or 2/4 time MM: ♩ = 144 to 264 bpm

❶ A smoothly turning two-step (polka without a hop) in triple or duple time: glide side (2nd pos); close; glide side. Same as the turning galop step. Note that the next 3 are completely different kinds of steps, all called the same name.

❶ Glissade and chassez toward LOD w/o turning very much, passing your partner who may be at your right side (cts 1-2-3); pivot-turn in place crossing R behind as your partner passes you. Smooth gliding style.

○ 1847 Cellarius: To fast waltz music (88 measures/min.), half-turn pivot on 1st measure; side-close chassé LOD on 2nd meas. (stepping cts 1&3); repeat with lady pivoting in front of gent on 1st meas. Rotate CW or CCW on 1st meas.

♦ 1843 D'Orsay: (1) Glide L, (2) close R and glide L, (3) hop L, turning halfway CW or CCW. Repeat opposite.

♦ 1843 D'Orsay: (1) hop L, (2) Glide L, (3) close R and glide L, turning halfway CW or CCW.. Repeat opposite.

❶ Reverse (CCW) rotation is described as being possible in all of these versions.

❶ Duple timing is 

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♦ Duple timing is 

○ Triple timing is 

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♦ Back the lady or gent in pursuit in  duple timing, the first of 3 steps being longest.

♦ In duple time, slightly plié on counts 1 and 3 (of 4).

Note: Because of translation and semantics problems with Cellarius and his imitators, it is possible to misinterpret the Deux Temps as having only 2 weight changes instead of 3. A study of concordances clarifies this potential error.

THE REDOWA

also Redowa Valse and Redova

47 references from 1847 on 3/4 music (2/4 possible) MM: ♩ = 144 bpm

❶ Descriptions are clearly a turning Pas de Basque, and are not usually confused with the Polka Redowa (below).

○ From 1856 through the 1880s, a "shifted" Pas de Basque appeared as the Redowa (glide-cut-switch, which is still not the Polka Redowa's glide-cut-leap).

♦ A single source does call the Polka Redowa a Redowa (a book with many other errors).

❶ Reverse turn. Change directions by adding a one-bar bridge backing the man.

❶ The term "Redowa" often referred to the general act of backing the lady or gent in pursuit, often with an open two-hand hold, like the original Bohemian Redowa.

○ An early Redowa had three parts (like the Cellarius), including a two-handed pursuit and an unusual Deux Temps.

○ The Redowa may be done in duple time: 

♦ Glide to the side (2nd pos) on count 2, instead of 4th position.

♦ Combine one bar of Redowa with one bar of Waltz.

THE POLKA REDOWA

22 references from 1858 on

3/4 music

MM: ♩ = 120 to 140 bpm

- ① Glide; cut (or close); leap. 
- ① Hop-glide; cut (or close); leap. 
- ♦ Hop-glide; close; glide (diagonally forward).
- ♦ Reverse turn.

THE POLKA MAZURKA

also Mazurka Polka, Polka-Mazur and The Mazurka

46 references from 1854 on

3/4 music

MM: ♩ = 120 to 140 bpm

All descriptions are essentially the same (glide-close-hop-glide-close-leap), but there is some diversity in the gesture on the count-three hop.

- ① Close the forefoot to the front of the supporting foot, toe pointing down to floor.
- Close the forefoot to the rear of the supporting foot (but not described as a ronde-de-jambe movement).
- ♦ Close the forefoot to the side of the supporting foot.
- Click the heels on count three.

Other variations:

- Reverse turns.
- Vary by oscillating (half-turn right then half-turn left).
- Vary with a promenade (i.e. forward Polka Mazurka without turning).
- ♦ Follow with 16 Redowa steps.

THE VARSOVIENNE

also La Varsoviana, Varsouvienne and Varsouvianna

43 references from c.1850 on

3/4 music

MM: ♩ = 120 to 144 bpm

FIRST PART:

- ① Polka Redowa a half-turn before you point.
- Waltz a half-turn before you point.
- ♦ Two-Step or Chassez a half-turn before you point.
- ① Do the turn-and-point figure four times (8 bars) before going on to Part 2.
- Do the turn-and-point figure eight times (16 bars) before going on to Part 2.

- ♦ Do the turn-and-point figure two times (4 bars) before going on to Part 2.
- Reverse turn as a variation.
- ♦ Oscillate the turns (turn to the right than turn to the left).
- ♦ Close the pointing foot behind the supporting foot on count 6.
- ♦ Change waltz position after the half-turn.

SECOND PART:

- ❶ Commence either with two "mazurka steps" in a straight line or two turning Polka Redowas, before the final turn and point,
- ❶ Only the two mazurka steps are described.
- ♦ Only the two turning Polka Redowas are described.
- ♦ Click the heels during the mazurka step.

THIRD PART (rare):

- ♦ Polka Redowa as a third part.
- ♦ Holubiec as a third part.

THE CELLARIUS MAZURKA WALTZ

also La Cellarius, the Cellarius Waltz, Cellarius Valse, Valse Cellarius, Valse Mazourka and Mazurka Valse

23 references from 1845 on

3/4 music

MM: ♩ = 144 bpm

There were originally three parts (or four in an 1845 description) to the Cellarius, which simplified to only one.

FIRST PART:

- ❶ Hop-glide-hop timed 
- Same steps timed 
- Done sideways (back and forth) before turning.
- ❶ Later, glide-hop-hop (the Skater's Waltz) began to replace the original step (around 1870), and tended to predominate as "The Cellarius" thereafter.
- ♦ An early description (1845, before Cellarius' own book) had the gent backing on the second hop-glide-hop, possibly turning. Then this first part (named "The Mazurka") continued with 3 heel-clicks on either foot, probably turning.

SECOND PART:

- ❶ Click heels; side step; close. Repeat in the same direction. Then reverse direction 2 bars.
- Raise the free foot behind on count 6 (just before reversing direction).
- ❶ Same, done only once each direction (back and forth and back and forth).
- ♦ The 1845 description included this (3rd) version, without a heel-click, as a fourth figure, named "The Moresca."
- Click heels again as you close on count 3.

- ♦ Danced in a square (quarter-turns) .
- ♦ Heel-click 3 bars in the same direction and rest on the 4th bar before reversing.

THIRD PART:

- ❶ Hop; glide; hop (and turn halfway); hop; glide; cut (without turning).
- ♦ Click the heels together on the count 6 coupé.

Note: This third part quickly faded from practice. Then the second part faded.

THE CACHUCA (from the 1845 source):

- ♦ Glide; hop; close (with a slight bounce), then walk 3 steps turning halfway. Repeat opposite.

THE FIVE~STEP WALTZ

also Valse à Cinq Temps and Waltze à Cinq Temps

19 references from 1847 on

5/4 music

MM: ♩ = 144 to 152 bpm

There were two different versions of this dance:

- ❶ A modified Hop Waltz (3 counts) followed by a two-count pivot (which she leaps), introduced by Cellarius.
- ❶ A "mazurka step" (3 counts) followed by a step-hop on counts 4 & 5.

The first version dominated the first decade of the dance, but was superseded by the second version in later decades. A late-century version replaced the first three steps with the first three counts of the Yorke.

THE ESMERALDA

22 references from 1858 on

4/4 music

MM: ♩ = 104 to 116 bpm

All description are of the same step, but are worded in two ways:

- ❶ Galop 4 slides, turning after the 4th step; two bars of turning Polka.
- ❶ Galop 2 slides; three bars of turning Polkas.

You will find the execution of the two descriptions identical unless you choose to interpret the Polka of the second description as commencing with a brief hop. In this case, the four slides of the galop would be interrupted by the hop, If this interpretation of the step were valid, at least one of the 22 sources would probably have mentioned the hop, but none did. Many did specify that there is no interrupting hop after the first two slides.

This concludes the survey of variations in mid-century couple dances. Dance steps which do not vary appreciably from one source to another include:

Bohemian (Heel and Toe) Polka	21 references
Danish Dance	20
Gorlitza	17
Hop Waltz (Sauteuse)	11
Sicilienne	10
Zulma L'Orientale	9
La Gitana (Carlowitzka)	8
La Koska	8
Zingerilla	7

NUMBER OF DANCE DESCRIPTIONS IN MID-CENTURY DANCE MANUALS

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