

KERRY POLKA SETS

Reconstruction and choreography by Richard Powers,
based on what he observed and danced in Ireland, supplemented with polka set
descriptions by Larry Lynch, Tracey Powers, Pat Murphy, and others

Formation: Four couples in a square, taking closed waltz position with partners

Music: Any polka with 8 bars phrases will do, with sections of 16 bars being ideal

Basic Footwork: The polka step here is a fairly smooth leaping two-step, without a preliminary hop, but there are many regional style variations, and a traveling pas de basque (redowa) in polka time is also seen on occasion. Note that this means that the Lead backs around in front of the Follow on count 1, like a rotary waltz, not taking a side-step like a normal polka.

1) The Body

Polka step leaning into the center, polka step back to place turning toward the next place to the right, full turning polka to progress to the next place to the right. Repeat a total of four times, to return home.

This is done in a small, compacted quadrille set, almost touching the other couples when you polka inward.

2) Figure 1 - Partner Change

Head couples begin turning polka in toward center (2 bars) traveling toward the right diagonal, then the man opens his right arm, with his partner in that arm, to carefully place his partner into the arms of the opposite man. Turning polka home with a new partner. Side couples do the figure. Heads then sides repeat, to get your partner back.

3) The Body

4) Figure 2 - Grand Star

All 4 men star left (left handshake with opposite man) promenading with partners in their right arms, traveling forward with 3 polka steps. Men back out and ladies wheel in on the 4th polka. Ladies star right home (right handshake with opposite lady) still in the arm of their promenading partners. Men wheel in and ladies wheel out on the 4th polka. All couples polka around the set for 8 bars.

5) The Body

6) Figure 3 - Grand Chain

All 4 ladies grand chain across by giving right hand star in the middle, to cross over to the opposite man (2 bars). Forearm-turn your opposite partner with left arm, turning counter-clockwise (2 bars). Ladies grand chain home with a right hand star in the middle (2 bars). Men give left hand to his original partner and raise the left hands high, letting ladies pass behind his back (2 bars). At the last moment, he turns almost halfway to his right (to see his partner who was behind his back) and takes right-in-right hands, crossed under left-in-left hands, bringing all the hands together. In this crossed-hand position, all couples polka around the set for 8 bars.

7 - 12) Repeat 1 - 6

13) The Body

Optional Traditions and Modifications:

These are some things that have been done with Kerry Polka Sets at Stanford. We encourage you to invent your own.

- **Set Cheer:** After the dance, bring hands into the middle to decide on and execute a final cheer as a set. This modification has become an integral part of the tradition.
- **Stomping:** Replace the "polka in" during the body with a double stomp.
- **Shouting:** Throw the held hands into the air and shout "Woo!" on the polka out.
- **Pivots:** Replace traveling polkas with pivots, and standing with pivots in place.
- **Role Reversal:** Reverse roles on the fly during the dance.
- **Eight Couple Sets:** We'll leave this as a challenge for you to figure out ;).