

Name of dance: Bulgar

Pronunciation: bull-**gahr**

Place of origin: the shtetl Krosne (Krasna) in the Podolia region of southwestern Ukraine

Source of music: Margot Leverett, *The Art of Klezmer Clarinet* (Traditional Crossroads CD 42960), Band 3: “Bulgar Medley”; Itzhak Perlman, *In the Fiddler’s House* (Angel CD 7243 5 55555 2 6), Band 10: “Der Alter Bulgar”. These two recordings are almost the only ones among modern klezmer recording that are suitable for the couples’ version of this dance. Other modern *bulgar* recordings abound, but their phrasing usually works at cross-purposes to the figures of the dance. Older sources are generally more reliable, and include *Naftule’s Freylekh* by Naftule Brandwine, and *Zol Zayn Gelebt* and *Nikolaev Bulgar* by Dave Tarras.

Learned from: Michael Alpert, 1991. Michael learned this dance from Isaac “Tsunye” Reimer, who died in 1989, and who came from the Krosne shtetl.

About the dance: This dance is similar to the *sher*, but is danced by only two couples to a set. Asked about this two-couple format, Reimer said: “If we were more than two couples, we probably would have danced a *sher*.” Often such couple dances were introduced to Jewish communities near the end of the 19th century by dance teachers who specialized in leading social dancing at weddings. The name of the dance may derive from Moldavian line dances called *bulgaresti* or *bulgareasca*. Obviously there is some connection to Bulgaria in the name, but what the connection is remains a matter of speculation. There were large numbers of Bulgarians living in Moldavia and the Odessa region in the late 19th century, and there was also sustained contact with northern Bulgaria by Moldavian Gypsy musicians, who were an important source of repertoire and style for Jewish folk musicians of the time. This general region also suffered major pogroms near the turn of the last century, and perhaps for this reason contributed heavily to Jewish emigration to America. Many of the *klezmer* musicians arriving in America at the time played *bulgars*, so much so that the entire East European dance repertoire became known among Jewish-American wedding musicians as “the bulgars”. Later Jewish immigrants from other regions didn’t even know the term. There are also line dance versions of the *bulgar*. They resemble what is now known as the Israeli *hora*, and may have been its source.

Rhythm: 2/4

Formation: 2 couples facing each other, with the woman of each couple on the R of the man.

Direction	Measure	Step
		<u>Figure I:</u> Circling
←	1	The 2 couples take hands at shoulder level in a circle, and move off in CW direction by stepping L (ct. 1), R (ct. 2).
	2-7	Repeat Measure 1 six more times.

Direction	Measure	Step
		<u>Figure I</u> (continued): <i>Note: Hands are held up in an ebullient and buoyant way, bouncing slightly on each step, and definitely not sagging into unconsciousness.</i>
⊥	8	Turning to face center, step L to L (ct. 1), continuing turning to face R, close R to L (ct. &), step on L in place (ct. 2), prepare to move CCW in the circle (ct. &). The leader may call “ <i>ayns-zvey-drey!</i> ” (“1-2-3!”).
→	9-16 17-31 32	Repeat Measures 1-8 with reverse footwork and direction. Repeat Measures 1-15. Repeat Measure 1 with reverse footwork and direction (in other words, do not do reverse of Measure 8, the “1-2-3” direction-changing step, because at this point you do not want to change directions). Drop hands at this point with your corner (i.e. with the opposite couple), and change contact with your own partner to a shoulder-hold.
		<u>Figure II</u> : Side to Side in Shoulder-Hold
→	1	Facing its opposite couple, each couple moves off to its own R , stepping R to R (ct. 1), down on flexed L across behind R (ct. 2).
	2-4	Repeat Measure 1 three more times.
←	5	Each couple moves off to its own L, stepping R across in front of L (ct. 1), down on flexed L to L side (ct. 2).
	6-8	Repeat Measure 5 three more times.
	9-16	Repeat Measures 1-8. During the last measure, let go of your shoulder-hold with your partner. <i>Note: During Figure II, the man’s R arm and the woman’s L arm are linked in shoulder-hold, but their other hands remain free. These free hands can be parked akimbo on their respective hips, or can be waved expressively (for example in a “shoo-ing” or “flicking away” motion) in the air. The two couples move in this figure as if on parallel tracks, starting facing each other, and then diverging from each other to their R sides, and then returning to facing.</i>
		<u>Figure III</u> : “ <i>Firn Aroys</i> ” (Leading Out)
↑	1-2	The 2 men “lead out” toward each other, stepping R (ct. 1), L (ct. 2), R (ct. 1), bringing arms up “Russian” style to where elbows are level with shoulders and each hand rests on or touches its opposite elbow, while either stamping with the free L foot or jumping on both feet at once and nodding to or acknowledging the other man (ct. 2).

Bulgar (continued):

<u>Direction</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Step</u>
		<u>Figure III (continued):</u>
↓	3-4	Men return to original positions by backing up L (ct. 1), R (ct. 2), L (ct. 1), R without weight (ct. 2).
↑	5-6	Men walk past each other's R shoulders to reach their corners with 4 steps: R (ct. 1), L (ct. 2), R (ct. 1), L (ct. 2).
	7-8	Men turn R elbows with their corners ½ way around until men again face across the set, while their corners use the last measure to continue "rolling out" to also face across the set. The footwork is again 4 steps as in Measures 5-6.
	9-16	Repeat Measures 1-8 to return to your own partner. <i>Note: In this figure as described, the women must hold their own places while the men are leading out toward each other, otherwise the set will get disoriented and fall apart. The next time this figure comes around, however, the roles are reversed, and the women lead out (passing L shoulders) while the men hold their places. This alternation of roles continues for as many times as this figure recurs during the dance.</i>
→	1-8	<u>Figure IV: Promenade</u> In "Varsouvienne" position (woman's hands held up near her shoulders, man to her L side holding her R hand with his R and her L with his L), each couple promenades CCW around the 2-couple set with 16 steps. On the last few steps, as they pass their home position, they release L hands and the woman can turn CCW under the man's R hand ("oysdreyen zikh"). This is done without interrupting the couple's forward progress.
	9-16	Repeat Measures 1-8 but step without weight on the last beat. The dance then begins again from the top. <i>Note: It is more important to keep to the beat than it is to the exact musical phrase. It would be out of keeping with the Yiddish spirit to follow these instructions too exactly, and a certain amount of happy chaos and improvisation suits the dance well.</i>

dance notes based (not slavishly!) on those by Michael Alpert