

Name of dance: Terkisher

Pronunciation: **tehr**-kish-ehr

Place of origin: Jewish communities of southern Moldavia

Source of music: Khevrisa: European Klezmer Music, SFW CD 40486, Band 18:

“Bughici’s *Terkisher Freylakhs*”; also many recordings by Naftule Brandwine and others, including modern interpretations such as The Klezmatics: Between Two Worlds (Aviv Productions), Band 7: “Mizmor shir lehanef (Reefer Song)”.

Learned from: Michael Alpert, 1999; with background information on Greek *syrtos* from Joe Kaloyanides Graziosi

About the dance: The name of the dance means “Turkish”, and comes from a time when Turkish or Ottoman influence extended far beyond what is now Turkey. During the 18th and early 19th century, when the area of Moldavia and Bessarabia was in dispute between the Ottoman and Russian empires, an agreement was reached that the area would belong to Turkey but be ruled by Greek Orthodox Christians, the so-called Greek Phanariots, to allow Russian control of the church there. Moldavia thus underwent an extended period of Greek influence, which included exposure to Greek music. Moldavian Jewish *klezmorim* would have been likewise exposed, and would probably have heard *syrtos* music, and seen the dances done to it. The Greek word *syrtos* means “pulled” and refers to the action of the leader of a dance line, who “pulls” the line along behind him.

Judging from the style of this music that found its way into the Moldavian Jewish klezmer repertoire, the type of *syrtos* in question comes from the Greek islands rather than from the mainland, and hence carries a rhythmic pattern of slow-slow-quick or 3-3-2 (as opposed to the mainland *syrtos* or *kalamatianos*, which is slow-quick-quick or 4-2-2). This gives it a lilting and somewhat languorous quality, well captured by the above Klezmatics song about marijuana, a pastime probably more traditional than even they imagine (though they do sing about its sanction by the Maggid of Mezerich!). Many *terkisher* tunes found in early klezmer recordings of the 20th century such as those by Naftule Brandwine may not be old Moldavian material at all, but are more likely taken directly from Turkish or Greek sources since they were played by klezmer musicians for Greek audiences in Constantinople and New York. But the *Terkisher Freylakhs* tune above does come from Avram Bughici of the Bughici family of klezmer musicians from Iași, Moldavia. Whether Moldavian Jews actually danced something like an island *syrtos* is a matter of speculation, since by the late 19th and early 20th century, the *terkisher* tunes in the klezmer repertoire were treated mainly as ones to listen to rather than to dance to. But given that klezmer music already had plenty of listening repertoire (*doinas*, ballads, etc.), it seems unlikely that this infectious music was originally imported only for its listening value. More likely there were perhaps very simple dances that went with it that were forgotten during the course of the 19th century, the way dances often are forgotten for lack of a way to write them down or preserve them.

Terkisher (continued):

If this is right, the dances are not hard to reconstruct, since the Greek sources are still with us, and can be reinterpreted through the filter of klezmer and Moldavian dance styles. That is what is attempted here.

Rhythm: 8/8, counted 1 – 2 – 3, 1 – 2 – 3, 1 – 2,
or slow slow quick

Formation: Line dance, hands held in “W” position, leader at the R end.

Direction	Measure	Step
→	1	<p><u>Basic Step:</u> Facing and moving to the R, step on R (ct. S), step on L (ct. S), close R to L (ct. Q).</p>
	2	<p>Repeat Measure 1 with reverse footwork but in the same direction. <i>Note: This step can be done in a simple walking style, or with more lilting movement by dipping into flexion on the first two counts and rising on the last, giving it a feel of “down-down-up”.</i></p>
		<p><u>Variation 1:</u> Going backwards Repeat Basic Step with same footwork, but face L as you move to the R.</p>
		<p><u>Variation 2:</u> Turning <i>Note: This variation is for the leader to do as the rest of the line continues with the Basic Step.</i> Let go of hand-hold and continue the Basic Step with a slow turn in either direction, resuming hand-hold when the turn (or turns) is complete.</p>
→	1	<p><u>Variation 3:</u> Swaying Travel Facing and moving to the R, step R (ct. S), touch L forward and somewhat toward center, possibly transferring weight just briefly to it (ct. S), step on R in place (ct. Q).</p>
	2	<p>Repeat Measure 1 with reverse footwork but in the same direction.</p>

Terkisher (continued):

Direction	Measure	Step
↑	1	<p><u>Variation 4: In Place Facing Center</u> Facing center, step on R toward center (ct. S), touch or briefly transfer weight to L toward center (ct. S), step back on R in place (ct. Q).</p>
↓	2	<p>Step back on L (ct. S), briefly transfer weight to R away from center (ct. S), step forward on L in place (ct. Q).</p>

Note: These variations are just embellishments on the Basic Step in a Greek island syrtos style. They can be mixed and matched and further embellished to suit the mood of the dancers.

dance notes by Erik Bendix