

# RŮČENICA

## Bulgarian

PRONUNCIATION: ruh-cheh-NEE-tsoh

TRANSLATION: The word "růčenica" (also "râčenica") is a term used to indicate an irregular 7-count Bulgarian musical rhythm consisting of two beats of two counts followed by one beat of three counts. "Růčenica" is also used to indicate the group of dances done to this rhythm. The term comes from the Bulgarian root words for hand or forearm, "růka" (singular) or "růce" (plural).

SOURCE: Dick Oakes learned this dance from Anatol Joukowsky who described it in his book *The Teaching of Ethnic Dance*, J. Lowell Pratt and Company, New York, New York, 1965, and who taught it at the 1957 University of the Pacific Folk Dance Camp (now the Stockton Folk Dance Camp). Since the 1950s, many other instructors, such as Dick Crum, René Besné, Yves Moreau, and Jaap Leegwater, have taught variations on the růčenica theme. Special thanks are extended to Jaap Leegwater, from whom much of the information for these notes was obtained.

BACKGROUND: A very important "prop" used in the růčenica is the handkerchief (or scarf) made of linen or silk called the "růčenik." The růčenik, often fringed, is a part of the costume in many areas of Bulgaria. Dancers may hold the růčenik by opposite corners and twirl it, or hold it by one corner and flourish it grandly. It is also sometimes held in both hands by adjacent corners and held out in front of the body. The use of the růčenik allows the dancers a greater range of creativity and enhances their movements.

Most experts agree that the růčenica is Bulgaria's National Dance and it is danced throughout the year. Special occasions bring out the růčenica dancers and many line dances bear the names of such occasions. Examples are "Svatbarska Růčenica" (wedding dance) and "Lazarska Růčenica" (a seasonal ritualistic festival dance). Růčenici are danced in all of the ethnographic regions of Bulgaria, taking on various regional and local style characteristics.

MUSIC: Many good růčenica melodies have been produced on records, cassettes, and audio CDs, such as:

XOPO (LP) X-LP-1A, side 1, bands 4 and 6; side 2, band 4

Jaap Leegwater produced a cassette which has, in addition to five pravo-style dance melodies and five three-measure-group dance melodies, six růčenica-style dance melodies from various regions:

Leegwater, Jaap: Pan Bulgarian Folk Dances (cassette) JL 1987.02

There are also several sources of sheet music for playing růčenica music. Four are available in a collection by Marcus B. (Holt) Moskoff:

Holt, Marcus B.: *Orchestral Melodies for Gajda, Gadulka, Kaval, and Tambura: 1977; Stara Zagora Ruchenitsa, Uvalijska Ruchenitsa, Ruchenik, Kyustendilska Ruchenitsa*

**FORMATION:** Originally done as a solo dance ("solova"), the rŭčenica may also be found as a dance for two ("po dvojka"), a dance for three ("po trojka"), and, most recently in its evolution, in a closed or open circle ("na horo") holding each other's hands, sashes, or belts ("na lesa"). Although the rŭčenica is danced in all these formations, Bulgarians distinguish it from other group dances called "hora" (plural for horo), possibly because the hora have no solo form. These notes only present the freestyle solo and partner forms of the dance.

**METER/RHYTHM:** 7/16. The 7-count rŭčenica rhythm is the most popular irregular dance rhythm in Bulgaria. It consists of two beats of two counts followed by one beat of three counts (2+2+3=7). These three major beats are counted in the step descriptions that follow as 3 dancer's counts of two quicks and a slow (QQS). The tempo of the rŭčenica can be very slow, or very fast, or anywhere in between.

**STEPS/STYLE:** The steps and arm-and-hand movements described here are those found in a freestyle solo dance form, or dances done by two or three persons. Although described as beginning with a particular foot, the steps may just as correctly begin with the opposite foot.

In both the solo and partner forms of the rŭčenica, Bulgarian men are free to do flashy acrobatic movements, including kneeling, sitting, or even lying on the floor (some of which are described below). Men may also do squatting and leg slapping, as well as vigorous rhythmic and cross-rhythmic clapping actions. Women, on the other hand, are much more subdued, utilizing more graceful hand, arm, and body movements.

Regarding the solo form of the dance, Professor Joukowsky, in his book *The Teaching of Ethnic Dance*, relates, "There is a feeling of rivalry between dancers. The fact that someone is dancing on the floor with him spurs the dancer on to greater heights. Usually an admiring circle is formed about the dancer or dancers to encourage them with shouts or occasional handclapping. As excitement mounts, a call of 'ee-hoo-hoo' is shouted in encouragement."

## STEPS

**BASIC THREES (for M and W):** Step softly in place R, slightly bending ankles and knees (bt 1); step softly in place L, straightening knees (bt 2); step softly in place R slightly bending ankles and knees (bt 3). Repeat with opp ftwk. The step has a soft down-up-down character.

**BOUNCE THREES (for M and W):** Steps are similar to those of Basic Threes, except that they are not as soft; there is less bending of ankles and knees, giving a bouncy character to the steps.

**KNEE LIFTS (for M and W):** Steps are similar to those in Bounce Threes, except that the knee of the free ft is raised. The knee raises for M are much higher than for W.

**CROSSING STEP (for M and W):** Steps are similar to those of Bounce Threes,

except that the second of the three steps is in front of or crossed over in front of the first.

SCISSORS STEP (for M and W): With legs straight, and a slight bend at the hips, step R in place as L is extended fwd with toe near or touching floor (bt 1); repeat with opp ftwk (bt 2); repeat with original ftwk (bt 3).

HOP-STEP-STEP (for M and W): Hop L, facing slightly R and extending R diag to R (bt 1); hop L, facing ctr with R extended fwd (bt 2); turning to face slightly L, step R across in front of L (bt 3). M hold their R leg higher than W, have a broader sweep from R to L, and bend knees slightly more on the step.

SQUAT STEP (for M only): M drop into a squat on balls of ft, knees almost together (bt 1-2); rise to standing pos (bt 3). At times one ft is thrust fwd on the third beat.

KNEELING STEP (for M only): M drop onto one or both knees, lean fwd, and hit the floor with palms or fists with or against the rhythm.

SLAPPING STEP (for M only): M individually and creatively slap thighs, calves, and hips in syncopated rhythm while dancing the steps of their choice.

#### ARMS AND HANDS

BASIC HANDS (for M and W): Hands are often held on hips during the Růčenica, especially when a rest is needed after some energetic arm motions. W may use fists on their hips but often hold hands fwd on hips with palms dn, fingers fwd, thumbs bkwd. M may use fists, but often hold palms against hips, fingers dn, thumbs fwd.

BIG ARMS (for M only): Hold the hands up at head level. Extend the R arm to the R, and bend the L elbow with the L hand aproximately in front of the face. Hold the fingers together and extend them with the thumb held out slightly. Hold the hands down at an angle ("broken wrist") rather than in line with the forearm. In time with one Basic Threes or other step, move the hands in a shallow upward arc from one side to the other, sometimes with a slight dn-up motion of the arms and a slight waving movement of the hands.

LITTLE ARMS (for M only): Hold the arms and elbows at chest level or slightly lower, and with the hands not quite as stiff as in Big Arms. Hold the R arm across in front of the body with the elbow bent. Hold the L elbow, also bent, to the L side with the forearm down at an angle and the hand near the back of the hip, palm dn. During one Basic Threes or other step, bring the arms across the body in a motion somewhat akin to that used in Big Arms so that they end up in the opp pos. It is said that the side-to-side movement in Big Arms and Little Arms represents the cutting of grain (such as wheat) with a scythe.

WAVING HANDS HIGH (for W): With hands extended high overhead and slightly fwd, wave hands from side to side at wrists. This waving may be on each of the three beats, or on just the first and third beats.

WAVING ARMS HIGH (for W): With the hands held up as in Waving Hands High, wave the arms with elbows slightly bent and the hands making the same motions as in Waving Hands.

WAVING ARMS FWD (for W): Extend arms fwd from shldr, R hand somewhat higher than L, palms dn, fingers of R slightly up, fingers of L slightly dn. Reverse pos of arms by lowering R and raising L. At the end of the stroke, switch hands to opp pos. This motion may be made slowly on the first and third beats, or with a more fluttering motion on each of the three beats.

CLAPPING (for M): With hands held fwd at about chin level, clap hands with or against the rhythm at any time.

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MEAS

MOVEMENT DESCRIPTION

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INTRODUCTION - None.

SOLOVA ("single" or "solo")

The freestyle solo rŭčenica is considered the oldest and most original form of the dance. Upon hearing the music, dancers may spontaneously begin to dance the above movements to the 7-count rhythm, following the dictates of the dancers' own hearts, emotions, and inspirations.

The solo rŭčenica is the least structured form and gives the dancer much freedom and room for improvisation. The steps vary widely in the solo form, being danced not only in place, but in any direction. In addition to the steps described above, dancers may add spins and turns to the steps for variety.

PO DVOJKA ("for two") and PO TROJKA ("for three")

Often, the improvisational communication between two dancers develops into a couple dance. They may dance opposite each other, or hold hands, and advance to and retreat from each other, circle each other, or parallel each other's movements. A give and take feeling is often present, with dancers complementing each other's actions. When a third person joins in, a trio is formed. This form is not nearly as spontaneous as the solo or couple forms of the dance.

The choreographed couple and trio rŭčenica forms, believed to be of a much later origin, appear to have been influenced by other dance forms from outside the country; examples are ballroom dances done at various courts, and the Russian troika dances.

NOTE: The "na horo" (in the circle, line) or "na lesa" (belt hold) type of rŭčenica is a group dance. As it is not danced in a freestyle manner, it is not covered in these notes.