

Alpine Zwiefacher

Please, enjoy these notes about the Zwiefacher dance and music.

Defined

The Zwiefacher almost certainly originated in Bavaria. Two forms of documentation have been preserved from the 1400's; musical notation and arrest records. Arrest records? Dancing in a closed hold, face to face with someone other than your spouse, was an impermissible violation in pre-renaissance times. When there was a musician there, even while dancing with your spouse, you were doing it "in public", too!

The Zwiefacher is most common in areas of the Alps but its mixed rhythms have never been confined to their home there; Southern Germany, Austria & Switzerland. They have just survived better there. The Danish *To Ting*, with waltzes and step hops, or the Norwegian *Rassmus Storm*, with *snoa* and *pols* turns, qualify as Zwiefacher forms. So do some French, Italian and Slovenian dances, mostly in or near the Alps.

The current definition of Zwiefacher requires two things, mixed rhythms and the possibility for couples to turn face to face. If you are inspired to create a tune for a mixture of Mazurka, Polka and Blues... Well, I have no idea how to annotate the dance but am game to try dancing it. There are recordings assembled out of such a variety of music. They are fun though it is doubtful that casual dancers can be counted on to make them a fad.

Steps

The Zwiefacher is usually a mixture of Waltz and pivot (German: Dreher) steps, often quite scrambled together.

Waltz: (Oom-pah-pah rhythm, danced with steps on all three beats)

Pivot (Oom-pa rhythm, danced with one step on the Oom beat)

These waltz and pivot steps, long predate the concept of moving in a line-of-direction around the dance floor, a concept invented in the huge Viennese ballrooms in the 1700's. Until some of the Viennese concepts merged into the Zwiefacher, it had no standard turning direction or line of dance. If the Zwiefacher moves at all it usually moves just like the other popular couple dances from the 1400's; the Hungarian *Csardas*, the Norwegian *Steigarn* and the Swedish *Slängpolska*. All move rather randomly about the room.

In most places it is still danced in place. Yet; Zwiefacher tunes with even numbers of waltzes and pivots can be danced in progression like a waltz, turning the couple once on each two pivot steps or two waltz steps. Indeed, many German people dance it that way. Few Germans were exposed to the Zwiefacher between the 1500's and the 1900's. When Zwiefacher recordings sold well in the 1920's, many who began dancing to those recordings were free to assume it moved around the floor like the waltz. They still are free to do so, as are you.

The full pivot turn uses 4 beats of music and the full waltz turn 6 beats. A progressing couple's rate of rotation will continuously speed and slow, centrifugal forces changing at the same time. One prone to dizziness may become uncomfortable. I recommend; make your partner comfortable. Dance in place, just like they did in the old tiny alpine dance halls. Take all your steps forward. (That is; forward in relation to your own body, not forward in relation to a dance line of direction.) Turn at an even speed, about a half turn on 3 waltz beats and a third of a turn on each pivot step. At first you might dance with no turn at all. You have rhythm to worry about, why worry about balance too? A shoulder waist hold is common, so is a waltz hold.

In the traveling waltz, your three steps that begin with the left foot go forward in relation to the dance floor direction, but are moving backwards in relation to your own body. Your Zwiefacher pivot steps also all go forward, unlike the pivot steps in the Scandinavian *Snoa*, where your body is stepping backwards each time you step onto you left foot. Obviously your forward steps cannot be long enough to smash into your partner, though the zweifacher can be danced in place with a delightfully cuddly dance hold. It is easy to feel the difference between dancing in place and dancing in line of direction while dancing a Zwiefacher. To keep moving in the line of direction dancers accelerate their turn speed each time they start to pivot, in order to make a half turn in two beats. To accelerate, they pull, tug or jerk a bit, some by lowering their center of gravity, others by getting a bit closer together. Either increases the speed of the turn. When the waltz rhythm returns, they raise their center of gravity or get farther apart. This effort is not necessary when dancing in place. You maintain an even speed of rotation and step more smoothly.

In most German speaking areas, a Zwiefacher is a mixture of Waltz and Pivot (Dreher) turns. A Bavarian

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might also do a Polka step (Alpine: Boarischer). There an Austrian would proudly pivot twice. *Weiß-Blau* is a well known example of a Bavarian polka/pivot Zwiefacher. Since pivots rotate at twice the speed of polka steps; this dance is especially hard to dance to while traveling in line of direction on the dance floor. A long string of Oom-pah-pah-quiet measures may be a string of pivot, schottische, polka or *Boarisch* steps. Such a string leaves the dancers with a choice of ways to dance. 8 pivots, 4 polkas or one full Schottische figure all fit the same music. In Austria pivots are the preferred choice. Oh, at least one French tune includes the Mazurka.

Listening Clues

Each Zwiefacher dance step is actually quite simple. Ultimately, you can dance it standing in place or even seated and just tapping your toes. Hearing the rhythm that you should dance to; there is the hard part!

So, a few clues:

The most helpful clue works best for recordings of traditional brass Oom-pah bands, the kind the Germans call *Blasmusik*. A large band may have a bit of the same trouble the dancers do; keeping together throughout a complex rhythm. So many assign one musician to act like a metronome. This musician, usually deep bass or percussion, plays only the pah or pah-pah notes. Even while the rest of the band is trying to trick you, this musician will help. If he played "pah-pah"; you should have been dancing a waltz. If he just played "pah" you should be finishing a pivot. Helpful, even though too late to serve as a warning. Small bands don't have enough musicians to do this and modern bands may not try.

The best way for a band to trick you is to play three notes and a null beat. Oom-pah-pah-silence is two pivots, not one waltz followed by a dancer's off balance feeling. This is most common at the beginning of a phrase.

At the end of a Zwiefacher musical phrase; often only the Oom beat is emphasized. Even bands with a musician acting as a metronome may not play the separate pah or pah-pah. So the final step may be determined by whenever the next phrase starts. With a recording; practice allows you to predict. Some recordings do alternate. With live music, the band can vary that last step between waltz and pivot anytime they want. Just smile after you notice what happened! With sound editing software, you could even slice a beat off a waltz or insert a bit of sound into a final pivot. The musicians can be tricked, too. There are recordings where a band with no metronome musician plays a single final measure halfway between Oom-pah-pah and Oom-pah just once on the recording. Yes, the dancers can have company when making mistakes.

So finally; the most useful clue to dancing a Zwiefacher; "**Don't be a perfectionist**". You are usually dancing in place, so you are not likely to collide with or injure anyone. The stress of being a perfectionist can eat a stomach lining. Don't let dancing the Zwiefacher make it worse! More sadly; a Zwiefacher perfectionist will be limited to selecting a dance partner from the world's few other Zwiefacher perfectionists. Best to just smile after your brain, ears and feet all end up on different beats, and when the same happens to your partner. Safer yet; smile throughout the whole dance. Oh; you may also consider it wise to wear shoes that protect your toes.

Names

Please, read the below.

But know; you are welcome to dance without understanding the details!

The dance name is now spelled and pronounced according to the rules of the German language, but this only happened consistently after the spelling reform of the mid 1990's. It was an uncommon, uncultured, backwoods music and dance style in the 1800's & the first decades of the 1900's while the modern German language and spelling system were created. Its archaic Austrian spelling went unnoticed by linguistic scholars. The Zwiefacher is alpine. Many northern, flat land, Germans were exposed to it via material spelled the archaic way "Zweifacher" and some still pronounce it as it used to be spelled; in other words, incorrectly. Zwiefacher as always been pronounced Tswee faKh er, not Tswai faKh er.

Also because of the long history of the music, linguistic drift, and its low cultural status from 1560 to the start of the Jazz Age, the dance has different names in different places. A few rare names are; *Bayerischen & Neubayerischen* (but only on old 78s), *Bairische & Bairischen*, and *der Boarische* (but never the more commonly seen *die Boarische* which is the dance an American would call either a Polka or Schottische, depending on how high in the Alps the musicians are from). More common German names that mean Zwiefacher include *Bäuerischer, Schweinauer, Schleifer, Übern Fauß, Heuberger, Mischlich* and *Grad und Ungrad*.

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The tune names also are confusing. Tunes drifted through the backwoods for centuries, with the usual folk processes; tune changing but keeping the name or, tune unchanging but being renamed. In 1956 researcher Felix Hoerburger cataloged 112 different Zwiefache having 474 different names. Why not? The Zwiefacher is especially vulnerable to changes in rhythm, and thus dance structure. Intentionally; a wedding musician might modify a tune by a note, leaving wedding guests in awe of how much better the groom could dance when in his bride's arms. (The bridal couple, of course, knew in advance that one of the pivots was being changed into a waltz. The wedding guests were the ones who stumbled about :-)

It is quite common for names to have proper and slang versions in both dialect and proper German. Some tunes have one name for the instrumental score and another for the matching song. Correctly; the dance would use different names depending upon if the tune was instrumental or vocal. And, catchy tunes that have been around for a few hundred years may collect multiple names by collecting multiple songs! Thus I tend to pick one name for a tune/dance pattern combination. This means I may ignore what the musician called it and risk using a different name, or spelling, than they, or you, prefer. (And I usually pick the easiest to spell!)

Different German speaking folklore districts, especially Bavaria, have made attempts standardize the tune names. So far this has not made name recognition much easier for a North American. To know the difference between *Unsa oite Kath*, *Hemauer*, *Boxhamerisch*, *Eichelbauer* and *Die alte Kath*, you have to understand a few dialects and a few alternate names. These are all, at most, a few notes different from exactly the same tune and all are exactly the same dance. I call them all *Alte Kath*.

Not quite confused yet? Consider this. Preferred musical annotation evolved during the time the Zwiefacher was unpopular. A preserved score that would have been played in the 1500's for dancing two Waltzes and two Pivots will be played using the modern rules as two Waltzes and four Pivots. Many of these old scores have been republished without being updated, giving musicians an easy way to make one tune into two acceptable dance patterns. Clearly, the dance could only have survived all these changes by being such a lot of fun.

I had no clue how to explain the variety of different Zwiefache tunes and dance patterns named *'Suserl, das Suserl, s'Zuserl, Zuserl* and similar names. No clue until I considered all would be translated to "Little Suzie" in English. Like; I could expect only one tune to have been composed in America with a name that could be shortened to "Little Suzie", in the time since the Zwiefacher was created, since Columbus wore diapers?.

Another confusion with dance terms; the translation of terms meaning Polka and Schottische are not consistent in Alpine rural dances. In America, a polka is the faster of those dances. The same is true in Northern Germany. But; high enough in the Alps the meanings switch. In the late 1800's the Swiss Schottische was played so quickly that only a pivot was danced, one step on every fourth beat. The Swiss Polka was played at a slow speed, like the modern Fox Trot. In Swiss communities around Enumclaw they are still danced that way.

Yes! You are still welcome to dance without remembering those details!

Dance the Zwiefacher

The Swedish Cultural Center in Seattle holds a Zwiefacher dance, to live music, whenever there is a 5th Friday in the month. Contact pat@folkdancing.com for the up to date schedule.

This document was prepared mainly from articles published on the web, secondarily with the help of musicians and dancers with significant German experience and only in minor ways from the author's experiences in Germany.

Comments are welcome. Contact pat@folkdancing.com.

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