

## Bizourka and Freestyle Flemish Mazurka

(Flanders, Belgium, Northern France)

These are easy-going Flemish mazurka (also spelled *mazourka*) variations which Richard learned while attending a Carnaval ball near Dunkerque, northern France, in 2009. Participants at the ball were mostly locals, but also included dancers from Belgium and various parts of France.



Older Flemish mazurka is usually comprised of combinations of the Mazurka Step and Waltz, in various simple patterns (see Freestyle Flemish Mazurka below). Like most folk mazurkas, their style descended from the Polka Mazurka once done in European ballrooms, over 150 years ago. This folk process is sometimes compared to a bridge. French or English dance masters picked up an ethnic dance step, in this case a mazurka step from the Polish Mazur, and standardized it for ballroom use. It was then spread throughout the world by itinerant dance teachers, visiting social dancers, and thousands of easily available dance

manuals. From this propagation, the most popular steps (the Polka Mazurka was indeed one of the favorites) then “sank” through many simplified forms in villages throughout Europe, the Americas, Australia and elsewhere. In other words, towns in rural France or England didn’t get their mazurka step directly from Poland, or their polka directly from Bohemia, but rather through the “bridge” of dance teachers, traveling social dancers and books, that spread the ballroom versions of the original ethnic steps throughout the world. Once the steps left the formal setting of the ballroom, they quickly simplified.

Then folk dances evolve. Typically steps and styles are borrowed from other dance forms that the dancers also happen to know, adding a twist to a traditional form. We can only speculate on the borrowed influences that were added to ancient folk dances, but in this case we know. Renaat Van Craenenbroeck observed the changes in the local mazurka over his lifetime, and saw that those who danced waltz and mazurka also went out dancing elsewhere, learning other steps and styles, then added some of those variations back into to their mazurka. Specifically, Bizourka shows influences from tango and salsa over the past 25 years. Sources: Renaat Van Craenenbroeck (1937-2001); his daughter Katrien, and Michel & Regine Wallop.



Pronunciation:     bih-ZUR-kah

Music:               3/4 meter

*Richard Powers 2011 CD, Track 2*  
Flemish folk mazurkas, 136-154 BPM.

Formation:         Couples in informal closed Waltz position.

Steps & Styling:    The Flemish Mazurka Step: M’s steps are described; W steps are opposite. Step L to L with wt (ct 1); replace wt back on R (ct 2); bounce on R, closing L to R without wt (ct 3).

Rotary Waltz: This is the standard folk rotary waltz that most folk dancers already know, with the M backing around, beginning with L, in front of the W as W steps fwd R, somewhat between M’s feet (ct 1); and vice versa on ct 4.

## Bizourka and Freestyle Flemish Mazurka — continued

Steps & Styling: Waltz Balance: Step R to R (ct 1); step on L next to R (ct 2); step in place on R (ct 3). This step can be done with opp ftwk and direction.  
Running Mazurka Step: Step fwd L (ct 1); step fwd R (ct 2); hop on R while raising L (ct 3).

**Bizourka**

M's steps are described; W steps opp. The pattern is learned traveling LOD, but in practice it travels in any direction, perhaps among dancers who are doing their own freestyle mazurka.

Meas     3/4 meter

Pattern

I.     MAZURKA STEP, GRAPEVINE AND TWIST

- 1     One Flemish Mazurka Step moving LOD (CCW).
- 2     Repeat meas 1.
- 3     Step L to L (ct 1); step R behind L (ct 2); step L to L (ct 3).
- 4     Step R in front of L (ct 1); step L next to R and twist so that knees aim to R diag (ct 2); twist so knees aim to L diag (ct 3).

II.     SHORT GRAPEVINES

- 1     One Flemish Mazurka Step LOD (cts 1-3).
- 2     Step L behind R (ct 1); step R to R (ct 2); step L next to R (or step R in front of L) (ct 3). Lean body slightly R.
- 3     One Flemish Mazurka Step with opp ftwk to RLOD (cts 1-3).
- 4     Step R behind L (ct 1); step L to L (ct 2); step R next to L (ct 3). Lean body slightly L.
- 5-12     Repeat Fig I and Fig II.

III.     WALTZ TO CRADLE POSITION

- 1-2     Two Rotary Waltz steps moving LOD (CCW) (cts 1-3).
- 3     W turns CW under M's raised L arm with a waltz step (cts 1-3).
- 4     Using three steps, W rotates an extra half-turn to end facing LOD at M's R side and she folds her L arm across her belly, under her R arm, and he takes three steps in place and takes her L hand in his R hand, ending in Cradle Position with W at M's R side, closing feet (cts 1-3).

IV.     BERCEUSE AND WHEEL

- 5     One Waltz Balance step such that M steps R to R as W steps L to L, to Cradle Position with W on M's L (cts 1-3). Partners look at each other.
- 6     Repeat meas 5 with opp ftwk and direction, to return to original Cradle Position, W on M's R (cts 1-3).

## Bizourka and Freestyle Flemish Mazurka — continued

7 Using 3 light running steps, rotate as a couple with W backing up beg with L and M moving fwd beg R (cts 1-3).

8 Dance 2 light running steps beg M's L, W's R (cts 1-2); touch M's L, W's R (ct 3).

Alternative: During meas 7-8, rtun a total of 6 steps and quickly change ft on ct &.

V. UNWIND AND WALTZ

1 M raises L arm, circling W's head CW like a halo, to let W unwind out of Cradle Position. W travels LOD with CW pivot steps beg R, turning 360° in 3 steps, R-L-R; as M walks fwd LOD 3 running steps, L-R-L.

2 M raises R arm, circling W's head CW like a halo, to let W continue to travel LOD, turning CW. W begins backing up on L to waltz CW (cts (1-3). On ct 3, completely let go of hands for a moment, face ptr, to take closed Waltz Position.

3-4 Two Rotary Waltz steps traveling LOD (cts 1-3).

VI. MAZURKA AND TOUR SUR PLACE

5 One Flemish Mazurka Step twd LOD. On ct 3, W swings her free R back, behind L.

6 W dances solo grapevines (R behind L; L to L; R in front of L) while M stands in place for 3 cts. Couple is now in R-Side Position (W by M's R side).

7 Both do a Running Mazurka Step as both travel fwd around each other, rotating CW.

8 Both step L to L (ct 1); step R next to L (ct 2); and hold (ct 3). End facing LOD.

Sequence:

Repeat the entire pattern until the music ends, or only do the pattern a few times then change to Freestyle Flemish Mazurka.

**Freestyle Flemish Mazurka**

- 2 Flemish Mazurka Steps, 1 Full CW Rotary Waltz (the most common variation).
- 1 Mazurka Step, 1 CW Half Waltz (turn halfway in 3 steps); 1 Mazurka Step over the elbows (i.e., opp ftwk); 1 CW Half Waltz.
- 1 Mazurka Step, 1 Half CCW Reverse Waltz (he casts her toward the center); 1 Mazurka Step, 1 CW Half Waltz. M faces somewhat forward twd LOD the entire time.
- 3 Mazurka Steps, 1 CW Half Waltz. Repeat opp, again turning CW.
- 2 Mazurka Steps then both roll away from each other, solo, M turning CCW and W turning CW.
- 4 Mazurka Steps.
- Any elements from Bizourka.

Presented by Richard Powers