

Tavas Zeybeği

Turkey

Choreography: Two unidentified Turkish men in a YouTube video

Music: Any Zeybek music with 6–4–8 phrasing

About the Dance

The Zeybek dance form is named after the Zeybeks, who were tribal warriors who lived in the mountains of western Anatolia. Many sources say they originated in the 17th century, but others claim that they appeared as early as the 13th century. According to Turkish tradition, “They acted as protectors of village people against landlords, bandits and tax collectors.” I do not know whether this is true, or is just another example of the romanticization of outlaws (Robin Hood, Jesse James, Russia’s “Twelve Thieves”, the Greek Klephts, etc.)

The Zeybek is definitely a “living” folk dance according to Don Buskirk’s classification. Tavas Zeybeği is one of several Zeybek styles that are common in western Turkey. The variations and versions are near infinite. Turks dance the Zeybek in stage performances, in nightclubs, at weddings, and on the street – where this version came from.

Musically and in terms of movement, the Greek Zeibekiko is unmistakably a form of Zeybek.

The music for the Zeybek is slow, and is generally said to be in a nine-count rhythm (9/4 or 9/2), like the Zeibekiko. However, many recordings of Zeybek music are audibly divided into three phrases of six counts, four counts, and eight counts, in that order. This adds up to 18 counts, which is the same length as two nine-count bars.

Recordings of Zeybek music typically begin with a long improvisation that has no rhythm, sometimes up to 3 minutes. You will need to edit most of this out in order to use such a recording for dancing.

The dancers who created this version danced it to 6–4–8 music, and their movements matched that phrasing. Therefore, I have described it that way.

Dance Directions

Music: Slow, in 9/4 or 9/2.

Formation: Circle of 2 to 8 people

Handhold: No handhold

Steps – Basic Figure

PHRASE	COUNT	STEP
1st	1	Step on L foot in line of direction (to right), turning outward (clockwise) so that L heel is towards the centre. Raise arms to “eagle” position.
	2	Point R toe to touch the ground, slightly forward and to the right, then “push off” from the R toe, pushing the right side of the body back and continuing the clockwise turn. Timing is not exact; the toe push may happen slightly ahead of count 2.
	3	Repeat count 2.
	4	Continue slow CW turn and finish facing LOD.
	5	Step on R foot in LOD. Some dancers point the R toe forward before stepping.
	6	Lift L foot to beside R knee.
2nd	1	Step on L foot in LOD, toe turned slightly outward. Begin lowering arms.
	2	Step on R foot crossing behind L, turning body more outward (CW). Arms come down to sides.
	3	Step on L foot in LOD, turning body back towards LOD (counterclockwise). Begin raising arms.
	4	Lift R foot to beside R knee while continuing CCW turn, ending with body turned slightly towards centre. Arms return to “eagle” position.
3rd	1	Step on R foot in LOD crossing slightly in front of L, turning body more towards centre.
	2	Lift L foot to beside or behind R knee while turning body towards outside of circle (CW)
	3	Step on L foot in LOD crossing slightly in front of R
	4	Lift R foot to beside L knee while turning body toward LOD (CCW).
	5	Step on R foot in LOD. Lower arms to sides.
	6	Step on L foot in LOD.
	7	Step on R foot in LOD.
	8	Touch L toe beside R foot. Sole of L foot is vertical.

The dancers performed several variations, but I am documenting only one of them. This variation has two versions, which I am calling 1A and 1B for convenience. Both versions are done facing the centre of the circle.

Steps – Variation 1A

PHRASE	COUNT	STEP
1st	1	Facing centre, step toward centre on L foot. Arms are down at sides.
	2	Lift R foot to behind L knee.
	3	Step back on R foot.
	4	Lift L foot to behind R knee.
	&	Hop on R foot while extending L foot to L side
	5	Step on both feet, feet more than shoulder width apart. Raise arms to “eagle” position.
	6	Transfer weight to L foot and lift R foot in front, knee bent.
	&	Dip R foot a few inches down and up again. Weight remains on L foot from here until the 3rd phrase.
2nd	1-2	Slowly swing R leg clockwise to behind L knee, L knee remaining bent.
	3	Touch R toe behind L foot. Sole of R foot is vertical.
	4	Lift R foot to beside L knee.
3rd	&	Point R foot towards centre.
	1	Step on R foot towards centre.
	2	Point L foot forward. Weight remains on L foot from here until the end of this phrase.
	3	Brush L foot backwards across front of R foot.
	4-6	Slowly swing L foot counterclockwise to behind R knee, L knee remaining bent. Slowly lower arms to sides.
	7-8	Hold position.

Steps – Variation 1B

PHRASE	COUNT	STEP
1st	1-6	Same as variation 1A
2nd	1-4	Same as variation 1A
3rd	&	Same as variation 1A
	1	Same as variation 1A
	2-3	Kneel on both feet, L foot slightly behind R and body turned slightly to R
	4	Stand up on R foot, lifting L foot in front, knee bent.
	5-6	Same as 4-6 of Variation 1A
	7-8	Same as variation 1A