NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN POLKAS WITH RISING LINES AND CADENCE GESTURES

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INTRODUCTION

Until the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe, music and dance were closely linked, both stylistically and socially. The ability to dance skilfully signified both health and education, and the leadership of heads of state, from Elizabeth I of England to Louis XIV of France, insured that dance and its musics were well embedded in the highest levels of culture and politics. Lully gathered a variety of French regional dances and adapted them for use in opera and ballet, in the process generating the genres of dance musics that would remain stable until the late eighteenth century and that were widely adopted in other European countries. Following the model established by Louis XIV, a ball would have two parts: an opening section of couple dances (usually menuets) meant to demonstrate skill and grace, and a second section of group dances (contredanse; gavottes and gigues) in which everyone participated.

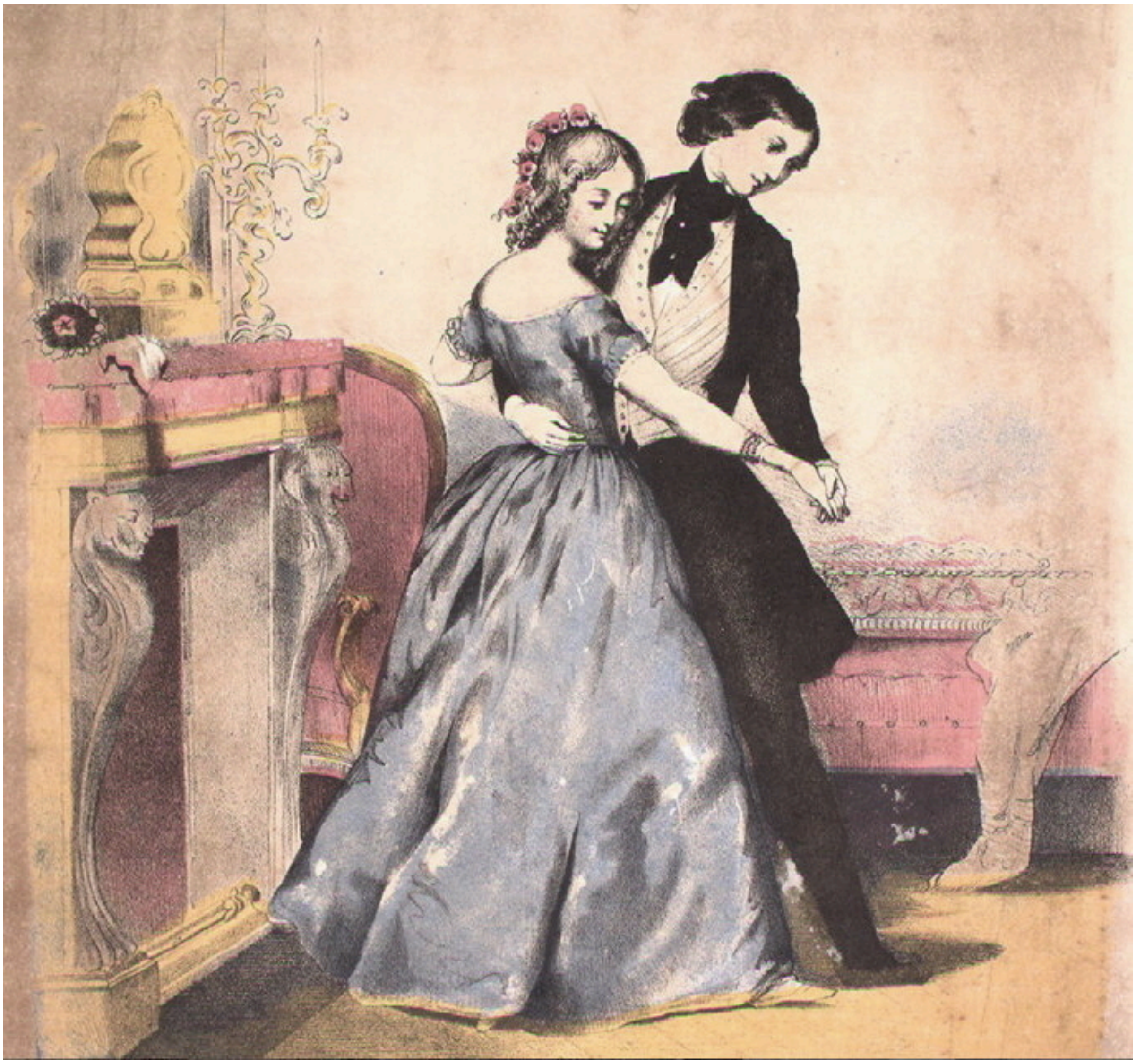
After the French Revolution, a similar process of adoption was undertaken by the now dominant middle class, as a variety of national dances largely displaced the older menuets, gavottes, and rigaudons: these included waltzes of several types, Scots dances (schottisch or ecossaise), redowas, mazurkas, and eventually polkas. Alongside them, the older group dances continued in the form of quadrilles and cotillions, but musical styles were no longer associated with specific dance figures as in the past (quadrilles used many different musics, more often than not including tunes borrowed from opera or from folk or popular repertoires).

For most of this time period, individual dances remained short and works of any length were generated by chaining multiple dances together. Music might be a single strain (typically 8 bars, sometimes more, up to 16 bars), or it might be built in the familiar two-reprise form (most often 8+8, occasionally 8+16) with or without thematic reprise, or two strains might be made into three in a *da capo* or *en rondeau* form (ABA, where the first A closes in the tonic key). From these simple forms any number of longer forms could be assembled to suit the needs of the dancers.

In more complex versions, these designs were transferred into the third and fourth movements of the sonata and symphony, especially from the early 1770s on: the third movement is the familiar menuet and trio, the fourth is often based on the contredanse and frequently borrows its rondeau (rondo) designs. Especially notable examples occur in works by Haydn and Mozart from this period (see my article "The Contredanse, Classical Finales, and Caplin's Formal Functions" in *Music Theory Online*: http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.06.12.4/mto.06.12.4.neumeyer.html and its references).

The polka was a social dance, not a folk dance that turned into a popular social dance, as a common myth has it. It emerged somewhere in Bohemia or southern Poland in the mid-1830s and became a popular dance across Europe around 1840, quite quickly turning into the main rival of the waltz. Its basic figure was easier to execute, its characteristic lilting *chassée* step—somewhere between a slide and a hop—was infectiously pleasant, and ironically it was easier to start and maintain the turning figures from which the waltz took its name (German: *walzen* = turning). From the *New Grove* article on the polka:

> In 1839 the band of a Bohemian regiment took the polka to Vienna, and that year it also reached St Petersburg. The Prague dancing-master Jan Raab introduced it to Paris in 1840, though it was not until 1843–4 that it became the favourite dance of Parisian society. On 11 April 1844 the dance was first performed in London by Carlotta Grisi and Jules Perrot on the stage of Her Majesty's Theatre. The next month it appeared in the USA, where it gave rise to numerous jokes about the presidential candidate J.K. Polk.



Cover graphic for the Cally Polka by Allen Dodworth (1846) -- (see below for the music and commentary).

Among duple meter dances, the polka largely replaced the slower moving schottisch (ecossaise), and was more interesting than the faster galop, whose figures were minimal and mostly a matter of running across the room while in a partner hold. A sample of the basic polka figure may be found in the video demonstrations for the Library of Congress Dance Instruction Manuals collection: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/musdivid/050.mpg. The decidedly different step of the schottisch may be seen here: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/musdivid/056.mpg. Of course, dance instructors in different cities would invent their own versions, and it's likely that schottisch and polka figures were combined in various ways during the 1840s at least. The term schottisch also survived longer in England and the United States than in continental Europe.

Related dances include the redowa, which was popular mainly in the 1830s. Although later described as a "waltz danced in place" because of its prominent measure-long stops, the redowa could include some complex figures and was a particular favorite of prominent dance instructors. See a version of it (with the label *varsovienne*) on the LOC Dance Manual site: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/dihtml/divideos.html#vc059. Its music was like a slow waltz with some mild mazurka accents and is indistinguishable from that for the polka-mazurka (of which the A Major Prelude in Chopin's Op. 28 is an excellent example). The polka-mazurka dance looks like a simple waltz with a slide (*chassée*) and hops, the former supposedly deriving from the polka, the latter from the mazurka: see http://lcweb2.loc.gov/musdivid/057.mpg. Examples of the polka-mazurka appear later in this file.

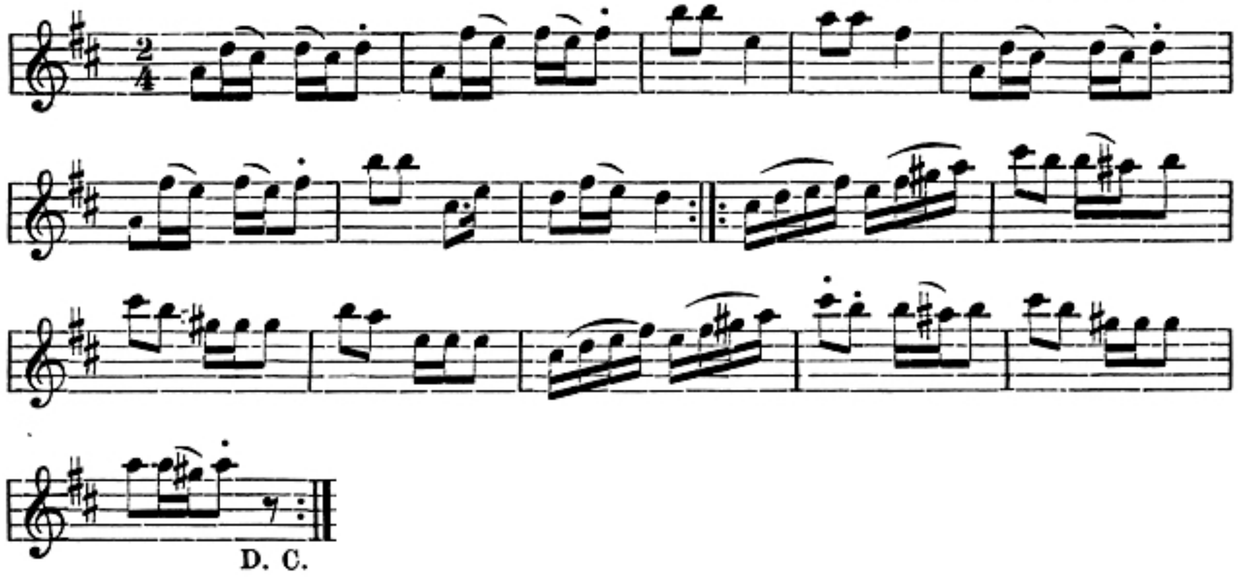
After about 1850—that is to say in the generation of Johann Strauss, jr.—two main types of polkas were recognized: the moderately slow *polka française* and the faster *polka schnell*. The former is close to the original moderate-tempo polka of the 1840s, whereas the latter —in music and dance—is often hard to tell apart from the galop or "quick step." Examples of a *polka schnell* and a *polka française* by Eduard Strauss, brother of Johann Strauss, jr., are shown at the end of this file.

Although very popular in the 1840s and 1850s, the polka couldn't compete with the waltz in the longer term, in large part because the latter, with its six-beat figure, was susceptible to much more variation. Newly popular versions of the waltz continued to appear by the decade, into the early twentieth century. (The "Viennese waltz" of the Strausses—and the movies—was only one type among many.) As the *polka schnell* implies, the square rhythms of the polka tended toward galop and march; it was variations of the latter, as the one-step, that dominated duple-rhythm partner dances in the later nineteenth century. As any American with personal experience of German, Czech, or Polish ethnic communities knows, however, the traditional polka retained its place in dance culture into the mid-twentieth century.

Of all the nineteenth-century dances, the polka—at least in the 1840s and 1850s—had the smallest range of variation in its music. All its basic characteristics can be seen in one of Franz Boehme's historical examples, which he suggests might be one of the oldest: strong emphasis on the beat, including the second beat of the 2/4 bar; 16th-8th groups, contrast between the first idea (bars 1-2) and the second idea (3-4) and limited use of dotted rhythms except at cadences. (from *Geschichte des Tanzes in Deutschland* [1886])

255. Polka (älteste?).

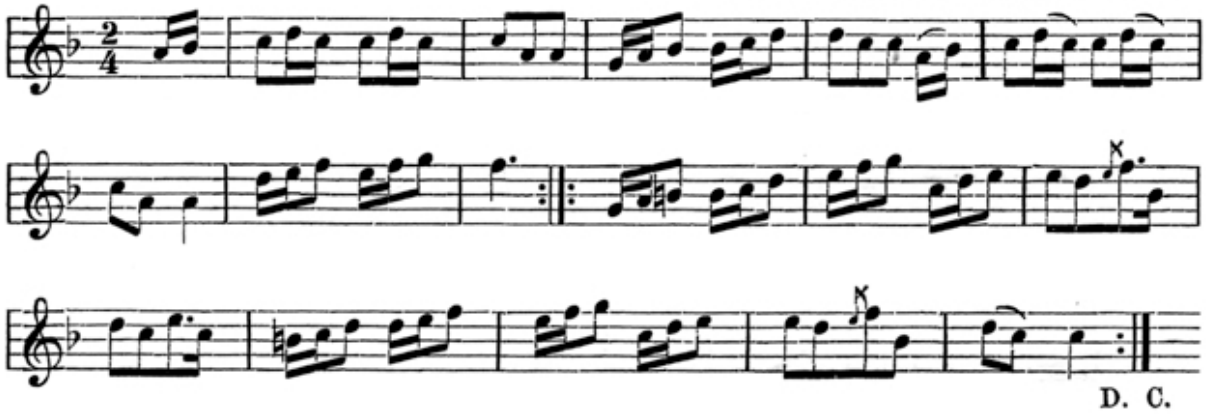
Um 1841—45 sehr beliebt.

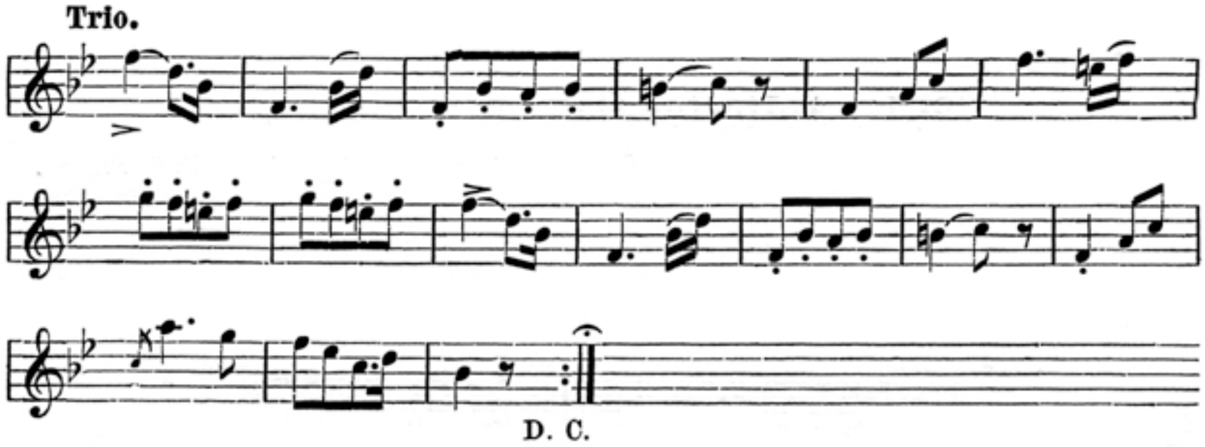


Another of Boehme’s examples appears below, for sake of comparison. The trio of this “Bavarian polka” shows a common trait of early polka trios that distinguishes them from waltz trios or subordinate strains—a strongly contrasting melody with little of the 16th-8th note groups of the main dance, sometimes lyrical or, as in this case, march-like.

258. Bayrische Polka.

1843—60 sehr beliebt in ganz Deutschland.





Gesang dazu:

Wenn der Muth in der Brust die Spannkraft übt,
Heitere fröhliche Stimmung giebt etc.

I have written about rising line figures in polkas using Schenkerian terminology in my *Rising Lines in the Harmonic/Voiceleading Frameworks of Traditional Tonal Compositions*. The file is available here: See pages 58-65, 86-89, and 99-107.

https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/29530.

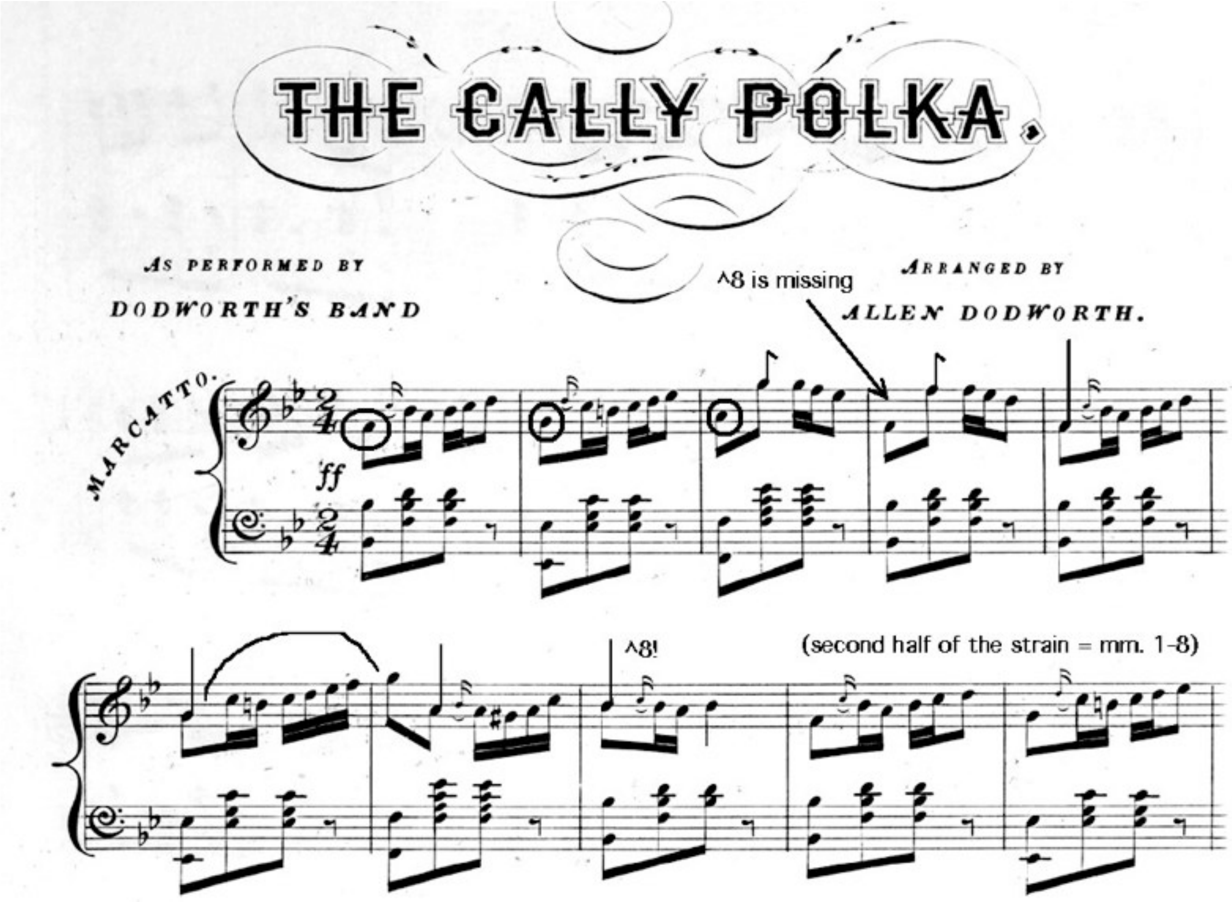
CALLY POLKA (earliest American publication in 1846)

Composer unknown

The polka is the first genre of European music in which the rising cadence gesture became commonplace. The reason is uncertain, but I would speculate that it has to do with a small number of melodic prototypes that were reused frequently once the dance became popular (in other, words, it was partly a product of the dance's very speedy rise to popularity) and also with the "upbeat" mood and physical movements of the dance, in contrast to the waltz, which began each six beat group (or in some styles even each three beat measure) with a pronounced dip downward.

The *Cally* polka, in the version of prominent American bandmaster Allen Dodworth here, shows the simplest version of the rising line figure, one that dominates the entire melody, not just the cadence.

LOC link to the score and bibliographical information: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1848.090060/



^8 is missing

^8!

(second half of the strain = mm. 1-8)

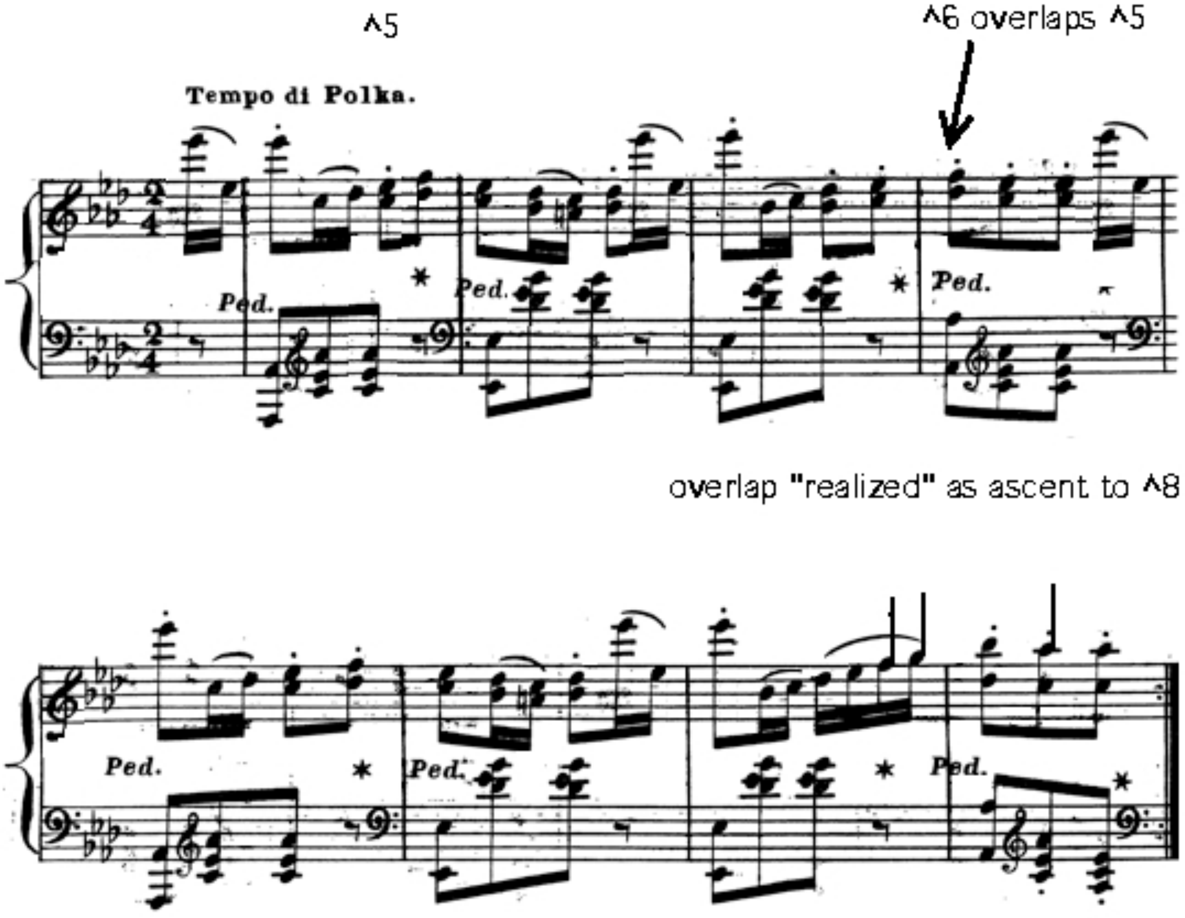
DELICIOSA or LEONORE POLKA (1855)

by

Carl Merz

The music of the polka adopted the play with scale degrees ^5 and ^6 that was prominent in the waltz repertoire starting with Schubert, Lanner, and Strauss, sr. in the 1820s. The *Deliciosa Polka* is a simple but interesting example in which this play in the first phrase—where ^5-^4 in the first idea is followed with an overlap as ^6-^5 in the second idea—is then realized as an ascending cadence figure in the second phrase. This is, of course, exactly what Schubert does in the A Major waltz, no. 13 in the *Valses sentimentales*.

LOC link to the score and bibliographical information: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1855.281480/


^5
^6 overlaps ^5
Tempo di Polka.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
overlap "realized" as ascent to ^8
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

DODWORTH'S VERY BEST POLKA (1850)

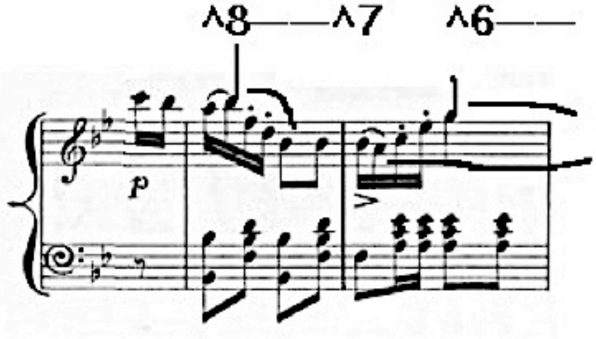
by

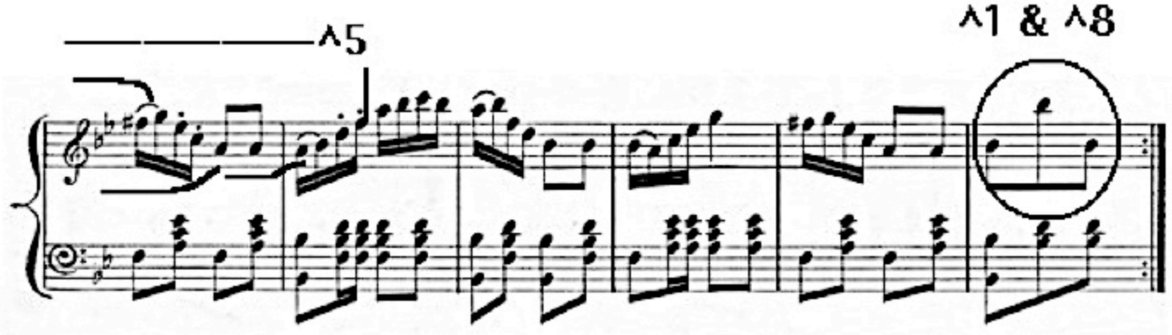
Allen Dodworth

DODWORTH'S
VERY BEST
POLKA
NEW YORK.
Published by Wm HALL & SON 239 Broadway

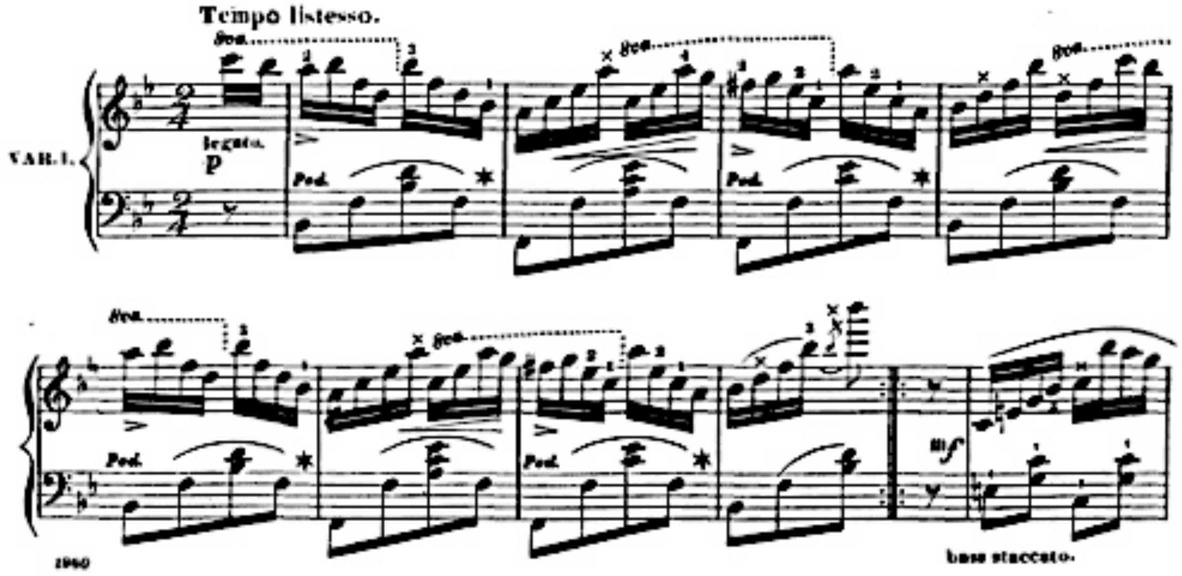
Though melodies focused on ^5 were most common, occasionally one finds one that uses an ^8-^7-^8 pattern over a phrase, and most often with some version of an ascending cadence figure. Dodworth uses strongly violinistic figures to move rapidly between octaves and—as a confirming gesture for both ^8-^7 above and ^7-^8 above—gives us ^1 & ^8 in the final bar rather than the common three repetitions of ^1.

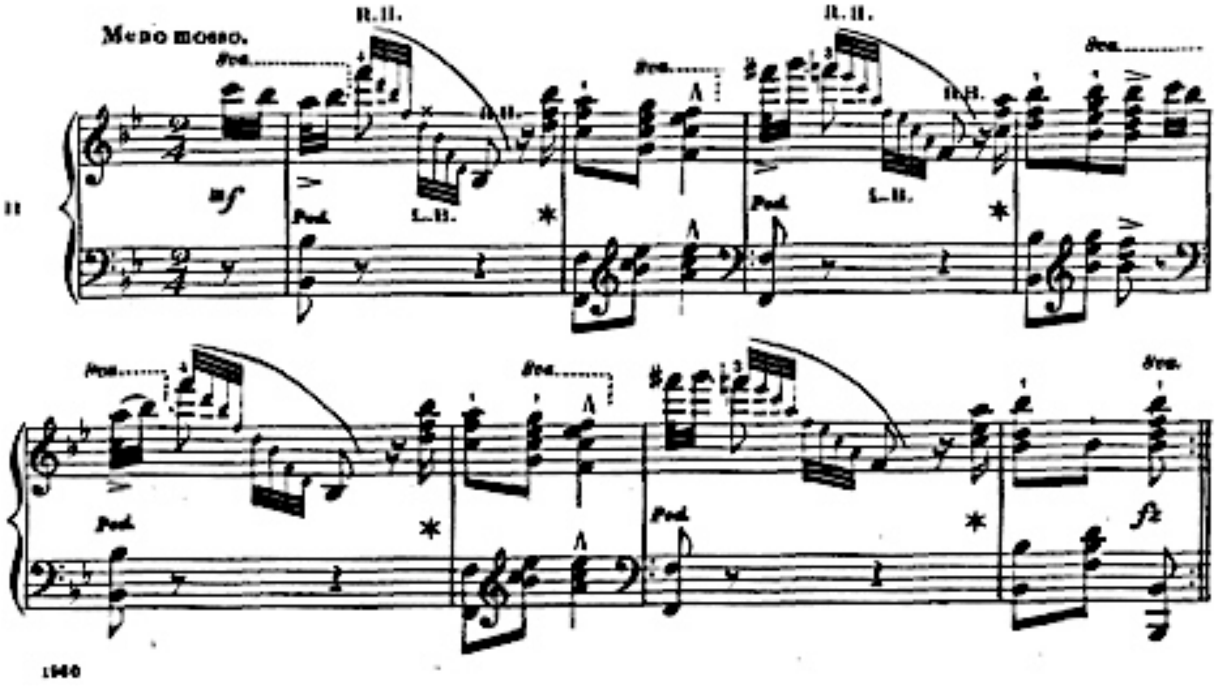
LOC link to the score and bibliographical information: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1850.660340/





In his “Brilliant Variations” on this polka, William Dressler—an industrious arranger-composer who rivaled Charles Grobe in output at mid-century—takes fullest advantage of this octave motif. See the openings of variations 1 & 2 below.   LOC link: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1852.171320/


Tempo listesso.
8va
VAR. I.
legato.
p
Ped.
mf
bass staccato.
1960


Meno mosso.
R.H.
L.H.
8va
II
mf
Ped.
fz
1960

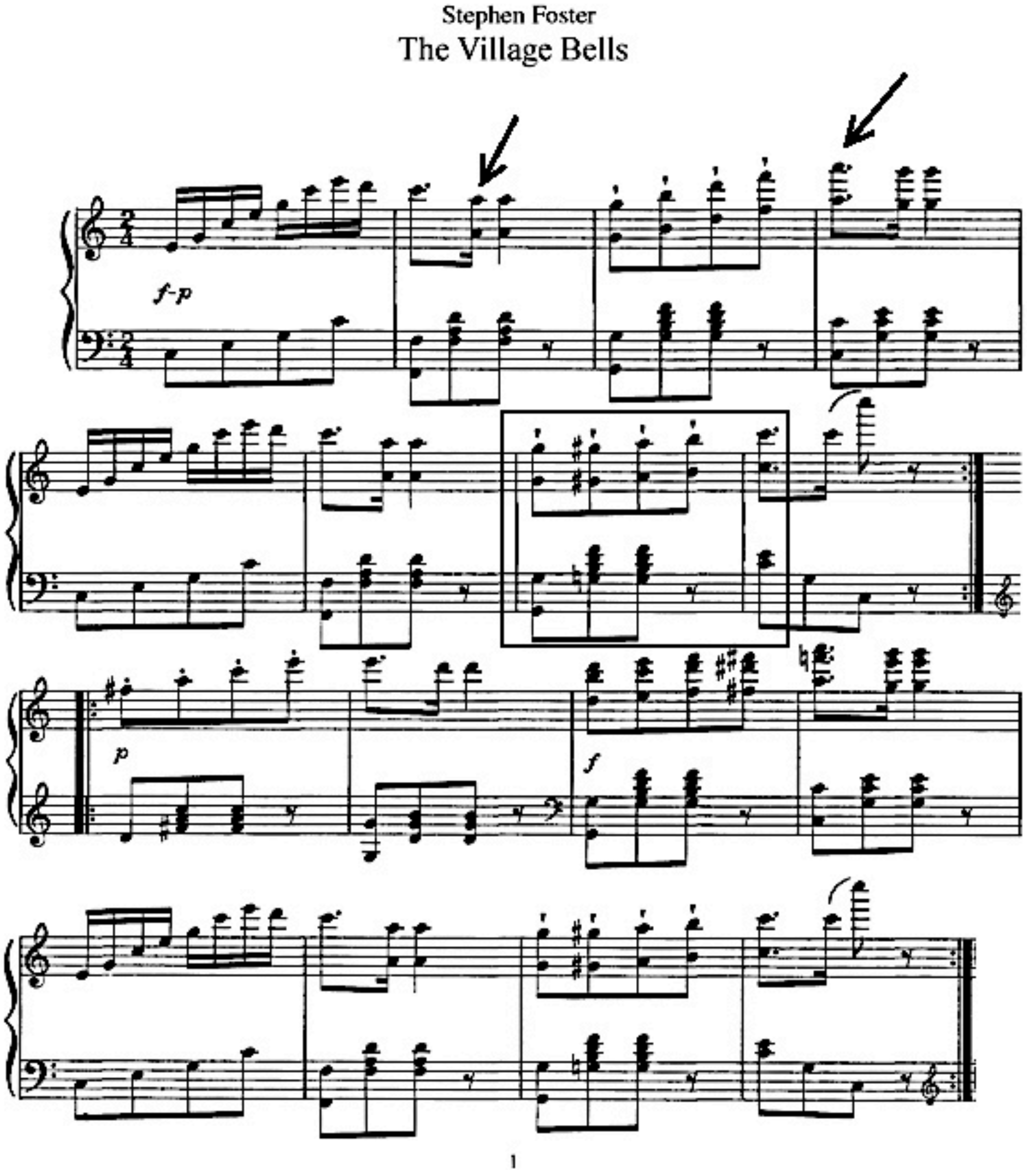
VILLAGE BELLS POLKA (1850) and SOIRÉE POLKA (1850)

by

Stephen Foster

Known for songs, not contemporary social dances, Stephen Foster did publish at least two polkas, the openings of which are shown here. The *Village Bells* includes emphasis on ^6 and a direct ascent over V7 to ^8 in the final bar. The *Soirée Polka* (on the next page) reproduces the figure of the *Cally* polka. The second strain is equally simple and direct.

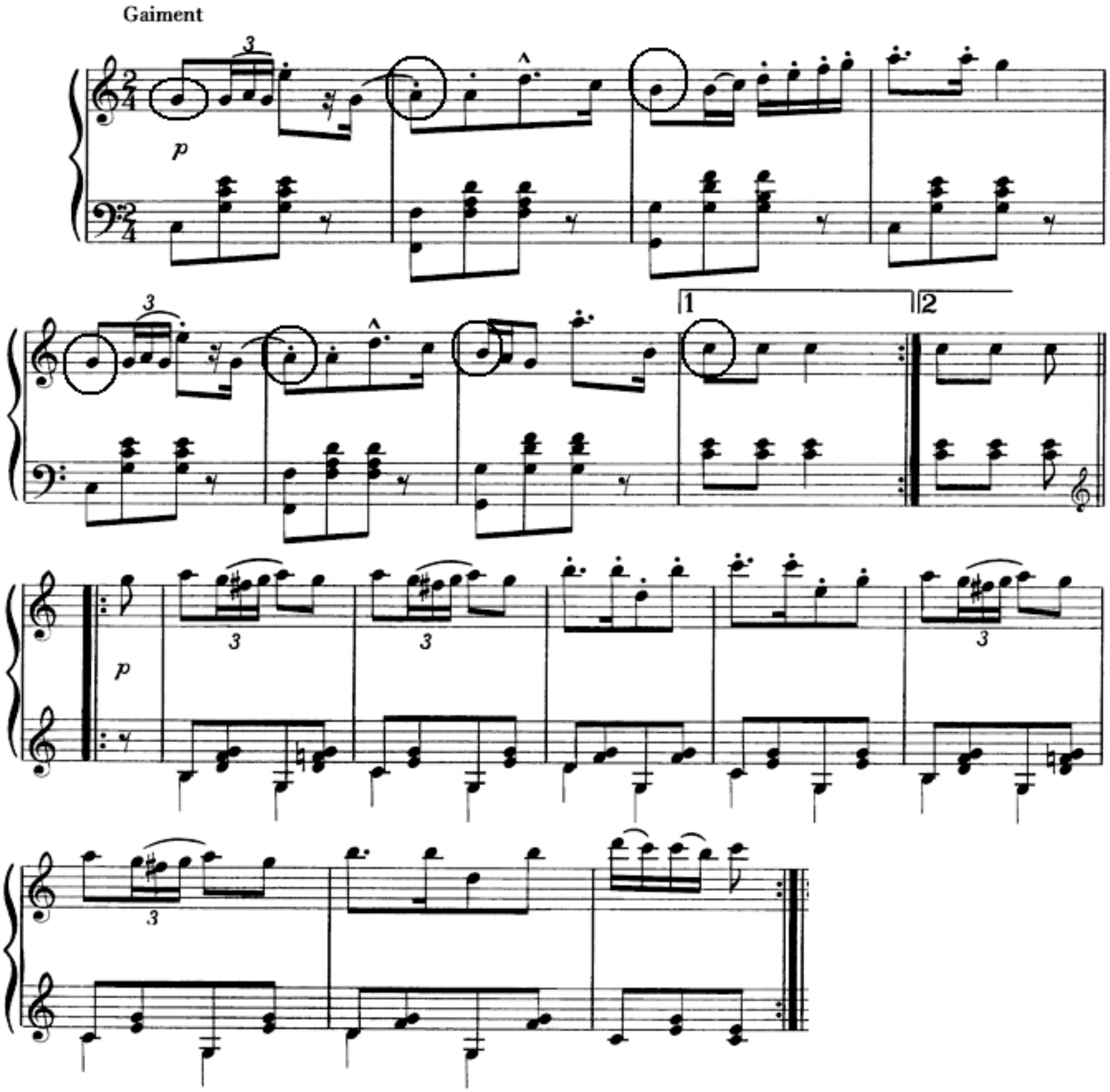
IMSLP link: http://imslp.org/wiki/The_Village_Bells_(Foster,_Stephen)



IMSLP link: http://imslp.org/wiki/Soiree_Polka_(Foster,_Stephen)

Stephen Foster

Soirée Polka


Gaiment
p
3
1
2
p

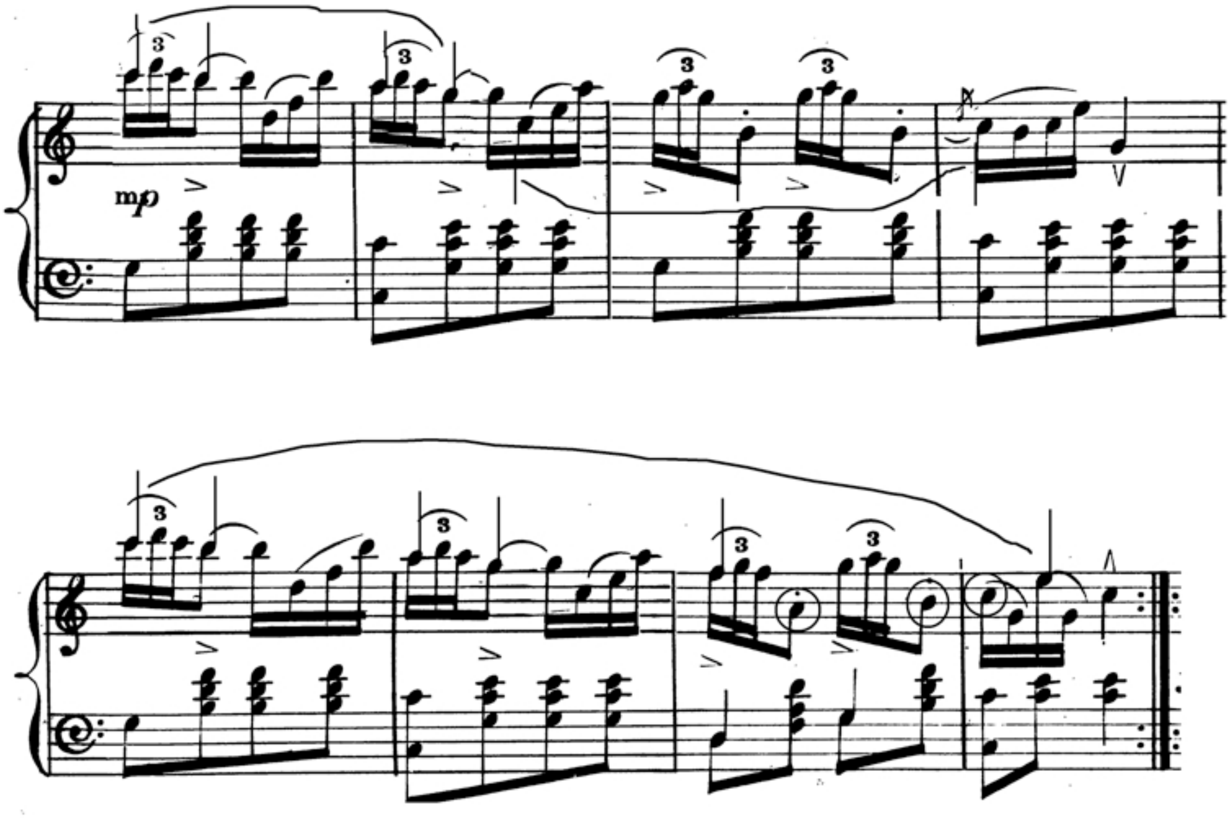
27th NATIONAL GUARDS POLKA QUICK STEP (1851)

by

James Couenhoven

In the violin-dominated repertoires of the dance, compound melodies were the rule rather than the exception. When an ascending figure dominates an entire strain, not just the cadence, a counterbalancing descending figure is often present, usually in the form ^5-^4-^3, ^3-^4-^3, or even ^3-^2-^1. And of course the counterpoint can be inverted. The first strain of the *National Guards Polka* is an interesting, if atypical, example in which a figure strongly descending from ^8 is primary. ("Quick step" is a synonym for galop. Note that this piece has little if anything of typical polka figures; its offbeat accents are unthinkable in a normal polka.)

LOC link to the score and bibliographical information: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1851.671450/



The Gallant Old

27th

NATIONAL GUARDS

Polka Quick Step

Composed & Respectfully dedicated to the

7th Regiment N. Y. S. M. National Guards

BY

JAS. COUENHOVEN.

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[illegible]

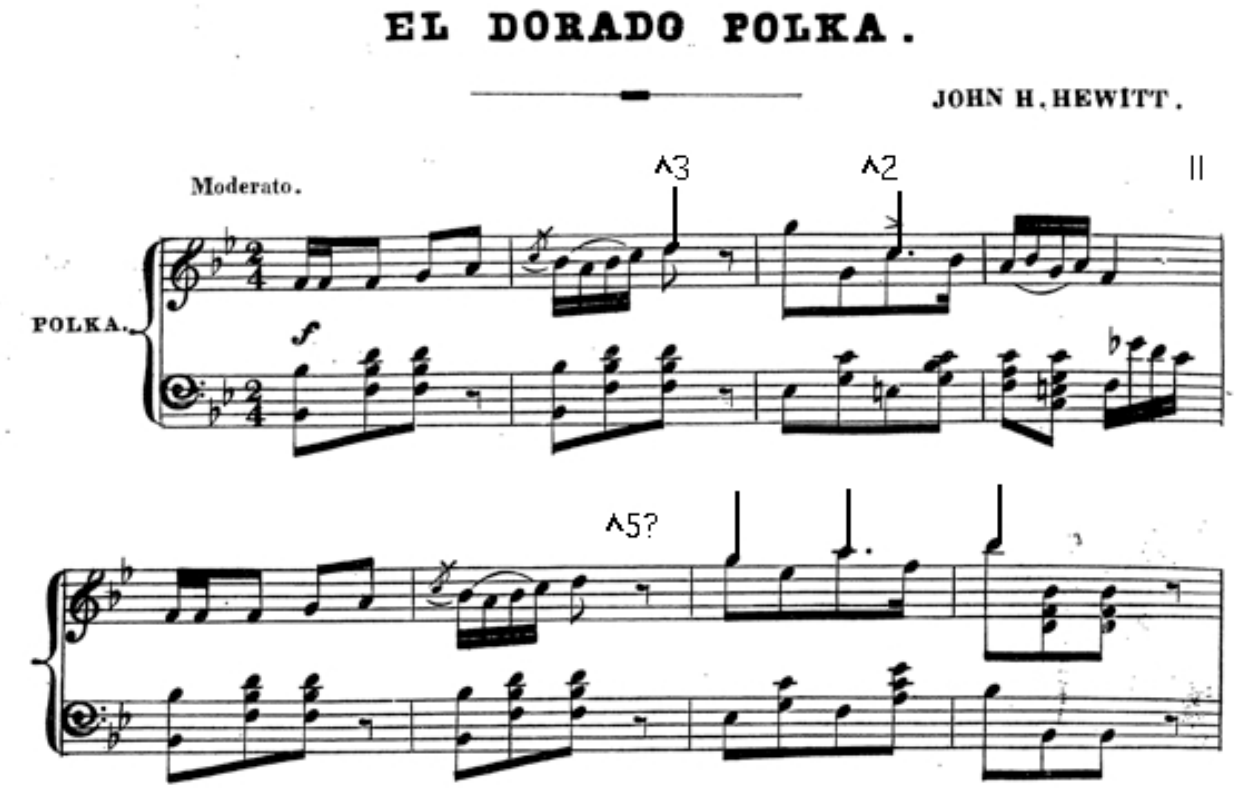
EL DORADO POLKA (1852)

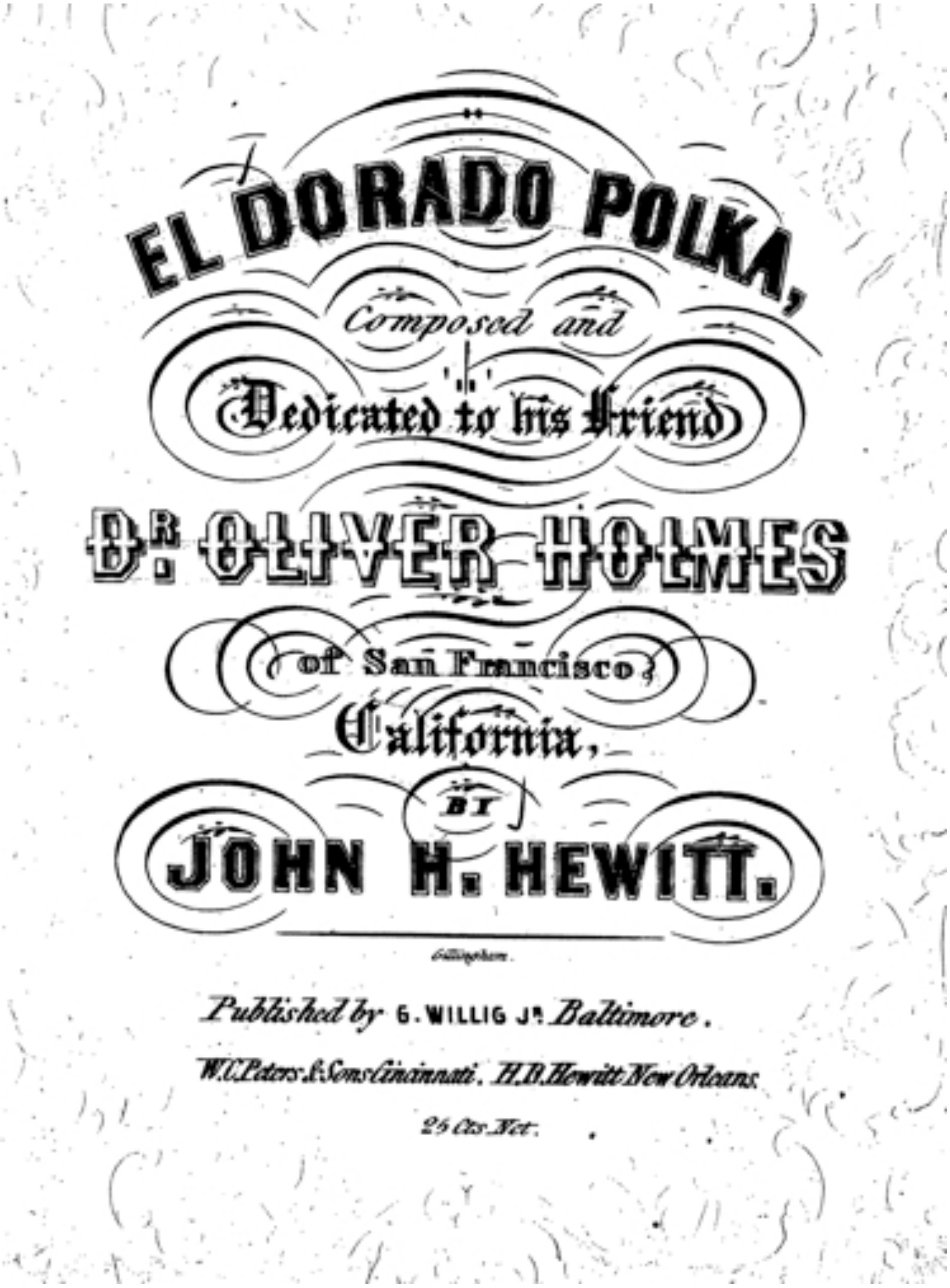
by

Hewitt, John H.

The *El Dorado Polka* was named in honor of the California Gold Rush (note the dedication to a prominent San Francisco citizen). Its first phrase is as simple an ascent to ^3 with interruption on ^2 following as one may find anywhere in the historical tonal repertoire. The second phrase, however, upends the pattern by superposing an ascent to ^8 in the S-D-T cadential progression. The lack of any ^5 in the upper register—we get ^6 in bar 3 instead!—lends the whole a disjointed feel.

LOC link to the score and bibliographical information: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1852.690590/





EL DORADO POLKA,

Composed and

Dedicated to his Friend

DR. OLIVER HOLMES

of San Francisco,

California,

BY

JOHN H. HEWITT.

Gillingham.

Published by G. WILLIG Jr. *Baltimore.*

W.C.Peters & Sons Cincinnati. H.D.Hewitt New Orleans.

25 Cts Net.

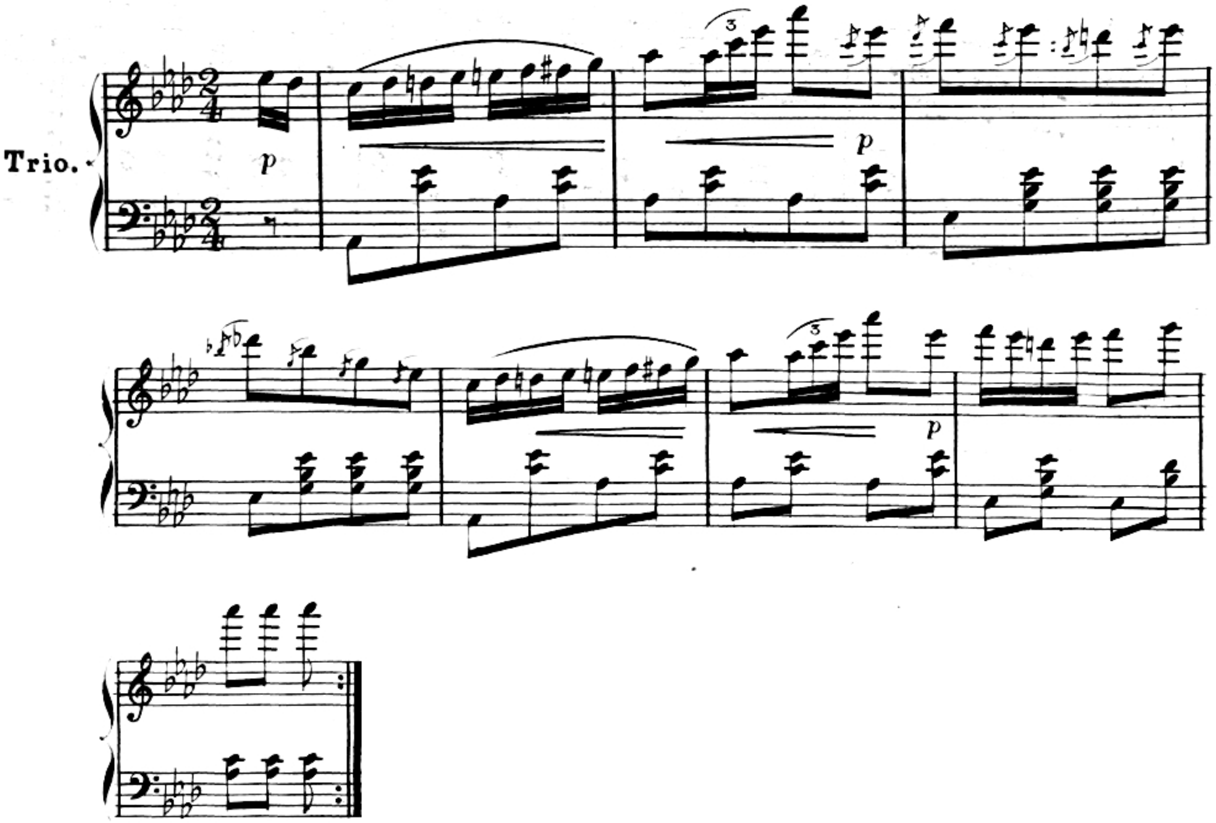
NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY POLKA (1859)

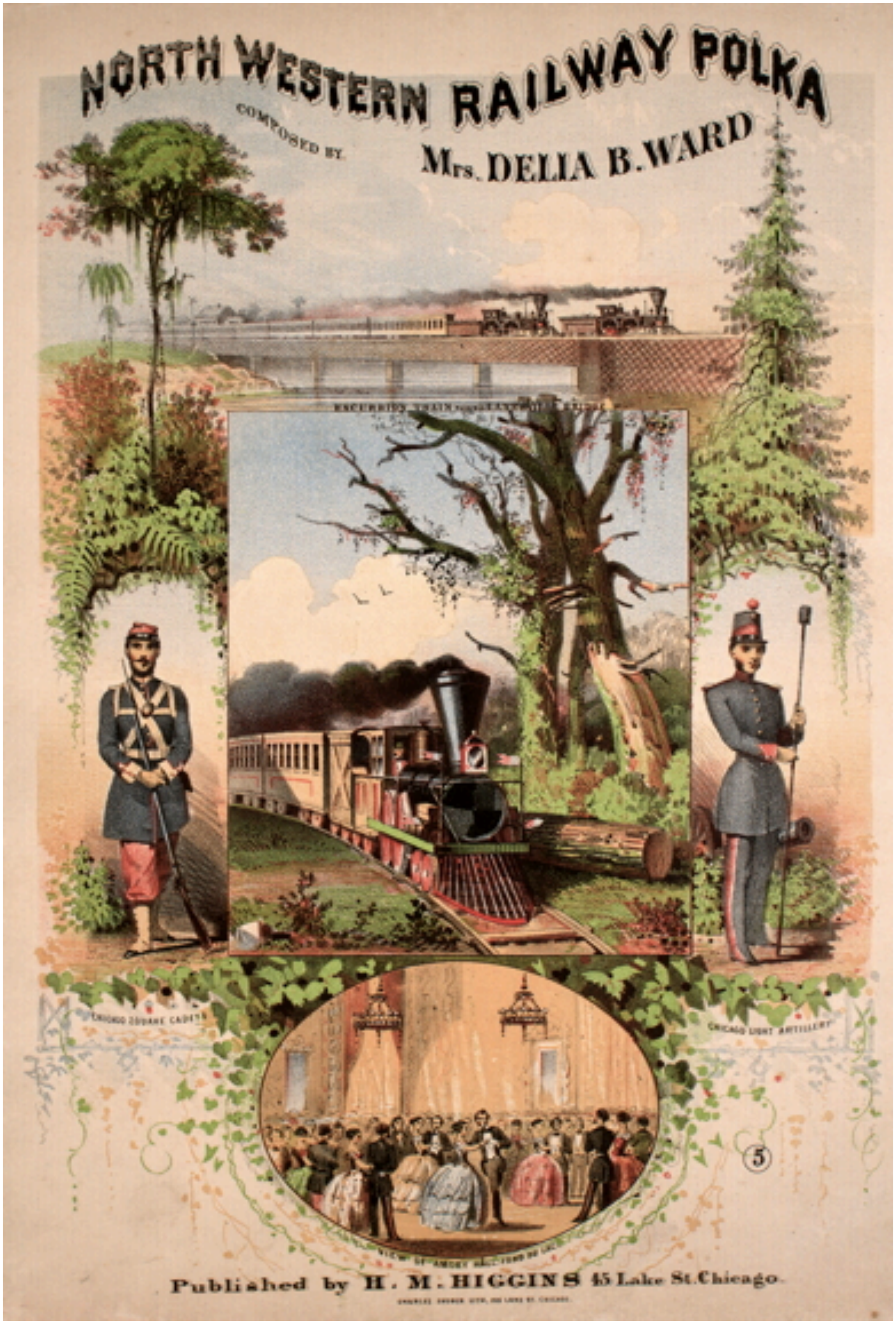
by

Mrs. Delia Ward

Here the opening sixth-space, C5-Ab5, suggests ^3 with ^8 as a cover tone, but the second phrase again confounds expectation as it takes the middle-range Eb6 and runs the cadence back up again to ^8 (Ab6).

Link to the score and bibliographical information (Lester S. Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University): http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:058.088





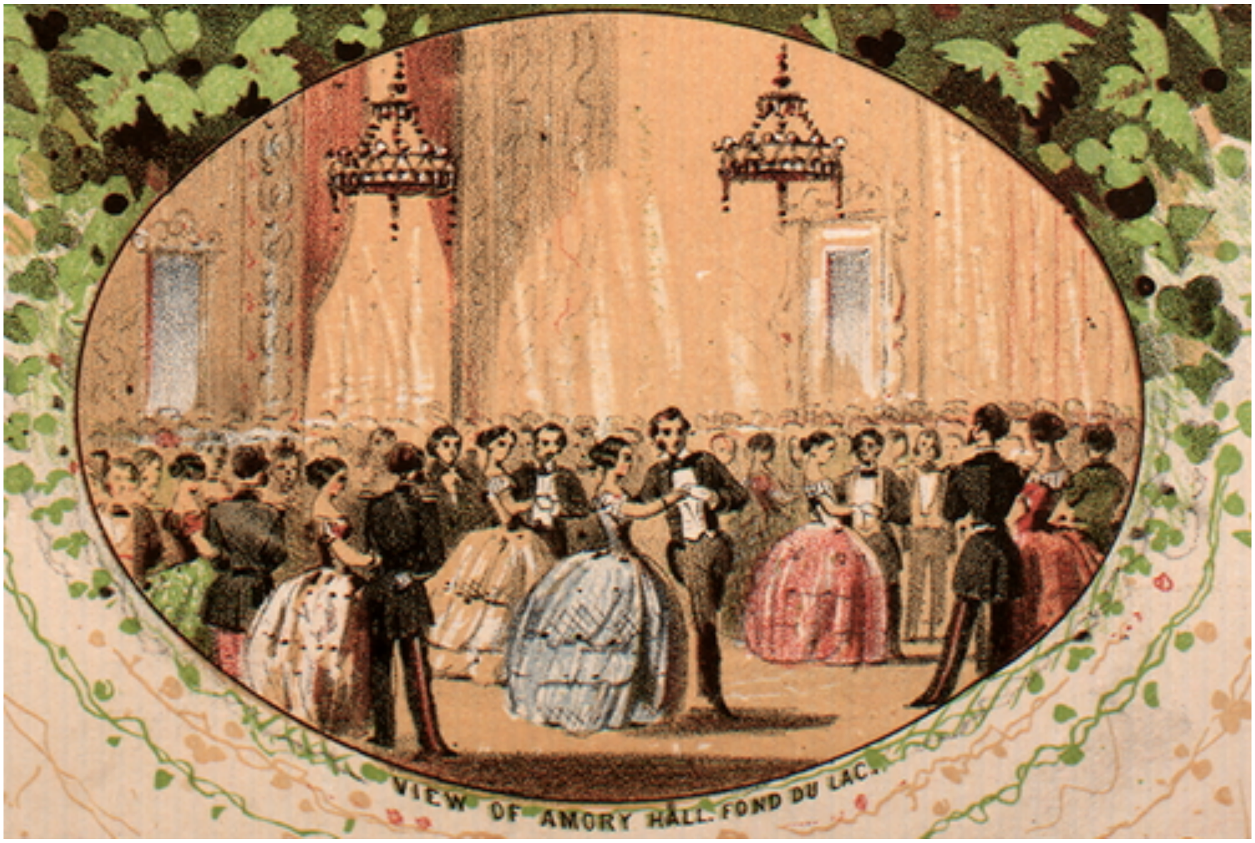
NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY POLKA

COMPOSED BY

Mrs. DELIA B. WARD

EXCURSION TRAIN
CHICAGO ZOUAVE CADETS
CHICAGO LIGHT ARTILLERY
VIEW OF ARMORY HALL
5

Published by H. M. HIGGINS 45 Lake St. Chicago.


VIEW OF AMORY HALL. FOND DU LAC.

Detail of the cover for the North Western Railway polka. Note the caption: View of Amory Hall. Fond du Lac. *About Amory Hall: "A theatre and ballroom on Main Street in the city of Fond du Lac [WI, it] was built by S. B. Amory in 1856 and enjoyed the reputation of being the largest and finest such building in the state outside of Milwaukee. When the hotel, the Patty House, was opened across the street in 1868, a special walkway was built so that the hotel patrons could enjoy the elaborately decorated ballroom without crossing at street level. Amory Hall burned September 27, 1937. The two lower floors were salvaged and converted into a variety store." (from Ruth Shaw Worthing,* The History of Fond du Lac County, as told by its place-names *[1976]; digital collections of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Library)*

LA VIENNOISE. POLKA-MAZURKA (1854)

by

Johann Strauss, jr.

In an article that uses Chopin's A Major Prelude as its case study, I wrote this about the Prelude and the polka-mazurka:

> The A-Major Prelude is not a compact and perfect waltz miniature or a brief mazurka, both common characterizations of this piece. In fact, it is a polka-mazurka, the characteristic music of which is the same as that for the dance later called the *varsovienne* (literally, "Young Woman from Warsaw").
>
> As a dance, the polka-mazurka was no more than modestly popular in Paris in the 1830s and 1840s, apparently because its slow tempo was at odds with the trend toward faster speeds, as exemplified by the *valse à trois temps* and the galop. The polka-mazurka is not a waltz—instead, it combines the characteristic polka *chassée* step with a mazurka hop. For the dancers, the experience might be slightly disconcerting, like dancing a slow polka in triple meter.
>
> We know that Chopin was an enthusiastic and skilful dancer (McKee 2004, 109, 118); there is little doubt that he danced the polka-mazurka himself while in Paris, if not earlier in Warsaw. Quite appropriately, the first manuscript version of this Prelude was indeed a *souvenir* written into a woman's album in 1836.
>
> Chopin recalls or imagines the dance at a distance, rendering it doubly nostalgic by the *piano-dolce* marking, slower-than-normal tempo, and murky pedalling. (Neumeyer, "Themes and Lines: On the Question of Hierarchy in Linear Analysis," *Res musica* [Estonia] 3 [2011]: 19-20.) In a note I add that "The dance master Carlo Blasis gives a detailed description of the polka-mazurka figures (Blasis 1866, 40-41)." Link to the *Dance Instruction Manuals* front page: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/dihtml/dihome.html

Although there is some play with ^6 and ^5 in the second strain, nowhere in *La Viennoise* is there any suggestion of rising figures. Indeed, in both strains the prevailing motion is downward.

IMSLP link: http://imslp.org/wiki/La_Viennoise_Polka-Mazurka,_Op.144_(Strauss_Jr.,_Johann)

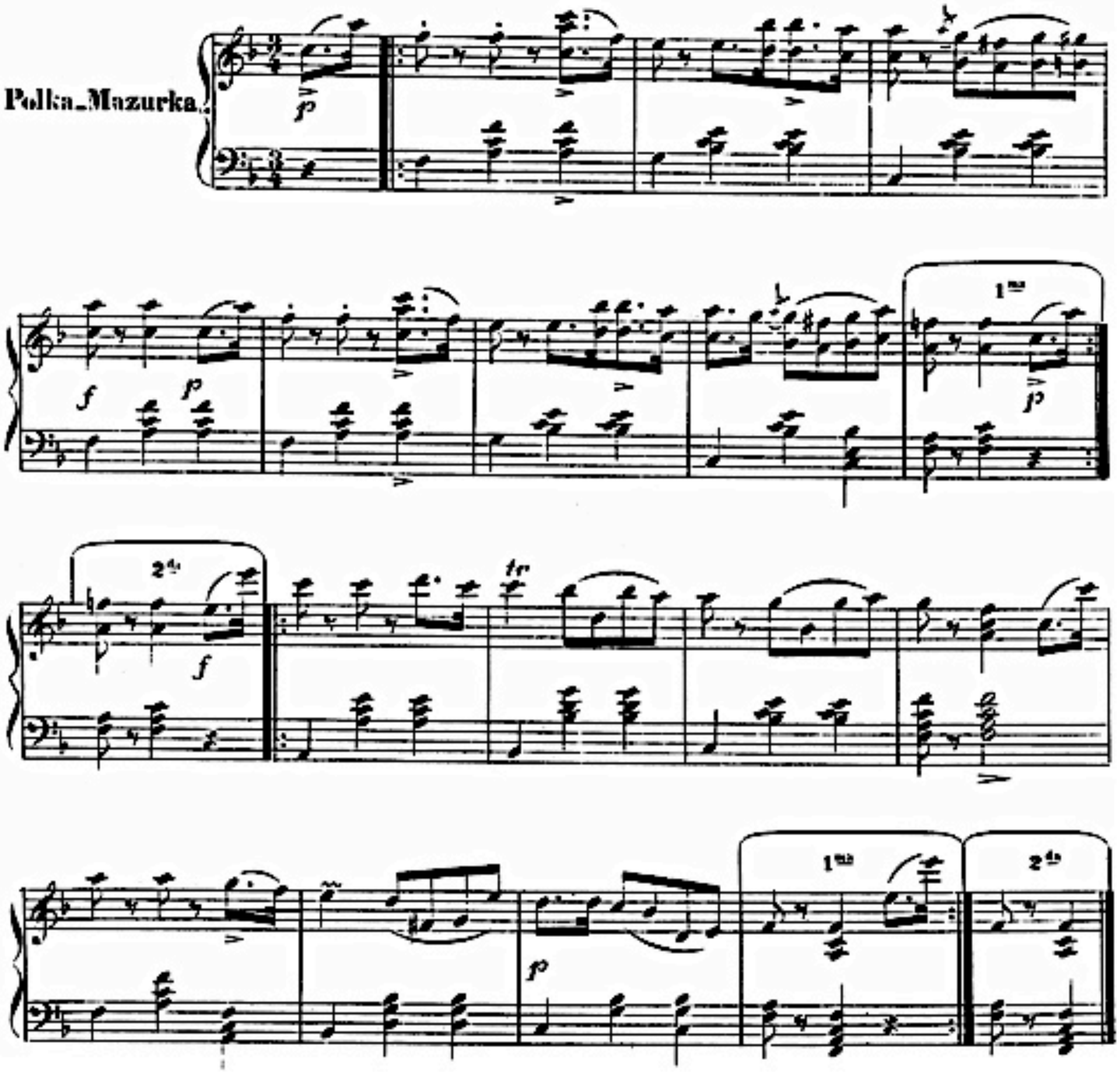
LA VIENNOISE.

POLKA-MAZURKA

von

Johann Strauss.

144^tes Werk.


Polka-Mazurka.
p
f
p
1ma
p
2da
f
tr
1ma
2da
p

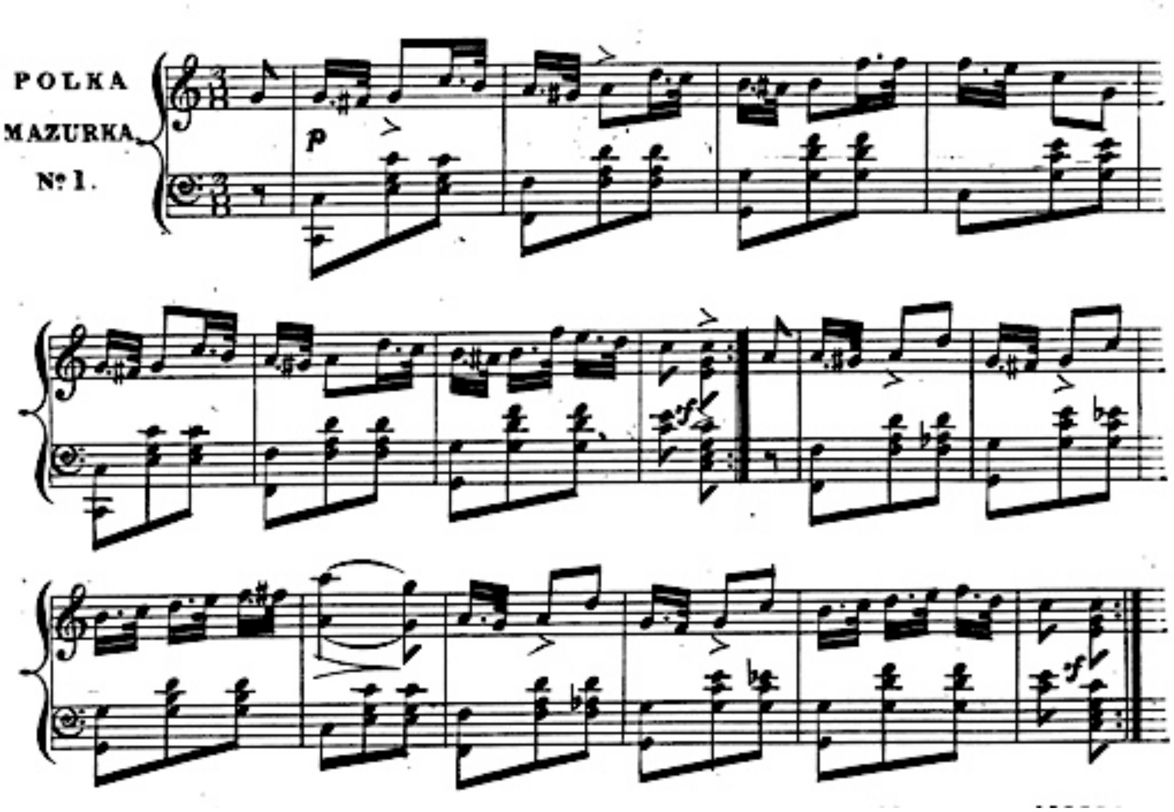
POLKA MAZURKA (1849)

by

Anton Canti.

One in a set of "Fashionable Dances as Taught by Saracco [a dance master in New York]," this polka mazurka adopts the simple accented rising figure we saw first in the Cally Polka. The second strain is only slightly more complicated in that ^6 precedes ^5 before the cadence brings the closing ^7 and ^8.

LOC link to the score and bibliographical information: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1849.101680/



SWEETBRIER POLKA-MAZURKA, WITH VARIATIONS (1854)

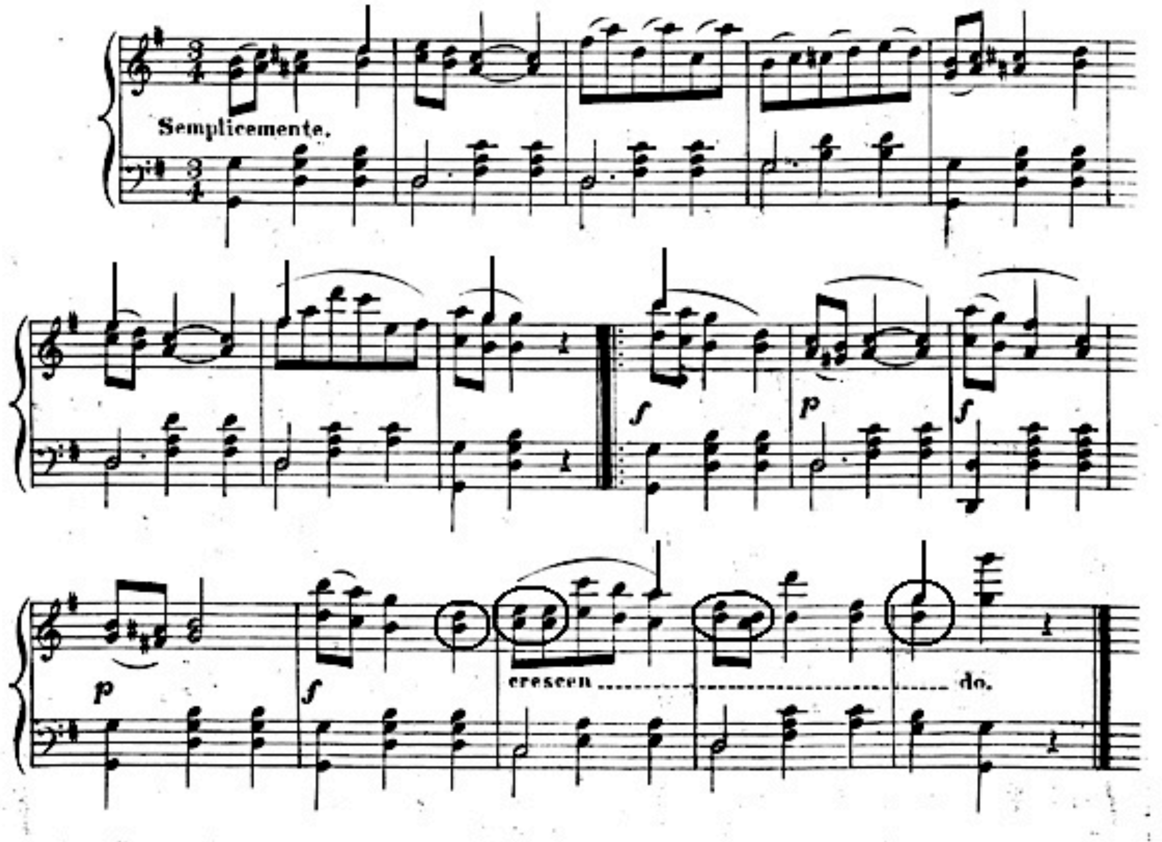
by

Wamelink, J. T.

J. T. Wamelink was a church organist, business man, and prominent musician in Cleveland (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.T._Wamelink). This edition of the *Sweetbrier Polka-Mazurka* has two variations and an extended finale in which the dance is "translated" into duple meter. Such "translations" were common in mid-century publications, but typically in the form of a separate appendix that would provide a polka version of a waltz or *vice versa*.

The first phrase is based on a ^5-^4-^3 frame, but the consequent pulls what was an upper neighbor ^6 upward in the cadence. The second strain superposes ^3, as B5, and the cadence then positions an ascending figure—even though accented—as the principal inner voice ("alto"). The finale opening works the same way, except note that, at the last second (that is, the penultimate bar), the ascending figure is superposed.

LOC link to the score and bibliographical information: http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1854.761170/



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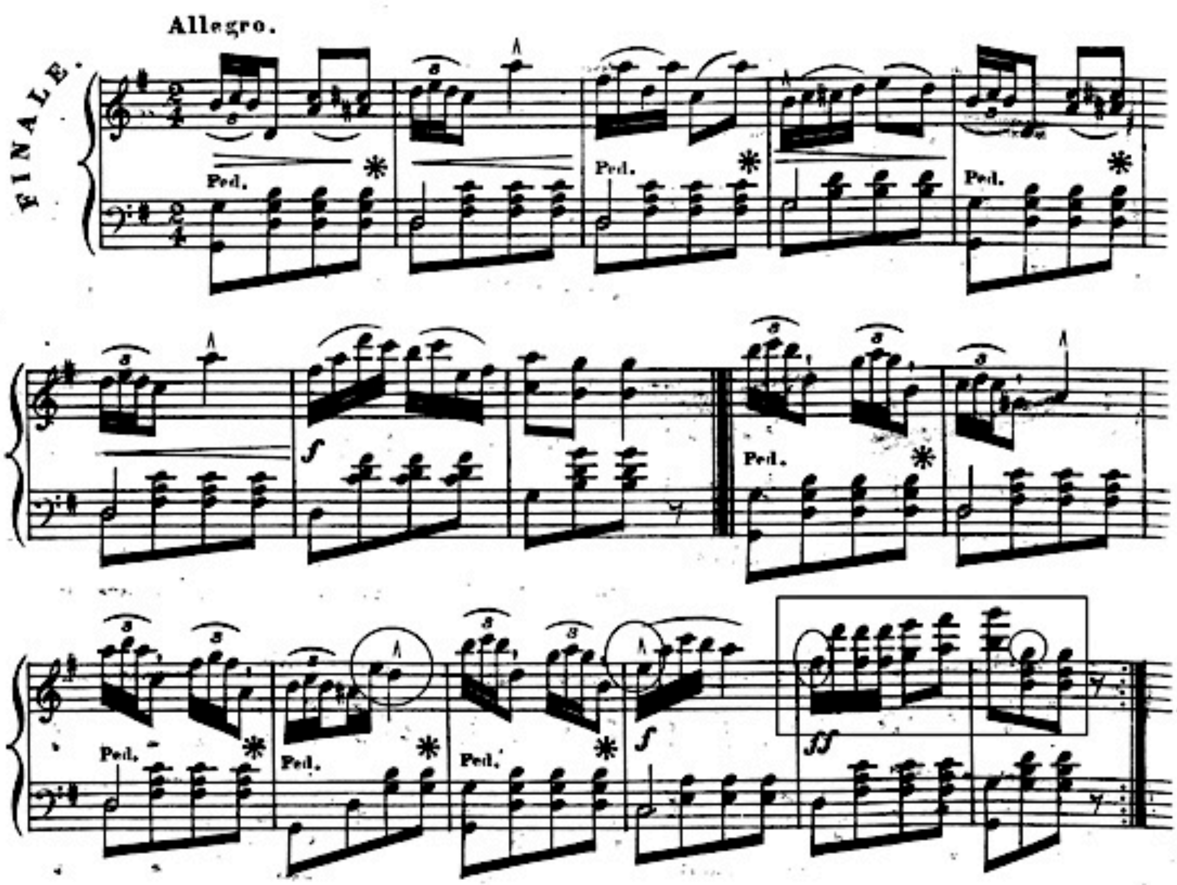

FINALE.
Allegro.
Ped.
f
ff
3

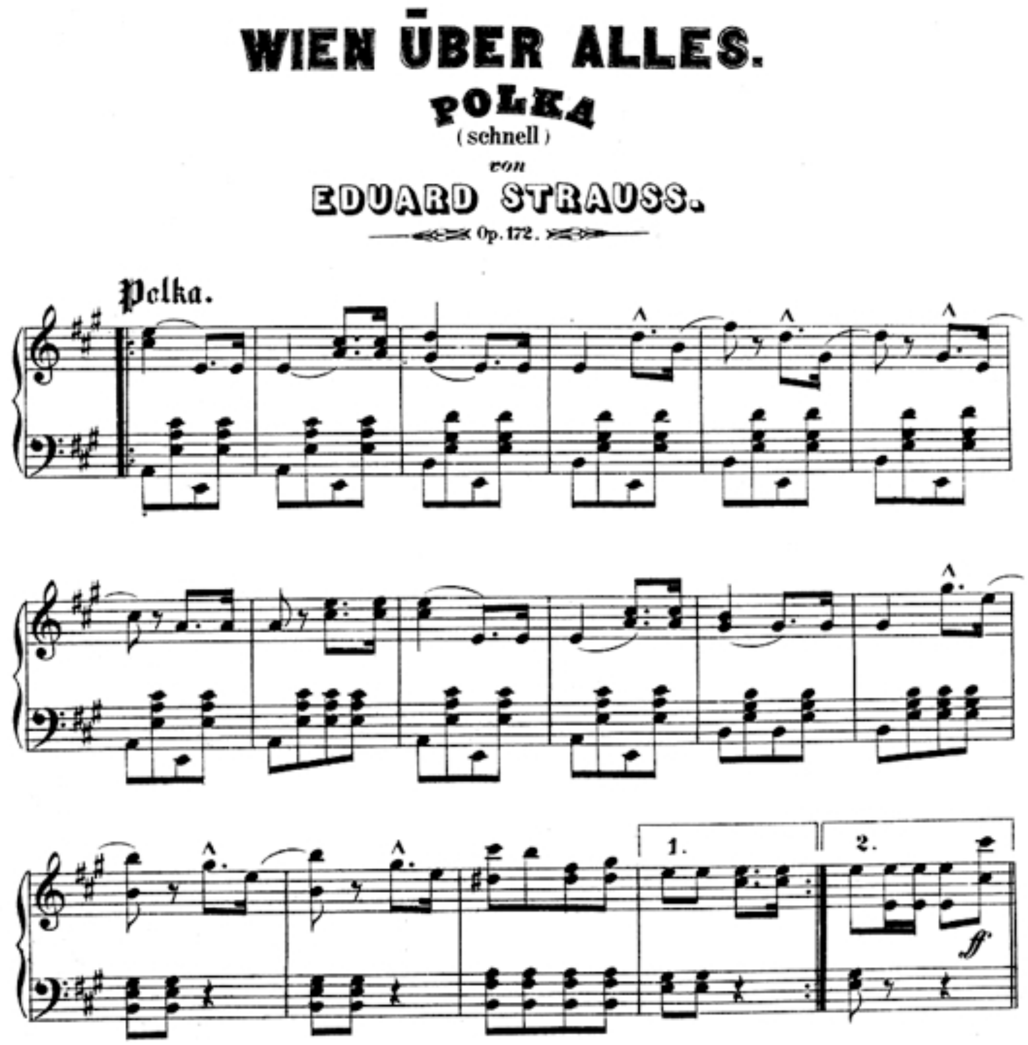
WIEN ÜBER ALLES! POLKA SCHNELL (1870s?)

by

Eduard Strauss

None of the strains in this polka uses ascending gestures. I provide the example to support a point made earlier about the close link between the *polka schnell*, galop, and march. In this case, the failure of harmonic arrival in the final bar of a phrase (V7 is in bar 3, not 4; I is in bar 7, not 8), and the expansion of a progression beyond a 4-bar phrase (see bars 11-12 and ff.) are particularly inimical to the character of the earlier polka.

Link to the score and bibliographical information (Lester S. Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University): http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:059.152



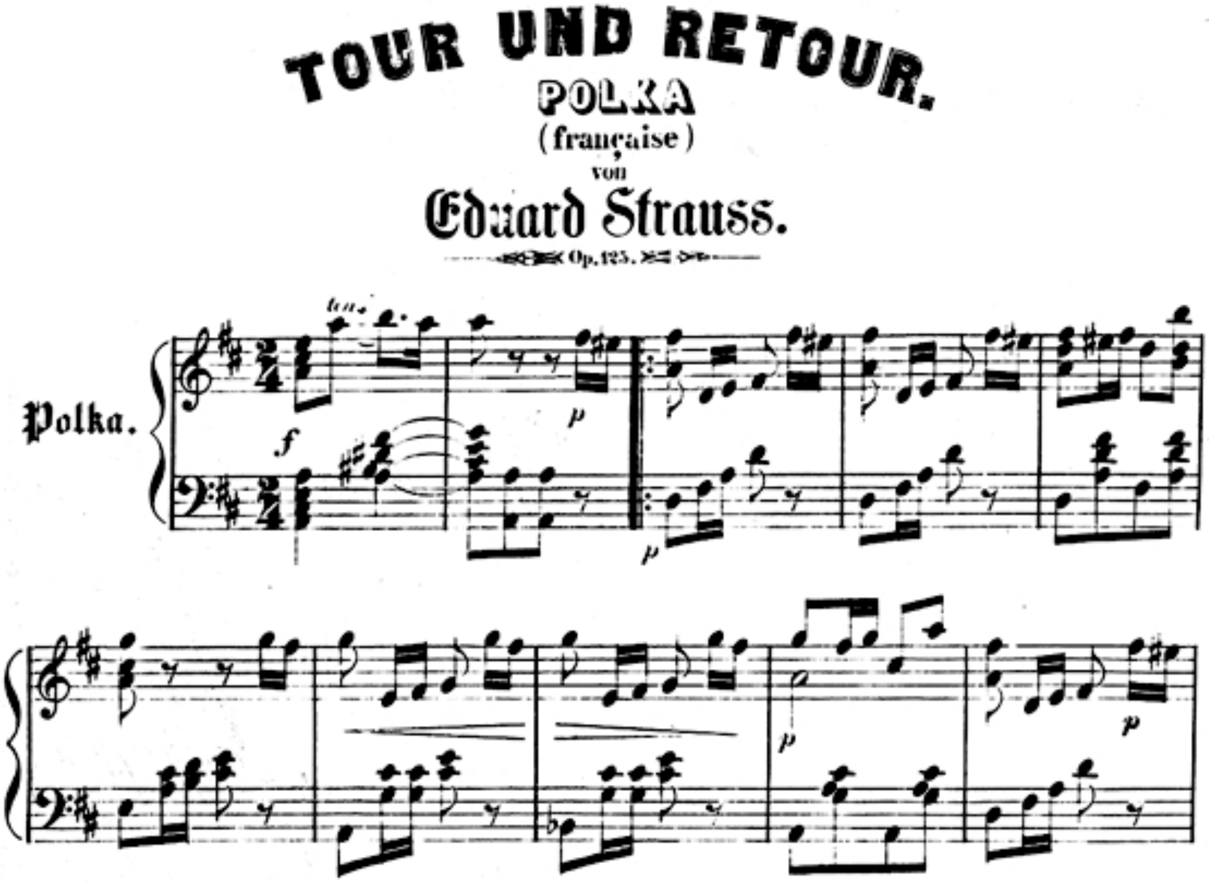
TOUR UND RETOUR. POLKA FRANÇAISE. (1870s?)

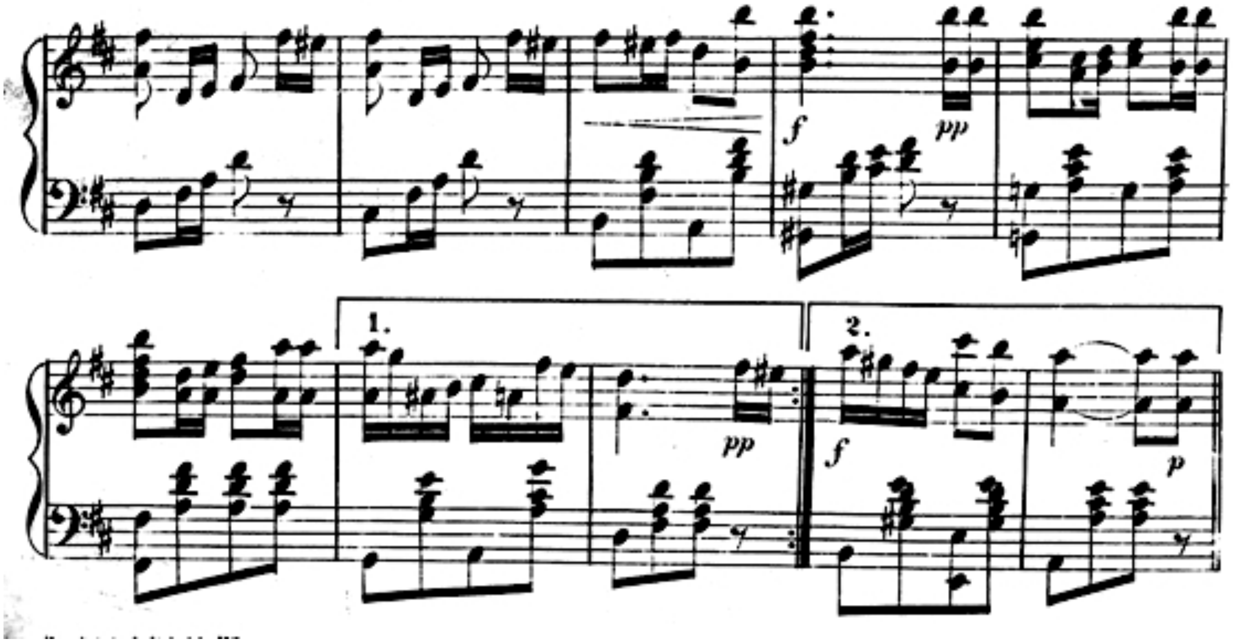
by

Eduard Strauss

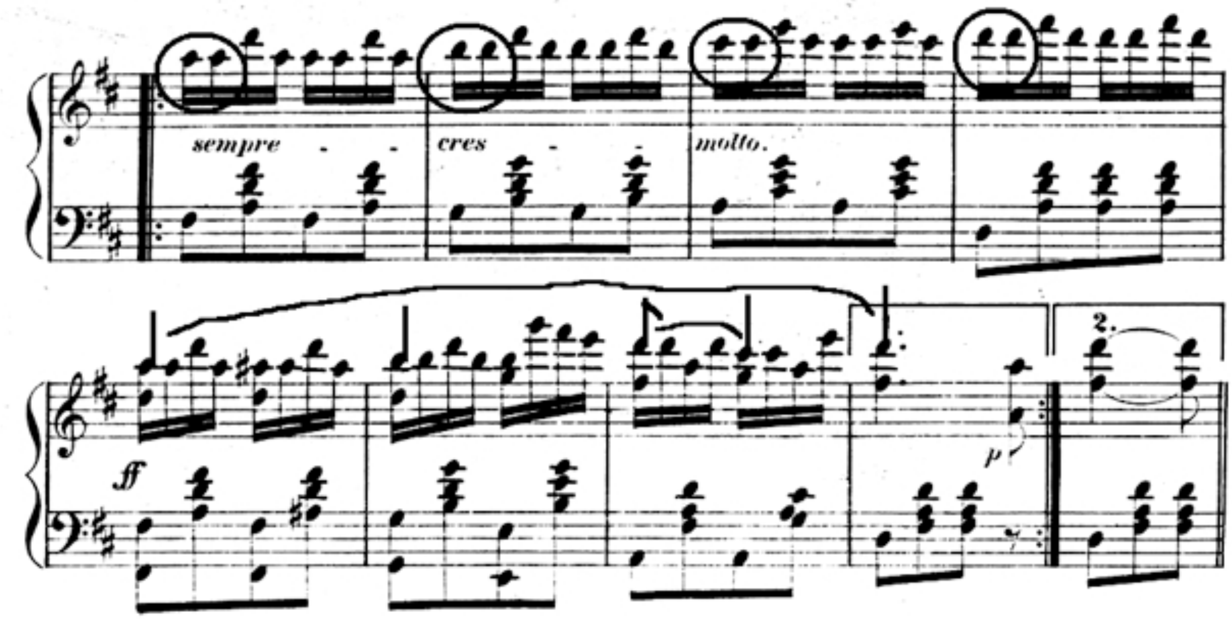
Under the Strausses, the waltz expanded from eight-measure themes (Schubert and Lanner's generation) to sixteen-measure and even thirty-two-measure themes. As the first strain of *Tour und Retour* shows, those designs were transferred to the polka in almost every detail, here including the unstable dominant at bar 4, the imperfect cadence at bar 8, the consequent (rather than continuation) at bar 9, and the dramatic dissonance at bar 12 that sweeps into the final cadence. More concert than dance music, *Tour und Retour* does at least have the familiar polka rhythms—though it lacks the repeated notes in the final bar of each eight-measure unit, instead relying on the accompaniment to continue the motion.

Link to the score and bibliographical information (Lester S. Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University): http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:059.098





Also like the waltz, *Tour und Retour* has two strains in its main section. The Strausses routinely built their waltzes in two strain groups, a flexible model that allowed a single waltz in each set of five to be played as AB, ABAB (*alternativo*), or ABA (dance with trio). This one is something of a throwback stylistically, in that it is very much like the yodeling or coda-figure second strains in early waltzes. Note that the harmony in each phrase consists of an expanded cadential progression (ECP; Caplin), which supports a simple but dramatically effective rising line in the melody.

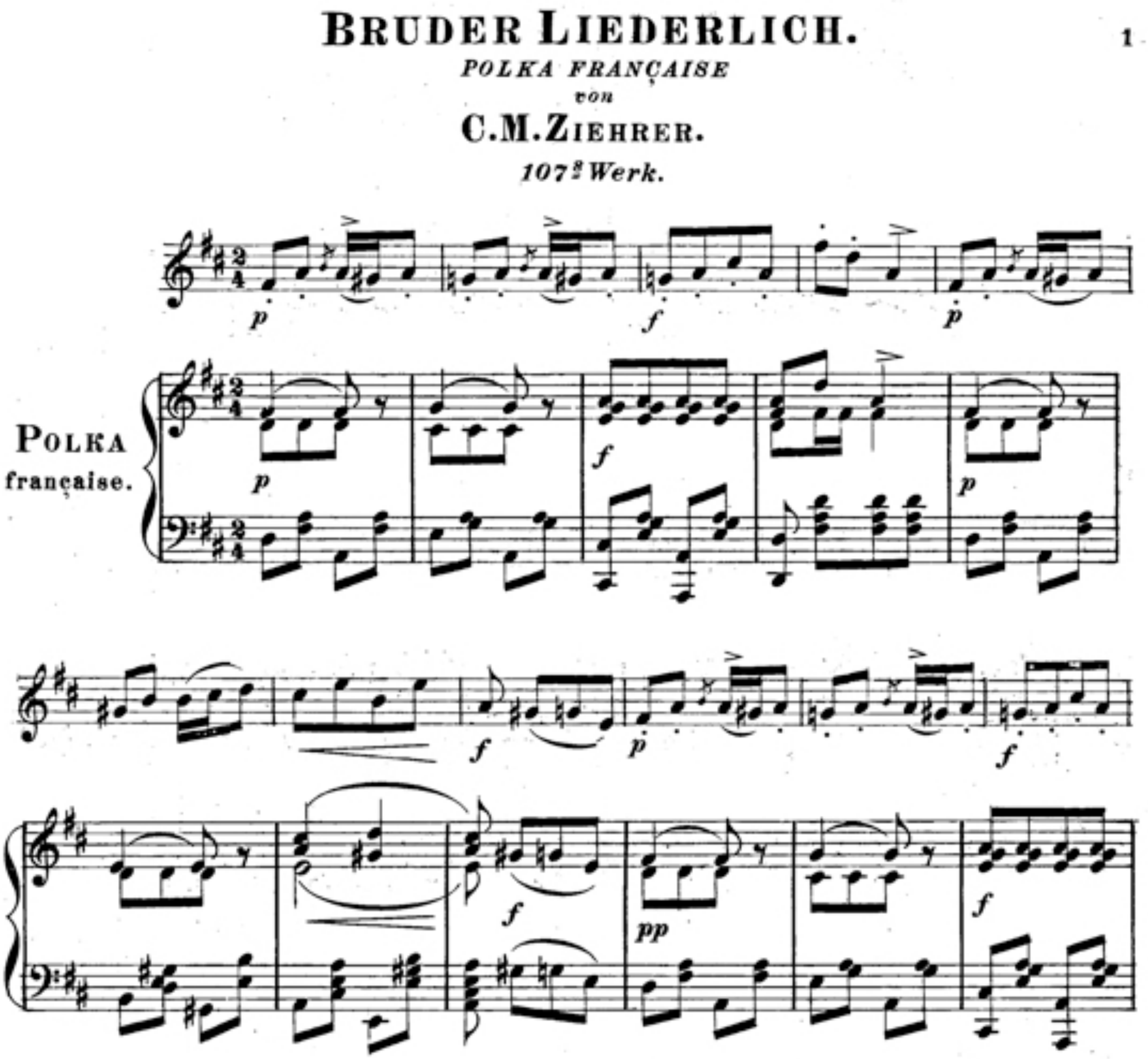


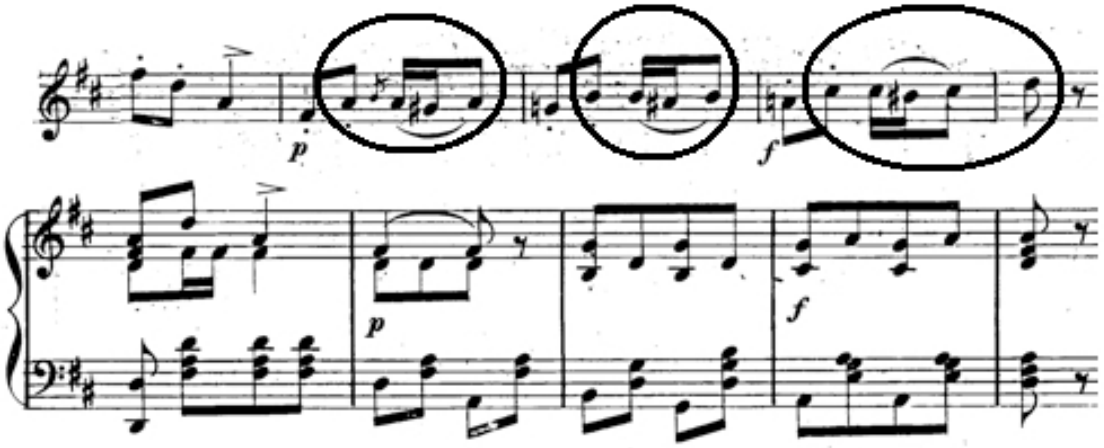
BRUDER LIEDERLICH. POLKA FRANÇAISE (c.1850)
by

Carl Michael Ziehrer

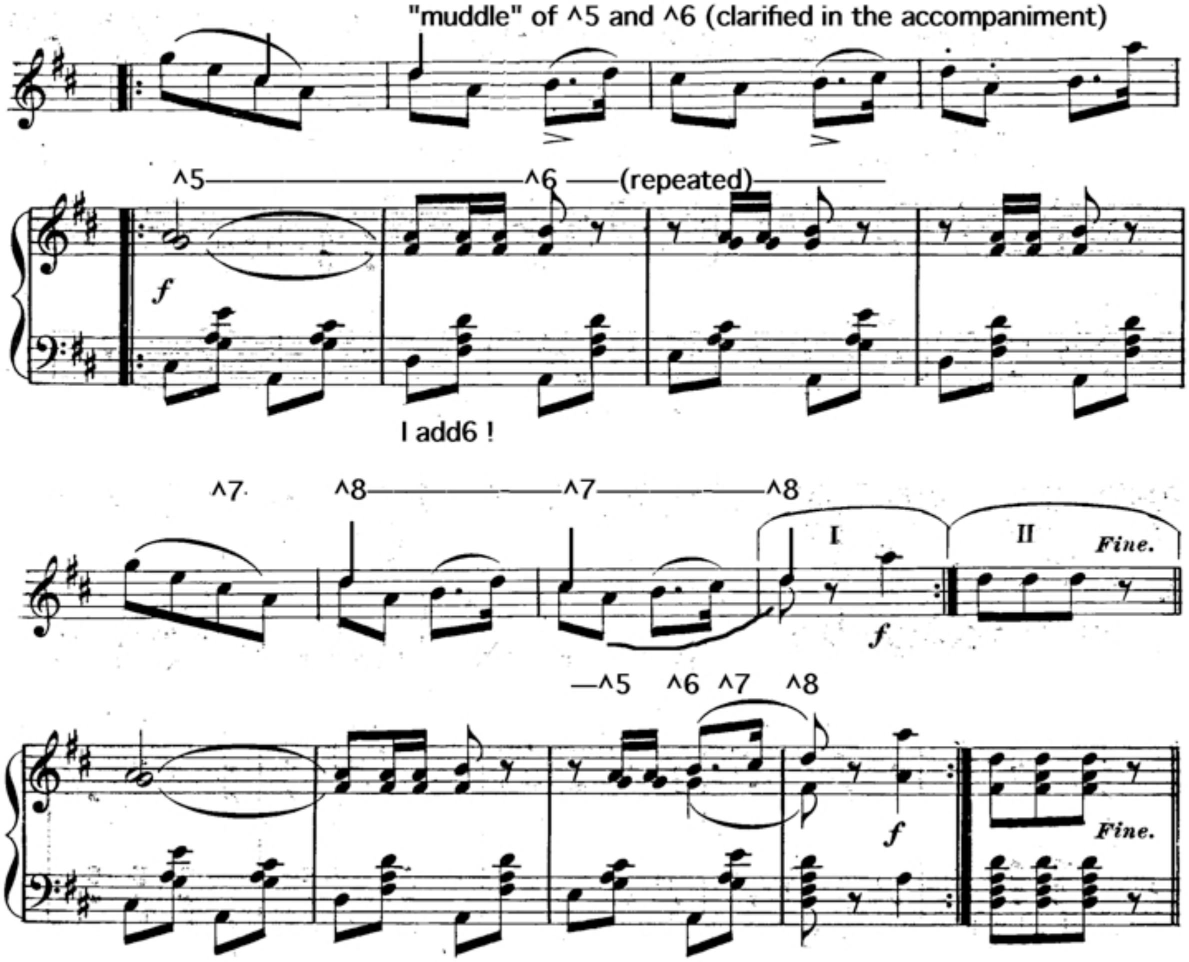
Ziehrer was Eduard Strauss's *bête noire*, a Viennese competitor of the Strausses who eventually forced Eduard into disbanding his orchestra and retiring. In an early polka française, Ziehrer sticks closely to the polka rhythms but does expand the strain into a sixteen-measure theme with a move to V in the antecedent. The concluding phrase of the consequent, then, uses a rising figure as simple as that of the *Cally* polka.

IMSLP link: http://imslp.org/wiki/Bruder_Liederlich,_Op.107_(Ziehrer,_Karl_Michael)


BRUDER LIEDERLICH.
1
POLKA FRANÇAISE
von
C.M.ZIEHRER.
107^{s} Werk.
POLKA
française.
p
f
p
p
f
pp
f



The second strain is similar to Strauss's in *Tour und Retour*, in that it is short and doesn't sound at all like an independent strain. It is interesting, however, for its "muddle" of ^5 and ^6 in the melody of the first phrase. The underlying figure is clear in the accompaniment, but the melody of the second phrase shows that the model was really (^7)-^8-^7-^8.


"muddle" of ^5 and ^6 (clarified in the accompaniment)
^5
^6
(repeated)
f
I add6 !
^7
^8
^7
^8
I
II
Fine.
f
—^5
^6
^7
^8
f
Fine.

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