

Leoncello!

Taught by Lady Helena Hrolfsdottir at Atlantian Summer University, A.S. XLIX  
penelilady@gmail.com

Leoncello was a dance composed by Domenico da Piacenza in honor of his patron, Duke Leoncello of Ferrara. We will be trying several versions of the dance today to see how it changed throughout the years.

I have become interested in studying how the dance tradition started by Domenico, commonly referred to in the SCA as “15<sup>th</sup> century Italian dance”, evolved over the years. This includes teasing out the differences between the dances as he described them and as his two apprentices, Guglielmo Ebreo (aka Giovanni Ambrosio) and Antonio Cornazzano described them. I am also interested in how long that tradition lasted and how it might have transitioned into the styles of dance described by Caroso and Negri in the later 16th century. I chose Leoncello because it remained a popular dance for decades after Domenico composed it.

Steps:

Sempi – single step

Doppio – double (three steps, no close)

Movimento– a “slight movement to honor one’s partner”, many do this as a rise

Saltarello – a double with a salto or hop/kick.

Riprese – a sideways step

Contrapassi – 3 quick doubles done in the time of 2 measures instead of 3

Leoncello, the original by Domenico da Piacenza as found in *De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi*.

(This manuscript is undated but was probably written later in his life, somewhere between 1455-1470, as it contains references to him as a knight.)

Section A: (In Quadernaria tempo, 4/4 at 112 beats per minute)

Holding hands with your partner, six saltarelli forward starting on the left foot.

Man movimento, woman movimento.

The man goes in front of his partner and turns into place with 1 saltarello starting on the right foot in 1 measure.

The woman goes in front of her partner and turns into place with 1 saltarello starting on the left foot in 2 measures.

Section B: (Quadernaria)

The man leaves his partner with 4 sempii and 1 doppio starting on the left foot.

The woman finds her partner with the same steps.

Section C: (Quadernaria)

The man leaves his partner with 3 doppii forwards in 2 measures. (Later manuscripts call this contrapassi but Domenico does not use the term, only stating that the doubles are in 2 tempi (measures) of quadernaria, which is how contrapassi is defined in those later manuscripts. Somebody at some point appears to have decided that a specific name was needed for these quick doubles.)

The woman finds her partner with the same steps.

Section D: (In Bassadanza tempo, 6/8 at 84 bmp/quarter note)

The man leaves his partner with 2 sempii and 2 doppii.

The lady follows him with the same steps.

They take hands and riprese left and then right together.

Together they go forward with 2 sempii and 2 doppii.

Riprese left and then right together.

Section E: (Quadernaria)

Man a movimento, then woman a movimento.

Leoncello v2, as described by Guglielmo

For this version I used both *De Practica Seu Arte Tripudii* by Guglielmo Ebreo ("The Jew") from 1463 and his 1470s version of the manuscript, written under the name Giovanni Ambrosio after his conversion to Christianity around 1465. Guglielmo's version of Leoncello is not significantly different from Domenico's, but I find the changes to the first section interesting.

Section A: (Quadernaria)

Holding hands with your partner, 3 doppii forward starting on the left foot.

Man a movimento, woman a movimento.

The man goes in front of the woman with 1 doppii starting on the right foot and turns into place (2 full measures).

Woman a movimento, man a movimento.

The woman turns in place (a volta) with four steps.

Sections B,C,D and E are the same as Domenico's description.

I did not choose to use Cornazzano's manuscript or any of the other unattributed manuscripts to further examine shifts in the dance at this time. I do plan to go back through and see if there are any interesting differences in the future besides the addition of the term *contrapassi* to section C.

Leoncello v3, as described in the Nurnberg Letter

The source is a German letter written in 1517 by Johannes Cochlaus while visiting Bologna, and sent to Willibald Pirckheimer so that his daughters might learn what was being danced in Italy at the time. It contains seven dances, all of which have similar names and choreographies to dances in the manuscripts by Domenico, Guglielmo and Cornazzano.

There are some significant differences in the descriptions of steps (not just because they are in German) in this source. In interpreting these, I considered what we know about trends in music and in European dance elsewhere around 1517. One key fact is that the transition in music from medieval theory and notation that was taking place in the 15th century had pretty much solidified by this point. In medieval music theory and notation notes were assumed to be divisible by 3 ("perfect") unless otherwise marked - whereas the white mensural notation of the 16th century that soon become modern music notation assumed notes to be divisible by 2 unless otherwise marked. Popular and art music of the 16th century shows that 6/8 and 9/8 musical styles were fading, and several new styles in firmly 4/4 music emerged around this time.

These musical changes also affected changes in dance steps. It was around 1520 that Arbeau claims that his dance master invented the concept of the close. The close on a single or a double is really an attempt to take steps that were done to music with 3 beats per measure and make them fit music with 4. Other styles in the early 16th century made similar adaptations, such as the kick at the end of an *almain double*. It is based on this that I have made my conclusions below about the steps "with a repress".

Steps! I need to figure out and be consistent about language of the steps –English or nah???

Section A:

- With your partner, go forward with 2 *contrapass* and 1 with a repress. This is done three times. (I am interpreting this as 3 *contrapassi doubles*, that is quick doubles in 4/4 measures, and a quick sideways step as a close on the final leftover beat.)

- Each rises.

- The man goes around his partner with a *bassduppell*. (*Bassduppell* seems to mean a regular *doppii*.)\*

- Each rises.

- The woman goes around her partner with a *bassduppell*.\*

\*The wording of this section in the German is slightly confusing. It can be read as goes around with a turn, or simply turns around in place. Either way, they both have to do the same thing, because it specifies in section B that the man starts the section back on the proper side.

Section B:

The man leaves his partner with 4 basssimpel (sempii) and 1 bassduppel with a repress. (Again, I am interpreting this to mean that the double has a sideways close step on the end.)

She goes to him with the same steps.

Section C:

They do two riprese together. (There is not enough time for this in the music as written in earlier manuscripts but it would work just fine if you repeated this section 3 times instead of 2.)

The man leaves his partner with 2 contrapass and 1 with a repress, turning with it. (Due to what happens in section D in this version, I think you use the close step to turn to face inwards, that is perpendicular to the line of travel so that you will be facing your partner when they catch up.)

The woman catches up with the same steps.

Section D:

Take right hands and circle with 2 basssimpel and 2 bassduppel.

Take left hands and circle back with 2 basssimpel and 2 bassduppel. At the end of the circle, turn of face the same direction and take hands.

Riprese left and right.

Forward together with 2 basssimpel and 2 bassduppel.

Riprese left and right.

Section E:

Each rises.

I find this version of Leoncello fascinating in terms of the changes it shows in how dances were done in Italy by 1517. It is still recognizably the same dance, with the same basic pieces: enter together, pass & turn, chase, chase, bassadanza section, movimento ending. However, the step changes show the beginnings of the livelier and quicker steps that are found in the descriptions of dances by Caroso and Negri, as well as changes in how people thought about fitting dance steps to the music. This is honestly my favorite version of the dance - the circling version of the bassadanza section is much more fun than yet another chase sequence.

In the future I am planning on applying the same analysis to the other 6 dances contained in the Nurnberg letter: Amoroso, Angelosa, ??? .... I'm hoping to start to tease out patterns in the differences between dance descriptions from Domenico to his apprentices and then to this much later source.

Sources:

Picture Sources

Smith books, Vol I and II: The first volume provided important information on putting dance in context, while the comparison charts of the Italian manuscripts was what made a lot of my research possible. It also contains the Nurnberg letter. His translations of Italian and German were of some help, although I had to go back to the original Italian to tease out the differences between each version.

Music Notation book & Music Notation class at KWDS: The relevant chapters in this book and this wonderful class last year helped me understand white mensural notation and the changes occurring in European music in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Pennsic Class on Amoroso

Neville book: I am greatly indebted to Neville's work on fitting the dance tradition into the wider cultural context of the Renaissance. Her work on reconstructing the music and steps had some particular insights that really helped me to understand theoretical sections of Domenico's manuscript.

Sparti book on Guglielmo: Although some of Sparti's work has been overturned by more recent scholarship, her account of Guglielmo's life was quite helpful.

Wilson article on reconstructing Damnes versions: This article on looking at the descriptions as actually different versions of the dances helped influence me to start this project.

Duchessa Diana Alene: Of course, a Laurel helps her apprentice, but she still deserves so much credit for all that she has done to help with this project. Her knowledge of the history and development of European dance in all of the SCA period has been an amazing help in developing my own understanding of the context for these specific dances. She also provided the music I am using, including splicing the tracks to have the right repeats for each version. Finally, whenever I am stuck on the interpretation of a word or phrase in Italian or German she is always there for me. (I know dance/music terms and cognates of English. She actually studied both languages.)

Neville, Jennifer. *The eloquent body dance and humanist culture in fifteenth-century Italy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Smith, A. William. *Fifteenth-century dance and music: twelve transcribed Italian treatises and collections in the tradition of Domenico da Piacenza*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995.

Sparti, Barbara. *Guglielmo Ebreo of Pesaro: on the practice or art of dancing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

A Hands-On Introduction to Early Notation

Instructor: Master John Elys ( Stephen Bloch)

KWDS X 2013

Elys, John. "A Hands-On Introduction to Early Notation." Class, Known World Dance and Music Symposium X, Saratoga Springs, June 22, 2013.

4 pm Amoroso -- by the Book Lord Maurin Lessault mka David Barnes Amoroso is a fun dance from 15th-C. Italy that appears in two manuscripts. Learn both versions as well as the common SCA version. Pennsic 42 2013

Lessault, Maurin. "Amoroso by the Book." Class, Pennsic War 42 from Society for Creative Anachronism, Slippery Rock, July 26, 2013.

Apel, Willi. *The notation of polyphonic music, 900-1600*. 5th ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953/1961.

Wilson, David. "'La Giloxia'/'Gelosia' as described by Domenico and Guglielmo." *Historical Dance* 3: 3-9. (accessed ).