

Leoncello

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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 evolved over the years. I chose Leoncello to study when I first started this project because it remained a popular dance for decades after Domenico composed it. I have since continued the project with other dances, but this remains a favorite.

Italian Steps:

- *Sempi* – single step
- *Doppio* – double (three steps, whether or not there is a close depends on the *misura*)
- *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 with a close at the end. In some places these are described as all being on 1 foot, but in other places it describes the feet alternating. There are other interpretations of the descriptions of *contrapassi*, I base this on comparing the descriptions in Domenico (who does not use the term) to those in other sources, including the German letter.

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.)

Entrance: (*In Quadernaria tempo, 4/4*)

- 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 to face forward 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 right foot in 2 measures.

Strut: (*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.

Fast Chase: (*Quadernaria*)

- The man leaves his partner with 3 *doppii* forward in 2 measures.
- The woman finds her partner with the same steps.

Procession: (*In Bassadanza tempo, 6/4*)

- The man leaves his partner with 2 *sempii* and 2 *doppii* starting left.
- 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* starting left.
- *Riprese* left and then right together.

Finale: (*Quadernaria*)

- Man a *movimento*, then woman a *movimento*.

Notes on my reconstruction: In the entrance section, Domenico does not state that the *movimenti* are repeated. Later versions do, so you could assume that it is. I have chosen instead to give the woman more time for the go in front and turn piece. After all, she most likely is wearing a trained houppelande at this point in time.

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.

Entrance:

- 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 *doppio* starting on the right foot and turns over his right shoulder into place (2 full measures).
- Woman a *movimento*, man a *movimento*.
- The woman turns in place (a *volta*).

Note that this leaves them improper. You can choose to correct that after the man leaves and the woman catches up to him.

The Strut, Fast Chase, Procession and Finale match Domenico's description.

Leoncello v3

As described in the Nürnberg 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, such as the complete lack of *saltarelli* in these dances.

German Steps:

- *contrapass*- In the dances in the letter, this is only ever used in sets of three, which are always described as "2 *contrapass* and 1 with a *repress*." I am interpreting this as 3 quick doubles with a quick set as a close. This takes 2 4/4 measures. This means that you would start each set of three doubles on the left foot, which matches the language about *contrapassi* being on the same foot that is sometimes found.
- *bassimpel*- This appears to be the equivalent of a *sempii* or single step.
- *bassduppel*- This appears to be the equivalent of a normal *doppio* or double. At times in the letter it is describe as a "*bassduppel* with a *repress*" which I am interpreting to mean that it is closed, especially since this description only occurs when the music is 4/4.
- *altzada*- from the verb "to rise", equivalent to a *movimento* or *schosso*.
- *repress*- Similar to the Italian *riprese*, a sideways step.

Entrance:

- Holding hands, enter with 3 sets of *contrapass* doubles.
- Man rise, woman rise.
- Man turns over the left shoulder with 1 double.
- Woman rise, Man rise.
- Woman turns over the left shoulder with 1 double.**

Strut:

- Man leaves with 4 singles and 1 double.
- Woman catches up with the same.

Fast Chase:

- *Repress* (left, right).
- Man leaves with 1 set of *contrapass* doubles.
- Woman catches up with the same.

Turns & Procession:

- Take right hands and circle clockwise with 2 singles & 2 doubles.
- Take left hands and circle counter-clockwise with 2 singles & 2 doubles.
- *Repress* (left, right).
- Together forward with 2 singles & 2 doubles.
- *Repress* (left, right).

Finale:

- Man rises, woman rises.

** Alternate reconstruction of the Entrance: Holding hands, enter with 3 sets of *contrapass* doubles. Man rise, woman rise. Man goes around his partner with 1 double. Woman rise, Man rise. Woman goes around her partner with 1 double.

Sources

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