

# Evolution of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian Dance: Leoncello

Magnifica Helena, OL ~ [penelilady@gmail.com](mailto:penelilady@gmail.com) ~ <http://gratzioso.net>

Leoncello was a dance composed by Domenico da Piacenza in honor of his patron, Duke Leoncello of Ferrara, which continued to be danced for nearly a century. The evolution of this dance can show us a lot about the evolution of dance styles in northern Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century. In my notes I will use English step terms where possible (such as double instead of *doppio*) and Italian step terms where there is no easy substitution.

## Leoncello, the original, for two dancers

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 *quaternaria* tempo)

- Holding hands with your partner, six *saltarelli* forward starting on the left foot.
- Man rise, Woman rise
- Man in front of Woman to her right with 1 *saltarello* on the right, quick turn to face forward
- Woman in front of Man to his right with 1 *saltarello* on the right, 1 full turn to face forward

**Strut:**

- Man leaves with 4 singles and 1 double starting on the left foot.
- Woman finds her partner with the same.

**Chase:**

- Man leaves his partner with 3 doubles in 2 measures (1 *contrapassi* set\*) starting on the left foot.
- Woman finds her partner with the same.

**Bassadanza:** (change to *bassadanza* tempo)

- Man leaves with 2 singles and 2 doubles starting on the left foot.
- Woman finds her partner with the same.
- Take hands, *riprese* left and right.
- Together, forwards with 2 singles and 2 double starting left.
- *Riprese* left and right together.

**Coda:** (back to *quaternaria* tempo)

- Man rise, Woman rise

## Leoncello v2

For this version I looked at both *De Practica Seu Arte Tripudii* by Guglielmo Ebreo from 1463 and his 1470s version of the manuscript, written under the name Giovanni Ambrosio after his conversion to Christianity and knighthood around 1465. Guglielmo's version of Leoncello is not significantly different from Domenico's, but I find the changes to the first section interesting. The music as written by Guglielmo is also slightly different in the entrance section than Domenico's.

**Entrance:**

- Holding hands with your partner, 1 *contrapassi* sequence forward starting on the left foot.
- Man rise, woman rise
- Man goes in front of the woman with 1 double starting on the right foot and turns into place
- Woman rise, man rise
- Woman goes in front of the man with 1 double starting on the right foot and turns into place

**The rest of the dance is the same as Domenico's description.**

## Leoncello v3

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.

**Entrance:**

- Holding hands with your partner, forward 3 sets of *contrapassi* starting on the left foot.

- Each rises
- The man turns around with a double
- Each rises
- The woman turns around with a double

**Strut:**

- Man leaves with 4 singles and 1 double starting on the left foot and the double is closed.
- Woman finds her partner with the same.

**Chase:**

- *Riprese* left and right together.
- Man leaves his partner with 1 *contrapassi* set\* starting on the left foot. He turns with the final *repress* on the right to face his partner.
- Woman finds her partner with the same.

**Bassadanza:**

- Take right hands and circle with 2 singles and 2 doubles starting left.
- Take left hands and circle back with 2 singles and 2 doubles.
- Face forward, take hands, *riprese* left and right.
- Together, forwards with 2 singles and 2 double starting left.
- *Riprese* left and right together.

**Coda:** (back to *quaternaria* tempo)

- Each rises

## Leoncello Nuovo, for 3

This version is also found in *De arte saltandi* by Domenico da Piacenza. It is a variation to be danced with two men and a woman in the center.

**Entrance:**

- All together two *saltarelli* doubles starting on the left

**Chase:**

- Double left woman then men
- Double right woman then men

**Snake Hey:**

- Woman 8 *pive* doubles in “S” thru men substituting 2 singles for the 4<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> piva when she goes between the men

**Turns:**

- Men do two *saltarelli* & a circle turn left with 4 singles
- Woman do two *saltarelli* & 4 quick singles in a half turn to end face to face with men

**Contrapassi:**

- (Contrapassi sequence) Three *pive* doubles with half turn right in place of the *ripresa* right at the sequence end & a posture with the left foot forward
- Do all this again to switch sides

**Bassadanza:**

- Double left woman then men
- Double right woman then men
- All half turn right and face
- 2 *riprese* (left, right) & two *continenze* (left, right)
- Double left woman then men
- Double right woman then men (include half turn right to end next to lady)
- All *reverenza* left

**Coda:**

- Woman rise, Men rise

## Steps and Music Tempo

Most of the dance is in the *quaternaria* tempo, which in modern notation approximates to 4/4 at 108 beats per minute to the quarter note. There is one section in the *bassadanza* tempo, which in modern notation approximates to 6/4. Doubles danced in *quaternaria* are walked flat and closed, whereas those done in *bassadanza* are syncopated, with a rise and fall on the balls of the feet, and no close. The *saltarello* being done in *quaternaria* tempo still has a hop/kick on the end but is less bouncy than in its own time signature. There are some differences in the music as written in the different manuscripts, which seem to fit the different entrance sections.

The *contrapassi* sequence in the 3<sup>rd</sup> section is described (but not named) in Domenico and Guglielmo's description of the dance. Domenico describes that it is 3 doubles in two tempi and Guglielmo that it is 3 doubles, each on one foot, that is left, right, left. The term shows up in some later copies from fragmentary manuscripts, and there is a definition in Cornazzano's manuscript. The most thorough description which also uses the term is in the German manuscript. This states that it is 3 *duppel contrapass*, 1 with a *repress*. Essentially, this is 3 *Pive doppii* and a close in two 4/4 measures. Originally, I thought that this version with a close was unique to the later style, but based on the descriptions in several of Domenico and Guglielmo's dances where the term *contrapassi* is later used, I think this is what was meant all along.

### Step Terms

English	Italian	German
Double	<i>Doppio</i>	<i>Bassduppel or duppel</i>
Single	<i>Sempio</i>	<i>Basssimpel</i>
Rise	<i>Movimento</i>	<i>Altzada</i>
Set or Close	<i>Ripresa / Continenza</i>	<i>Repress</i>
Hopped double	<i>Saltarello doppio</i>	<i>Bassduppel behennt</i>
Fast double	<i>Piva doppio</i>	<i>Bassduppel behennt</i>

## Sources

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Elys, John. "A Hands-On Introduction to Early Notation." Class, Known World Dance and Music Symposium X, Saratoga Springs, June 22, 2013. (*This class really jumpstarted my understanding of period music notation and how it changed, and led to further research on the subject.*)

Lessault, Maurin. "Amoroso by the Book." Class, Pennsic War 42 from Society for Creative Anachronism, Slippery Rock, July 26, 2013. (*Lord Maurin's class looking at the different descriptions of Amoroso in the manuscripts in different versions helped cement my interest in the same sort of approach to reconstructing other dances.*)

Nevile, Jennifer. *The eloquent body dance and humanist culture in fifteenth-century Italy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004. (*I am greatly indebted to Nevile's work on fitting the dance tradition into the wider cultural context of the Renaissance. Her work on reconstructing the music and steps also had some particular insights that really helped me to understand theoretical sections of Domenico's manuscript.*)

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. (*The first volume provided important information on putting dance in context, while the comparison charts of the Italian manuscripts in the second volume was what made a lot of my research possible. It also contains the Nürnberg letter.*)

Sparti, Barbara. *Guglielmo Ebreo of Pesaro: on the practice or art of dancing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. A Hands-On Introduction to Early Notation. (*Although some of Sparti's work has been overturned by more recent scholarship, her account of Guglielmo's life was quite helpful.*)

Wilson, David. "'La Giloxia'/'Gelasia' as described by Domenico and Guglielmo." *Historical Dance* 3: 3-9. (*This article on looking at the descriptions as actually different versions of the dances helped influence me to start this project.*)