

Dances from Il Papa

The Il Papa manuscript, thought to have been written around 1500 or 1550, or possibly somewhere in between, is neither 15th Century Italian in style nor 16th Century Italian. Instead it lies somewhere in between, having elements of 15th Century dance as well as some of the features of 16th Century dance.

Introduction

The Manuscript

Nobody knows who Il Papa was, but he signed the preface and wrote several of the dances contained in this manuscript. The manuscript itself contains dances by three different authors, who are named as Il Papa, Giovannino and Il Lanzino.

Location

The manuscript currently resides in the New York Public Library, Performing Arts Research Center at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in Manhattan (near 65th St).

Location, Description and Reference:

Dance Collection

(S) *MGZMB-Res. 72-255

Manoscritto di balletti composti da Giovannino e Il Lanzino e Il Papa; scritto da Cosimo Ticcio. [155-?] [27] p. (26-31 lines) 29 cm. (f.)

Cia Fornaroli Collection. NN 72-7014766

Music

The manuscript contains no music for the dances, but fortunately some has been composed by modern composers to fit the music.

Step Descriptions

Most of the steps in Il Papa appear to come from the 15th C Italian repertoire. The dances include singles, doppii, riverenze, continenze, and other steps that appear to be identical to their counterparts from Domenico, Cornazano, and Guglielmo.

There are a few steps that are unique to the repertoire, however, and I will describe them here.

Passetto (Ps)

This appears to be a fast passo or single step – 4 of these are done in one bar of music.

Trappasino (Tp)

There is no indication as to what this step is, however I have made it look like a piva step from the 15th C sources. It appears to be used in several places where pive would be reasonable steps to include. The name of the step may come from the words “tre passi”, which adds further weight to the piva conjecture, because a piva contains three steps.

Volta di Lasso

The description of this step in the manuscript is “a turn on the right side, moving the left foot first”. This looks like almost exactly the opposite of the first part of a 15th C volta del gioioso, in which a turn is done over the left shoulder starting on the right foot.

Meza ripresa (RpM)

A meza ripresa is exactly half of a 15th C Italian ripresa. It takes half of a bar and involves a single step with a close, either to the left or the right.

Lasso

This dance is by Giovannino, and the reconstruction is by Susan E. Kronenfeld and Bess Libby.

The dance starts with 2 men and a lady standing in a half-moon figure. That is, with the men at each end and turned slightly inwards to face towards the lady in the middle.

At the beginning of the dance, the dancers will need to be a fair distance apart, say or 3 paces.

1	CnL CnR	Two continenze, left then right.
2	SL SR	Two singles, forwards.
3	RpML RpMR	All face right shoulders into the middle, and do two meza riprese, the first outwards, the second inwards.
4	Volta di Lasso	Make a full turn over the right shoulder, starting with the left foot.
5	RvL	Riverenza

6	SL SR	The man on the lady's left hand side only does 2 singles towards the center
7	PsL PsR PsL PsR	The lady and the man on her left change places with 4 passetti, taking right hands.
8 – 11	Repeat x 2	Repeat the above twice more. The second time, the exchange is started by the left hand man (who is now in the lady's place). The third time, the exchange is started by the lady (who is in the left hand position).
		At the end of this, the lady will be back in her place, but the two men will have swapped places.

12	SL SR	Moving in towards the center
13	PsL PsR PsL PsR	Moving in towards the center

The next section is a repeat of bars 3 – 5, above.

14	RpML RpMR	All face right shoulders into the middle, and do two meza riprese, the first outwards, the second inwards.
15	Volta di Lasso	Make a full turn over the right shoulder, starting with the left foot.
16	RvL	Riverenza

In the next section, the dancers are moving around the circle, each with 3 trappasini and a passo.

17 – 20	TpL TpR TpL PsR	First man leads around the circle.
21 – 24	TpL TpR TpL PsR	The lady follows.
25 – 28	TpL TpR TpL PsR	The second man follows.

The next section is a hey for 3 dancers.

29 – 32	TpL TpR TpL PsR	The first man begins the hey by moving between the lady and the other man, using 3 trappasini and a passo
33 – 40	Tp x 8	The hey continues, with 8 trappasini, with the first man exchanging places with the lady again. Each exchange of the hey takes 2 of these, so at the end of they hey the lady will have returned to the middle, and the men will have exchanged back into their original places again.

The last section is a repeat of bars 3 – 5, above.

41	RpML RpMR	All face right shoulders into the middle, and do two meza riprese, the first outwards, the second inwards.
42	Volta di Lasso	Make a full turn over the right shoulder, starting with the left foot.
43	RvL	Riverenza

La Villanella

Another dance by by Giovannino, this is my reconstruction.

Like most of the other dances in the Il Papa manuscript, the dance starts with 2 men and a lady standing in a half-moon figure. That is, with the men at each end and turned slightly inwards to face towards the lady in the middle.

1	RvL	The lady gives her left hand to the man on her right, and does a riverenza.
2	RvR	The lady gives her right hand to the man on her left, and does a riverenza.
3	P sR PsL TpR	All facing around the circle, everyone do two quick passi beginning on the right foot, moving forwards, and one trappasino. ¹
4	PsL PsR TpL	Still facing around the circle, do two more passi and one trappasino.
5	PsR PsL TpR	... and again, one more time. These three sequences of passo, passo, trappasino, should have taken you completely around the circle, or thereabouts.
6	VtL	All do one doppio, turning over the left shoulder
7	RpMR RpML	Riprese right then left
8	VtR	All do one doppio, turning over the right shoulder.

In the next section, the dancers do a “treccia”, or hey, with 12 passi. The text takes some time to describe this, but it is basically a single hey for three people, taking 2 passi to change places with each person and continuing for 12 passi until everyone has returned to their original place.

The hey starts with the lady and the man on her right hand side, taking left hands, and doing the first passo on their left foot.

After each change of the hey, the inactive person (the one that has reached the end of the line) does 2 steps turning in a circle.

This is exactly like the “going around the pole” maneuver seen in country dance heys, and is used to ensure that the person reaching the end of the line uses the same hand coming back into the hey as they used coming out of it.

9 – 14	PsL PsR x 12	12 passi, in a hey as described.
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At the end of the hey, everyone faces into the circle again.

¹ I have commenced this section of the dance on the right foot as it makes the rest of the dance flow more naturally. The manuscript doesn't say whether to begin on the left or the right, however it does say to begin the treccia section on the left foot. Tracing back from there it's logical that this section begins on the right foot (after the right foot riverenza). If you're uncomfortable with that then you could always start on the left foot and change feet at some later stage, but in practice we found this to be rather awkward.

15	P sL P sR P sL P sR	4 passetti
16	V tL	All do one doppio, turning over the left shoulder
17	V tR	All do one doppio, turning over the right shoulder.

The dancers move to the left around the circle, do a short changing routine, and then back to the right around the circle.

18 – 19	T pL T pR T pL P sR	3 trappasini and a passo, walking around the circle to the left.
20 – 21	T pL T pR T pL P sR	3 trappasini and a passo, the men changing places while the lady stands still.
22	V tL	The lady does one doppio, turning over the left shoulder, while the men stand still.
23	V tR	The lady does one doppio, turning over the right shoulder, while the men stand still
24 – 25	T pL T pR T pL P sR	3 trappasini and a passo, walking around the circle to the right.
26	V tL	All do one doppio, turning over the left shoulder
27	V tR	All do one doppio, turning over the right shoulder.

The original manuscript doesn't say to repeat the dance, but you could. Note that the second time through, the man who started on the lady's left will be on her right, and vice versa. At the end of the second time through the dance, everyone will be back to place again.
