

# Teaching Notes: 15th C Italian Dance

*The dances of 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italy, as described in the manuals of Domenico, Cornazano, and Guglielmo, are perhaps somewhat more complex than the contemporary Burgundian or later French dance.*

*People who know me will know that these are my favourite dances.*

## ***Introduction***

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### **Teaching Notes**

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Although I rarely introduce people who have just begun renaissance dance to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italian repertoire, it is not entirely unsuitable for beginners. Once people have learned the basics of movement, and perhaps a bransle or two, it is possible for them to learn this repertoire. It also forms a useful introduction and perhaps pre-requisite to the more complex 16<sup>th</sup> Century Italian dance forms (although the two repertoires are essentially unrelated).

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### **Repertoire**

I have included a reasonable repertoire of 15<sup>th</sup> C balli in this book. There are others in various primary and secondary sources that could be learned, but for SCA purposes any student that has mastered the dances in this book is fairly well set to dance the most common 15<sup>th</sup> C repertoire done in the SCA.

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### **Bassadanze and Balli**

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The 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italian dances are divided into two categories: Bassa Danze and Balli. The distinctive feature of a basse danza was that it should not involve any leaps or jumps (the literal translation of “bassa danza” is “low dance” -- meaning where the dancers stay low to the ground and do not leap into the air). Certainly the basse danze are less complex and by and large do not contain as many leaps and bounds as the balli, but there is only a very fine dividing line between the balli and the basse danze.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Century Balli had a relatively formal structure, based on four tempi. These tempi were bassadanza (the only tempo found in the bassa danza), quadernaria, saltarello, and piva.

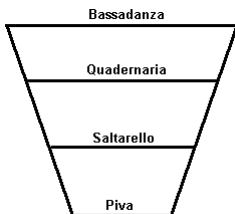
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## Tempi and Misure

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“Tempi and Misura” means “Time and Measure”, to an extent also meaning “time and motion” as well as many other things. -- these were considered to be the two most important aspects of all Italian dance.

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The basics of understanding misure is the understanding of how the music related to the dance. In all Italian dances there were only four major time sequences used, these are shown on a diagram in Cornazano’s text which looks somewhat like the one on the left.

The diagram shows the relationship between the four misure, bassadanza, quadernaria, saltarello, and piva.

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### The Measures

Bassadanza was considered to be the most important of the measures (“Bassadanza is the queen of measures”), while piva was considered to be the least important, or the most “common”. Bassadanza steps are the slowest and most elegant of the steps, while the piva steps are the fastest. Saltarello and quadernaria steps are obviously in their respective places somewhere between bassadanza and piva.

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### Tempi

The tempi relate to the misure in that the music relates to the dance -- the tempi (time) of the music corresponds to the steps or misure of the dance. Each of the 4 misure have their own tempi, as follows:

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Bassadanza	6/4
Quadernaria	4/4
Saltarello	3/4
Piva	2/4

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### Steps

Each of these tempi had a number of steps that could be done within each bar of music. So, music that is in 6/4 time will have bassadanza steps to it, music that is in 3/4 time will have saltarello steps to it, etc.

I will begin this chapter by introducing steps one misura at a time, beginning with piva, then quadernaria, then bassadanza, and finally saltarello. I find that this sequence makes it easier to teach, and easier to learn.

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## Time and Social Setting

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These dances were popular in Italy between about 1450 (perhaps earlier) and 1500 or later. During this time period, Italy became the center of the European renaissance. There were great innovators in both the arts and sciences, moderate and relatively unoppressive forms of government (even though Italy was fractured into a number of independent states at the time, all with their own forms of government, from empire to republic).

The French and the English were tied up in wars between themselves. The *reconquista* was in full swing in Spain, and most other European nations, even Russia, were tied up in internal affairs, which left Italy relatively peaceful until the French invasion of Charles VIII in 1494.

After 1494, until at least 1515, there were various wars in Italy which meant that too many people spent too much of their time shooting and stabbing at each other to do much in the way of dance. Certainly the artistic and scientific innovations were mostly achieved either side of this period.

Italian culture didn't settle down into peaceful growth again until the mid to late 16<sup>th</sup> Century. This had left a gulf of somewhat over 100 years between these dances and those of Caroso and Negri. During this time Italy, and Italian culture, had changed fairly significantly.

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## Domenico, Cornazano, Guglielmo

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There are three fifteenth century Italian dance masters from whom we have surviving manuscripts. These are Domenico, Cornazano, and Guglielmo Ebreo. Domenico was the first of the three, and both Guglielmo and Cornazano were his students (many of the dances appearing in both Guglielmo's and Cornazano's books were originally choreographed by Domenico, for example).

All of these manuscripts are transcribed and translated in A. William Smith's book "Fifteenth Century Dance and Music", published by Pendragon Press.

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# Lesson 1: Piva

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We begin looking at the 15<sup>th</sup> Century dances with a lesson on piva. Piva is the fastest of the four tempi found in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italian dance. There are only a very few steps that are done in piva time. We will learn some of those steps first.

At the end of the lesson we will perform a simple dance in piva time.

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## Teaching notes

Contrary to some expectations, I start teaching 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italian dance with the quickest steps, rather than with the slowest. This is because the piva steps are relatively easy to learn, and the piva dances (eg: Petit Vriens) are relatively simple dances.

Generally, I try to cover teaching Piva relatively quickly, even though it is not a simple step. It requires some demonstration of the piva sequence. Once this has been done you should be able to get the students to dance some pive around the room to no particular pattern (find some simple 2/4 music or the tune from Petit Vriens for this).

Once the students are comfortable with the step, move on to teaching the dance. The entire process should take an hour or less, and can probably be squeezed into half that.

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## Piva (2/4) Time

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Piva is usually in 2/4 time, although it can be found notated in 6/8 time. (The 15<sup>th</sup> Century dance masters tended not to write in bar lines, so the bar lines are a modern addition, also the length of notes and ideas about tempo have changed since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, so when we say this is “2/4 time” or “6/8 time” we are talking about modern concepts).

Piva is *syncopated* which means that there are more than two beats in each bar of piva.

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## Piva Steps

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### Piva steps in piva time.

The “piva” step is the main step done in piva time. The dance descriptions of the time often say things like “do sixteen tempi of piva” which means to do sixteen piva steps in sixteen bars of piva time, the step being implied by a measure.

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Here is how to do a piva step, beginning on the left foot:

- Step forwards on the left foot
- Step quickly forwards on the right foot, bringing the right foot either level with, slightly in front of, or slightly behind the left foot.
- Step forwards again on the left foot.

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**Beats**

Note that the above three actions are done in two beats. The second action is done quickly on the second beat, and the third step forwards happens just after the beat. The count is “ONE and TWO, ONE and TWO”, etc.

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To commence the next piva step, step forwards on the right foot, past the left foot, as if starting the first step of the sequence, and continue from there.

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**Doppio**

The doppio step done in piva time is really a quadernaria step. We haven't covered quadernaria steps just yet, but they are done in 4/4 time, as opposed to piva which is done in 2/4.

Two bars of 2/4 time is the same as one bar of 4/4 time, therefore to do a doppio in piva time we use two bars of piva measure to do the step, and have four beats to do the step instead of just two.

Here is how to do a doppio step in quadernaria, beginning on the left foot, in four beats:

- Step forwards on the left foot.
- Step forwards on the right foot, bringing the right foot past the left foot.
- Step forwards again on the left foot, bringing the left foot past the right foot.
- Step forwards on the right foot to close feet.

If you have done 16<sup>th</sup> C French dance then you will know that this is very much the same movement as Arbeau's “double” step.

To commence the next doppio step, begin on the right foot. Remember that all steps are done in a strict left, right, left sequence.

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**Riverenza**

The riverenza done in piva time is a quadernaria step as well. Here is now to do a riverenza beginning on the left foot, in four beats (two bars of piva time):

- Push the left foot forwards, somewhat ahead of the right.
  - Bring the left foot backwards, to somewhere behind where it started.
  - Bend both knees, keeping the body straight up and down, keeping the head upright and facing forwards.
  - Return to the upright position with the feet back where they started, straightening both knees and rising back into place.
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**Ripresa**

Here is how to do a ripresa in piva time:

- Step to the left with the left foot, bending at the knees very slightly and remaining on the flat of the feet.
- Join feet, stepping left with the right foot, and rising onto the balls of your feet.
- Repeat the movement, stepping with the left foot and staying on the balls of your feet.
- and then stepping with the right foot and falling back to end flat on your feet.

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This ripresa can also be done with the right foot, moving to the right.

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## Petit Vriens

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Petit Vriens is a fairly simple dance from Domenico. It is for three people -- it can be done with a man and two ladies or two men and one lady.

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<b>Part I (Piva)</b>	1 - 16	Pv x 16	Start with sixteen tempi of Piva, leading in and around the hall.
<b>Part II (Piva)</b>	17 - 20	Pv x 4	The front person leads forwards with four pive.
	21 - 24	Pv x 4	The second person follows.
	25 - 28	Pv x 4	The third person follows.
<b>Part III (Piva)</b>	29 - 30	DL	The first person goes forwards with a double on the left foot.
	31 - 32	DL	The second person follows.
	33 - 34	DL	The third person follows.
	35 - 36	RvL	The first person turns to face the second person, and does a riverenza on the left foot.
	37 - 38	RvL	The second person turns to face the first person, and does a riverenza on the left foot.
	39 - 40	RvL	The third person moves around to form the third point of a triangle with the other two people, faces the second person and does a riverenza. They all finish by doing a quick riverenza together.
<b>Part IV (Piva)</b>	41 - 42	DLb	They all walk backwards with a double on the left foot.
	43 - 44	DR	They all walk forwards back to meet with a double on the right foot.
	45 - 46	RpL	They all move to the left with a ripresa.
	47 - 48	RpR VtL	They all move to the right with a ripresa, and finish with a volta tunda around to the left.

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## ***Lesson 2: Quadernaria***

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Hopefully, by now, your students will have mastered piva. If not, then there will be plenty of time to catch up later.

We will proceed by moving on to quadernaria. This is the third fastest of the four tempi, and is done in 4/4 time.

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### **Teaching notes**

Learning quadernaria builds on the exercises of the previous lesson, although it should be a quicker step to master than the piva step. Once the students have the basics of pive, the saltarello todescho and the doppio in quadernaria should be fairly easy.

Again, I try to cover teaching quadernaria relatively quickly. Once you have demonstrated the saltarello todescho step and the doppio in quadernaria, you should be able to get the students to dance some of these around the room to no particular pattern. Finding a drum and beating out a simple ONE-two-three-four beat for this works well.

Once the students are comfortable with the step, move on to teaching at least one quadernara dance (there are several of these in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century repertoire, I have selected Anello here as the one to teach but you can easily teach others ... I would suggest Gelosia, or Belfiore.

The entire process should take an hour or so, including time to learn Anello, which is somewhat more complex than Petit Vriens.

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## **Quadernaria (4/4) Time**

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Quadernaria is pretty much universally agreed to be in 4/4 time (although this is again arbitrary, since the dance masters of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century didn't use bar lines).

Quadernaria is not syncopated, which means that there are four evenly spaced beats in each bar.

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## Quadernaria Steps

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**Saltarello todescho** A “saltarello todescho” step is done in 4 beats (1 bar of 4/4 quadernaria time), beginning on the left foot as follows:

- Step forwards on the left foot
- Step forwards on the right foot, bringing the right foot either level with, slightly in front of, or slightly behind the left foot.
- Step forwards again on the left foot.
- Hop forwards on the left foot, leaving the right foot raised to commence the next step

This should be done evenly spaced across the four beats of the bar, one action per beat.

Note the similarity to the piva step that we learned in the previous lesson. There is no rushing of the right foot step as there was in the piva step, however, and there is a hop at the end.

To commence the next step, begin on the right foot. Remember that all steps are done in a strict left, right, left sequence.

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### Doppio

We learned a doppio step in the previous lesson, however we are now working in quadernaria time instead of piva time. Since the time is now 4/4 instead of 2/4, we will do a doppio step in one bar of 4/4 instead of spreading it across two bars of 2/4.

Once again, here is how to do a doppio step in quadernaria, beginning on the left foot, in four beats:

- Step forwards on the left foot.
- Step forwards on the right foot, bringing the right foot past the left foot.
- Step forwards again on the left foot, bringing the left foot past the right foot.
- Step forwards on the right foot to close feet.

Remember to start the next step with the right foot.

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### Piva

We covered the piva step in the previous lesson. It may pay to quickly revise this step and have a minute or so of practice.

In the previous lesson, we had to spread a quadernaria step across two bars of piva, because piva is half the time of quadernaria. In this lesson we are going to do two piva steps in one bar of quadernaria, which means we are taking a bar of 4/4 and cutting it in half so we can do two 2/4 steps in it.

... you should hardly notice the difference!

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### Movimento

A movimento is also a piva step, but we didn't cover it last lesson.

A movimento basically involves a small rising or shaking motion, perhaps rise and acknowledge your partner or the audience, then lower back to stance.

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## Anello

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This is one of Domenico's dances, appearing also in Guglielmo's text. The name of this dance means "ring", and most of the dance is done with the dancers in a circle. It also bears many resemblances to some of the 4 person English Country dances of the 17th century.

The dance starts with two couples, dancing one couple behind the other. The back couple should be improper, that is the man is on the right and the lady is on the left.

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<b>Part I: Saltarello Todescho (4/4)</b>	1 - 8	SIL SIR SIL SIR SIL SIR SIL SIR	8 saltarello steps forwards, starting on the left foot. At the end of the last step, form into a square, all facing inwards.
<b>Part II: Saltarello Todescho (4/4)</b>	9	M	Men do a small rising "movimento".
		M	Ladies reply.
	10 - 11	SIL SIR MvR	The men change places with two saltarello steps, then turn to face each other again.
	12	M M	Ladies do a movimento, then the men reply.
	13 - 14	SIL SIR MvR	Ladies change places in the same way as the men (1 - 12 above).
<b>Part III: Saltarello Todescho (4/4)</b>	15	M M	Men do a movimento and the ladies reply.
	16	VtL	Men all turn in place.
	17	M M	Ladies do a movimento and the men reply.
	18	VtL	Ladies all turn in place
<b>Part IV: Piva (2/4)</b>	19 - 22	PvL PvR PvL PvR	Men dance around the ladies and change places, starting on the left foot, and going behind the ladies.
	23 - 26	PvL PvR PvL PvR	Ladies repeat the above.
<b>Part V: Saltarello Todescho (4/4)</b>	27	M M	Men and ladies do a movimento, one after the other.
	28	M M	Men and ladies do a movimento, one after the other.
	29 - 30	RpR	The leading couple turns back into place using a reprisa on the right foot.

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The dance repeats from the start. The ladies go first the second time through the dance.

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## ***Lesson 3: Maniera***

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Up until now I have merely introduced the steps and described a few of the dances that are to be done with those steps. I have not commented on anything to do with the correct dance style for this repertoire.

Domenico, Cornazano, and Guglielmo all have long sections on dance etiquette and style as a part of their manual. One of the things that they all speak about to some extent is Maniera, which is considered to be one of the six or so important graces that a good dancer must possess.

Learning maniera is not easy, and the dance students will not necessarily master all of the hip and shoulder movements required in a single lesson. It is worth taking a break at this point, however, to introduce it, so that it can be built on in later lessons.

“Maniera is, besides remembering the dance and moving with misura, that you must give attention to the things that you are performing: *campeggiano* and *ondeggiano* with the torso, in accordance with the foot that moves.” (Cornazano)

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### **Campeggiare**

*Campeggiare* is the manner of turning the shoulder forwards when you are stepping forwards, depending on what foot you begin a step sequence on.

For example, when you begin a *doppio*, *piva*, or *saltarello* step, you should also move the left hip and shoulder forwards, not as far as the foot, but forwards so that you are moving your entire left side forwards. On the second part of the step, when you are moving your right foot forwards, you should keep the left shoulder forwards. This is effectively what shortens the right foot movement in your left *doppio* ... it is keeping the left shoulder forwards the entire time while you are moving through the step.

When you finish moving through the step, you will begin (in most cases) a new step on the right foot. At the start of the new step you should bring your right shoulder and side forwards in the same way that you brought the left shoulder forwards during the left foot step.

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### **Ondeggiare**

In a *doppio*, *piva*, or *saltarello* step, you should *ondeggiare* during the second short step. This means that as you bring your feet closer together you elevate your body, raising onto the balls of your feet gracefully.

On the third step, as you are moving forwards again, you lower back on to the flat of your feet.

The objective here is to keep the body moving with the feet. When moving on the second beat of a *doppio*, raise your body up and turn your torso (hip and shoulder) towards the direction of movement. On the third beat of a *doppio*, lower the body again and straighten the shoulders.

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**Maniera ... gracefully** You should be able to complete the entire doppio / campeggiare / ondeggiare movement with a single flowing motion. Avoid the step, twist, rise, step, lower, step, stop sequence looking like one of the puppets from “Thunderbirds” having a bad day.

Think of the entire sequence as a single motion, turn your body during the first step, raise during the second step, and lower during the third step. If you think of everything as a single flowing motion then it will look like a single flowing motion when you dance it.

This achieves a very different style compared with the French and Burgundian dances, and also quite different to the 16th century Italian dances which use shoulder and body movement in a very different way.

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**Practice**

Since I originally introduced the various piva and quadernaria steps without maniera, it may be worthwhile to go back and practice those steps with the maniera added.

Perhaps it is also worthwhile to lead the dance class through one of the dances that they already know, introducing maniera along the way. Anello is quite good for this because it contains a mix of saltarello todescho steps and piva steps, both of which are candidates for maniera.

When I am teaching a class, I am less fussy about maniera in both piva and quadernaria sections anyway ... I get a lot more fussy about it during a bassadanza section. If you haven't completely got the idea behind maniera yet then don't worry about it too much, we'll catch up again when we get to bassadanza.

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## ***Lesson 4: More Quadernaria***

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By now you should have seen enough of the steps in piva and quadernaria time to be able to learn a few of the other dances that are in these times.

Instead of listing full choreographies for any more of these dances, I will suggest that you pick up a few of the other sources around and have a look at these.

The three dances that I suggest you select from (perhaps learn one or two of them now and come back to the others later) are “Gelosia”, “Amoroso” and “Belfiore”.

I will include a few teaching notes on each of these dances.

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### **Gelosia**

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Gelosia is one of the best 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italian dances for flirting.

Remember that when the man is dancing the ladies aren't moving their feet, but that doesn't mean they aren't dancing. Use plenty of eye contact and make a play on taking your eyes off your partner onto the man who is dancing towards you.

When you are teaching the dance, begin by teaching the three contrapassi that occur in the dance as eight quick single steps. This should take 8 beats. Once the dancers have learned the pattern then make some time to go back and correct the steps, introducing the contrapassi.

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### **Amoroso**

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This is a simple dance in piva / quadernaria time and should be relatively easy to teach. There is a quite strong pattern that recurs throughout the dance. Once that is learned, the dance is easy.

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### **Belfiore**

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This is really a stretched version of Petit Vriens and works quite well as a display dance.

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## ***Lesson 5: Bassa Danza***

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After some time learning piva and quadernaria, students should be able to move onto bassadanza.

Bassadanza is the slowest of the four measures, and is done in 6/4 time.

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### **Teaching notes**

I used to teach 15<sup>th</sup> Century Italian dance beginning with bassadanza, because it was the slowest and most graceful of the measures. I have recently changed to teaching it after piva and quadernaria for several reasons, including:

- Despite bassadanza being slow, it is a triple time step, unlike quadernaria which is duple time. This makes it inherently harder to learn for some dancers.
- Bassadanza requires more attention to maniera than the other movements. Although piva and saltarello todescho look passable without campaggiare and ondeggiare, although they are much better with it, bassadanza looks (and is) just plain wrong without it. You should have given your students at least one lesson on maniera and some practice time before beginning with bassadanza.

Having said that, the bassadanza steps are relatively simple (although somewhat varied) and should not take too long to learn.

The bassadanza was a dance form of its own which spread throughout Italy, Burgundy, France, and England during the early renaissance. There are a large number of bassadanza choreographies in both the Italian and Burgundian manuscripts, and even some in English and French. The choreographies vary from quite complex in the French and Italian forms to extremely simple in some Italian and Burgundian examples.

I have selected “La Spagna” as a beginning bassadanza to learn, because of its simplicity. Once the bassadanza steps are mastered, there is an enormous range of bassadanze to select from for further progression.

I can generally teach bassadanza steps and the dance La Spagna to a new audience in less than an hour.

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## **Bassadanza (6/4) Time**

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Bassadanza, throughout Italy, France and Burgundy, always appears in 6/4 time (occasionally in 3/2 time).

Bassadanza is not syncopated.

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## **Bassadanza Steps**

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There is a large variety of bassadanza steps and we are not going to cover them all in a single lesson. We will learn enough steps to get through a simple bassadanza and learn the rest as we encounter them.

**Doppio**

We have previously learned how to do a doppio step in quadernaria. A doppio step in bassadanza time is quite a bit different. It looks like this:

- Step forwards on the left foot
- Step forwards on the right foot, bringing the right foot either level with, slightly in front of, or slightly behind the left foot.
- Step forwards again on the left foot.

Note that there is no close at the end of the step. Remember to start the next step with the right foot.

Since there are six beats in a bar of bassadanza time, each of the above actions will take two beats.

The step looks a bit like a very slow piva step. Remember to use lots of *maniera* (*campeggiare* and *ondeggiare*) while walking through the step: Bring your hip and shoulder forwards gracefully while making the first step, rise up to your toes on the second step, and lower on the third step. Be graceful about raising and lowering, try to rise and lower slowly rather than falling back on your heels like a sack of potatoes.

**Sempio (single)**

The sempio (single) step is just a single step forwards on the left foot. A sempio right is a single step forwards on the right foot.

Sempi are not closed.

There is some ornamentation in a sempio, basically I prefer to do the *campeggiare* (shoulder and hip movement) without the *ondeggiare* that is found in a doppio. So, the sempio looks just like the first step of a doppio.

Two sempio can be done in one bar of bassadanza, which means that they take three beats each, or slightly slower than the first step of a doppio (which would be done in two beats).

**Riverenza**

The riverenza done in bassadanza time is done in a single bar, or six beats. Here is how to do a riverenza beginning on the left foot, in six beats:

- Push the left foot forwards, somewhat ahead of the right.
- Pause
- Bring the left foot backwards, to somewhere behind where it started.
- Bend both knees, keeping the body straight up and down, keeping the head upright and facing forwards.
- Begin rising off your knees, starting to straighten your knees and start coming back into place.
- Return to the upright position with the feet back where they started, straightening both knees and rising back into place.

This step is very similar to the quadernaria version of the same step, but it is slightly slower.

**Continenza**

Continenze are always done in pairs, usually left then right. La Spagna is the exception to this, they are done right then left.

To do two continenze as a pair of steps, the dancers take a single step to the left, join feet together, and then step back towards the right, joining feet together again. The steps are done with the same sort of rising and falling movements seen in the ripresa.

Each step takes the same time as a single step, so two of these are done in one bar of bassadanza time.

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**Ripresa**

A ripresa done in bassadanza time is also very similar to the same step done in quadernaria time, although again it is slightly slower.

Here is how to do it:

- Step to the left with the left foot, bending at the knees very slightly and stepping onto your left toe, or ball of your left foot.
- Rise off your right foot and sway over to the left side.
- Join feet, stepping left with the right foot, and staying on the balls of your feet.
- Repeat the movement, stepping with the left foot ...
- ... and rising.
- and then stepping with the right foot and falling back to the flat of your feet.

This ripresa can also be done with the right foot, moving to the right.

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**Ripresa variations**

There are a number of variations on the ripresa which occur in bassadanza time. They all follow the timing given above for the ripresa moving to the left, but can move forwards, backwards, or turn.

I have included some quick instructions for some of them here.

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**Ripresa Backwards**

Step backwards with the right foot, bending the knee slightly. Then join feet, stepping backwards with the left foot and rising onto the toes. Then repeat the same movements, stepping backwards onto the flat of the right foot, and then step backwards with the left foot, rising onto the toes again.

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**Ripresa Turning**

Place the left foot in front of the right foot, heel to toe, and bend at the knees. Then, rising on the toes, swivel in place through 180° over the right shoulder. The left foot will now be behind the right foot. Repeat the movement, placing the left foot in front of the right foot while bending at the knees, then rise and swivel again.

You will end up facing the way you started after having done a full turn.

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## La Spagna

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This is a relatively simple Italian Bassa Danza. It is uncharacteristic in that it begins the dance, after the opening Riverenza and Continenze, on the right foot instead of the left.

The dance is done in a line of couples, with the men on the left and the ladies on the right, and everyone facing forwards and holding hands with their partner.

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### Part I

1	RvR	Riverenza on the right foot.
2	CnR CnL	Two continenze, right then left.
3	SR SL	Two singles.
4 - 7	DR DL DR DL	Four doubles.
8	RpB	Reprise backwards.

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### Part II

Note that the dance changes back to the left foot at this point.

9	SL SR	Two singles
10 - 11	DL DR	Two doubles

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Drop hands, then turn to face your partner, and take their right hand in your right hand.

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12 - 13	RpL RpR	Move sideways to the left (away from your partner) then back towards your partner.
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Turn back to face the front of the line, joining hands again.

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### Part III

14	SL SR	Two singles
15 - 16	DL DR	Two doubles.
17 - 18	RpT RpB	Drop hands for this sequence, ripresa turning, then a ripresa backwards.

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The dance can end with a short riverenza to your partner.

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## ***Saltarello***

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There are a large number of dances that can be learned in bassadanza time. Dozens of them in fact. It was considered the most stately of the dances and was probably the most popular.

Without spending the time to do an entire course in bassadanza (which although possible would be somewhat boring) we will now progress to saltarello.

Saltarello is the second fastest of the four measures, and is done in 3/4 time, or alternatively it can be notated in 6/8.

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### **Teaching notes**

Saltarello is relatively quick.

Saltarello is in triple time.

Saltarello is syncopated.

For all of the above reasons, and several others, saltarello should not be the first dance step that you teach to newcomers. Saltarello steps are relatively complex compared to the rest of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century repertoire, and will take some time even for advanced students to master.

Make sure that you give your students plenty of time to put together the saltarello step. By the time they are at this point in the series of lessons, however, they should have the basics and be able to do it after a short practice session.

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## **Saltarello (3/4) Time**

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Saltarello time (as opposed to saltarello todescho, or quadernaria time) appears in 3/4 or the roughly equivalent 6/8 time.

Saltarello is syncopated, which means that the beats are not evenly distributed throughout the bar.

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## **Saltarello Steps**

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A saltarello step is done in 3 beats (one measure of saltarello time):

- Step forwards on the left foot.
  - Make a quick "lilt" onto the right foot (in effect moving the weight of the step backwards), then step forwards on the left foot.
  - Hop forwards on the left foot, leaving the right foot raised to commence the next step.
-

**Style**

Use plenty of maniera while doing this. Thrust your left hip and shoulder forwards as you begin the step. Rise up as you are dancing the lilt, then when you step forwards again drop back onto the flat of your feet.

Put lots of emphasis on the hop and not so much on the lilt ... you should really try to get up into the air in the hop, but you should only be going as high as rising onto the balls of your feet during the lilt.

**Timing**

Note that this is really four movements in three beats, however the middle two movements are pushed together into one beat. The beat goes something like: STEP lilt step HOP if you can imagine what that might sound like.

A typical saltarello sequence (eg: the one at the end of Prexonera) has a beat (quarter note), followed by two half beats (eighth notes), followed by another beat. The step follows the pattern of the beats in the music. Have a close look at the music to see what I mean.

## Rostiboli Gioioso

This dance is somewhat more complex than, say, Petit Vriens or La Spagna, but it is still much simpler than other dances in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century repertoire.

The dance appears in various different versions in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century manuscripts. This version is for 2 people, one man and one lady.

The dance combines bassadanza and saltarello with a short piva section at the end.

**One More  
Bassadanza Step:  
Volta del Gioioso**

The volta del gioioso is a step that is relatively uncommon. It is in fact a sequence of three steps taken over two bars of bassadanza. It appears in this dance as well as a few other dances in the repertoire.

The step starts with two singles, right then left, then ends with a ripresa on the right foot.

The first single is done stepping with the right foot across the body, and turning slightly over the left shoulder. The second single is done with the left foot, stepping back and around, completing approximately a half turn or a bit more (perhaps closer to two-thirds).

The step finishes with a ripresa on the right foot. Begin by stepping across with the right foot, continuing the turn to almost a full turn and putting your weight onto your right foot. Complete the ripresa by closing with the left foot, stepping away with the right foot, and close again with the left foot.

The full effect is to have done a full turn over the left shoulder starting on the right foot, and ending up slightly to the right of where you started (because of the ripresa).

**Part I – Bassadanza**

The dance starts with the couple standing side by side and holding hands.

1 – 2

RpL RpR

Ripresa left then right. At the end of this, drop hands.

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3 – 5	SL SR DL DR	The man moves forwards, away from the lady, doing a single left, single right, doppio left and a doppio right. At the end of the last doppio he should turn to face the lady.
6 – 7	RpL RpR	Both the man and the lady are now facing each other some distance apart. They do a ripresa left then a ripresa right.
8 – 10	SL SR DL DR	The man does a single left, single right, doppio left, then doppio right, to return to the lady. At the end of the last doppio he turns to face forwards again so that the dancers are back in their starting position.

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**Repeat**

This section is repeated, with the lady doing the steps that the man has just done.

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11 – 12	RpL RpR	Ripresa left then right. At the end of this, drop hands.
13 – 15	SL SR DL DR	The lady does a single left, single right, doppio left, doppio right, moving forwards away from the man. Finish by turning to face.
16 – 17	RpL RpR	Both the man and the lady are now facing each other some distance apart. They do a ripresa left then a ripresa right.
18 – 20	SL SR DL DR	The lady returns to the man with the same steps as before ... single left, single right, doppio left, doppio right. End up back in the starting position again.

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Note the pattern that occurs right throughout this section: Two riprese, two singles, two doppii. The next section alters this pattern very slightly.

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**Part II: Bassadanza**

The man and the lady start this section in the same place that they started the first section. In this part of the dance they will progress around the dance floor.

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21 - 22	RpL RpR	Ripresa left then right.
23 – 26	SL SR DL DR DL	Both dancers move forwards with two singles (left then right) then three doppii (left, right, left). Finish by dropping hands.
27	VgR	Volta del Gioioso, end up back in the starting position holding hands again.

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We repeat the above section.

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28 - 29	RpL RpR	Ripresa left then right.
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30 - 33	SL SR DL DR DL	Both dancers move forwards with two singles (left then right) then three doppii (left, right, left). Finish by dropping hands.
34	VgR	Volta del Gioioso, end up back in the starting position holding hands again.

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**Part III: Saltarello**

This is a simple saltarello section, with the dancers moving about the floor as they will.

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35 - 50	Sl x 16	16 bars of saltarello steps, dancers progress around the floor as they will. Use some improvisation here!
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**Part IV: Piva**

The dance finishes with a short flirty piva section.

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51	M	Man does a movimento
52	M	Lady does a movimento
53 - 54	DL	Man does a doppio on the left foot, moving away from the lady.
55	M	Lady does a movimento.
56	M	Man does a movimento.
57 - 58	DL	Lady does a movimento on the left foot, moving towards the man.

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The above section is then repeated to conclude the dance.

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59	M	Man does a movimento
60	M	Lady does a movimento
61 - 62	DL	Man does a doppio on the left foot, moving away from the lady.
63	M	Lady does a movimento.
64	M	Man does a movimento.
65 - 66	DL	Lady does a movimento on the left foot, moving towards the man.

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**Repeat**

The dance is then repeated from the beginning. On the second repeat of the dance the lady does everything first in all sections of the dance. Eg: in part I, the lady moves away and back to the man first, and the man goes second; in part IV the lady starts with the first movimento and the pattern continues from there.

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## Belreguardo

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I chose Rostiboli Gioioso as the dance for this lesson, mostly because I am more familiar with it, and recordings of it are easy to obtain.

Belreguardo is another dance with a similar level of difficulty, also using bassadanza and saltarello steps (this time beginning with saltarello and progressing to bassadanza).

If you prefer to teach this dance instead of, or additionally to, Rostiboli Gioioso, there is a reconstruction of it in *Joy and Jealousy* that is quite easy to follow.

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## More Complex Balli

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At this point we have basically completed the “crash course in 15<sup>th</sup> Century dance”. From now on you can concentrate on building repertoire and perhaps moving into other areas such as reconstruction or whatever else interests your dance class.

The lessons above really only cover a smattering of the most simple 15<sup>th</sup> Century court dances. You probably should attempt to build up a repertoire of some more complex and interesting (and enjoyable) dances.

I have listed a few dances below as suggestions. Reconstructions of these are available in either *Joy and Jealousy* or *Del's Dance Book*, and so I won't repeat them here.

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## Pizochara

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This is a dance of approximately medium complexity for 8 people (four men and four ladies).

The dance starts with a relatively simple piva section, and progresses on to bassadanza (danced by the men), saltarello (danced by the ladies) and then a final piva section. The dance is repeated, and during each repeat of the dance the line reverses so that the front couple end up at the back and the back couple end up at the front.

It's not too difficult a dance but it requires a fair bit of space.

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## Prexonera

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This is my favourite dance.

It's a relatively complex dance for 2 people, but it provides the most audience entertainment I have ever seen for a renaissance dance. Follow my reconstruction in *Del's Dance Book* fairly closely and use lots of eye contact and improvisation during the dance, especially in the piva sections.

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## La Fia Guelmina

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This is also a quite entertaining dance done for two people. The quadernaria section in the middle requires a bit of attention, the couple need to get their timing fairly exact, and flirt a lot as they are moving towards each other.

My favourite track for dancing this is the sung version on the CD "Mesure et Arte del Danzare".

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