
Doppii suxo uno piede or Contrapassi in Quadernaria Misura

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Introduction

Any attempt to find a solution to a dance step from the past which has never been described and has no immediately recognisable descendant is fraught with problems. At best it must remain a matter of surmise. However, this surmise, if based on certain solid foundations, need not be far from a possible truth. Such criteria are that the step should remain true to the rules as we understand them from studying other more fully annotated steps from the period and that it should conform to the pattern of the dances in which it occurs, both spatially and rhythmically.

Doppii suxo uno piede, doubles on one foot, are found only in Domenico and the earlier Guglielmo manuscripts, Pg and Pa. Later texts use the word *contrapassi*. Lo Monaco and Vinciguerra (1987) demonstrated that both terms refer to the same step unit by examining the step known as the *contrapasso* as it appears in the quattrocento choreographies. Through the comparison of its use with that of the *doppii suxo uno pie*, they were able to show that both of these step units most frequently appeared in groups of three, in *quadernaria misura*, where they required (and were given) the mensural equivalent of two musical tempi. This accords precisely with the only description of *contrapassi*, given us by Cornazano, namely that they should be performed three in two tempi.

The term *contrapasso* later appears to have gained a double meaning, since different versions of the same dance (*Belreguardo*, *Lioncello* and *Marchexana*) ask variously for three (S and M) or for four (FN and NY) *contrapassi* where, previously (Pd, Pg and Pa), there were three *doppii suxo uno piede*. Scribal error is a possible cause of this apparent discrepancy but seems unlikely in the face of so much evidence. Therefore we may assume a different performance for the three and for the four *contrapassi*, more than is fulfilled by the use of an arbitrary pause. For a review of the occurrences of these steps see Wilson (1992).

Further evidence is provided by the occurrence of four *doppii in su uno piede* in *Belfiore* (Pg and Pa), a number which remains consistent throughout all the treatises with the exception of S. Here the third dancer is asked to perform four *doppii* in a repetition of a sequence in which his two companions have done only three. This apparent anomaly is resolved by the realisation that the fourth *doppio* is to be performed at the same time as a subsequent single *doppio* danced by the first man. An extra ninth beat in the music not only permits the first two men to complete their sequences of three *doppii* but allows the third man to continue from his third to his fourth *doppio* in the same rhythm, without interruption.

On two occasions (*Leoncello in due* and *Marchexana*), two *saltarelli* asked for by Domenico have been replaced, in the Guglielmo manuscripts, by three *doppii in su uno pie*, in N by three *contrapassi*, and, in the later FN and NY, by four *contrapassi*. It is interesting that this alteration from three *doppii in su uno pie*, and the later three

contrapassi, to four *contrapassi* occurs only in FN and NY, the two manuscripts which regularly give details as to the repetition of dances and which may, therefore, have some common source. It is also worth mentioning that there are six examples of these steps in *quadernaria* rhythm contained in Domenico's choreographies and only three in *bassadanza*, *Verçeppe* containing one of each. What is intriguing is that in their treatises, so concerned with the exact stylistic performance of, for example, *aiere* and *maniera* and, in Guglielmo, the need to study the rhythm of the music or to dance *contra-tempo*, no mention has been made of how to perform these steps.

Realisation

In presenting the following interpretation of the *doppii suxo uno piede*, I start from the basic premise that any realisation of the step which so closely resembles some other step as to be almost indistinguishable from it in its performance must be at fault. Cruickshank (1989) offered an analysis of the different rhythms of the *passo doppio*. I proposed an interpretation of *doppii suxo uno piede* in which, while each *doppio* remained in its regular rhythm, the second and third *doppii* were placed apparently at variance with the metrical stress of the music. Such an interpretation would also seem feasible for a step known as a *contrapasso*, where one possible explanation of the name might be that the step should move in contrast to the basic rhythm of the music. A diagrammatic analysis of this step, in *quadernaria* rhythm, is given below.

The primary concern in placing three *doppii* in two tempi of *quadernaria* is that, at first glance, it is not apparently possible to fit nine steps into eight beats. Moreover, these nine steps must, in fact, be extended to eleven movements to allow for a change of foot between each *doppio* beginning with the same, left, foot.

An answer to this apparent enigma was discovered in Domenico's ballo, *la fia-guielmia*, as recorded by his pupil and admirer, Cornazano. Where Domenico had asked for *doppii tri sul pe sinistro e una riverentia*, Cornazano asks for *tre contrapassi sul sinistro... et finiscono el terco in una riverentia de uno tempo* (...and they finish the third in a *riverenza* of one tempo). From this later text comes the clear statement that the *riverenza* uses one full tempo of *quadernaria*, together with the revealing comment that that same *riverenza* in some way completes the previous *doppio*. That the third *doppio* on the left foot should be completed by a *riverenza* also made with the left foot implies that the third *doppio* has no concluding third step. This reduces the original nine basic steps required by three *doppii* to only eight, which, in turn, permits each of the eight steps to use one beat of the two tempi of *quadernaria*. The two changes of foot required between each of the three *doppii* also accord with the descriptions of *scambiamenti*, given by Domenico, as

motti accidentali taking a quarter of a tempo or, by Cornazano, as taking 'one tempo or no time at all'. Making these changes on the half beat after each third step results in the rhythmic pattern – 1-2-3+; 1-2-3+; 1-2. Although truncating the third *doppio*, this has one distinct advantage over other interpretations of this multiple step unit; it enables the basic step of which this triple unit is composed, the *doppio in quadernaria*, to retain its unique natural rhythm, each step using one beat of the music.

That this solution need not be reserved merely for this one dance may be seen by a comparison with the choreography given by Domenico himself for *Giloxia*. Here too the sequence of three *doppii*, all on the left foot, is continued, or completed, with a *riverenza* on the same, left foot. Subsequent versions of *Giloxia*, or *Gelosia* as later manuscripts name it, are consistent as far as the solo man's first move is concerned, although translated into *contrapassi* in M and NY. Interestingly, three manuscripts change the solo man's second move from Domenico's 'three more *doppii* on the left foot' to two – *passi sul pie sinistro* (Pg), *passi doppii* (Pa), or *passi doppii in sul pie mancho* (FN). Furthermore, all of these also omit mention of a second *riverenza*.

The three *doppii* on the left foot in Domenico's *Bel Fiore* form one section of the *ballo*. Interestingly, as was mentioned above, this is given a nine beat musical phrase, which subdivides melodically into two groups of three beats plus one of four. This sequence of steps admirably fits the melodic line of the music, as does the third man's sequence of four *doppii* on one foot, a rhythmic pattern which uses to the full the nine beats of the measure – two tempi of *quadernaria*, plus one note. The sequence is altered by Pg and Pa to two *doppii* on one foot (1½ tempi) plus one *scempio* (½ tempo) which fits the musical phrase if the *scempio* is extended to use the final three beats.

The change in later versions of *Leoncello in due* from Domenico's six *saltarelli* to a repetition of three *doppii* on one foot and, later, to four *contrapassi* (three in N) is intriguing, more particularly in that these are described as being grouped in threes, the first on the left foot, followed by three on the right, then three more on the left. If, to enable the required change of foot, the final step of the

third *doppio* is added in the last half beat of the second tempo, the sequence acquires a lively and spirited quality which accords well with the *ballo*'s interpretation as a courtship dance.

The apparent problems in adopting this rhythmic interpretation of three *doppii* on one foot in both *Leoncello in tre* and *Verçeppe* can be resolved by a comparison of the *mezze volte* (turns) made by the dancers at the end of the two sequences. In *Verçeppe*, the line of five dancers is asked to perform three *doppii suxo el pede sinistro dagando meza volta dalcanto sinistro*. Once this solution of an unfinished third *doppio* is accepted, the turn to the left made with the weight on the right foot is seen to add a very spirited and rhythmic energy to the dance, highlighting the moment when all five dance together before the resumption of the skirmish between the sexes which is the substance of this dance. In contrast, a similar *meza volta* in *Leoncello* is preceded by a *posa* on the right foot. I suggest that this should be interpreted as a deliberate placing of the right foot just behind the left, rather than merely as a close, as it makes the second step of the third *doppio*. This admirably facilitates the *meza volta* which, on this occasion, turns to the right, making it rather like a later pirouette. Support for this interpretation may also be derived from an additional instruction in the Domenico text – that the *posa* and *meza volta* should be made *in capo del terzo doppio*, at the head, or end, of the third *doppio*, therefore within it rather than as an extra movement.

Conclusion

By thus extrapolating from one dance (*Prima Figlia Guilielmina: V*) a solution which immediately clarifies the allocation of steps to the music in another (*Giloxia: Pd*), an interpretation of *doppii in su uno piede* and *contrapassi* has been developed which not only can be adopted in all other occasions in which they appear but which also accords with the rhythm of the accompanying music. That this solution adds a spirited energy to the dances by its use of cross-rhythm may be taken as some support towards its acceptance as a valid interpretation of a step known to many as a *contrapasso*.

Doppii suxo uno piede in quadernaria

Three *doppii* in the time of two

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	L	R	L /					
			[R]					
2.				L	R	L /		
						[R]		
3.							L	R

Three *doppii* in one and a half tempi (plus one *scempio*)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	(9)
1.	L	R	L /						
			[R]						
2.				L	R	L			
2b.									(R scempio)

References

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Sources

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- FL Guglielmo Ebreo – Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Antinori 13
- FN Guglielmo Ebreo – Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, magliabechiano XIX 88
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