
16th C Italian Dance Steps

Differences between Negri and Caroso Negri and Caroso use the same steps for many of their dances, and in many cases their descriptions of the steps are identical. There are, however, some important differences, which I will highlight where required.

Vocabulary There is a very large vocabulary of steps for the 16th C repertoire, and I will not attempt to list every step used, just the ones that are used in reconstructed dances in this book.

Beats and Measures Caroso and Negri both describe their steps in terms of the number of beats or measures that the steps take. For example, Caroso describes a riverenza grave as taking 6 beats, and a riverenza minima as taking two beats, Negri describes a passo as taking one beat, etc.

When you reconstruct various of these dances you will find that the length of each step is not always the same from dance to dance. It is sometimes the case that a passo must be done very quickly, whereas it is sometimes obvious that what Caroso has described as a passo “presti” (quick) takes 2 beats or bars. In most cases it depends on the style of dance – for example in the Cascarde or sciolta sections, which are fast triple time dance sections, many steps are done quite quickly. In the duple time sections of many balli, some steps that are done quickly in a sciolta are done more slowly.

Bars In the reconstructions, I have based the step length on the number of bars of music taken, and given the number of bars for each step or group of steps. This is the only really accurate way of describing how the steps match the music in all cases.

Remember that in the 16th Century they had a different idea of where bar lines should be drawn to what we use today. Therefore, you may find some pieces of music where the bar lines are drawn differently than they are drawn in other pieces. For example, you might find an alternate arrangement of one piece that I have available in 6/4 time, barred in 3/4 time instead, with two of their bars to one of mine. In all cases use the music provided with this dance book as a source for determining where the steps start and finish in terms of bar lines.

Common Terms Within a dance or repertoire, however, the following terms will generally be used to describe the speed of a step: Presti, Minima, Breve, Lunga, and Grave. Grave means quite slowly, Presti means quite quickly, and the other terms mean anything in between. Their usage is often qualitative and inaccurate, however.

**RvL -- Riverenza
(Grave) Left****RvML -- Riverenza
Minima**

Begin with the left foot somewhat ahead of the right foot. On the first beat do nothing. On the second beat, slide the left leg back behind the right. On the third beat, place the weight on the left foot, bend the left knee and sink lightly, keeping the head forwards and upright, and the body erect. On the final beat return to the upright position.

Caroso describes a riverenza grave as taking six beats, and a riverenza lunga as taking four beats, and a riverenza minima as taking two beats. They are all essentially the same step, just done faster or slower.

Negri describes riverenze as taking variously 8, 4, or 2 beats, and his step description is essentially the same as Caroso's.

A riverenza on the right foot is done in the same way, except that the right foot is moving and the left foot stays still.

**CnL -- Continenza
Left****CnR -- Continenza
Right****CnML -- Continenza
Minima**

The Continenza (or Continenza Grave) is done in the same way as a continenza for a 15th Century dance, except in 4 beats, taking twice the time. This is the normal style of continenza in the 16th C dances.

To do these as a pair of steps, the dancers take a very small single step to the left, join feet together, and then step back towards the right, joining feet together again. The steps are done with a rising and falling movement, so that you rise on your toes slightly while stepping across, and then sink back onto your heels when the step is complete. Bring the left shoulder forwards slightly as you step to the left, and the right shoulder forwards slightly as you step to the right.

Occasionally they are done right then left, although almost never singly (except: see Villanella).

The continenza minima is done in half the time of a continenza grave, i.e. in 2 beats.

PtL -- Puntata**PtGL -- Puntata
Grave**

This is done in the same basic manner as a single step in a French Bassa Danse or Pavan, but more lightly, and on the ball of the foot. This step takes 1 beat.

A Puntata Grave is the same as a Puntata, but takes 2 beats.

PsL -- Passo**PsGL -- Passo Grave**

This step takes a single beat. Step forward with the left foot. The right foot should not be moved. This is similar to a puntata, although without closing the feet.

A passo grave is the same as a passo, except that it takes two beats.

**RpGL -- Reprise
Grave****RpL -- Reprise
Minima**

A Reprise Grave to the left is done by stepping sideways with the left foot, onto the left toe, and rising onto the right toe, then stepping to the left with the right foot, joining feet and lowering back onto the heels. This takes two beats.

A Reprise, or Reprise Minima, is done in the same way as a Reprise Grave, but in one beat.



Cd – Cadenza

Kick the left foot forwards, a little in advance of the beat, and spring into the air. While in the air, bring the left foot back in line with the right foot. Land on both feet, with the left foot slightly advanced. This is usually done at the end of a sequence of galliard type steps (eg: sottopiedi), and the time taken to do it is highly variable, but usually in the order of half of a beat.

A cadenza can be described as “Left”, indicating that the left foot is in advance as above, “Right”, indicating that the right foot is the one moving and in advance, or “a pie pari” which means landing with both feet together.

TbL -- Trabuchetto

This step takes one beat. Leap slightly to the left, landing on the left foot, and closing with the right foot so that the right heel is closest to the left instep, and about two finger-breadths away. This should be done lightly, on the toes of the feet, with the legs well extended, lowering the left hip and raising the right hip slightly as you land in the jump.

**FL -- Fioretto**

This step is done in very much the same way as a trabuchetto, but much more ornamented. It starts by kicking the left foot forwards and around to the left, and leaping onto the toes of the foot as it is placed a short distance away to the left. Then, bring the right foot across and land lightly on the flat of both feet. This takes two beats, or sometimes one beat.

SgL -- Seguito Ordinario

Caroso: Going forwards, step left, step right, step left, then raise your right foot and move it somewhat forwards as if to close, but do not close the step. This step takes 2 beats. This is similar to a standard French bassa danse / pavan double, but not quite as it is not completely closed.

Negri: Moving forwards, step left, close with the right foot, then do a left spezzato. Caroso calls this step a “Seguito Semidoppio”. This takes 4 beats.

SgGL -- Seguito Grave

Negri: This step is done in 4 beats. On the first beat, step forwards with the left foot. On the second beat, step forwards with the right foot. On the third beat step forwards again with the left foot. On the fourth beat, remain still. This is similar to a double in a French basse danse or pavan, except without closing the feet on the fourth beat.

Caroso doesn't use any step called a “seguito grave”.

SzL -- Spezzato / Seguito Spezzato

This step is done by stepping forwards onto the left foot, then forwards onto the right foot, up level with the heel of the left foot, rising onto the left toe as this is done. At the end of the beat, lower the left heel. The step takes 2 beats.

Caroso says to raise the left foot. Negri says to raise only the left heel. Apart from that, the steps are similar.

Sc -- Seguito Scorsi This is a small forwards shuffling motion done to a specified number of counts and normally to execute some pattern. Negri says to take 8 small forward steps in 2 beats, the same time normally taken for a seguito ordinario. Caroso says to take 10 of these small steps in 2 beats.

Trango A trango left is a diagonal step backwards to the left on the left foot, and then pull your right foot back towards your left. You should end up with your right heel backed up against your left instep. A trango right is the same thing, stepping backwards to the right instead.

SpL -- Sottopiedi This step is done very quickly -- In La Nizzarda and Lo Spagnoletto, 3 of these are done in one bar. Spring to the left onto the toes of the left foot, and then place the right foot behind and slightly under the heel of the left foot. Don't lose your balance here, or you'll step on your own toes.



ZpL -- Zoppetto Basically done in the same way as a KL for a bransle or galliard. Jump into the air very slightly onto the right foot, finishing with the left foot off the ground. Then lower the left foot back beside the right.

Scambiata L This step occurs in some of the Cascarde from Il Ballarino. It is a sottopiede step (as described above), followed by moving the left foot forwards, and then around slightly behind the right foot, and jumping to land with both feet together. It can be done singly, or followed by another scambiata going to the right.

Saffice A saffice is very simply one sottopiedi step (as above), followed by a trabuchetto, all going to the left. This step occurs in Nobilta di Dame. It is usually followed by the same step going to the right.

Destice A destice is similar to a saffice, however it is two sottopiedi steps (as above), followed by a trabuchetto, all going to the left. This step occurs in Nobilta di Dame.

Doppii all'Italiana This is, oddly enough, very much like a french basse danse or pavan double. It comprises three steps walking forwards, with a close on the fourth beat. Bend your knees slightly at the end of the step, and rise and then lower your heels into place as you close.

This step occurs mostly in Caroso's dances from Nobilta di Dame.

Doppii alla Francese This step is a trabuchetto diagonally backwards to the left, a trabuchetto diagonally backwards to the right, and a very small double on the left
L forwards to finish where you started, closing feet.

The same step can be done starting on the right foot, going diagonally backwards to the right to begin.
