

The Steps of 16th Century Italian Dance

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<http://www.pbm.com/~lindah1/santucci/kwds/>

Version 1.1 (July 10, 2009). Revision history at bottom.

I haven't seen much discussion of 16th century Italian dance steps – for the most part we just do them “the usual way”. There isn't even much academic discussion of the topic; there's a step concordance from Markus Lehner, but it doesn't translate or compare the various steps, and Julia Sutton published some detailed step reconstructions in Labanotation, which few people can read anymore.

The goal of this class is to collect up all 4 of the main sources for comparison. Two of the manuals were written by the same person (Caroso, *Il Ballarino* CB in 1580, *Nobiltà di Dame* CND in 1600), one plagiarized most of the step descriptions from Caroso's first manual (Negri, 1602/1604), and the last source, Santucci, was written in 1614, a considerable time after the others.

The parallel translations shown below are intentionally overly literal. When a translator tries to turn a technical manual into idiomatic English, there are a lot of ways subtle confusion can be introduced. For example, in Julia Sutton's translation of Caroso's Rule 21, *Seguito Spezzato* (*Courtly Dance of the Renaissance*, p. 110), she translates “alzando il sinistro con gratia” as “raise the left foot gracefully”. The word “foot” does not appear in the original; it refers to a masculine something, which I think is the left heel referred to earlier in the sentence. If you do this step these two different ways (raising the foot vs. raising the heel), you will find them to be quite different.

If I would be so bold as to make conclusions from what is presented in the subsequent pages, it would be:

1. *Seguito Ordinario*. There are 2 ways of doing this step, one in CB and Negri, and the second in CND and Santucci. The second is more ornamented throughout, and seems a lot more fun to me.
2. *Seguito Spezzato*. CB has this step only in duple meter, while CND has it in duple and triple. In 3, such as in the *cascarda*, the step has 4 motions and is syncopated. This is considerably different from the step in 2. Santucci has a completely different and much more difficult step.

The Seguito Ordinario

	CB	Negri	CND	Santucci
on the toe	Y	Y		
little hops			Y	Y
3rd step flat	n	n	Y	Y
finish w/heel-raising ornament	n	n	Y	Y
flat at end	Y	Y	Y	Y
short/short/long	Y	Y	Y	Y

My interpretations: Y = strong yes, y = implied, N = strong no, n = implied no, or no comment

Caroso's *Il Ballarino*

Il Seguito ordinario si fa similmente
in tre Passi,
& in quattro battute ordinarie;
è vero,
che all' vltima battuta
si stà tutto quel spatio
di tempo con la persona fermato:
& fassi in questo modo;
Si comincia nella prima battuta
col piè sinistro, spingendolo
in punta di piedi tanto innanzi,
che col calcagno
arriui alla punta del destro,
& distante intorno
à due dita da quello;
poi leuando il destro alla seconda battuta,
si ha similmente da spinger'innanzi
in punta di piede,
& tanto distante dal sinistro,
come del sinistro si fece:
poi nella terza battuta,
si spinge innanzi il sinistro
con l ordine medesimo;
ma però restando
con amendue li piedi spianati in terra,
come appunto si deue stare quando
la persona ha da trouarsi in prospettiua
nel fare della Riuerenza:
& in questo modo
ha da trattenersi,
come s'è detto,
lo spatio della quarta battuta.

The Seguito ordinario he does himself likewise
in three Steps,
and in four ordinary beats,
it is true,
that at the final beat,
he will stand himself that all space
of measure with the body:
and you do it in this fashion;
beginning himself in the first beat
with the left foot, thrusting him
into the toe of the foot so much forward,
that with the heel
you arrive to the toe of the right,
and distant about
by two inches from that;{toe}
then advancing the right at the second beat,
he has himself likewise to thrust from forward
into the toe of the foot,
and so much distant from the left,
like of the left he did himself:
then in the third beat,
he thrusts himself forward the left
with the same manner;
but then resting
with both the feet he levels yourself into the earth,
like he must appoint himself to stand whereas
the body has of to find herself [in prospettiva]
in the to do of the Riverenza:
and in the same fashion
to have from to hold back himself,
as he is himself aforesaid,
the space of four beats.

Poi nel principiarsi della quinta battuta,
s'ha di nuouo da seguitare,
spingendo il piè destro innanzi
secondo l'ordine dato nel sinistro:
auertendo,
ch'ad ogni Seguito ha
con la persona da paoueggiarsi alquanto.

Then in the to begin himself of the fifth beat,
he has himself of the new to step?,
thrusting the right foot forward
following the manner doing in the left:
noting,
that to each Seguito he has
with the body of peacocking himself somewhat.

Negri

Negri's Rule 9 (Seguito Grave) is basically an exact copy of Caroso's Rule 12. See "Copying between Negri and Caroso", <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/articles/copying.html>

Caroso *Nobiltà di Dame*

Del Seguito Ordinario,
il quale anchora si può chiamar Breve.

Of the Seguito Ordinario, {ordinary step}
the which ??? himself ??? to call Short.

REGOLA XVI.

D. DICAMI di gratia U.S.
perche questo Seguito vole
che si chiami Ordinario,
& Breve,
e donde derivino questi nomi.

??? of ???
because this Seguito intends
that you call himself Ordinary,
and Short,
and whereby deriving this name.

M. Ti dico,
figliuol mio,
che si chiama Seguito Ordinario,
per questa ragione,
che nel farlo si segue
il movimento naturale dell'ordine de'piedi,
quando egli si farà.

I tell you,
my son,
that he calls himself Seguito Ordinario,
for this reason,
that in the to do he follows himself
the natural moving of the method of the feet,
whereas he will do himself.

Si chiama anco Breve,
perche v`a in due battute di Musica,
& di qu`i nasce questo nome
di Seguito Breve;
& in amendue le maniere `e ben detto.

He calls himself also Breve {short},
because he will go in two beats of Music,
and of the {this has sprung} this name
of Seguito Breve;
and in both the manners he is well named.

D. In che maniera,
& con qual regola,
& con che gratia,
& misura s'h`a egli `a fare?

In what manner,
and with whatsoever rule,
and with what ornament,
and rule he has himself by to do?

M. Questo Seguito Ordinario,
`o Breve,
lo farai con due Passi Minimi,
cio`e presti,
& con un Semibreve,
al fin del quale,
gratiosamente alzarai il calcagno
del pi`e susseguente insieme con la vita;
& nel far queste attioni,
& questi moti di piedi,
fanno il tempo di una Breve,
che son due battute,
di maniera,
che due Minime,
& una Semibreve fanno una Breve.

This Seguito Ordinario,
or Breve,
you will do him with two Passi Minimi,
that is to say quick,
and with one Semibreve,
to end of the which,
gracefully you will raise the heel
of the foot, following together with the body,
and in the to do this action,
and these motions of the feet,
they do the time of one Breve,
which are two beats,
of the manner,
that two Minims,
and one Semibreve to do one Breve.

Appresso bisogna cominciarlo
nella seguente maniera;
& prima hai d'alzare
la punta del pi`e sinistro,
stendendo ben'il ginocchio,

It must be near to begin him
in the following manner,
and first you have of to advance
the toe of the left foot,
extending well the knee,

& il calerai subito in terra;
avertendo à non spianarlo,
& vi ballarai un poco
à modo d'un saltetto;
poi farai un'altro passetto
col destro piede,
tanto che il vano di questo piede
sia al pari della punta del sinistro;
l'ultimo passo,
che sarà Semibreve,
spingerai innanzi,
ma non che sia sforzato,
ma che sia spianato,
facendolo però nel medesimo modo,
si come di sopra t'hò dimostrato;
& poni mente di dargli quella gratia,
che t'hò detto;
& in questa maniera sarà
gratiosamente fatto,
& darà bella,
e gratiosa vista à i riguardanti:
col qual ricordo finisco di parlarti
di questo Seguito,
& discorerotti del Seguito Doppio.

Regola CLxviii del Seguito ordinario.

Trouandosi il piè sinistro in dietro,
in passo naturale,
farai dui passi minimi inanzi,
uno col sinistro,
l'altro col destro,
e nel far detti passi,
si altererai à modo di saltetti,

e poi col sinistro
farai un altro passo
nel tempo d'una battuta,
e nel fine ti alzarai un poco
sù la punta de piedi,
e poi li spianarai in terra,
e lo potrai fare anco per contrario,
et anco trouandoti con li piedi al paro;
si chiama così,
perch? si fan trè passi naturali.

and you will fall into the earth;
noting by to not level him,
and you will dance a little
by the fashion of a saltetto; {little hop}
with the right foot,
then you will do another small step
so much that the instep of this foot
be it to a pair of the toe of the left;
the final step,
that he will be Semibreve,
you will thrust forward,
but not that be he forcing,
but what be he leveling,
using him then in the same fashion,
himself like of the above I have demonstrated to you,
and putting of the ??? ??? ornament,
that I have aforesaid to you;
and in the same manner he shall
gracefully done,
and he will do beautiful,
and grace view by the viewing:
with which ??? I finish the ???
of this Seguito,
and ??? of the Seguito Doppio.

Santucci

Rule 168 the Seguito ordinario.

Finding himself the left foot behind,
in passo naturale,
you will do two passi minimi forward,
one with the left,
the other with the right,
and in the to do the named passi,
you will change themselves by the fashion of the
saltetti, {little hops}
and after with the left
you will do another passo
in the time of one beat,
and in the end you will raise yourself a little
upon the toe of the feet
and afterward you will flatten them into the earth,
and you will be able to do him also by the opposite,
and also finding himself with the feet to a pair;
it is called thus,
because he is doing himself three passi naturali.

The Seguito Spezzato

CB: beat 1: left step level

beat 2: right step raising right heel, right toe to left heel while raising both heels,
end of beat 2: lower left heel (no forward motion)

Negri: Same as CB

CND: in duple only used in "Tordiglione" (rule 15)

first beat: left step level

second beat: raise right heel, put toe behind left heel, raise left heel, drop straight down

CND: in triple (rule 21)

first triple: left step level, right toe *behind* left heel

second triple: raise/lower left {heel?}, not moving forward nor backwards

Sutton says "raise your left foot gracefully" while Caroso actually says "alzando il sinistro con gratia", raise the left {masculine} gracefully. I think this refers to the left heel, e.g. "raise your left {heel} gracefully".

Santucci: step, sottopiede, lower foot

Caroso *Il Ballarino*

Del Seguito spezzato. REGOLA XVI.

Si fa questo Seguito spezzato

in due battute ordinarie,

in questo modo;

Prima (trouandosi la persona à piedi pari)

nella prima battuta ha da spinger'

il piè sinistro mezo palmo innanzi,

& due dita distante dal destro,

tenendolo ben'in terra spianato;

poi nel principiar la seconda battuta,

ha da muouere il piè destro,

con l'alzar prima il calcagno,

& con la punta di esso ha da auicinarlo

al calcagno del piè sinistro;

& nel tempo medesimo,

che pone in terra la punta del destro,

ha da leuar' amendue i calcagni,

& la persona insieme alquanto;

poi nel fine della battuta,

ha d'abbassar' insieme con la persona

il calcagno del sinistro.

Poi nel principiar la terza battuta,

ha da passar' innanzi col destro

nel modo stesso che ha fatto col sinistro:

& questo Seguito è detto spezzato,

perche nel tempo

che si fa lo Seguito ordinario,

To do themselves this Seguito spezzato

in two ordinary beats,

in this manner;

First (the body finding itself with equal feet)

in the first beat he has to thrust from

the left foot half a hand's breadth forward,

and two inches distant from the right,

holding him {the foot} leveled well in the earth;

then in the to begin the second beat,

he has to move the right foot,

with to advance first the heel,

and with the toe of the that

to have from to approach himself {the shoe}

to the heel of the left foot;

and in the same time,

when he sinks into the ground the toe of the right,

he has of to raise both the heels,

and the body together somewhat;

then in the end of the beat,

he has of to lower together with the body

the heel of the left.

Afterward in the to begin the third beat,

he has of to pass forward with the right

in the same fashion which he has done with the left:

and this Seguito is named spezzato,

because in the time

that he does himself the Seguito ordinario,

spezzandolo,
se ne fanno due de ì sopradetti.

breaking him {the step},
they do himself some two of the above named {steps}.

Negri

SI fa questo seguito spezzato
in due battute ordinarie in questo modo,
prima trovandosi la persona a pie pari,

nella prima battuta ha da spingere
il pie sinistro mezo palmo innanzi,
& due dita distante dal destro,
tenendolo ben in terra spianato.
poi nel cominciare la seconda battuta,
ha da muovere il pie destro
con alzare prima il calcagno,
& con la punta d'esso ha d'avvicinarlo
al calcagno del pie sinistro,
& nel tempo medesimo,
che mette in terra la punta del destro,
ha da levare amendue i calcagni,
& la persona insieme alquanto,
poi nel fine della battuta
ha d'abbassare insieme
con la persona il calcagno del sinistro,
poi nel cominciare la terza battuta,
ha da passare innanzi col destro,
nel modo c'ha fatto col sinistro,
& questo seguito ` detto spezzato;
perche nel tempo,
che si fa'l seguito ordinario spezzandolo,

se ne fanno due de i sopradetti.

Himself to do this seguito spezzato
in two ordinary beats with this same fashion,
first finding himself with the body by equal
feet,
in the first beat he has from to thrust
the left foot half a hands-breadth forward,
and two inches distant from the right,
keeping him well level into the earth.
after in the to begin the second beat,
he has of to move the right foot
with advancing first the heel,
and with the toe of that to have of bringing
to the heel of the left foot,
and in the same time,
that he put into the earth the toe of the right,
he has to raise both the heels,
and the body together somewhat,
then in the end of the beat
he has of to lower together
with the body the heel of the left
then in the beginning of the third beat,
he has of to pass forward the right
in the manner as he has done with the left,
and this step he is named spezzato{broken};
because in the time,
that he does himself the seguito ordinario
breaking him,
XXX they to do two of the aforesaid.

Santucci

Regola CLxxviii, del Seguito Spezzato ordinario.

Trouandosi il piè sinistro in dietro,
in passo naturale,
farai un passo naturale inanzi,
poi col destro,
darai un sottopiede al sinistro,
e lo inalborarai inanzi,
e poi lo posarai,
in terra in passo naturale
e lo potrai fare anco per contrario,
et anco trouandoti à piedi pari;
si chiama cosi,
perche si spezza il moto del camminare.

Finding himself the left foot behind,
in passo naturale,
you will do one passo naturale forward,
then with the right,
you will do one sottopiede to the left,
and you will raise him {the foot?} forward,
and then you will lower him {the foot}
into the earth in passo naturale,
and you will be able to do him also by the opposite,
and also finding himself with equal feet;
it is called thus,
because he breaks himself the motion of to walk.

Revision History

1.1 July 10, 2009: Emphasize CB spez you raise both heels at the same time that you put down your right toe by the left heel. Remove extra "of the shoe" from CB spez translation.