

Prexonera

Prexonera (or Presoniera) is a dance by Domenico. It first appeared in his manuscript *De Arte Saltandi et Choreas Ducti*, in approximately 1450. It was learned and written up in a slightly different form by Guglielmo in *De Pratica seu Arte Tripudii*.

The title of the dance means “Prisoner”. The dance is for two people, one man and one lady. In this dance the lady and man take turns in capturing each other and holding each other prisoner. I take the opinion that the dance would most probably have been done as a performance dance -- the actions of the dancers are a play as much as they are a dance.

I have attempted to reconstruct the dance in a slightly different manner to the way in which most dance reconstructions are done. Rather than following the master’s instructions to the letter, I have deliberately mis-reconstructed the dance in the manner that it could possibly have been done by a pair of young dance students of the time.

Improvisation was still used fairly heavily in dancing in the 15th Century -- Domenico and Cornazano both offer chapters on body movement and manner, but also indicate that variations of their mannerisms were in common practice at the time they are writing (partly, in admonishing the reader against these manners that are in error, the masters admit that they are in common practice).

In this reconstruction, I have taken Domenico’s description of the dance, which basically includes feet movement only, and added some body and hand movements that emphasise the play-acting nature of the dance. I have enhanced the third figure of the dance, which would otherwise be a straightforward piva sequence with the dancers moving side by side, into a game of cat-and-mouse, or more correctly, captor and prisoner.

In doing this, the dancers appear to be acting in a manner to be against some of Guglielmo’s teachings -- in particular his “Rules for Women”¹. Perhaps the more experienced (and older, and more demure) dancers of Guglielmo’s class would not have done the dance in this fashion, but some of the younger participants just might.

The result is, I hope, a dance that although it disobeys some of the instructions laid out by Guglielmo and Domenico, is a feasible interpretation of how the dance could have been done as an entertainment piece in the period.

Figure 1

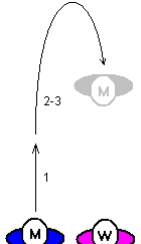
This opening sequence, in 6/4 time (bassadanza) is a reasonably straight forwards bassa danza section, done moving forwards into the center of the dance floor.

(A) 1	CnL CnR	The dancers start by facing forwards, to the presence. They then do two continenze, left then right.
2 - 3	SL SR SL	Three singles, left, right, left
4	DR	Double Right
5	RvL	Riverenza on the left foot
6 - 10	CnL CnR	Repeat the above to the repeat of the music.
	SL SR SL	
	DR	
	RvL	

¹ Guglielmo, “De Pratica seu Arte Tripudii”, translated by Barbara Sparti (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

Figure 2

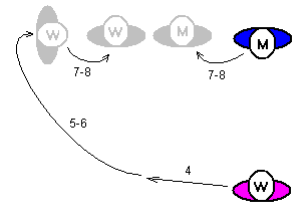
In this section, the dancers move away from each other and then back towards each other, in bassadanza time.

(B) 1	SL SR	The man alone moves forwards, with a single left then right	
2 - 3	DcL DcL pause	Two contrapassi, or doubles on the same foot, on the left, in 1½ tempi, turning around to face the lady. The man should remain a short distance away from the lady. Finish with a half tempo pause.	

This section of the dance contains an element of acting. The dancers should shy away from each other as they do the singles, and then move in a more lively manner back towards their prisoner (or captor) as they do the contrapassi.

In the first three bars of the above section, the man walks forwards to end up in front of, and facing, the lady.

In the next three bars, the lady walks around to the improper side of the man, as shown in the diagram.



4 - 6	SR SL DcR DcR Pause	The lady sets off away from the man, moving away from him to the left with two singles, and then turning back towards him with two contrapassi. The lady should finish a short distance away from the man.
7	SL SR	The dancers step towards each other with two singles.
8	CnL CnR	The dancers then do two continenze, turning to finish facing forwards again, but improper.

B (9 - 16)	Repeat	Repeat bars 1 - 8 above, this time with the lady moving first. The couple should end up proper once again.
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Figure 3

This is a piva sequence. The true nature of the dance is revealed here, as the man (on the first time through the dance, the lady on the second time through), takes his "captive" almost forcefully across the dance floor.

1 (8)	PvL PvR PvL PvR PvL PvR PvL PvR	The dancers do 8 piva steps travelling forwards. At the start of the sequence, the man grabs the lady by the hand, and leads her forwards, the lady following behind.
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Figure 4

In this figure the dance stays in piva time. The captive-captor relationship continues through this sequence, as the man and the lady play a small capture-and-escape game on the dance floor.

1 - 2	M M	The man makes a movimento, and the lady replies with another. The man should make a leaping movement at the lady (who he has just lead at a piva pace across the floor), in order to entrap her. The lady darts just as quickly away from him.
3 - 4	4 Passitti	The dancers make 4 passitti, or “little steps”, on the right foot. The lady, having leapt away from the man’s “entrapment” now leads him on a chase across the floor. The dancers skip lightly on their right feet as the lady leads the man around.
5 - 6	M M	The lady makes a movimento, and the man replies with another. This is a repeat of the first two bars, with the lady leaping towards the man, and then the man leaping away.
7 - 8	4 Passitti	The dancers make 4 passitti. This time, it is the man that leads the lady on a short chase.

Figure 5

As is often the case with Domenico’s balli, the dance concludes with a saltarello sequence.

1 (3)	SIL SIR SIL SIR	The dancers now conclude the dance with four saltarelli, starting on the left foot, moving towards each other to take hands again.
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The dance can be repeated from the start, with the lady taking the man’s place, and the man taking the lady’s place.
