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God Save the Double!

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God Save the Double!

REPLY BY MAURO LO MONACO AND
SERGIO VINCIGUERRA

To the Author,

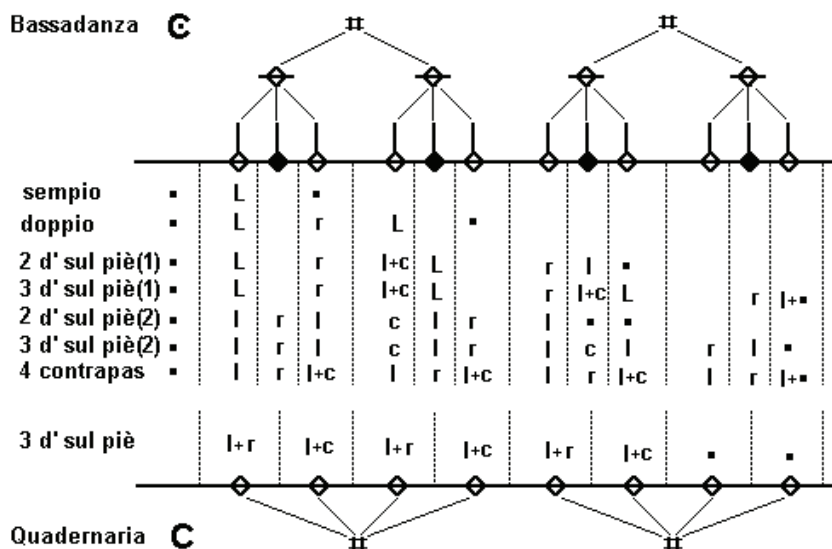
Thanks for your letter. Clear criticism always stimulates people to make their ideas clearer and to formulate them in a more comprehensible form.

I have the feeling that the hypothesis according to which the term ‘double step’ takes its origin from the verb ‘to double’ is facing some opposition: not for the double in itself but for the possibility that the extension of this concept can be used also for explaining the origin and the way of performing the ‘*doppi in sul piè*’.

None of us, of course, has direct experience of these steps and of the way of dancing in the fifteenth century. Still we amateurs and scholars can propose hypotheses, which are formulated by connecting both knowledge (of objective data related to the object of our research – in this case, the ‘*doppi in sul piè*’) and intuitions (unconscious connections). After, we must gather elements, as many as we can, that fit, and oppose, the hypothesis and, on this base, we can elaborate a thesis. If we are lucky enough, we can try to extract a rule or law, and eventually we must check how much it fits with the objective data that generated the hypothesis. The simpler the law the wider is the context in which it works. The problem then is not to list all the possible solutions existing for a number of different situations, but to state what is the underlying law that can resolve all of them.

In this sense the variety of solutions you proposed for performing 2 and 3 ‘*doppi in sul piè*’ and for 4 *Contrapassi* (assuming that this late term does not indicate a different way to name 3 ‘*doppi in sul piè*’ or 3 *contrapassi*) perplexes me. Moreover, none of the solutions proposed for the *Bassadanza* can work in *Quadernaria*. Actually, I find even more difficult to accept the continuous changing of accents. In your solution (1), the first *doppio* begins on the first count, the second one on the fourth and the third one on the third count of the second measure of *Bassadanza*. The upbeat of the next step has to be shared with the last step of the sequence of 3 ‘*doppi in sul piè*’. In the solution (2) the doubles begin on the first and fifth count of the first measure and on the third count of the second measure. These solutions are summarised in figure 1 where I used the same symbols you used in your formulas: ‘upper case is used to indicate a full step of two counts;

lower case for a shorter step of one count; and a point to mark the upbeat'. In the upper part of the picture you find a scheme showing two measures of *Bassadanza* with their division in imperfect time and major prolation consisting of 6 + 6 minims. In the lower part, two measures of *Quadernaria* that, with the only exception of the ballo Jupiter, are always divided into four semibreves or the equivalent. (I suggest to leave the discussion of this point for the future, if you agree.) The columns below the notes show which step is performed during that note. Of course the brevis of *Quadernaria* is 1/6 shorter than that of *Bassadanza*.



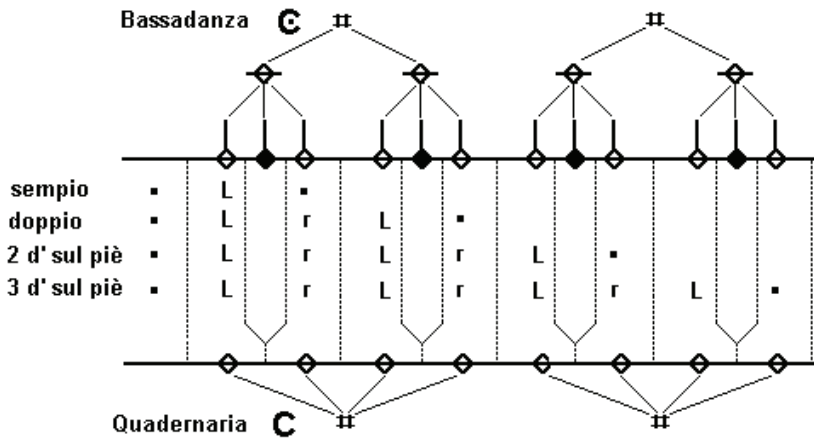
Going back to the beats and their relationship with the steps, I wish to report Domenico's and Cornazano's words concerning the rhythm of *Bassadanza* and *Quadernaria*:

Cornazano 10r: *Di Bassadanza ogni tempo si divide in quattro parti. el vodo e una cioe el primo moto surgente, poi ciaschun de gli tre passi che si fanno ne consuma uno quarto che viene a compire quatro ...* (every tempo of *Bassadanza* is divided in four parts ...).

Domenico 4v: ... *Advisandote che la quadernaria sonandola le sue bote del tenore vanno più equale per distantia che quelle de la bassadanza* (and playing *Quadernaria* please note that the beats of the tenor are at a more equal distance than those of *Bassadanza*).

Translating it in modern notation we can consider *Quadernaria* as a 4/4 time with one beat at each minim and *Bassadanza* as a 6/4 time with the beats consisting of semibreve – minim – semibreve – minim. Both have four beats but those of *Quadernaria* 'are at a more equal distance than those of *Bassadanza*'.

In figure 2 you find our solution for performances of *sempio*, *doppio*, 2 and 3 'doppi in sul piè' in *Bassadanza* and *Quadernaria*. The symbols used are those you suggest, while the white notes indicate the position of the beats and the black the count without beat. Of course the dots in *Quadernaria* do not indicate any upbeat but prolongation of the last step.



Looking at the picture, it is relevant that all the steps maintain their position, no cutting or overlapping of steps occur and, according to Domenico, all the steps *sono in lo pieno* (correspond to a beat). **Domenico 3r:** *Lui dice che dodice motti sono in l'operar de questa arte. De li quali ne cava nove naturalli e tri accidentalli. Li nove naturalli operati sono in lo pieno e li tri accidentalli operati sono in lo vuodo ... dico vuodo il tacere dico pieno lo dire. dico vuodo tra un tempo e l'altro dico pieno in nel tempo instanti.* (He says that twelve movements are in this art ... nine *naturalli* and three *accidentalli*. The nine *naturalli* are performed upon a beat the three *accidentalli* upon upbeat. ...)

There is a bulk of evidence suggesting that our hypothesis, according to which the term '*doppio*' takes its origin from the concept of 'doubling a *passo sempio*' and not from a step that is twice as long, discloses a simple rule which can explain why:

- When the same rule is extended for a second or third doubling it generates sequences of 2 and 3 '*doppi in sul piè*' with a mensural value of $1 + 1/2$ and 2 measures respectively.
- Doubles in a sequence of two or three, can maintain their value of one measure each when they are described with a regular change of foot, but add only half a measure to the second and to the third double, if they are described as 'on the same foot'.
- '*Doppi in sul piè*' can be performed in *Bassadanza* as well as in *Quadernaria* without losing the relation between step and beat.
- The performance of these steps is very easy and natural.

At least the authors find this rule convincing.

REPLY BY DIANA CRUICKSHANK (Translator)

I have always considered that the one clear distinction between the *passo doppio* in *bassadanza* and in *quadernaria* was the relative difference in the inherent and essential rhythm of the step-unit. In *bassadanza*, the *doppio* has a long first step – equal to two of the six beats of the *tempo*, a shorter second step – using the third beat only – and another (third) step, taken on the fourth beat, which has a pause after it. In practice, this is filled by the lowering of the heels and the *movimento* which introduces the next *doppio*. In *quadernaria*, these three steps are evened out – one on each beat of the first three – followed by a fourth beat which is often filled with other embellishment, such as a *frappamento*, or some other movement as requested in the various choreographies. One case worthy of mention occurs in La Fia Guielmina for two as described by Domenico where he indicates that the complete step comprises three *sempi e due continentie* in the one *tempo* – though some will argue that this is a ‘one-off’ and not therefore applicable as a general statement, since the step is not classified as a *doppio*.

Although Wilson may feel ‘short-changed’ by this interpretation of the steps, I feel equally uneasy in the face of this levelling out of the rhythm of the steps or the increased speed of his version of the *doppio* in *quadernaria*. That the step as it occurs in ‘*Jupiter*’ is described as *presto* might equally well be taken as descriptive of my truncated step, with the *cambiamento* being performed on the same beat as the third step, and, in the case of three *contrapassi*, the loss of the final or ninth step of the group. What makes this particularly attractive to me is that, in *bassadanza*, that very concluding step is permitted within the $1\frac{1}{2}$ *tempi* thus leaving the dancer with the correct foot free for the next movement.