

Villanella Documentation

Overview

In this piece, I am dancing Villanella as an Italian Lord of the 16th Century would have done at a ball. Because 16th Century Balls were done one couple at a time with everyone else seated, it was an opportunity to show off how graceful, cultured, and mannered you were. My submission is the entire performance, however a still shot has been chosen from the 5th verse as it displays much movement. This is because the Google Form I submitted my work on required a still image. Link to performance has been provided in the item description.

Villanella is a ballo written in 1581 by Signor Fabrito Caroso, printed in Venice in the book *Il Ballarino*. As a dance instructor, it hurts me to have a Ball without any dancing, and so I decided to share this performance of Villanella, danced as a Lord with an invisible Lady. I thought to record the performance on November 4th, although the actual record took place on November 7th. I did, however, have prior knowledge of how to do the dance and Italian dance etiquette.

I chose Villanella because it was a 16th Century ballo. Being a ballo, there was much promenading about the room so that I could adjust my positioning on the fly. Being a piece by Caroso, the dance would have commonly been done for one couple at a time, and so all I needed to pay attention to was my invisible partner. In period it would have been a performance piece more than a social one. We do it in the SCA as “for as many couples as will” so that more people get to enjoy it. I also happened to be teaching Villanella for the first weekend of November, in East Kingdom Shire Wars, [Dancing In a Warrior's Land](https://shirewars.eastkingdom.org/dancing-in-a-warriors-land/) (https://shirewars.eastkingdom.org/dancing-in-a-warriors-land/), so it was a good time to record the piece.

From a mechanical standpoint, Villanella is easier than most of the 16th century Italian pieces I am familiar with, as those are cascade, characterized by bounciness and complexity. Villanella mainly centers around Passo Passo Ordinario for the verses; and Continenza, two Riprese, Riverenza for chorus. Being 16th century, the Riverenze are much easier on the thighs and even the knees. For a 15th Century Italian dance piece, refer to [Vita di Cholino](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywHf0MBvnUo) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywHf0MBvnUo). It has two Riverenze per chorus for the middle person before the single turn.

In this performance, I have chosen to perform the Lord's part, as I was more familiar with the Solite Creanze, or etiquette, of the man's part. More on that in the next paragraph. While proper Ladies in 16th Century Italian dancing looked demurely at the floor, the Lords were free to look around the room. Performances today are generally with the expectation that the audience will be looked at, so it was nigh imperative to choose to do the Lord's part. Furthermore, according to Countess Judith, a great dance mistress known primarily for work from the 15th Century Italian Sources, the Lord was considered the leader in the dance. True, 15th Century is before

the 16th, but in Villanella we have a strong clue that the Lord is the leader because it, similar to Amoroso of the 15th Century, has the Lord going away and returning first. In addition, up North in 16th Century England, Playford commonly describes what the Lord does, and then simply says "Women the same".

A key component of Solite Creanze is the clothing. For the Lord, this includes wearing a bonnet, a cloak, and gloves. The men's cloaks at the time did not have ribbons or fastenings, and would be worn over the left shoulder. There were those who wore it over both shoulders, but they would have been perceived as grave and not as fashionable. The hand holding the Lady was to be kept ungloved, while the other one was generally gloved. The 4th verse is the Lady's solo. However, this does not mean that the Lord is free to stand and do nothing. If gloved on the right hand and not the left, due to previously doing the chorus with the Lady's hand in his left, the glove needs to come off the right hand for the upcoming chorus. The left hand, since it is now away from the Lady, can be worn again. The gloves should be removed by the hands, rather than by the teeth as Caroso pointed out that some rude gentlemen did in period. As the cloak was not fastened, the Lord should ensure that it is not slipping off, particularly because a fast section is coming up and it would bring much embarrassment to have it fall off while dancing. In the SCA, Lords commonly also move slightly to the left in this verse so that the Lady has space to come into.

Instructions and Steps

VERSE 1

Riverenza: To do a Riverenza, bring free foot half a foot-length forward, draw it back, transfer weight onto back foot, drop down, transfer weight to front foot, and rise. This move is repeated through all but one of the choruses.

2 Continenze: Continenze, plural of Continenza. Step away to the side of the body, bring the other foot in a half-moon shape, then drop to heel.

2 Ordinarii about the room: Ordinarii, plural of Ordinario. Tip toe walks.

CHORUS 1

Continenza left: As in Verse 1

2 Riprese right: Riprese, plural of Ripresa. Small sideways step away from the body, going up and over, close, bringing the other foot up and over as well.

VERSE 2

Go about the room with

2 Passi: Passi, plural of Passo. Walking steps,

Ordinario: As in Verse 1

That again (2 Passi, Ordinario).

Most of the dance uses steps previously covered.

CHORUS 2-6

Continenza left, 2 Riprese right, Riverenza

VERSE 3

Lord's solo with pattern established in verse 2
(2 Passi, Ordinario; that again)

REPEAT CHORUS

VERSE 4

Lady's solo, same footwork pattern as Lord's solo
(2 Passi, Ordinario; that again)

REPEAT CHORUS

VERSE 5

Using same footwork as established in verse 2
2 Passi to walk straight forward
Cast away from partner
Ordinario to half turn
2 Passi to walk back to original place
Cast away from partner
Ordinario to half turn

REPEAT CHORUS

(Continenza left, 2 Riprese right, Riverenza)

VERSE 6

Face partner

Spezzati section: Spezzati, plural of Spezzato. Syncopated doubles, each double takes the same time as a Passo did in the earlier sections.

2 Spezzati to change, passing right shoulders.

2 Spezzati to turn over your left shoulder

Face partner

2 Spezzati to change, passing right shoulders.

2 Spezzati to turn over your left shoulder

FINAL CHORUS

Differences from Period

One of the primary differences from period is that I used pre-recorded music from a publicly available YouTube video. In period, they would have had live musicians.

With regards to clothing, I did not wear a sword, since I do not own one. I also wore a simple tunic and pants, rather than Italian garb because I do not have any, being Persian. I hope the garb brings you delight, however, as it is at least in fall colors. My cloak was more of a scarf, but served a close demonstrative purpose.

Etiquette breaches included keeping my cap on for the entire dance, for the Lord would have doffed his cap while dancing with the Lady, although the cap was likely worn during the Lord's solo, as the Lord was not with the Lady at the time. I also forgot to "kiss" my hand, as would have been done while approaching the lady. Fortunately, it only happens twice briefly in the dance.

Sources

Villanella Instructions

[Villanella \(Il Ballarino\)](http://www.pbm.com/~lindah/del/sections/16th_c_italian_dance9.html) (http://www.pbm.com/~lindah/del/sections/16th_c_italian_dance9.html)

Format of Balls Using the Dances from Caroso's Works

[Renaissance Dance | Western Social Dance: An Overview of the Collection | Articles and Essays | An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals, ca. 1490-1920 | Digital Collections](https://www.loc.gov/collections/dance-instruction-manuals-from-1490-to-1920/articles-and-essays/western-social-dance-an-overview-of-the-collection/renaissance-dance/)

(<https://www.loc.gov/collections/dance-instruction-manuals-from-1490-to-1920/articles-and-essays/western-social-dance-an-overview-of-the-collection/renaissance-dance/>)

Countess Judith's Facebook Page

[The Creative Contessa - Home](https://www.facebook.com/TheCreativeContessa/) (<https://www.facebook.com/TheCreativeContessa/>)

Playford Dances

[Dancing Master Volume 1 – Playford – Playford's Dancing Master: The Compleat Dance Guide](https://playforddances.com/dances-1/)

(<https://playforddances.com/dances-1/>)

[Goddesses – Playford's Dancing Master: The Compleat Dance Guide](http://playforddances.com/dances/goddesses/)

(<http://playforddances.com/dances/goddesses/>)

Etiquette in Italian Dancing

["Le solite creanze" - How to behave well during a dance in 16th-century Italy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUMNA8Twgus)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUMNA8Twgus>)

[How to Behave Badly According to Italian Dance Masters](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JSn6hHW7_M)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JSn6hHW7_M)

Music

[Villanella by Caroso](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxcUflbk-30)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxcUflbk-30>)