

# »ALL'UNGARESCA – AL ESPAÑOL«

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Uwe Schlottermüller, Howard Weiner und Maria Richter

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Uwe W. Schlottermüller  
Postfach 5266  
79019 Freiburg

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# French-Italian Dance Technique

## on the European Stage of the Late 18th Century

GUILLAUME JABLONKA

Drawing upon his experience as a grotesque dancer, Gennaro Magri wrote a treatise organized around the explanation of dance steps, the *Trattato teorico-prattico di Ballo*, which was published in Naples in 1779. A short time later, a manuscript<sup>1</sup> was written in Valenciennes that, with the aid of dance notation, reported on pantomime ballets and *divertissements* that had been performed in 1782 by the Ferrère company. The connection between these two sources has already been discussed in Rebecca Harris-Warrick and Bruce Alan Brown's book *The Grotesque Dancer on the Eighteenth-Century Stage: Gennaro Magri and his World*. The goal of this paper is to shed some light on these steps and dances from the viewpoint of a performer-reconstructor, to match step names to the step notation in the Beauchamp-Feuillet system,<sup>2</sup> and to offer, as far as possible, practical examples based on the theoretical descriptions.

My research recently found an echo at the Aide à la Recherche et au Patrimoine en Danse, which is supported by the French Ministry of Culture and managed by the French National Center for Dance. With the help of Irène Ginger, new resources will be published by January 2013 under the title *Identité du ballet pantomime au XVIIIe siècle: des théâtres de la foire au manuscrit Ferrère*. This project, which attempts to identify more clearly the style associated on stage with pantomime ballet, made the present paper possible.

The term pantomime ballet was coined in the late 1720s to describe works performed by English dancers on the stage of the Opera Comique, one of the fair theaters in Paris,<sup>3</sup> and at that time this kind of ballet was generally comic and grotesque. By the mid 18th century, comic dancing seems to have had a shared movement vocabulary across Europe, in which French and Italian tradition blended.<sup>4</sup>

According to Magri, some steps were specific to either serious or to grotesque dancers, whereas others were used by all, the only difference being how they were performed. The Ferrère manuscript deals with a few serious dances but primarily with comic dances, which were also Magri's specialty, and, as we shall see, noble technique can also be employed in these dances.

Let us begin with a very typical and impressive step, the *gorgugliè*.<sup>5</sup> According to Magri, this step is a jump with one or two *tordichamp*.<sup>6</sup> The one found in the Ferrère Manuscript is designated *altra sorte di gorgugliè* on pages 124f. of the *Trattato*, where it requires two *tordichamp* or *tours de jambe*.<sup>7</sup> Figure 1 shows the choreography to *La colère* (anger) found in the pantomime ballet *Le Peintre amoureux de son Modèle*.<sup>8</sup> In bar 2 we see the outward *tour de jambe* with the left leg and the double inward *tour de jambe* with the right leg. The step

ends on the left leg with the right in the air, just as described by Magri. However, one potential problem in interpreting Ferrère's use of Beauchamp-Feuillet notation is that he does not always include the bending, rising, or jumping signs that the context would seem to require. Different hypotheses are possible, but exceed the scope of this lecture, and we have to deal with what we have for reconstruction. Taking the speed of the accompanying music into account, Irène and I found that it would be easier to jump than to stand on one leg and then on the other to do the *tours de jambe*, and it would also take too much time.

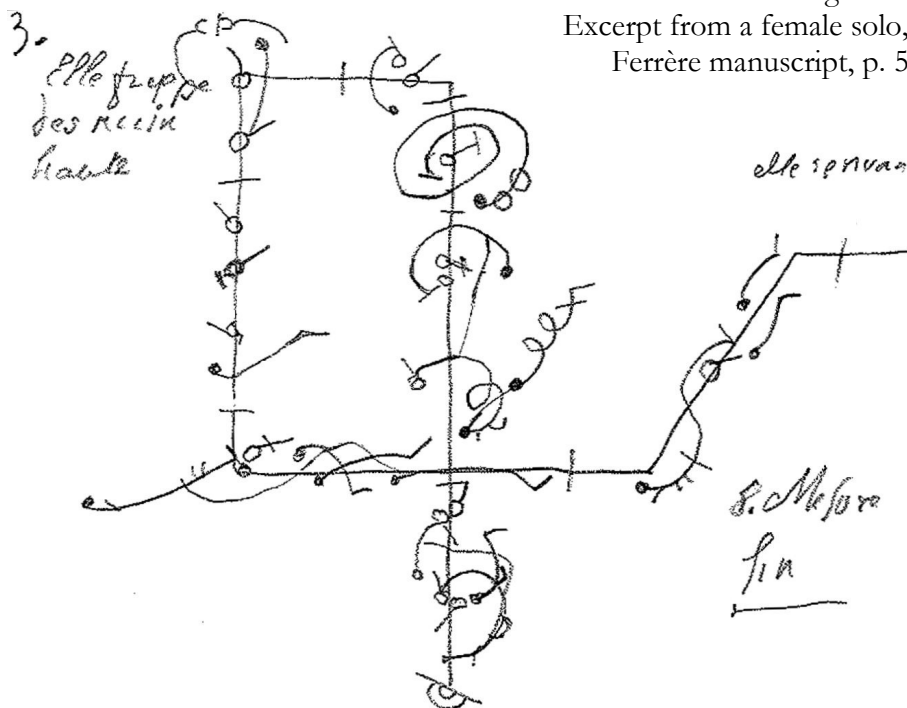


Figure 1:  
Excerpt from a female solo,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. 5

Surprisingly, Magri describes this kind of *gorgugliè* as being close to the ground and specific to French serious dancers, but he adds that *gorgugliè* can be performed by all kinds of dancers and also close to the floor or high up in the air. In the *Encyclopédie*, Louis de Cahusac described a *gargouillade* that corresponds to this step:

Ce pas est consacré aux entrées de vents, de démons, et des esprits de feu; il se forme en faisant du côté que l'on veut, une demi-pirouette sur les deux pieds. Une des jambes, en s'élevant, forme un tour de jambe en dehors, et l'autre un tour de jambe en dedans, presque dans le même temps. Le danseur retombe sur celle des deux jambes qui est partie la première, et forme cette demi-pirouette avec l'autre jambe qui reste en l'air [...] Dans la danse comique on s'en sert avec succès, comme un pas qu'on tourne alors en gaieté; au lieu qu'il ne sert qu'à peindre la terreur dans les entrées des démons.<sup>9</sup>

This step is specific to the entries of winds, demons, or fire spirits; it is done with whichever side one chooses, with a half-pirouette on both feet. One leg, while rising, does a *rond de jambe* outward and the other a *rond de jambe* inward, almost at the same time. The dancer lands on the leg that went out first, and executes this half-pirouette with the other leg remaining off the floor [...] In comic dancing it is used successfully as a step spun with joy; whereas in the entries of demons it is intended to depict terror.

One can easily imagine that this step is perfectly suited for communicating anger, as in the example from Ferrère. Remarkably, this step is preceded by a *pas de bourrèe incrociato*<sup>10</sup> that turns three quarters of the way around, and not a half pirouette; in any case, it provides the necessary turning impetus for the step.

Another *gargouillade* can be found in the Ferrère manuscript on page 15, in *Les galants Villageois* (The Village Swains): a woman seeks her husband, who is hiding in order to laugh at her. Going from one side to the other, she finishes one musical phrase with this step, which is again taken with *pas de bourrèe incrociati*.<sup>11</sup> In Figure 2 we can see the jumping signs; the two black points are also linked together, meaning that both *tours de jambe* should be performed at the same time, landing on the left foot, with the right off the floor, which closes afterward in third.

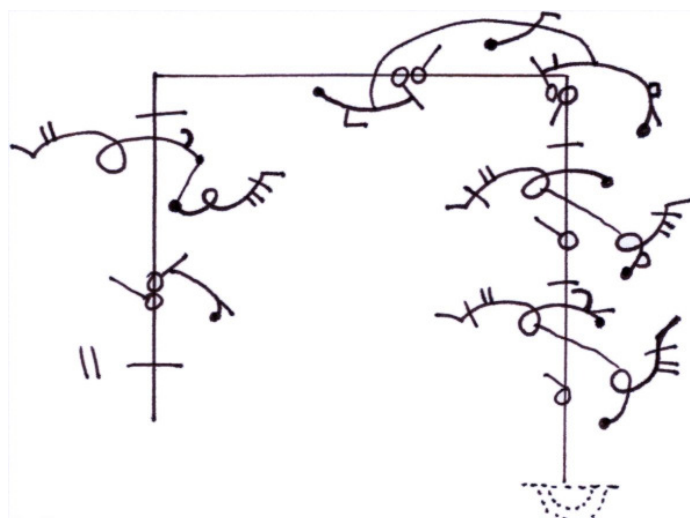


Figure 2:  
Excerpt from a female solo,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. 15

In the same illustration we see a *tordichamp in aria saltato* in the two previous bars,<sup>12</sup> the round line describing the *tordichamp*, the off-the-floor sign toward the end of each step, and the jumping sign. However, reconstructing this step sequence leads to problems: if we allow the right leg to do all the *tours de jambe*, and if we follow the body-turning signs, we finish with the right leg crossed toward the left side. How can the right leg then begin the next *pas de bourrèe*? From the back to the front or from the right to the left, depending on the orientation? As I mentioned above, Ferrère's notation is not always very precise, but we suggest that the dancer step on the right foot at the end of the first bar and do the second step with the left foot, then step on it at the end, which would allow the right foot to perform the *pas de bourrèe* correctly. Although the two bars seem to indicate a repetition, since they look similar, this is hardly possible because of the body-turning signs, and signs that would enable a repetition are missing. Reconstructing these dances is still a work in progress.

We also find signs that are easier to execute: going back to Figure 1 from *Le Peintre amoureux de son Modèle*, we find in the penultimate bar a *passo scacciato a quattro passi*<sup>13</sup> whose verbal translation could be Ferrère's *chassé à 4 pas*.<sup>14</sup> The first step is the left chasing underneath, the second the right going open to second position, the third the left crossing over, and the fourth the right opening to second. Figure 3 is the part that comes immediately before Figure 1: she is mad at him and chases him, but he finally escapes into the wings, "Il s'en va,"<sup>15</sup> and she remains on stage, angry because she could not catch him. Both have a *chassé à 4 pas* as their very first step, then she has a *chassé semplice girando*.<sup>16</sup> *semplice* because it has only three steps, and *girando* because we find a turning sign on the third step, which is the one that chased first and finishes before the other; the notation is thus similar to Magri's description. In bar 3, both dancers again have the same step, a *chassé a quattro passi girando*. We clearly see the four steps with the turn

on the third. It is remarkable that the turn is not synchronized with the chasing; we clearly have two different actions: one is chasing and the following one is turning, everything being done in one bar.

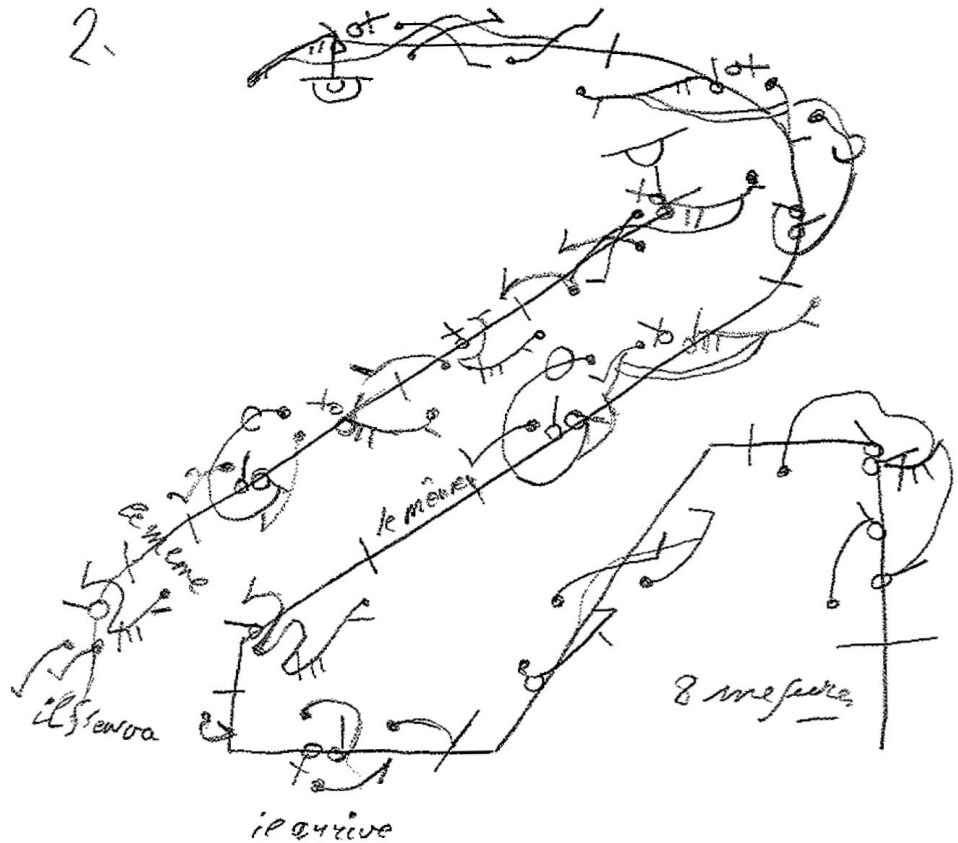


Figure 3:  
Excerpt from a duet,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. 5

Figure 4 is likewise from *Le Peintre amoureux de son Modèle*; it is the end of the *pas de deux* on page 9: I have only reproduced the man's part. He begins with a *passo tronco a due movimenti*<sup>17</sup> to prepare a *capriola sesta intrecciata*,<sup>18</sup> which is a *coupé* preparing an *entrechat 6*.

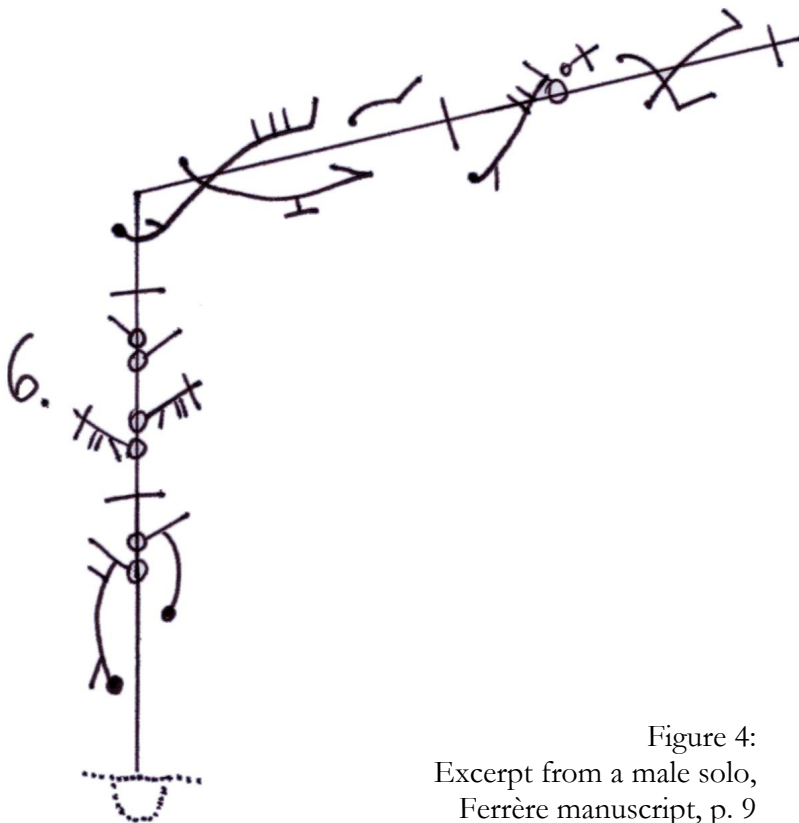


Figure 4:  
Excerpt from a male solo,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. 9

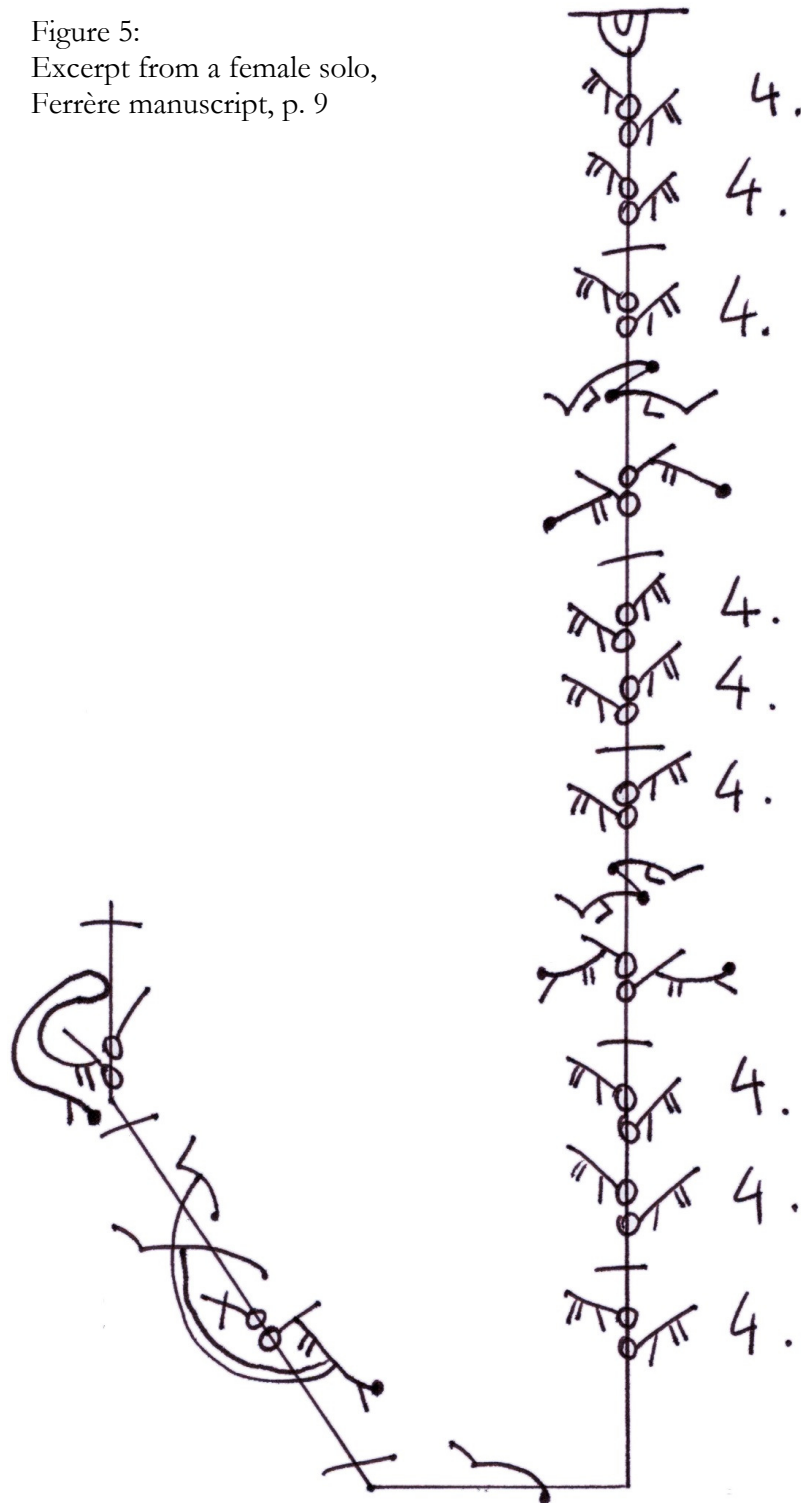
Ferrère often uses an Arabic numeral to specify the interweavings when going from a closed position to another closed position, which is described by Magri as *capriola alla francese*.<sup>19</sup> Of course this system synthesizes the notation and is a great help for the reader. Then we find what I believe to be a *glissade a 3 pas*.<sup>20</sup> Ferrère, for example, uses this term in a group dance from *La Réjouissance villageoise* (The Village Celebration). Magri only describes a *glissata fiancheggiata* finishing in fifth position,<sup>21</sup> but if we follow the counting system proposed for the *chassés*, we have the first



step being a jump aside, the second sliding in fifth, and the third opening to second. Although we have here a *cabriole* sign instead of the jump sign that we find in similar places in the manuscript. I would not say that the *glissade à 3 pas* is a French step unknown to Magri, but rather I call to mind the fact that Magri is not comprehensive in his descriptions, and that he writes that many dancers have invented steps that he would not have occasion to talk about. The last step notated in Figure 4 is a *chassé simple* or *chassé à 3 pas*.

To illustrate the Ferrère system of writing *entrechats*, I would like to continue with an excerpt from the female solo in the same pantomime ballet. In Figure 5 we find a series of *entrechats 4* that can easily be recognized from the repetition of the number 4. They are interspersed with *passi sfuggiti*<sup>22</sup> or *échappés*: from a closed position, the dancer falls into second position and then jumps back to the alternate closed position. The last element to be identified,<sup>23</sup> following the last *capriola quarta intrecciata*, is *passo staccato*. Also called *degagé*, this step is a linking step that helps prepare the next one. It is often found in the dances notated by Ferrère. Finally, we have *chassé simple*, and then, as I understand Magri's descriptions, a *capriola quarta intrecciata*, but taken with one leg only: it looks like an *assemble*,<sup>24</sup> since the final position is closed but the interweaving puts it in the *capriole*, i.e., second, front, second, back.

Figure 5:  
Excerpt from a female solo,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. 9



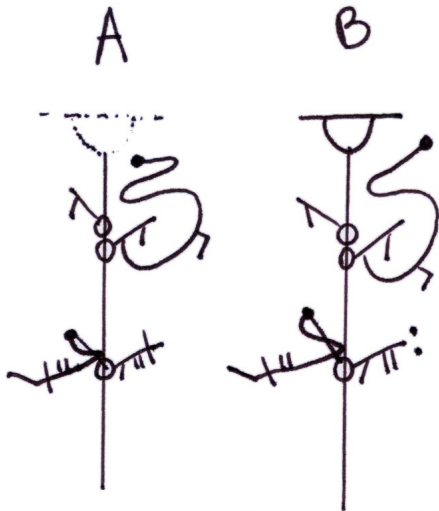


Figure 6: Excerpts from a male solo, Ferrère manuscript, p. 8, and a duet, p. 9

The Ferrère manuscript also offers variations inside the same step family, for example, the *passo di sissone battuto*<sup>25</sup> can be done either with a full jump or with a jump on the toes. Example A is done with a full jump in which both feet get off the ground, while Example B is done jumping on point marked by the double point toward the end of the foot position. In both cases, bringing the feet together before opening is marked by a falling sign, and not a jumping sign. This is entirely in accordance with Magri's explanation of *passo di sissone semplice*.<sup>26</sup> Also remarkable is that in the late 18th century the *pas de sissone* still requires two movements, with the first being a kind of falling *assemblé*.

Another step can be seen in the *Balet final*<sup>27</sup> from the Ferrère manuscript, which I would call *balotté*<sup>28</sup> after Sandra Noll Hammond's article.<sup>29</sup> Magri's explanation of the step is very succinct, and it is thanks to other sources that we can assume this link. In Figure 7, we see the first leg going out before the first *jetté*,<sup>30</sup> ending underneath on very high half-point and taking the other leg out. Then comes the second jump, apparently without a very high half-point, and the third, which is similar to first but without taking out the freed right leg: it will in any case come out slightly to execute the *assemblé*. This example is rather easy to deal with, although the two sources alone would not be sufficient to draw conclusions about the link; the performer-reconstructor still has problems with a lot of other examples from the Ferrère manuscript, because the link to Magri's sometimes very unclear explanations or to other earlier choreographic sources is not always so obvious. Anyway every thoughtful attempt at reconstruction increases our collective understanding.

Figure 7:  
Excerpt from a duet,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. A2

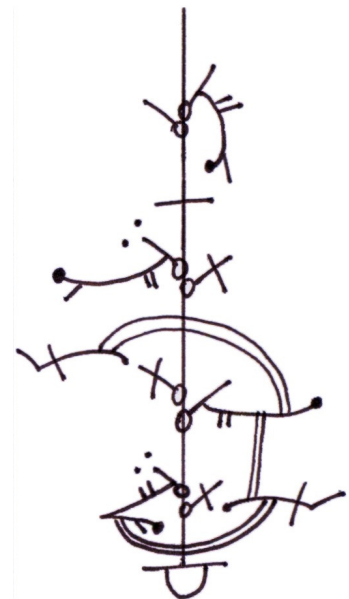


Figure 8 displays a combination of steps that have already been discussed: *coupé*, *entrechat 6*, *degagé*, *chassé en tournant*, and *chassé à 3 pas*. This sequence is found in the four last bars. The 6 for the *entrechat* is lacking, but in view of the preparatory step and the fact that the *entrechat* ends in the alternate foot position, I tend to think that it could not be otherwise. And now let us consider the first step of this combination: it is obviously a *cabriole* because of the triple sign toward the end, and one leg finishes off the floor, although the sign could have been on the foot position sign. We also find a double point on the foot

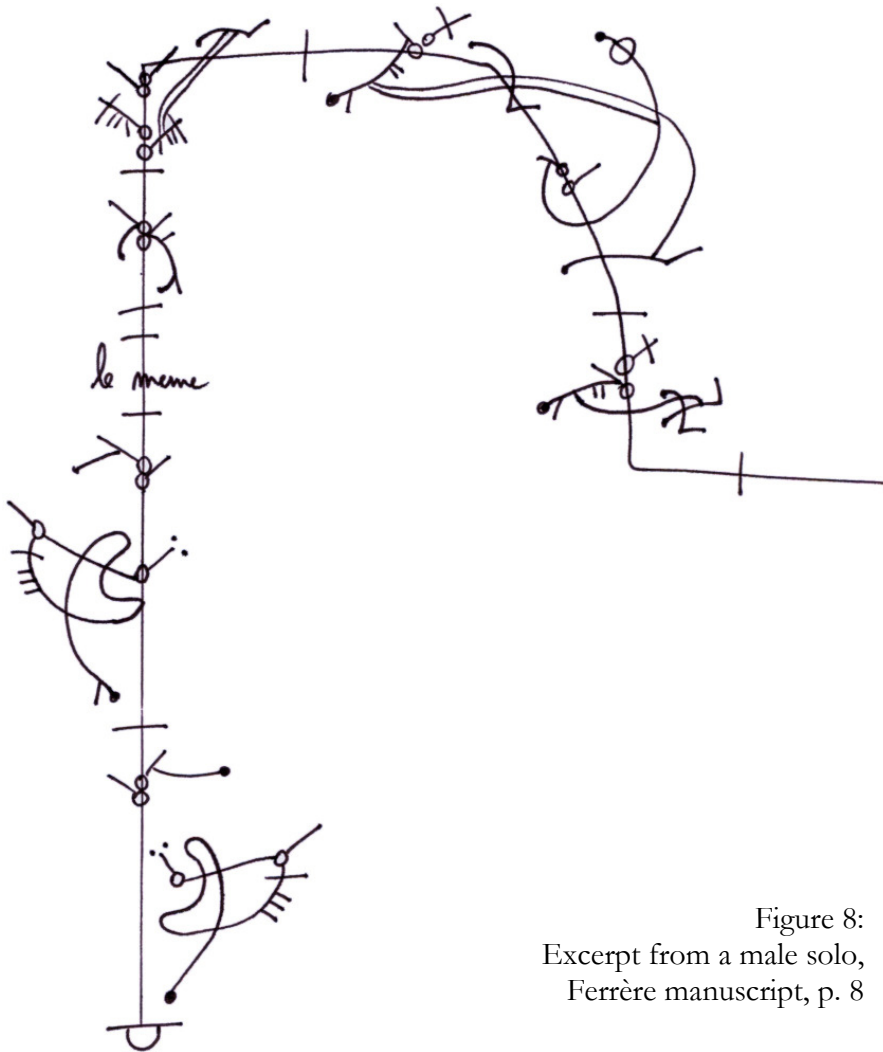


Figure 8:  
Excerpt from a male solo,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. 8

position sign near the center line, meaning a body standing on point, but in a *capriola* we should have both feet off the floor due to jumping. I do not have an unambiguous solution to propose today, but considering the interweaving with an open ending position, we might assume it to be a *capriola quinta intrecciata*.<sup>31</sup> Coming out of a closed position, this *capriola* ends in an open position after going through second, fifth front, second, fifth back, and second wide open: count 5 is reached ... and maybe done on top of the foot.

In his chapter on *capriole*, Magri insists on distinguishing the closed position called French from the open position called Italian. We have already discussed a few French *capriole intrecciata*, so now I would like to look at examples with more Italian positions. Figure 9 shows a combination with a very interesting step after the *mezzo sfuggito*.<sup>32</sup> it has two jumping signs, but is not an exception since it also occurs in other parts of the manuscript. Jumping twice makes it obvious that you somehow have to land in between to execute the second jump. There is also an off-the-floor sign between the two, and we can then imagine that everything is done on

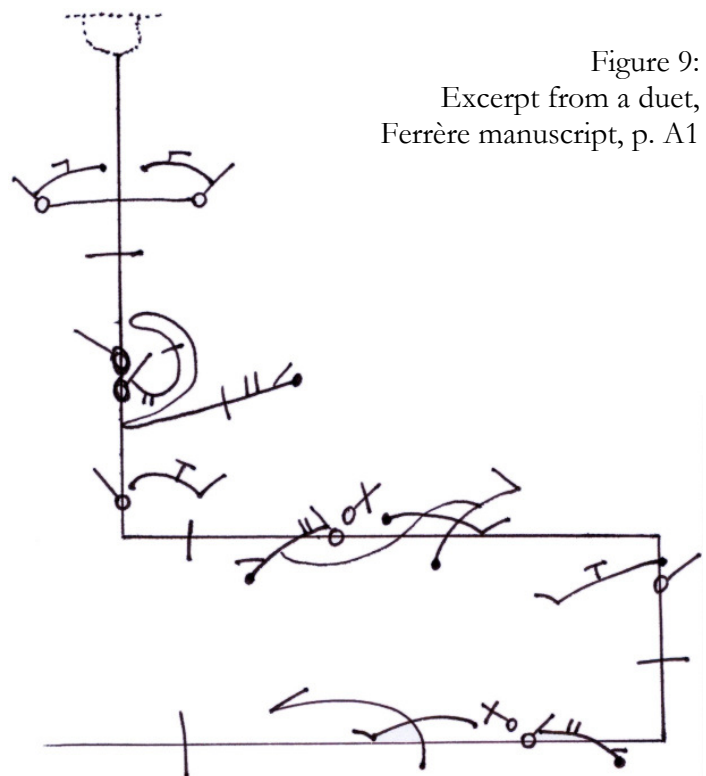


Figure 9:  
Excerpt from a duet,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. A1

the same standing leg. Given Magri's description of *battimenti sul collo del piede*<sup>33</sup> and the speed at which they have to be done (§ Allegretto), I suggest that the first beat to the back is done in the air when closing from second, with stretched foot along the ankle, the second to the front while standing on the left leg that is preparing the second jump, during which the third beat happens closing on both feet. Next come a *dégagé* sliding and *chassé semplice*, both repeated to the other side. As far as a designation for this mysterious step is concerned, we could imagine that it is a *battimento sul collo del piede saltato* joined to an *assemble*. Magri might have considered it a *capriola quinta* taken from an open Italian position and finished in a French closed position. I do not consider any of these solutions to be satisfying, but maybe time will tell.

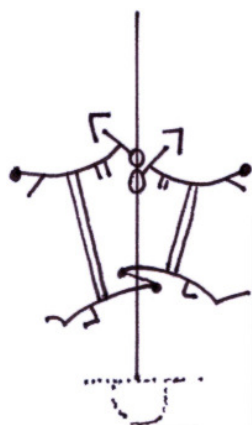


Figure 10:  
Excerpt from male solo,  
Ferrère manuscript, p. 6

Another variation mentioned by Magri in his treatise is the *ritirata capriola*. By this he means that, in general, all jumps and *capriole* can be done with drawn-up legs. Figure 10 gives a possible example of *passo sfuggito ritirato*.<sup>34</sup> The two little square angles on top of the foot position signs may well mean with knees drawn up, but this is still a hypothesis.<sup>35</sup> The dancer falls into a second position bent and while jumping he draws up his knees, closing the feet and stretching the legs before landing. This kind of Italianate step is not explained by Feuillet in his *Chorégraphie*, and the line showing the movement does not reveal if the knees are stretched or drawn up, but Ferrère probably tried to adapt the system to his practice.

Along these lines, I am currently experimenting with a way of performing *capriole* and interweaving steps with voluntarily bent knees that could look more Italian or grotesque. For smaller jumps that according to Ferrère usually have to be done quickly, I would tend to favor the knees not going up too much, but interweaving bent: the lower legs then cross in the air, as in Figure 11, called *Vidali* by Lambranzi. We have to be careful with this figure, because we do not know if it is rising or landing, or what its maximum height might be. This particular page is even evoking one of the rare serious dances in the book, but interpreting Lambranzi is tricky, so we should be cautious. I consider this image as an inspiration for experimenting with reconstructions.

To conclude, I should reiterate that the whole process is an ongoing experiment in how to interpret these dances. Magri's treatise and the Ferrère manuscript still remain the two principal sources for the reconstruction of theatrical dances and their techniques in the late 18th century: both authors were very active in their home countries and abroad, probably without ever having met. Yet, their practice and knowledge of dance helps us ascertain some links and nuances between French and Italian styles: this paper is a part of an experimental research that is still in progress.



The image is a composite illustration from a dance manual. At the top, three staves of musical notation are shown in a treble clef with a common time signature (C). The first staff is labeled 'Vidali'. Below the music is a large illustration of a male dancer in 18th-century attire, including a powdered wig, a long coat with wide sleeves, and breeches. He is captured in a dynamic dance pose with his arms extended and legs crossed. Below the dancer is a dark, horizontal brushstroke. At the bottom, a scene depicts two musicians: a violinist on the left and a double bassist on the right, both seated on stools. Between them is a large, rectangular text box containing German instructions for the dance.

*Vidali.*

Diese Figur zeigt hauptsächlich an, wie man eine Capriol gerade in die Höhe machen soll. Darauf folgen pas-graves, boures, tumbes, Siffoni, Ballansemens, Rigaudons, und pas de Diacona, so lang, bis die Aria 2. mahl abge spielt werden.

Figure 11: *Vidali* from LAMBRANZI: *Neue und curieuse theatralische Tanz-Schul*, 2nd part, p. 1

## Notes

- 1 Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra de Paris, Ms Rés 68.
- 2 FEUILLET: *Chorégraphie*.
- 3 I read a more detailed paper on the subject during the conference *Diversité et modernité du théâtre au XVIIIe siècle*, organized in Québec in October 2011 by Université Laval. The editor Guillemette Marot-Mercier is preparing the publication.
- 4 *The Grotesque Dancer* (HARRIS-WARRICK/BROWN), p. 173.
- 5 MAGRI: *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo*, p. 124.
- 6 Ibid., p. 41.
- 7 See the quote, below, by Louis de Cahusac from DIDEROT/ D'ALEMBERT: *Encyclopédie*.
- 8 *The Painter in Love with his Model*, Ms Rés 68 (see note 1), p. 5.
- 9 DIDEROT/ D'ALEMBERT: *Encyclopédie*, vol. 7, p. 515.
- 10 MAGRI: *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo*, p. 63. Also called *croucè*, or *pas de bourrèe sopra e sotto girando*.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., p. 122.
- 13 Ibid., p. 76.
- 14 Ms Rés 68 (see note 1), p. 1.
- 15 "He goes away." This expression occurs many times throughout the manuscript to indicate that the dancer is to disappear from the stage, going off into the wings.
- 16 MAGRI: *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo*, p. 74.
- 17 Ibid., p. 44.
- 18 Ibid., p. 119.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ms Rés 68 (see note 1), p. 26.
- 21 MAGRI: *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo*, p. 81.
- 22 Ibid., p. 58.
- 23 Ibid., p. 33.
- 24 Ibid., p. 82.
- 25 Ibid., p. 131.
- 26 Ibid., p. 69.
- 27 *Final Ballet*, Ms Rés 68 (see note 1), p. A2 (for pagination, see JABLONKA: *Restituer les danses du Manuscrit 'Ferrère'*).
- 28 MAGRI: *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo*, p. 84.
- 29 HAMMOND, SANDRA NOLL: *International Elements of Dance Training*, p. 137.
- 30 MAGRI: *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo*, p. 45.
- 31 Ibid., p. 119.
- 32 Ibid., p. 59.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 39f.
- 34 *Le Peintre amoureux de son Modele*, Ms Rés 68 (see note 1), p. 6.
- 35 See note 27.