

Contrary Body Movement

by Barbara & Jim German

Contrary Body Movement or CBM is always a topic of interest. Barbara and I have discussed the concept of CBM in past articles but not in great detail. After one of our articles was published, we had the pleasure of listening to Mr. Richard Lamberty discuss CBM and CBMP. Mr. Lamberty's knowledge of dance and presentation of material was outstanding and Barbara and I knew we had to publish his thoughts for you, the DRDC membership. Richard has kindly provided us with a written copy of his work. We are presenting below his material on CBM, which is a part of a large body of work he prepared. We thank Richard for sharing his material. So without further delay, may we present a discussion of CBM by Mr. Richard Lamberty:

One of the most fundamental, and most misunderstood, concepts in the ballroom dances is Contrary Body Movement (CBM). And as it would happen, this topic has come up in my teaching and in some discussion groups several times in the past few months.

CBM is actually a really simple and very natural thing. Imagine taking a jolly stroll down the street. Bright sunny day. Warm breeze. Good company. It is very natural for the arms to swing along with the body as you walk. You don't even think about the fact that, as you step forward on your left leg, your right arm and side swing forward to counterbalance your own movement. And on the next step, with your right foot, your left arm and side swing forward.

To understand how fundamental this really is, try taking a few steps where you swing the *same* arm and side forward with the leg that is stepping. I call this a Frankenstein Walk. There are very few times in real life where we move in this manner.

But the opposite side swinging is something that happens all the time.

And it is this opposite side swinging with the stepping foot that in the dance world we call Contrary Body Movement.

Sounds so simple . . . I should probably quit while I'm ahead.

Unfortunately, that is NOT what we actually do in dancing. Generally, we swing one side through an entire (three-step) figure. That means, for most basic figures, that the second step is taken such that the SAME foot and side are swinging. In other words, with a Frankenstein-Walk action.

Let's take a simple example (from the leader's point of view): Standing in CP facing DLW, a Maneuver in Waltz: (Forward R (between partner's feet) commence RF turn, side L, close R to L to end in CP facing RLOD;)

In the ballroom technique book this figure is given as having CBM on step 1. And it is easy to feel that the man's left side should swing forward as he takes that forward step on his right foot. But the swing of the left side does not end after the first step. It continues all the way through

the figure. Clearly this continuation of swing is NOT CBM, but it started as CBM and needs to continue without disruption in order for the movement to feel flowing and easy.

Again, not a hard thing to imagine, and even feel under the right circumstances.

The problems start to arise when we "manufacture" this contrary body movement instead of allowing it to occur as a natural consequence of our movement.

The most common problem is the force of the swinging side causing the moving foot to go off track. Rather than being a true forward (or backward) step, the foot either drifts in the direction of the swing, or worse (and more commonly) moves opposite to the swing causing the stepping leg to cut across the center line of the body. The feeling is one of being twisted up.

CBM should never cause the stepping foot to go off its path. Never.

Again, take a few strolling steps and see if your natural CBM causes your feet to flail around making you walk like a drunken sailor (no offense to our men and women in the Navy). And then force that swinging action and feel the reaction of your legs as you walk. Flail is not such a bad word.

CBM in our dancing should not cause this flailing effect. The legs should always have a clear path of movement.

Another problem with CBM is WHEN it occurs. When we just walk, a nice gentle CBM occurs naturally as the step is taken. In our dancing we must apply CBM when it will aid the overall movement of the figure.

For reverse (left) turning actions, CBM should generally be applied AFTER the initiating step has been taken. First direct the step, then swing the opposite side as a continuation of the directed forward (or backward) movement. And by releasing that swinging side fully, you can easily generate the second step of the figure with a natural flowing feeling.

For natural (right) turning actions, CBM should generally be initiated BEFORE the initiating step has been taken. The feeling of CBM will increase as the first step of the figure is taken. And the continuation of the swing of that side will enhance the second step of the figure.

WARNING WILL ROBINSON! DANGER! DANGER! DANGER! It is very easy to allow this early swinging of the side to cause the stepping foot to go off track. Great care must be taken to ensure that the initiating step remains clearly directed.

Now, the obvious question to raise is why this difference between natural and reverse turns? And the obvious answer is PHYSICS. The partner stands on the right side, not directly in front of you. Your hips align to partner's hips in a particular way. That alignment makes the left side feel more open than the right side.

If you applied CBM early when stepping forward into a reverse turning action, you are essentially directing your partner into your own path, thus cutting off movement. In natural turns, your partner is already partially blocking your path. By applying CBM early, you help to clear the path so that a freer step is possible.

Once you start having a clear feeling of CBM in your dancing, a new problem can arise. Like so many things in life, we might decide that if a little is good, then a lot must be better. And like an awful lot of the really fun things in life, a little IS good, and a lot is simply too much.

Remember, CBM is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Manufacturing it throws off the natural balance.

Rules. Rules. Rules. Do this. Don't do that. Early here. Late there. I guess you could say that it is all true, and all false. It is possible to dance with no CBM at all. And it is equally possible to dance with all the CBM your body can generate. Late CBM on reverse turns. Early on natural turns. **Of course** there are exceptions. But generalities help us to think about and understand the concepts.