

Do You Know...

...a Significant Way to Improve Your Dancing?

By Kaye West

According to Irv and Betty Easterday, early round dance pioneers, the best way to elevate one's dancing is to improve Closed Dance Position. And the number one indicator of an effective Closed Position is that dancers' bodies have contact with the partner so that there is consistently no space between them.

To achieve that, dancers must know (1) how to position their bodies plus (2) a technique to eliminate a "bouncing" sensation of bodies touching intermittently, interrupted with "space gaps."

POSITIONING THE BODIES

There is general consensus regarding the vertical position where dancers' bodies should touch: at their "right side" since they stand offset so their right foot is between partner's feet so they have a clear path to extend the leg forward and to avoid stepping on the partner's foot. Caution is warranted, however, to realize that what is meant by the "right side" is not the "true" right side which separates the front of the body from the back. Rather, it is a line *midway* between the "true" right side and the navel, which means in alignment with a man's suspender and a lady's bra strap.

While there has been agreement on that vertical position, back in the '90s there was a debate concerning which part of the body should touch. Many thought it would be below the waist, nearer the hips, while others believed it should be near the ribs. The favored position below the waist has two problems: (1) ladies tend to lean back so upper bodies have no contact and to keep their heads apart, and (2) the length of a dancer's backward step is limited to the distance from her hip bone to the toe when the distance could be much longer (hence more desirable) when the contact point is the ribs.

An emerging consensus resolved the controversy: the contact point can fluctuate between the ribs and the hips as needed, depending upon what the dancers are doing, but they always have some contact.

Next, dancers should realize that they must make their bodies fit together as closely as possible. While this can depend upon the respective shapes of the dancers, when both have normal girth they can think of each partner making the front of their bodies as flat vertically as possible, as Carol Goss advised me years ago. That means that when standing straight (perpendicular to the floor), each should have as flat a vertical plane from the bust to the knees as possible.

While that is reasonably easy for males when they stand up straight, it is more difficult for ladies who have a typical "hour glass" figure or if they routinely stand straight and "pull their stomach in" which often is translated that the lower pelvis (and consequently their shoulders) moves *forward*, creating an accentuated concave curve of their body instead of flattening it.

The remedy for ladies is to pull the *lower pelvis* back (instead of forward) which consequently pulls the shoulders back and results in moving the waist forward, creating as straight a vertical front as possible and also separates their heads. Using this posture, which some have described as a "banana shape," makes all the difference!

AVOIDING INTERMITTENT BUMPING

When I first attempted to stand close to my partner, I would momentarily have contact with my partner and then lose it as we moved; this happened repeatedly until I learned how to solve this problem.

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The problem occurs when the person moving backward simply takes weight when she believes she should. If their steps are not the same length, they easily can take weight with space between their bodies, which they must regain and then step again. Just how can they be sure to take the same size of steps? The resolving technique may be called “differentiated timing” which means that the dancers do not take weight at precisely the same instant, though there is just an ever-so-slight difference in when they step.

What must occur is that the dancer moving backward must position the leg and foot *without weight*, and then wait *for the dancer moving forward to move his body forward which concurrently moves her body above her foot* (which “places the partner” on her foot as her body moves backwards). Some teachers will say that the partner moving forward “drives” the figure. Most likely they are alluding to this concept. So on those occasions when the **Lead** is moving backwards, he must wait to be put on his foot.

It does take practice to achieve a helpful posture consistently and to train oneself to wait for the partner to “put you on your foot,” but the results are most gratifying and worth the effort!