

IT'S MORE THAN JUST BANJO Making Sense of CBM and CBMP

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The foundation of good dancing is natural movement. How you move is governed by certain physical laws, as they apply to the human body. Apply those laws properly and dancing becomes more enjoyable and comfortable, not to mention more beautiful.

The concepts of CBM and CBMP are important in making that happen. Although the terms sound alike, are often confused, and often occur together or one right after the other, they are not even distant cousins in application. CBMP is a placement of the moving foot on or across the line of the previous step, toward the opposite side of the body, creating a thinner profile. CBM is a signal transmitted through the body of the leader to the partner that a turn is being initiated.

In application, all turns and turning actions should be initiated by CBM. Almost all steps taken from banjo will be in CBMP, as well as the “through step” in semi-closed position. A turn initiated from banjo will have both CBM and CBMP.

So what exactly do the terms mean?

CBMP stands for “contra (or contrary) body movement position.” As the term implies, it is a position caused by a foot placement.

CBM stands for “contra (or contrary) body movement.” It has nothing to do with placing the feet but results from a body action, an internal application of power within the body to initiate turn.

I. CBMP

CBMP is defined in the positions section of our phase manual as :

“The placing of the stepping foot, forward or back, onto or across the line of the other foot, giving the appearance of contra body movement having been used, but without turning the body, i.e, like in the last step of feather.”

Think of it as walking into a “slim line,” or a “slicing” position.

The purpose of CBMP is to allow the partners’ bodies to retain a good dance frame together and still have room to swing their legs in certain movements that otherwise would be awkward. Without it, banjo would be hip to hip. (Note: There may be times, in some rhythms, when “hip to hip” is the desired position, but generally not in the smooth rhythms in our manual.)

All dancing starts with a good frame, with the partners in relationship to feel connected and dancing together. This means that the partners’ centers are directed toward each other, even if they are not in body contact. When centers are not together, there is tension, a pushing & pulling, and the individuals will be off balance.

Steps taken from outside partner/banjo generally have to be in CBMP to keep a dance frame. (An exception to the rule: step 3 of a fishtail.)

Some steps done from closed position use CBMP, such as a contra check and normal left foot forward on walking steps in tango.

In semi-closed position, CBMP allows partners to keep their dance frame as they step through. The first step forward with lead feet is usually OK, but body position will fall apart, going hip to hip on the second (through) step, without CBMP. Why? Because partners turn their centers away from each other to create a path to get through. With CBMP, they step forward with a “crossing” step that allows them to maintain their frame.

II. CBM

CBM is defined in the general terms section of our phase manual as:

“The moving of the opposite side of the body toward the stepping foot either forward or backward.”

How do you do it?

This movement is a signal from the leader to the partner that a turn is coming. It begins with an impulse, energy generated by a flexing of the feet and knees to create pressure into the floor and a turning of the torso (hips, body, shoulders as a unit) toward the direction of the moving leg (the direction of the turn). The shoulders should never rotate separately from the hips and body, and there should be no twisting at the waist. Think about the teacup and saucer: When the saucer moves, the teacup goes along with it, otherwise the tea spills.

What it isn't

CBM initiates a progression of body movement, not a twist. There has to be movement after the application of power.

If you don't use your base to initiate the power, you have to use your arms to direct the partner, and that creates tension in the shoulders (as well as between the partners).

How much "impulse?"

This depends on the amount of rotation needed, i.e., what kind of turn you are initiating. The amount of impulse needed to direct the partner will be minimal in initiating a feather step, greater for a curve or turning figure, and powerful to initiate a pivot.

III. Why do you need to know this?

A. Because you want to do it correctly for your partner and yourself.

We began by saying that applying these mechanical concepts will make dancing easier, more comfortable and therefore more enjoyable for you as a dancer.

As a teacher, you need to know what is right to be able to correct a problem when the student is ready.

B. Because students should learn from the start how to move correctly.

We know some people will come into a basic round dance class and be happy staying with easy level rounds where not as much precision is needed to maintain dance frame. We know we don't want to overwhelm them with theory and concepts. We know that beginning dancers should immediately feel some accomplishment and have fun.

But, introducing the concepts—without the technical names—will increase the comfort level for new dancers and give them some basics they will not have to unlearn. They can layer on from that basis.

IV. When do you start using this?

From the beginning. The "hip to hip" style of banjo should not be thought of as a beginners version of CBMP, while "outside partner" (as it is also called) or "contra banjo" (as it was once called in round dancing to distinguish it from hip to hip) as the more advanced version. Banjo should be taught as "hip in front of hip" from the start.

You don't want to overwhelm new students but they should learn from day one:

- 1) how to move (body initiates movement, not feet stepping out first)
- 2) that CP is not nose to nose and sidecar and banjo are not hip to hip
- 3) the elements of a dance frame, even if they stand miles apart.

When teaching waltz turns, start with gradual turns and tell men to keep their partners in front of them. A form of CBM will happen naturally. The dancers won't be focused on their feet or the floor, and relating to the partner will start to become habit.

As new dancers add on refinements such as rise and fall and close body contact, they will not have to relearn how to move.

Note: We want to thank our professional coaches for their contributions to our understanding of these concepts: *Sherry A. Novak*, former ISTD (now DVIDA) examiner, trainer for professional certification and international judge, and *Dennis Lyle*, owner of Imperial Ballroom in Fullerton, CA, and a former Fred Astaire national professional champion.