

Smooth Rhythm Points of Contact

Chris & Terri Cantrell

The following ideas have been collected in order to assist you in comfortable dancing and are not meant to be absolutes. The body alignment for closed position in the modern rhythms (waltzes, foxtrot, & quickstep) is all-important in terms of dancer's comfort & confidence. It also extends to their ability to execute some figures. This position involves contact between the partners at 5 points.

The smooth rhythms include waltz, foxtrot, quickstep, Viennese waltz, and international tango. We will save international tango for a later time since it has several unique characteristics that are not shared with the other smooth rhythms. Let us start with the basics of the closed position hold.

FIVE POINTS OF CONTACT OF CLOSED POSITION:

During this entire exercise keep shoulders relaxed, stand erect, and remember to breathe.

Contact Point #1: The first point of contact is the man's left and the woman's right hand. The man's left arm should be held up with the elbow bent fairly sharply somewhat towards the floor. His left wrist should bend slightly to the left side with his palm facing the woman and thumb up. This will cause his fingers to be parallel to the floor. The woman should approach the man with her palm facing his and her fingers up and her elbow relaxed. Her hand should contact the man's at the fleshy part below their thumbs. She should then gently fold/cup her fingers over the man's hand between his thumb and forefinger. The man should gently wrap his fingers around the woman's hand. He can optionally tuck his last two fingers into his own palm. Partners can keep their thumbs up and parallel or may gently fold them over being careful not to clamp down on their partner's hand. The woman's wrist will break slightly. The man's left hand is held between the woman's cheek and chin level, adjust the level so that both partners can keep their arm slightly bent. If the woman is shorter than the man, the hands will be slightly lower. If the man is shorter than the woman, the hands will be slightly higher.

Contact Point #2: The second point of contact is the man's right forearm & the woman's left upper arm. With the woman's left arm held to the side and slightly forward, man should place his right lower forearm under the woman's upper arm near her armpit. He should apply slight upward pressure to her upper arm and the woman in response should apply slight downward pressure. Man's right hand is not yet touching the woman's back, but his fingers and thumb should be together and his wrist should bend slightly downward. The woman should stand slightly to the man's right side and both partners should turn slightly right face relative to their feet. This keeps the right side of each person off their partner. Using only these first two points, it is possible for a couple to dance many of the easier dance figures in the modern rhythms. This is a useful exercise for you and your dancers.

Contact Point #3: Woman's left hand. The woman places her left forearm and hand on top of the man's right arm. She should gently hold his biceps with her thumb and middle finger, being careful not to clamp down. Her hand should be turned slightly outward from the wrist.

Contact Point #4: Folding of the man's right hand. The man then folds his right hand around to gently touch the woman's left shoulder blade. Be very careful not to use this point to squeeze the woman, but rather it should be a gentle point of contact. Remember both of you need to be able to breath freely and be on your own feet, not leaning on or dragging your partner. If points 2, 3, and 4 have been made properly and if the partners are holding their arms up, then no light will be seen between the man's right arm and the woman's left arm, excluding elbow overlap due to height differences of the partners.

Contact Point #5: The last point of contact is a gentle connection between the right side of the lower rib cages of each partner. Keep in mind the slight right face turn mentioned in point 2, in order to keep your right side off of your partner. The woman should not feel like the man is leading her with his belly, rather she should feel the lead coming from his upper legs up and under her body. This point is the one most often loosened if the partners are substantially different heights. To practice this point of contact try blowing up a small balloon to about four inches

in diameter or smaller and place it at this point of contact. You may need to get the balloon slightly wet to cut down on the static electricity. Dance a few simple figures starting with linear figures (forward waltz, closed change, three step...) and progress to simple turning figures (left & right turns...), and then try a few figures that change from closed position to banjo, sidecar, contrary body movement position (CBMP) and/or semi positions and visa versa (feather, whisk, hover...).

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