

Filipino Cotillion Traditions

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Birthdays are special, especially when they signify the celebrant's entrance into adulthood.

A Cotillion in the Philippines is celebrated when a young girl turns 18 years of age and she officially becomes a young woman, called a "debutante." Cotillions are celebrated in the Philippines mostly by those in high society, and much time and money are spent on their planning. Families of Filipino descent have brought the tradition with them to the United States.

1. History

- The Filipino Cotillion tradition is a throwback to the Spanish colonization era (between 1521 and 1898) and is popular among the upper class of Philippine society. Historically, the Cotillion was used by the girl's family particularly to introduce her to young men of marrying age who belonged to the same upper-class society. In the U.S. between the mid-1960s through the early 1990s, group cotillions became popular. Group cotillions allowed families who would otherwise not be able to afford the expenses associated with this celebration to host them.

Preparation

- Cotillions and wedding preparations are similar in the time and money spent. For some, it could take months to prepare for this celebration. Also, the amount of money may become exorbitant, considering the girl's family has to pay for everything, including the debutante's court's (consisting of nine couples) outfits, the place where the celebration will take place, food, photographer/videographer, a band or DJ, decorations and guest presents.

The Big Day

- During the celebration, friends and family of the debutante present her with 18 candles. Eighteen male friends and family members also each give her a rose while she dances with him. The highlight of the night is a presentation by the debutante and her court of the "Cotillion de Honor," which is a choreographed dance that they have practiced to perfection, usually either a waltz or the Filipino traditional dance known as "Rigodon."

Variations

- Variations to the Cotillion have been added or have replaced some of its traditional aspects. For example, instead of receiving 18 roses, some debutantes receive 18 symbolic gifts or another type of flower, such as calla lilies or tulips. The traditional dances may also be replaced with a hip-hop dance routine, which is very popular among young Filipinos.

Significance in the U.S.

- Most immigrants go through hardships before they become established in the U.S. Cotillions are celebrated by many Filipinos not only for their daughters' birthdays but as celebrations of their lives in their adopted country. It is popular in areas of the U.S. where Filipinos flourish, such as California, Arizona and New Jersey.

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