

Modern Day Vals

You just wanna have fun with the waltz

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Use dance choreography and the quince waltz to express the heart and soul of your quinceanera.

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"I don't care how ghetto or princess she wants to be, every girl wants to feel special the day of her quince. It's supposed to represent you and your style," says Erika "Chucke" Peña, who has studied dance in college and danced off-Broadway in New York before continuing her late father's quince company in Houston, Texas.

Chucke saw that courts were easily bored with music they didn't listen to and learning moves they didn't like. So, she combined today's music with yesterday's waltz movements. "How about a waltz that they would be interested in, and actually enjoy doing, and actually appreciate? Because the waltz is a tradition that you should keep alive," explained "Chucke", known by her street name she earned as a break dancer.

Some things never change

In her modern waltz, the ladies are still ladies, the boys are still gentlemen, and the courts still curtsy and bow. But the 15 couples in the court dance to contemporary music, like the remix of an Orishas song on the Havana Nights movie soundtrack. The Cuban hip-hop/rap group may not play a classic Blue Danube, but it still inspires a great dance. Peña mixes a little cha-cha-cha and hip-hop with the traditional, Cinderella-like waltz movements, like open arms, big legs and spinning and switching partners.

You can always improvise

In addition to waltzing to contemporary music, a quinceañera can add acting to the dance to modernize it, according to Manuel Armando Bravo, choreographer of Maestros de Vals in Houston, Texas. For example, he has choreographed a skit and waltz between the father and the small quinceañera.

"The vals is an opportunity to be creative", recommends Bravo, a native of Puebla, Mexico. Laura Isensee is a staff reporter for RUMBO de Houston, part of a network of Spanish-language daily newspapers in Texas. A native of Houston, Ms. Isensee graduated from the University of Texas at Austin where she studied Spanish and wrote for The Daily Texan. Photography courtesy of: Chucke's Choreography; Manuel Armando Bravo. Sources for this story include: Chucke's Choreography; Manuel Armando Bravo.

Other choreography resources: MarÃ-a Piña, 713-366-9136; Imperio Coreografos, Javier Maqueda 713-926-2989.

