

OBAMA BIDEN  
ARE YOU IN?  
PAID FOR BY OBAMA VICTORY FUND 2012

Advertisement

FIELD NOTES

Shock and Aww!



Tina Fineberg for The New York Times

David Centner, center, carefully orchestrated a flash mob of dancers to propose to his girlfriend, Leila Samoodi.

By JI HYUN LEE  
Published: July 27, 2012

IT was a humid summer evening better spent indoors when David Centner, 46, and his girlfriend, Leila Samoodi, 35, found themselves crossing Union Square Park this month only to come upon salsa dancers rehearsing in the plaza.

Suddenly, the music changed, and in what seemed like a bizarre act of randomness, a crowd of some 100-plus strangers rushed to the center of the plaza and began to dance to "I'm All Yours" by Jay Sean in near-perfect synchronization.

"It's a flash mob," someone said, and in a swift move, the crowd — and Ms. Samoodi — whipped out cellphone cameras to capture this very spontaneous New York moment.

Ms. Samoodi was doubly surprised when she saw Mr. Centner, a typically shy corporate executive, jump in and join in the dance.

She had no idea what this was all leading to until Mr. Centner, who had carefully orchestrated this flash mob, took her hand and led her into the circle of dancers.

"I thought he just wanted to go out there and show me he could dance," said Ms. Samoodi, a designer of maternity clothing whose company, the House of Layla, is based in

Multimedia



A Flash Mob Proposal at Bryant Park



Dancing and Proposing in Union Square

Enlarge This Image



OBAMA BIDEN  
JOIN MICHELLE and TELL BARACK YOU'RE IN  
ARE YOU IN?  
PAID FOR BY OBAMA VICTORY FUND 2012

Advertisement

Today's Headlines Daily E-Mail



Sign up for a roundup of the day's top stories, sent every morning.

Sign up input field

Sign Up



"Parks and Recreation" in Washington

ALSO IN ARTS »

- Anew faith in classical music
- Joan Rivers: By the book

nytimes.com

ARTS

ADVERTISEMENTS



It's Just the Ticket for Everything Theater

COVERAGE THAT RAISES THE BAR

GO NOW »

The New York Times  
NYTIMES.COM/OLYMPICS



Dan Gill for The New York Times

When Heather Ryterski and Shawn Stephens found themselves watching a flash mob unfold, Mr. Stephens recalled, Ms. Ryterski kept repeating, “It feels like they’re singing to me!” at which point he said, “That’s because they are.”

Great Neck, N.Y.

“My pretty Leila,” he began nervously. “From the moment I met you, I fell in love with you.” Then, dropping to one knee, he said, “Leila, will you marry me?”

“I didn’t have a clue that he was proposing until he went in the middle,” said Ms. Samoodi, who quickly agreed to his proposal. “Isn’t that crazy?”

A certain breed of men, and some women, look upon marriage proposals not as an intimate moment between two people, but as an opportunity for a very public, and recordable, display of affection. In an era in which social media and YouTube play an increasingly dominant role, the bar to garnering public notice has never been lower — and higher when it comes to delivering something unique.

Yet when flash mobs come crashing, with swoon-worthy tunes like Bruno Mars’s “Marry You” and choreographed routines by dancers who quickly assemble and just as quickly disperse, the sum is quite often a cinematic moment that is fleeting but everlasting. Even hard-core cynics can be left feeling a little choked up.

“Most single guys’ reaction to this is like: ‘Oh great, you raised the bar. How am I supposed to beat that for my proposal?’ ” said Craig Jones, 26 and a financial consultant in New York, who took the flash-mob concept one step further [when proposing in June](#) in Bryant Park to his girlfriend, Allison Leclair, 29 and a textile designer. “I really love the energy of a flash mob, but that’s been done before,” Mr. Jones said.

So in addition to hiring a dance troupe, he negotiated to bring in a marching band from Port Chester, N.Y. Bob Vitti, the director of Port Chester High School’s band, so loved the idea that he enlisted his whole 140-piece band.

On the day of the proposal, the band rode into the city on four school buses and did its very best to remain inconspicuous standing by, in formation, on one side of the New York Public Library, next to the park. When it was time to make its grand entrance, as Ms. Leclair patiently sat, the band hit all the right notes. Of course, Mr. Jones did, too.

When asked why some men make a spectacle of their marriage proposal, [W. Bradford Wilcox](#), the director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, said: “Over-the-top proposals allow men to signal to a future wife, and to family and friends, that they are all in. They are ready to man up, forgo all others and become a responsible husband.”

Helen Fisher, the author of “[Why Him? Why Her? How to Find and Keep Lasting Love](#)” and a research professor in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers, said: “Men have done astounding things across history to win a bride, and a mother for their young — in battle and in romance. This is just another very imaginative approach. And she won’t forget it. When they hit some bumps down the road, she will be able to recall this moment and perhaps forgive his other foibles.”

Which helps explain why, when it comes to proposing, “they want the wow factor,” said Paula Broussard, founder of Dance Mob Nation, a production company based in Los Angeles that has made a specialty out of staging engagements, like the one for Mr. Centner, and other events. Having the aid of a middleman, so to speak, lowers the pressure of having to create a unique will-you-marry-me moment, she said. “They can still have something beautiful, romantic and fun,” she said, “and they don’t personally have to get up and dance — unless they want to.”

*This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:*

**Correction: July 27, 2012**

The previous version of this article incorrectly stated that the groom is a program manager with I.B.M. He is a program manager with Forsythe, a technology consulting

business.

A version of this article appeared in print on July 29, 2012, on page ST1 of the New York edition with the headline: Shock and Aww!

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

Weddings and Engagements

Dancing

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



REAL ESTATE »



A Run-In With a Flying Eyesore

N.Y. / REGION »



He's Tony Disco to You

FASHION & STYLE »



Shock and Aww!

OPINION »

## Disunion: Birth of the 'Battle Cry'

The origins of one of the Civil War's most famous fighting songs.

HEALTH »



The Well Quiz: Olympic Bodies

OPINION »



Gray Matter: Did Your Brain Make You Do It?

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [Site Map](#)

© 2012 The New York Times Company | [Privacy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Terms of Sale](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work With Us](#) | [Advertise](#)