The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Dance Flash Mob Surprises Unsuspecting Shoppers

By Nataliya Nedzhvetskaya

March 26, 2012



All smiles Saturday at the Metropolis shopping mall as dancing Muscovites realize their dreams in a flash mob.

It seemed like a typical Saturday afternoon at Metropolis shopping center in the north of Moscow until 100 people started dancing in the middle of the mall.

The mass flash mob shuffled, shimmied and spun to a mash-up of music by Maroon 5, LMFAO and Harry Belafonte, among others, part of a new project that aims to surprise and cheer up complete strangers.

The dance routine, created exclusively for the event by top British choreographer Simon Barnum, who has worked with Sugar Babes and Take That, lasted a little over two minutes, but hours of planning and rehearsal went into the show.

The dance is part of a series of events planned by Mechtival, an art project that aspires

to make Moscow a more positive, creative and free-spirited city by providing Muscovites with a forum for sharing and realizing their dreams.

Mechtival, a pun on the Russian words mechta, or dream, and festival, draws on the "theory of small deeds," a philosophy popular among Moscow's hipster community, which teaches that change is best affected in small doses on a local scale.

The project is the brainchild of three friends, who live and work in Moscow and were frustrated by the lack of positivity and spontaneity they saw in their city.

"We wanted people to remember their childhood dreams and take a step toward improving their lives," one founder Lena Bekishiva said.

"The idea is to give people a chance to try something they've always wanted to do. Obviously, you're not going to become a world-class dancer by participating in a flash mob, but it's that crucial first step toward getting people to act on their dreams," she said.

Stepan, 34, who works in marketing and public relations, had no dance experience, but after hearing about the event on Facebook signed up and on Friday, the day before the flash mob, he took part in a six-hour dance rehearsal that was needed so the routine could go off according to plan.

"Considering that most people weren't professionals, and we only had a day to rehearse, I would say it went well," said Stepan after his and other dancers two minutes of fame was over, "I would gladly do it again."

Sam Golle, a professional choreographer who has organized flash mobs in his native Britain, flew in from London to train the dancers.

"It's been good fun," he said. "The main objective of the flash mob was for people to enjoy themselves. I didn't see one sad face, among the dancers and among the crowd."

Mechtival is planning to hold several events in the next few months, to spread the word about their cause and gain a following in time for a huge festival they will hold in August.

Upcoming events include cooking classes, lessons from stylists and make-up artists, and a half-day, Moscow-wide bike ride.

Interested individuals can find out more about the organization on their website, Mechtival.ru, where they can even submit their own "dreams" and ideas for future events.

The organization has no political associations or ambitions and is entirely not-for-profit. So far, the project has been largely self-funded by organizers, who are seeking sponsors.

In theory, the "dreams" that people submit on the website are supposed to be apolitical and nonmaterialistic in nature, but visitors have had trouble staying away from materialism and

politics.

At the moment, the No. 1 dream on the website is "I want a Bentley." No. 2 is "I want [Mikhail] Prokhorov to be president."

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