

Lawsuit: Attack by Lyft driver ended SCPA-graduate's music career

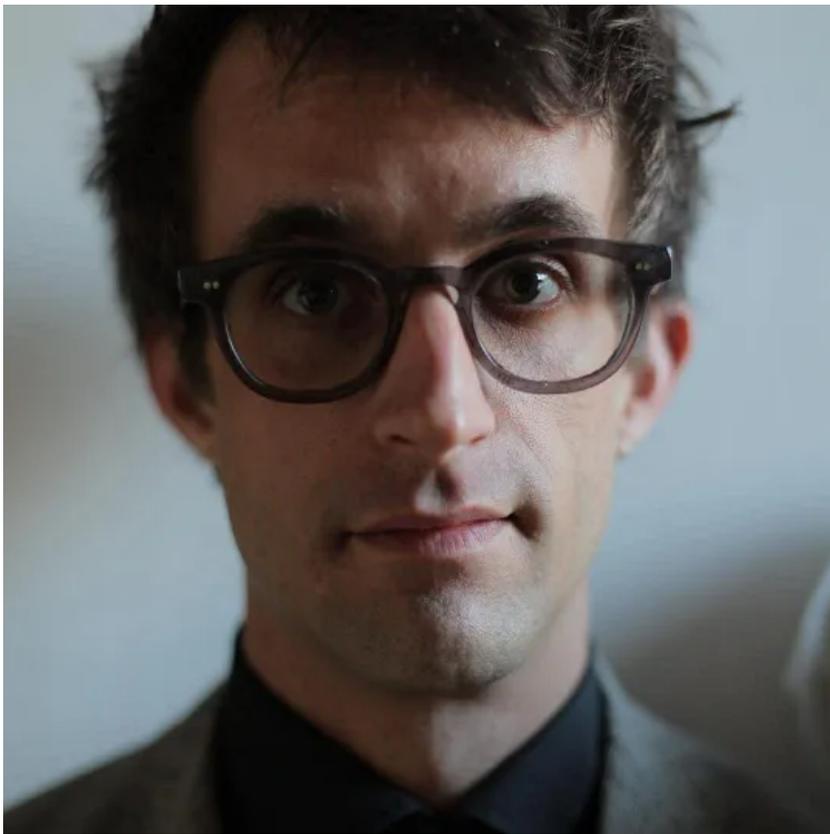
Kevin Grasha, Cincinnati Enquirer Published 11:37 a.m. ET Sept. 25, 2019 | Updated 3:23 p.m. ET Sept. 25, 2019

Jonathan Pratt says his music career effectively ended in 2017 after he was attacked by a Lyft driver in New York City.

Pratt, a 1997 graduate of the School for Creative and Performing Arts, is a composer, producer and musician who plays numerous instruments. His work has been performed at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, the American Dance Festival and the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

He says the attack left him with injuries including a fractured wrist bone and a traumatic brain injury. Even now, two years later, he said playing an instrument at a professional level remains extremely difficult.

"After the incident, I was unable to play or do or make anything," said Pratt, who underwent multiple surgeries and moved back to the Cincinnati-area after two decades in New York. "It took me out of the game."



5 free articles left.
\$3 for 3 months. Save 90%.

Pratt and his Loveland-based attorneys, Matthew Metzger and Steven Wolterman, have sued Lyft in New York state court, saying the ride-hailing company ignores safety when hiring and has resisted measures that would make its service safer.

Among the allegations is that Lyft does not conduct background checks of drivers in New York City. Instead, a city agency, the Taxi and Limousine Commission, performs and reviews them. The lawsuit also says the company doesn't perform ongoing checks and monitoring of its drivers in New York City.

But that is unique to New York City, where drivers must be licensed by the commission.

[Subscribe now to Cincinnati.com to get access to all our content \(https://offers.cincinnati.com/specialoffer?gps-source=CPNEWS&utm_medium=onsite&utm_source=news&utm_campaign=NEWSROOM&utm_content=KEVINGRASHA\)](https://offers.cincinnati.com/specialoffer?gps-source=CPNEWS&utm_medium=onsite&utm_source=news&utm_campaign=NEWSROOM&utm_content=KEVINGRASHA)

Police have not been able to find the driver accused of attacking Pratt, Kouame Nguessan, who is a native of the Ivory Coast. The commission's records, the lawsuit says, show that there were previous complaints about Nguessan "threatening, harassing and abusing riders."

Lyft said in a statement that safety is fundamental: "The incident described is terrifying, and the driver was permanently banned from the Lyft community."

According to the lawsuit, despite a police investigation, Lyft didn't terminate Nguessan from its platform until eight months after the attack, meaning he gave approximately 730 additional rides.

Get the **News Alerts** newsletter in your inbox.

Get alerted to the latest stories to stay on top of the news.

Delivery: Varies

Your Email



Pratt's attorneys say it took Lyft nearly six months to respond to a subpoena from New York City police.

Lyft's policy for handling law enforcement requests, listed on its website, says a subpoena or other valid legal process is required in order to disclose user information. The company says it will produce information without a formal, legal request when there is an immediate threat of death or bodily harm.

The incident at the center of the lawsuit happened May 24, 2017. Pratt, who then was living in New York City, requested a ride from a Brooklyn restaurant using the Lyft app on his smartphone.

The Lyft driver, Nguessan, got lost, the lawsuit says, and Pratt tried to give him directions to the restaurant. After about 10 minutes, Pratt decided to cancel the ride, but Nguessan refused to accept the cancellation, according to the lawsuit.

Ultimately, Nguessan confronted Pratt, demanding that he get into the car. According to the lawsuit: Pratt began using his phone to record video, and Nguessan ran from his vehicle and attacked Pratt, trying to take the phone.

The lawsuit says Nguessan slammed Pratt headfirst to the concrete, then kicked him repeatedly before smashing the phone on the sidewalk.

Also, according to the lawsuit, Nguessan swung at the face of Pratt's friend, a woman who was "pleading with him to stop."

Part of the attack was captured on the restaurant's surveillance camera.

The lawsuit says Lyft's high driver turnover rate coupled with the need to find drivers to grow market share "incentivizes the company to hire quickly and ignore safety concerns."

The lawsuit blames Lyft for the fact that Nguessan has not been found by police. It says Lyft gave police only his email address and a telephone number, but "refused to provide any other information," such as his address, driver's license number and the vehicle driven on the date of the attack.

Pratt has moved back to the Cincinnati area. He said he initially believed he'd be able to get through what happened, but the brain trauma and the multiple surgeries on his wrist continue to affect him.

"I c worse and worse and worse," he said.

5 free articles left.
\$3 for 3 months. Save 90%.

DIG DEEPER

You may also be interested in



- [Records: Day before Fifth Third shooting, gunman called attorney representing NBC in lawsuit he filed](https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/crime/crime-and-courts/2019/09/24/fifth-third-shooting-gunman-called-nbc-attorney-day-before-killing-3/2432381001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
(https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/crime/crime-and-courts/2019/09/24/fifth-third-shooting-gunman-called-nbc-attorney-day-before-killing-3/2432381001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
- [Millennium Hotel owner wants \\$1.3 million from county by Friday. Portune says county should pay or 'we will regret that.'](https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/09/24/millennium-hotel-hamilton-county-must-decide-fate/2430933001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
(https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/09/24/millennium-hotel-hamilton-county-must-decide-fate/2430933001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
- [Beto O'Rourke brings donuts, encouragement to striking GM workers in West Chester, Ohio](https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/09/24/beto-orourke-visit-west-chester-tuesday/2426530001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
(https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/09/24/beto-orourke-visit-west-chester-tuesday/2426530001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
- [Blink releases plans for Roebling Bridge to be 'played like a musical instrument'](https://www.cincinnati.com/story/entertainment/2019/09/24/blink-cincinnati-2019-plans-released-roebing-bridge-display/2430038001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
(https://www.cincinnati.com/story/entertainment/2019/09/24/blink-cincinnati-2019-plans-released-roebing-bridge-display/2430038001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
- [Other cities 'dumping homeless people here,' says Middletown police chief](https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/09/24/homeless-being-sent-middletown-other-cities-and-states-police-say/2434125001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)
(https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/09/24/homeless-being-sent-middletown-other-cities-and-states-police-say/2434125001/?utm_source=oembed&utm_medium=onsite&utm_campaign=storylines&utm_content=news&utm_term=2436129001)

Read or Share this story: <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/crime/crime-and-courts/2019/09/25/lawsuit-attack-lyft-driver-ended-scpa-grads-music-career/2433011001/>

5 free articles left.
\$3 for 3 months. Save 90%.