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# Unhinged Lyft driver's beatdown ruined composer's 'illustrious' career: suit

By Joshua Rhett Miller

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A Brooklyn composer's career was ruined by an unhinged Lyft driver — who beat him senseless when he canceled his ride, the music man claims in a lawsuit filed Wednesday.

Jonathan Melville Pratt, 40, says his "illustrious career" went south around 2 a.m. May 24, 2017, when the Lyft driver — allegedly behind the wheel without a TLC license — slammed him headfirst inside the doorway of a Williamsburg restaurant, knocking him unconscious.



Jonathan Melville Pratt  
Courtesy of Jonathan Melville Pratt

The attack left Pratt — whose works have been performed at venues such as Lincoln Center, the Guggenheim Museum and the Brooklyn Academy of Music — with two concussions and a broken bone in his wrist that required surgery on his dominant right hand and a bone graft from his leg, according to the lawsuit filed Wednesday in Brooklyn Supreme Court.

"It was catastrophic in every way," Pratt, who has since moved back home to stay with a friend in Cincinnati, told The Post. "And from what I'm getting from my doctors and therapists, this is going to continue to affect me for the rest of my life."

The driver — identified as Kouame Nguessan — also smashed Pratt's phone on the sidewalk and threw a punch at a woman with him, narrowly missing her face, surveillance video obtained by The Post shows.

More than two years later, Pratt still hasn't completely recovered physically, having lost the "subtle timing, mobility, concentration, sensitivity to pitch, and stamina" needed to perform as an elite musician, the lawsuit claims.

"For Mr. Pratt, his art defined him," the 42-page filing reads. "That identity has been stripped away by Lyft's indifference and willful neglect of its passengers."

The suit further claims that the San Francisco-based Lyft "flouted the law" by hiring Nguessan — a West African immigrant from the Ivory Coast — despite him not having a TLC license, and then allowing him to drive without a background check.

He also wasn't removed from the ride-sharing platform until January 2018, some six months after the assault, and drove for Lyft 730 times after attacking Pratt, conduct that put other passengers at risk, the lawsuit claims.

Attorneys for Pratt say they believe a jury will be convinced by the footage and the severity of the musician's lingering injuries, perhaps to the tune of several million dollars in damages.

"Based on the injuries Mr. Pratt suffered at the hands of a Lyft driver, the illustrious musical career taken from him because of those injuries, and the widespread wrongdoing we allege Lyft to have engaged in, we think a jury could easily award him an eight-figure verdict," attorney Steve Wolterman said in a statement.

Pratt filed a complaint with cops two days after the attack, but detectives have been unable to find Nguessan, who may have returned to Africa, Pratt's attorneys said.

A Lyft spokesperson responded to the lawsuit in a statement saying: "Safety is fundamental to Lyft and the incident described is terrifying. We permanently banned the driver from the Lyft community as soon as we were made aware of this incident."

A spokeswoman for the NYPD confirmed Nguessan had not been arrested as of Wednesday and that an investigation remains ongoing.

Pratt, meanwhile, said he longer feels safe in public and dreads seemingly benign interactions like phone calls and text messages.

"I don't reach out to people like I used to," he said. "I'm embarrassed about my situation. I don't have confidence going into situations — work or otherwise — and I tend to stay at home, which has never been who I am."

To make matters even worse, the assault couldn't have happened at a more pivotal time in Pratt's career, as he was increasingly composing for ballet and dance productions — and had done some work on commercials, including for late designer Kate Spade, according to his bio.

"But then I stopped being able to work and my ability to make music just stopped," he said. "That's the only way I can describe it. It's like a nightmare that keeps unfolding deeper and deeper every day. I've got a steep hill to climb."

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