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## The business of making Instagram fame last

FAME, FROM PAGE 1

sponsorship fee. Her lawyers sent a letter threatening to sue. (Bumble declined to comment on the record.)

"I was so pissed off at the way that I was treated publicly from it that I decided to quit the music business," Kluger says. "I was like, 'I built this company. I helped make this [expletive] popular.' Then I was like, 'I can make anything popular.'" Kluger hatched another plan, this time to save his own reputation. "I'm going to find something that's just so obscure, and I'm going to make it popular," he decided. "I'm going to pull every trick I've ever pulled with brands, and make someone into a walking, talking brand to prove my worth."

At the same time, the web was caught up in a drama over an absurd clip from daytime TV featuring a Florida teenager. Danielle Bregoli, of Boynton Beach, was a guest on a September 2016 episode of "Dr. Phil" titled "I Want to Give Up My Car-Stealing, Knife-Wielding, Twerking 13-Year-Old Daughter Who Tried to Frame Me for a Crime!" In the segment, Bregoli and her mother, Barbara Ann, sat facing a studio audience. Barbara Ann begs Dr. Phil for his help, while Bregoli seems to revel in the spectacle of conflict. When the audience laughs at Bregoli's affectation — part Florida, part Brooklyn, part misconceived Black Vernacular English — she calls them all "hoes," then invites them to fight: "Cash me outside, howbowdah?"

"Catch you outside?" Dr. Phil asks. "What does that mean?"

"Catch her outside," Barbara Ann explains. "Means she'll go outside and do what she has to do."

Following the show, Dr. Phil sent Bregoli for an extended stay at Turn-About Ranch, a residential program in rural Utah for youths with emotional and behavioral problems. As she fed and groomed horses, without internet access, clips from the "Dr. Phil" segment went viral, first on YouTube, then on Instagram, then on nearly every streaming site. By the time Bregoli returned to Boynton Beach in January 2017, the internet knew her as the Cash Me Outside Girl — yet another disposable star, or yet another victim of a stage mother, or yet another white girl getting famous off black culture. Nobody seemed to agree on the subtext or on the best way to spell her slogan, but everyone agreed that she wasn't meant to last.

Everyone but Kluger, who by then was living in Miami. He first heard the words "cash me outside" as a vocal sample in a song on a local radio station. Back at his office, he looked up the track, which led him to the clip from her "Dr. Phil" appearance. Kluger found her phone number by searching online. Bregoli answered the phone but told him she couldn't talk until Barbara Ann got back from the store. Barbara Ann invited him over. The next day, he made the hourlong drive through the South Florida sprawl, parking his Mercedes on their plain suburban street.

As Kluger recalls, "I said: 'I want to manage you. Give me some time, I'll make you a star. I'll make you guys rich. We want to make this thing happen.' With no hesitation, they were like, 'O.K., done.' They had no clue what that meant."

**SEVEN MONTHS LATER**, Bregoli was a rapper, reborn on the charts under the stage name Bhad Bhabie. If the rebirth was quick, it wasn't predestined; it happened through a kind of alchemical futz that aimed to convert her fleeting viral fame into something that might degrade less quickly. On her first day home from Turn-About Ranch, she joined Instagram under the username @slimthugga and soon found her followers compounding by the day — 10,000, 20,000, 40,000. For all she knew, every one of them loathed her; her first thought was: How do I fight all of you? Kluger didn't quite have a business plan worked out, but her question was in line with his vision for her future.



Danielle Bregoli, a.k.a. Bhad Bhabie, shifted from social media figure to a rapper with a video that has been viewed 100 million times.

"The initial idea was to brand her," he says. "To take this villain — relentless, crazy-attitude kid — and just brand her as this supervillain. She's going to be the one that the kids have to hide from their parents."

Kluger was fluent in branding-speak, but he knew he needed help turning followers into money. He placed a call to his colleague Dan Roof, the founder of FLUE, a digital firm, and he agreed to come on board as her digital manager, helping her set up sponsorship deals.

In February 2017, Bregoli and her mother flew to Los Angeles for a second "Dr. Phil" appearance, in which she told the TV therapist, "I made you just like how Oprah made you." That same week, she appeared in a video for the rapper Kodak Black, a fellow Florida native and one of Bregoli's favorite artists. In the video, Bregoli wore a shirt that said CASH ME OUSSIDE on the front and HOW BOW DAH on the back; she fanned stacks of cash in the back seat of a Rolls-Royce.

A few days later, on a Spirit Airlines flight, Bregoli clocked another passenger in the head during a dispute about overhead-bin space. She was bounced from the flight and landed back in the headlines on gossip sites. By the time she returned to Florida, Twitter



Ms. Bregoli and her bodyguard, Frank Dellatto. Her handlers have forbidden her to say the line that gained her internet fame: "Cash me outside, howbowdah?"

was losing its mind — partly in shock over her flagrant misconduct, partly in awe of her persistence in the news.

But in America's current cultural economy, such attention does not always convert easily to cash. She now had two managers and the interest of

the public but was still left facing an industry-wide predicament: Today's internet produces many figures of interest, but few possess the kinds of talent that our entertainment pipelines were designed to monetize. Influencers are famous for things that can't be sold — bod-

ies, personas, lifestyles and conflict. If these hustles can be profitable, then they tend to work best as one of several revenue streams; online stars are still best served by finding their way toward traditional talent.

During those first chaotic months, Kluger and Roof spent a lot of time in the car, shuttling Bregoli between various appointments. She killed the time in traffic on Instagram Live or by singing along to songs she liked. She loved to rap along with Kodak Black mixtapes as Roof made videos on his phone, just for fun. Reviewing the clips, he thought to himself, It kind of sounds as if she can rap a little bit.

A shift toward rap would be unprecedented. The year 2017 had already experienced a spate of enthusiastic, if terrible, rap songs by social-media figures, including "It's Everyday Bro," by the YouTuber Jake Paul, which, thanks to his millions of subscribers, managed to reach the Billboard Hot 100. That summer, the stripper-turned-Instagram-influencer-turned-reality-star-turned-rapper Cardi B made the most successful crossover yet, with her smash-hit radio single "Bodak Yellow."

Rap is a biographical form. Social media and rap share a similar mode — personal, direct, aspirational. A rapper can post to flesh out his world; an internet star can turn toward music as a way to commodify the world she has already created. A single is cheap and easy to produce, and just a few can serve to ground a whole career, providing a concrete reason for touring and a more stable base for a merchandise line. In a music industry that increasingly makes its money off things other than music, this reversal does not seem so convoluted.

Kluger was initially against the idea of getting back into the music business, but he consented to some studio time to see how Bregoli sounded outside the car. At that first trial session, she felt painfully self-conscious. "I was like: 'I don't want to put these headphones on. I don't want to get in this booth,'" she says.

That first trial session landed her a second one with Aton Ben-Horin, the global head of artists and repertoire at Warner Music Group. He was impressed by Bregoli's online following — by then, well over a million on Instagram — but told Roof and Kluger that she had a future only if she could actually rap. He brought along a songwriter's sketch of an unfinished track called "Hi Bich," a trap-pop banger with a mean-girl hook. When Bregoli got in the booth, he knew he had something. "I was convinced that even without Dr. Phil, without anything, this girl would have done music," Ben-Horin says. "There's something really special about her phrasing, and I think that's actually part of why the 'cash me outside' phrase went viral." On Sept. 15, a news release from Atlantic announced that it had signed Bregoli to a record deal. ("With her burgeoning rap career, Bhad Bhabie is set to prove that she is more than just a meme.") A lone tipster told TMZ the deal was worth millions; Atlantic declined to comment.

Bregoli had in the meantime changed her Instagram handle to @BhadBhabie — officially pronounced Bad Baby, but sometimes misspelled Bad Barbie or Baahd Bobby. (Bregoli has since suggested that "Bhad" stands for "been hated and doubted.") Kluger disliked the misspelling but accepted the name as a good first step away from her past: She was no longer the Cash Me Outside Girl. "She's not allowed to say 'cash me outside,'" Kluger says. "No one on my team is allowed to use those words, ever."

**IN DECEMBER**, BREGOLI visited the Atlantic offices in Midtown Manhattan. She showed up a little past 11 in the morning, chewing caffeine gum from the gift shop in the lobby and drinking a giant strawberry smoothie. By then, she had released four singles as Bhad Bhabie — each a more perfect pop distillation of a

gritty brand of trap rap. "Hi Bich" made its debut on the Billboard Hot 100; its video has been viewed over 100 million times. The internet seemed to resent its own enjoyment.

Bregoli is an only child, born in 2003. Her father, Ira Peskowitz, is a deputy sheriff in South Florida. He and Barbara Ann never married. Barbara Ann says that he took an interest in parenting duties only after his daughter's re-appearance on "Dr. Phil." And, according to an anonymously sourced story on TMZ, he accepted a payoff from Barbara Ann in exchange for terminating his parental rights. (Peskowitz strongly denies each of these claims.)

Around the time of the visit to Atlantic, Bregoli was on the cusp of a 26-date tour, for which she was enrolled in performance training lessons with Deja Riley, a movement coach who was brought on board to help develop her stage presence. If the Banned in the U.S.A. Tour went well, it would go a long way toward persuading the public that Bregoli wasn't just that viral brat from "Dr. Phil."

For the debut tour date on April 14, Kluger deliberately booked an under-sold venue — the Observatory in Or-

**"I said: 'I want to manage you. Give me some time, I'll make you a star. I'll make you guys rich.'"**

ange County, Calif. He had faith that Bregoli would do a good job but wanted to ensure a packed house, for her ego. It worked. That night, the crowd was diverse — almost too diverse to characterize. If the guests had anything significant in common, it was that none of them seemed sure if their presence was sincere.

**THE NEXT DAY'S** MUSIC news was dominated by a much larger happening: the Coachella music festival in the nearby desert. Bregoli, who wished she could have gone, instead went with her bodyguard, Frank Dellatto, to get Mexican food at a chile-pepper-string-lights place. Bregoli stirred a cup of tortilla soup as she scrolled through some photos on her private Instagram. Kluger and Roof run the public @bhadbhabie account. "I get mad, and I do dumb [expletive]," she explained. "It's better off that they have it than me." Far less brash than her public persona, in person she doesn't seem to care if you like her at all.

Later that night outside the Glendale Galleria mall, about 500 feet from Godiva Chocolaterie, Bregoli was filmed in a physical altercation with two less-famous social-media stars. The first, @imwoahvicky, was the 18-year-old daughter of a Georgia real estate developer who first gained attention on Instagram posting videos of her lavish life, using her own interpretation of a Southern black accent. (Vicky, who appears to be white, has claimed that an online DNA test proved she was part black.) The second, @liltay, was a suspiciously unsupervised grade-school girl, reportedly from Canada, who role-plays a rapper's lifestyle online.

"I'm not happy that Danielle got violent, but I understand why," Kluger said the next morning. "The reason I'm upset really is because this aligns her with someone who is just a complete nobody. Just a mockery. It's bad for my brand." Chaos is only profitable to the extent that you can control it; after the Spirit Airlines fight, Kluger learned to keep a piece of good news in his back pocket. "I know who I'm working with, and I'm prepared," he said. "We're going to drown it out with positivity."

Two days after the fight, and 580 days after her initial appearance on "Dr. Phil," a headline ran on TMZ: "Danielle Bregoli Reality Show in the Works."

*Adapted from an article that originally appeared in The New York Times Magazine.*

## A doo-wop singer with staying power

EUGENE PITT  
1937-2018

BY DANIEL E. SLOTNIK

Eugene Pitt, the lead singer of the Jive Five, a doo-wop group that reached the Top 10 in 1961 with "My True Story" and endured long past doo-wop's heyday by mingling its sound with ascendant genres like funk, disco and soul, has died. He was 80.

The cause of his death on June 29 at his home in Newberry, S.C., was complications of diabetes, his daughter Starr Pitt said.

Mr. Pitt formed the Jive Five in the late 1950s with Jerome Hanna, Thurmon Prophet, Richard Harris and Norman Johnson — four friends with whom he sang on the streets of Brooklyn. Like many young vocalists of the era, they sang doo-wop, the romantic, harmonic brand of pop music that became popular alongside early rock 'n' roll and contributed to the sound of soul.

Mr. Pitt's rich, rangy voice became the group's centerpiece, sometimes soaring to a falsetto over the deeper harmonies of the others. The group was often billed, on record and in concert, as Eugene Pitt and the Jive Five or the Jive Five featur-

ing Eugene Pitt, and Mr. Pitt remained the leader, and sometimes the only original member, as others came and went.

Their first and biggest hit was "My True Story," a lament of lost love written by Oscar Waltzer and Mr. Pitt and punctuated by Mr. Pitt's keening repetition of the word "cry." In 1961 the song reached No. 1 on the Billboard R&B chart and No. 3 on the pop chart. It became the Jive Five's signature for the next five decades.

Interest in doo-wop had begun to wane by the early 1960s, but the Jive Five remained popular throughout the decade with soulful songs like "A Bench in the Park" and "What Time Is It?" They reached the Top 40 in 1965 with the single "I'm a Happy Man." The group also toured the United States, sharing bills with acts like Tom Jones, the Shirelles and Chubby Checker.

"The Jive Five at that time was the only group that survived through the British invasion," Mr. Pitt said in an interview for the website Soul Express Online in 2009.

In the 1970s Mr. Pitt, with the Jive Five and others, recorded funky songs like "I Want You to Be My Baby" and disco numbers like "Samson" — sometimes under variations of the Jive Five name, like Jyve Fyve, and sometimes

under different names altogether, like Ebony, Ivory & Jade.

"We changed our name, because we figured that Jive Five was an old doo-wop name, and we wanted to come out fresh," Mr. Pitt said.

By the early 1980s the Jive Five were applying their vocal harmonies to more modern compositions. Their 1982 album, "Here We Are," featured songs with a classic rock sound like "Hey Sam," upbeat soul songs like "He's Just a Lucky Man" and a crooning cover of Steely Dan's "Hey Nineteen" that amplified its wistfulness.

"Here We Are" shows the same stylistic flexibility that led the Jive Five to score '60s chart successes in both vocal group ("My True Story") and pop-soul styles ("I'm a Happy Man"). Joe Sasfy wrote in a review in The Washington Post in 1982. "Most important, the Jive Five's imaginative vocal arrangements and Eugene Pitt's intimate lead vocals show the band's ties to a more innocent past and its desire for a more viable artistic future."

The Jive Five kept performing for decades, most recently in 2016.

Eugene Pitt was born in New York on Nov. 6, 1937, to Christal C. Pitt and Mamie Obye Pitt. His mother died when he was young, and his father, a longshore-

man and gospel singer, taught Eugene and his many siblings how to sing and harmonize. Some of them performed as a gospel group in local churches when they were children, and Mr. Pitt's brothers Frank and Herbert joined him in a later edition of the Jive Five.

Mr. Pitt began singing secular music on street corners in the Brooklyn borough of New York City before he graduated from Boys High School in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. He sang in two local groups, the Akrons and the Genies, before starting Jive Five.

Mr. Pitt's marriage to Emma Spencer, the sister of Casey Spencer, a longtime member of the Jive Five, ended in divorce. In addition to his daughter Starr, he is survived by five other daughters, Sheila Pitt, Tawanna Davis, Kasey White, Shoshone Johnson and Tamma White; four sons, Eugene Jr., Eric, Lamont and Rashard; six sisters, Mildred Alexander, Margaret Atkins, Dorothea Dowling, Juanita Rhodes, Unise Ann Pitt and Christa Pitt; his brother Herbert; 25 grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Jive Five recorded memorable jingles for the children's television network Nickelodeon, introducing a new generation to doo-wop's sound.



Eugene Pitt, seated, and other members of Jive Five in an undated photo. They hit the Top 10 in 1961 with "My True Story," and Mr. Pitt performed for many more decades.