

# Inside the Strip Clubs of Instagram

Going digital may be better for dancers.



By Taylor Lorenz

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For the past three weeks, Justin LaBoy, 28, a former professional basketball player and a social media personality, and Justin Dior Combs, an entrepreneur and P. Diddy’s 26-year-old son, have been hosting virtual pop-up strip clubs on Instagram Live.

“If it wasn’t for Justin and his Lives I don’t know what I would have done or how I would have paid my bills or gotten food in my house,” said Sasha, a dancer who has been featured on the pop-up show.

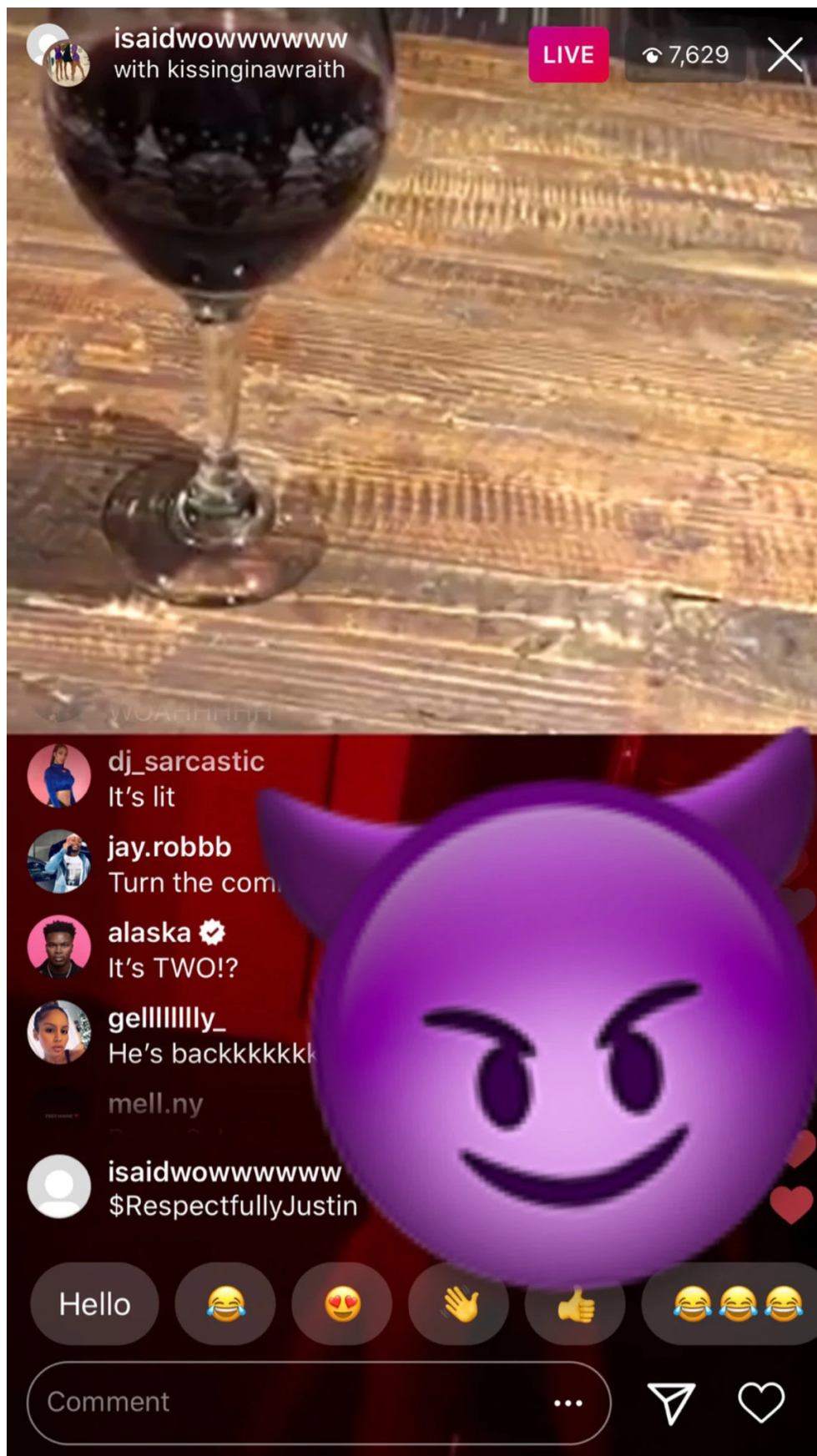
Many bars and strip clubs were forced to close nearly overnight around much of the world. Thousands of bartenders, bottle service girls and dancers have been left with no income. As with many other organizations, from elementary schools to Twelve Step meetings, strip clubs have also sought to recreate the experience digitally.

Magic City, a strip club in Atlanta, has started offering “virtual lap dance” performances on Instagram stories. Tory Lanez, a rapper, also recently began hosting dance nights for his 7.5 million followers, calling it “Quarantine Radio.”

But Mr. LaBoy’s events have attracted a unique and fervent fandom.

Music artists like the Weeknd and Diplo and many top N.F.L. and N.B.A. players and influencers have tuned in. Shaquille O’Neal, Meek Mill, YG, Casanova and Lil Yachty have all joined the stream as special guests.

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A screenshot of the live show with an emoji obscuring a dancer.

“It’s become larger than life,” Justin Combs said. “It started out as us going to live together, and it turned into this crazy thing. People ask me every night if the Live is going on. Justin has this crazy cult like following, and it’s just getting started.”

Mr. LaBoy said he got the idea at 1 a.m. to try to recreate the club atmosphere on Instagram after he was bored and livestreaming one night to his more than 60,000 followers. “I was like, man, I need a demon to call up,” Mr. LaBoy said. “I said, ‘Where my demons at?’”

Women immediately requested to be guests on his livestream. His followers loved it. “I was like, hold up, we can’t be doing this for free,” Mr. LaBoy said. “Some girls were dancing, twerking, taking it all off.”

So he began pinning the dancer’s Cash App user names to the top of the feed, so that followers could send them money. Mr. LaBoy realized he had stumbled onto something. The “Respectfully Justin Show” was born.

## Every Night, a New Club

Several hours before the show, Mr. LaBoy begins hyping up the event on social media using the hashtag #respectfully. Because Instagram prohibits explicit content, Mr. LaBoy creates a new Instagram handle for each event. He announces this page’s name through Twitter, along with the date and time of the show.

“I’ve never seen a page get 30,000 followers in an hour,” Justin Combs said. He’s “doing stuff that I haven’t seen anyone do.”



Justin LaBoy

Mr. LaBoy brings in Justin Combs, then kicks back and begins streaming a glass of red wine, which has become a meme of its own.

“People would post a picture of a red wine glass and be like, ‘If your girl knows what this means, she’s not your girl,’” said Alexis, a 24-year-old dancer at a club in Atlanta who has performed in several of Mr. LaBoy’s livestreams. “It’s become a symbol of the show.”

Then women, or, as the audience calls them, “demons,” are encouraged to request to join the stream.



When Mr. LaBoy accepts a woman's request to dance, he pins her Cash App information to the top of the stream and tells followers that if they like what they see, they had better pay up. "Blue-checks better pay," he said last Thursday, referring to verified Instagram accounts.

## Tales of the Demon Sisterhood

Women said they have raked in thousands of dollars from Cash App donations. Alexis said she has made about \$18,000 total from dancing on Instagram Live during a time when she'd otherwise be completely out of work. "Justin makes sure the girls make a substantial amount of money," she said. He also plugs his own handle, then distributes the funds as a bonus.

The amount of money Alexis has been able to earn through the internet far outpaces what she was previously earning at her job at the club, and for far less effort. "If I'm in the club, I'm there for eight hours," she said. "On Instagram Live, it's five minutes. Five minutes compared to eight hours of work."

Women who have appeared as guests have also amassed a larger following on their Instagram accounts. Alexis started a secondary Instagram account for her own Instagram Lives, after partygoers sent her messages with offers.

"People ask me to send them a voice note saying their name for \$500," she said. "They'll go on my page and send the eyes or a red heart like, 'Where you at? Where you from?' They're very active during this quarantine season."

Several women who have been featured have become close friends. "We have a demon community now," said Sasha, 32, who usually works as a hostess at an upscale restaurant in Los Angeles. "We go on Lives together. We're a little Demon sisterhood."

The women who perform don't show their faces and remain anonymous outside of their Instagram user names. (The New York Times agreed to identify them only by their first names.) Some, like Sasha, wear a ski mask while they dance; others simply film from the waist down. Sasha said she prefers to keep her offline identity separate from the work she has stumbled into online.

"The other women, one is a mom, we all had jobs that were taken away," Sasha said. "We all have problems, which is why we're doing this. We're all trying to keep our identity private while gaining fans and trying to make money."

Sasha said that amassing around \$4,000 through performing on Instagram Live inspired her to start an OnlyFans account, a service where she can gain subscribers of her own.

"My followers keep going up and up and up," she said. "It showed me that I have to do other things to get revenue. I have to pay my bills and get groceries."

Several brands have already reached out to Mr. LaBoy seeking to sponsor his events, but so far he hasn't taken anyone up on their offer. He is still deciding what to make of the whole thing. "I'm just trying to figure out: When outside picks back up, how does this translate to money?" he said.

Sasha also said she has received a flood of messages from other out-of-work women who have stumbled across her Instagram page, asking how they too can make money dancing online.

"Girls are like, 'How did you get the courage to do this?'" Sasha said. "I'm like, 'Girl, just put a ski mask on!'"

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Zack Bia DJing against a green screen displaying the iconic red wine glass.

## Getting More Exclusive

The success of the Respectfully Justin Show has spawned a stream of copycats, many of which look to be taking advantage of women in need. Other users pretend to be Mr. LaBoy or Mr. Combs to solicit money or nude photos from women.

“There are a million fake pages that don’t get shut down that are scamming girls out of money,” Sasha said.

On April 4, Mr. LaBoy decided that he would stop openly tweeting the name of each night’s Instagram account, both for privacy and to avoid being shut down. “It’s members only,” he tweeted. “God bless, the haters and fake pages ruined it for everybody.”



Performers said they don’t mind if the shows attracts a smaller crowd, as long as the high rollers continue to show up. It’s not often that they have the chance to dance for people like Meek Mill and Kevin Durant from the comfort of their living room.

So far, attendance hasn’t slowed much. “Men buy tables and sections at clubs, this is cheaper,” Mr. LaBoy said. “You get to sit home, see everyone you want, and donate \$5 or \$10.”