

Jay-Z's 'Picasso Baby' Video Shoot: Where's My Cameo?

NEW YORK — Growing up in Brooklyn, it was hard not to be a fan of Jay-Z. Even when the Notorious B.I.G. reigned atop the borough's food chain, there was something magnetic about Shawn Carter and his early records that only seemed to get played on Stretch & Bobbito's overnight Columbia University-based college radio show. So when Hov put the call out to purchase his independently released debut album *Reasonable Doubt* in 1996, I answered and hit BK's famed Fulton Mall after school and bought the eventual hip-hop classic.

Seventeen years later, I'm still answering the call. However the most recent one was more direct. "Jay is doing something cool, I can't say what, but you should come and be a part of it," one of those industry connects, who eventually turn to great friends, told me over the phone on Tuesday evening.

I arrived at the address I was given, 510 West 25th Street, shortly after noon on Wednesday (July 10) but didn't realize that I'd be taking part in Jay-Z's "Picasso Baby" video shoot until after I was asked to sign a waiver inside of the Pace Gallery. In my head I joked that I signed my life away to the illuminati, but in reality, I simply consented to having my image used and agreed not to sue if I turned up in the video. (Why would I do that?)

There were a few familiar faces; music executive Michael Kyser, Roc A&R Lenny S. and performance artist Marina Abramović. The crowd for the most part was largely unfamiliar to me. There was a sampling of rap fans, art types and cool looking people from all walks of life; black, white, young and old. Then of course there was Jay-Z, the former "skinny n---a on the boat"-turned-conqueror of all that he surveys.

We were all ushered into a vast white room and asked to stand alongside the walls behind a roped partition. It didn't take long for the MC, who once fancied himself rap's Iceberg Slim to emerge wearing black pants, a white button down shirt and sparkling gold Roc-A-Fella chain. He greeted us with a wide grin, salutes, hugs and handshakes. "Hey big guy, how you been," Jay asked me, leaning in for the customary pound and hug.



I congratulated him on the release of *Magna Carta... Holy Grail*, told him I thought it was dope — no really, I think it's dope and stepped back as he worked the rest of the room.

Once the beat to the Timbaland-produced "Picasso Baby" began to blare from the house speakers, Jay immediately sprang into action, performing for the camera. It was interesting that he didn't lip-sync to a full backing track, instead Brooklyn's Finest recited the song aloud with each and every take. It was amusing to watch Hov two-step and twirl with an elderly white lady with silver hair, as he bragged about his Leonardo Da Vinci flow. I'm not quite sure if she picked up on the song's seedy Foxy Brown reference though.

Originally, the plan wasn't to document any of today's events, I was merely supposed to attend as a fan — that same 16-year-old fan who purchased Jay's first CD back when he stylized his rap moniker with the umlaut above the Y. So I could've kept this all to myself, but the 16-year-old me just wouldn't allow that, so instead I went ham, taking video, pics and jotted down my thoughts.

I wonder if I'll make the final cut?

