

# Brawley filmmaker airs TV tale of water transfer crimes in The Man From Jalisco series

BY ROMAN FLORES

**IMPERIAL VALLEY** — A tale of water transfers, the perils of reporting, and dangerous drug cartel deals all mix together in local filmmaker and Brawley resident, Ryan Brandt's "The Man From Jalisco" television series.

The Man From Jalisco — whose story is set in the Imperial Valley — is a fictional tale about a "ghost writer" reporter at a fictitious local newspaper who discovers "secret information about a drug cartel dealing with crooked landowners, and he lets the people know that they're dealing with these landowners to sell out the city's water to bigger cities along the coast."

"The Man From Jalisco gets in trouble because the cartel finds out who he is," Brandt said, "so his life and family are in jeopardy because they want to tell the truth about what's going on. We have good guys and bad guys. There's good farmers but they're not part of the crooked water deal."

"The main thing that I'm trying to do is trying to show how the water issue is very important right now," Brandt said.

"The Man From Jalisco's argument is for the cities on the coast to build desalination plants because they have the ocean right there," he said, "but why everybody tries to get the water from this little Colorado River... it puts too many straws in the river and sooner or later there's not going to be any water... Lake Mead is drying up... so it gives people perspective."

"So I show the Valley, I show water, I show fields... but I'm mainly trying to show how we should save the water for the farmers and the people living here in the Imperial Valley versus giving it away and turning this fertile Valley into a desert again," Brandt said.

"Some of the story is inspired by true events that happened in the



**L TO R: SERIES CREATOR, RYAN BRANDT,** directs cinematographer, Justin Knodel, when shooting a scene in The Man From Jalisco, on YouTube and airing in full on KSWT 13 in 2023. *Courtesy photo of RJLB PICTURES*

Valley, water scandals, etcetera," he said. "The story is about trying to save the harmony while bad forces are at work. I think people are getting a picture of what's going on."

Brandt — who wrote, executive produced, is directing and acts in the project — said The Man From Jalisco originally started as a YouTube series, but as he was creating the script in college, he realized it should be a television series rather than a feature film.

Now The Man From Jalisco series has been airing on local TV through the Yuma-based channel KSWT 13, airing an "Independence Day Special" — episodes 6 and 7 along with never-before-aired cast interviews — on July 3. It first aired on television on Mexicali's Canal 66 in 2016, and aired on YouTube on December 31, 2019, but the beginning of the project actually dates back to Brandt's film school days, he said.

The Man From Jalisco stars Hollywood actors Luis A. Medina, of Uruguay — who also was in

the J.J. Abrams show Alias with Jennifer Garner — and Sergio Julian De Oliveira, of Argentina, who play brothers Antonio and Vicencio Flores in the series, respectively. Antonio's wife in the show, Maria Flores, is played by actress Julieta Ortiz, who also was in 2020's No Man's Land, opposite Andie MacDowell, Captain America/Marvel's "Crossbones" Frank Grillo, and comedian/actor George Lopez.

The Man From Jalisco also features local actors such as Mexicali's Gerardo Venegas, Valley-born-and-raised mariachi teacher Genaro Rascón Jr., Palo Verde's Bo Shropshire, Imperial's David Foster, Brawley residents and spouses Jesse and Raquel Herrera, and Brandt himself, among others in the large cast.

"The reason I wanted to do this project is, not only is it about the water, but it's about the Valley and the people in it," Brandt said.

Brandt said he chose to make his series' protagonist as from the

Mexican state of Jalisco because Brandt "loves" working with people from Jalisco who work on his family's farm in real life, saying Jaliscienses (people from Jalisco, Mexico) have a rich culture.

"They are so friendly and they have passion and love, talent and are hardworking; they help Mexico shine," he said. "I wanted to put them as the hero in this story."

Though Brandt admittedly has invested a lot of his own capital, a list of local investors have been lending their support to the project as well such as Johnny's Burritos, Jordan Central Implement, Tucker Auto Body & Towing, Valley Ag Supply, Rush Steel, Zendejas Hardware, Westmorland Date Shake, Desert RV Service, Assagio Restaurant, Bill and Sue Brandt, and The Desert Review, to name a few.

The project is still being created, Brandt said, as the episodes airing currently are the "pre-production" version, "but once we're done it will be more fashionable and will sound better." He said the series

will be completed by early 2023, and will air once a week for three months locally on KSWT 13 as a full season. Each episode is about 30 minutes long.

"Right now with the help of local sponsors we're putting it on local channels, then I'm going to try to put it on San Diego and LA channels," he said. "I want to see how that can build."

"We're hoping to basically get it picked up (by a network or streaming service)," Brandt said. "I've invested a lot of money in this thing but it's not the money that's the important thing, it's the education; getting people aware of the water deal."

The Man From Jalisco has been a long time coming since Brandt's days studying film in Loyola Marymount University and writing the script at UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) in 2004, but he says it has been a worthwhile venture.

"It's been a long time doing the story but it's finally coming together," he said. "It's neat to see the actors perform your script and see it come to life."

The Man From Jalisco can be seen on RJLB Pictures' YouTube Channel, from its pilot episode through the recently aired Independence Day Special with cast interviews or separate episodes 6 and 7.

Brandt said Part 8 of The Man From Jalisco will be "premiering soon at a location in Brawley" and will air on the RJLB Pictures YouTube channel and KSWT 13 in late July or early August.

Brandt said locals interested in being considered for becoming possible extras in The Man From Jalisco series finale should contact him by email at rjlbrandt@aol.com. He said the season finale will film locally in this fall.

For more information on The Man From Jalisco, and Brandt's other in-the-works project — Captain Cook and the Leap for Mankind: To Far and Distant Places — can be followed on his social media page on Facebook @RJLBPictures.

# CALEXICO BAND BREAK FROM SOCIETY RE-RELEASES "TIME CAPSULE" ALBUM

BY ROMAN FLORES

**IMPERIAL VALLEY** — The love of music is something that has never faded for the members of reggae-rock band Break From Society throughout their 20-year existence as a band.

Band leader and guitarist/lead singer Marc Muñoz, drummer George Flores, and two friends started Break From Society while attending Calexico High School in 1999, but the band's roots go as far back as 1992, Muñoz said.

Now a three-piece power trio with bassist Roger Rascón, the band is re-releasing their all-original 2005 self-titled album for the first time on all streaming platforms. The "Break From Society" album will include its original tracks along with previously unreleased, original material.

While various other cities in California boast reggae-rock bands — so much so that the subgenre has been labeled "SoCal rock," among other names — Break From Society's re-mastered re-release is the culmination of decades of work and an amalgamation of four albums worth of original material, Muñoz said.

"Before we even knew who Sublime was, when we were just listening to old school roots-reggae and dub on tapes, and we decided to form a reggae band (back in high school)," Muñoz said. "It was something different and we really liked it so we just formed a band."

Muñoz, who has been playing guitar since the age of 13, said the group's long-time coming album is a tale of the struggles of being musicians in a genre that was not quite as popular as one would think in the late '90's and aughts.

"When we were in high school we were kind of like outcasts, outsiders," Muñoz said. "You had a lot of cliques during that time coming out of the '90's and no one was playing reggae, during that time it was all about nu-metal, hip hop and rap."

"When we would play at shows people would look down on us or talk (bad stuff about us), so BFS was like our break from these cliques," he said.

"I think the name resonates a little stronger now," said Flores, Muñoz's cousin and an El Centro resident.



**REGGAE-ROCK TRIO BREAK FROM SOCIETY** pose for a photo at the Dawgz Hot Dogs Border Party, November 6, 2021, in Calexico. *Courtesy photo of BFS Band*

"With all the stuff going on in our society sometimes you need to just get away, and I think our little break from society is when we're in Marc's garage making music. You kind of forget about things that are going on outside."

Rascón agreed, saying a lot of the band's lyrics — written by Muñoz — brandish "Imperial Valley-isms, Calecia-isms if you want," as they share "our story of musician-artists in the Valley to try and get our voice heard."

"I would say it's a representation or a voice of what it's like growing up in the Valley," Rascón said. "It's the hardship, the struggles, the love, the carnalismo, the barrios, and the Imperial Valley all summed up into one thing."

"For someone who's not from here can kind of get a little taste of the Valley," he said.

Rascón said the band's sound is "Imperial Valley reggae, border town rock, social-cultural punk, everything and anything all encompassed into one thing."

"It's like a caprotada of musical styles and compilations from Mr. Marc," Rascón said. "I would say we're desert reggae," Flores said.

Muñoz said the band's sound is identifiably '90's reggae, influenced from what they grew up listening to, including guitar sounds of '90's grunge bands like Smashing Pumpkins and '70's psychedelic groups like Pink Floyd.

"It's really a time capsule," Muñoz said. "It's the best material that I've done and a lot of those ideas originate in the '90's but I was able to record it with modern techniques."

"It's a 3-piece... a very stripped down sound," he said, "but it has a lot of heart, a lot of soul, the message sounds good, and it talks about a lot of different topics. There's all sorts of themes: Love, hate, acceptance, struggle, war... it's basically everything we've been going through all these years."

Muñoz said some of the album's topics deal with frustration with

hard work but no advancement, escapism, times of war and PTSD, and developing a positive outlook to keep going in life in tracks like Resignation, Hoy en Guerra, No Fuss Keep Fighting, and Dub Creation, respectively. The album also features tracks about living in the Imperial Valley such as Down in Calecia.

The Break from Society self-titled album is mostly in English but does feature some songs in Spanish. While the original album featured a lot of saxophone from original band member Andy Garcia, the trio says they are looking to add a local trumpet player with relevant band experience in the near future.

Even though Break From Society has fans as far as Japan through their old CDbaby.com release, they hope now that their music will be more available through streaming services, locals will support them.

"We didn't grow up with a silver spoon in our mouths... back in the day you had to be signed to a label to pump your music out," Muñoz said. "Now you can do things independently but at the same time you still need support or else it's just going to get buried with all the noise on social media."

"So it is a little bit nerve wracking to see how it's going to do but... at the same time it's kind of like a relief because I've been sitting on all this material for years," Muñoz said. "Yeah some people aren't going to like it but

I don't care," he chuckled. "If I cared what people thought then we would have stopped playing a long time ago."

"We're trying to show the masses this is what you can do when you set your mind to it," Rascón said.

"It's an opportunity to hear something from someone that you know," he said. "A lot of what we listen to are from out of state or out of country, and being able to have the opportunity to listen to someone from the Valley that see how things affect us specifically is great."

"I would invite people to take the time to listen to what this man has got to say," Rascón said, "and hopefully that will lead some to closure or understanding or just being educated (on the Valley)."

"All through these years we've been recording all this music so I feel like... you're basically listening to the story of the band maturing through good times and bad times," Flores said.

"Tag along with us on this journey of what is Break From Society," he said.

Break From Society's self-titled album can be previewed at hearnow.com and purchased for download on all music streaming platforms, including Amazon, Apple Music and Spotify, on July 16.

For more info on their album release follow Break From Society on their social media platforms, @breakfromsocietymusic on Instagram, breakfromsociety on Facebook, and their YouTube channel.

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