



Press Kit Notes

RANCHERO

Lampost Productions in association with Stage 6 Productions

Director: Richard Kaponas

Writer/Producer: Brian Johnson

Cinematographer: Michael Bratkowski

Unit Production Manager: Dennis Curry

Cast: Roger Gutierrez, Brian Eric Johnson, Christina Woods, Ruth Livier, Jade Gordon, Rodger Hoopman, and Danny Trejo

www.rancheromovie.com

Synopsis

Ranchero depicts the journey, both geographic and personal, of Jesse Torres (Roger Gutierrez), a first generation Mexican-American with Rockabilly style and a passion for photographing everything he sees.

After the deaths of his parents, Jesse leaves the cattle ranch he has worked for twenty years and strikes out alone for the bright lights of Los Angeles. He moves next door to his estranged childhood friend Tom (Brian Eric Johnson), who has been subsisting in a low-rent Hollywood apartment. They struggle to redraw the boundaries of their friendship as Jesse comes face to face with the harsh realities of Tom's world - a morass of drug addiction and abandoned dreams.

Unemployed and virtually unemployable in his new urban surroundings, Jesse finds that Los Angeles doesn't quite live up to its image as a land of opportunity. He is soon reduced to working at a grocery store, herding shopping carts instead of cattle.

A spark of hope comes into Jesse's lonely existence when he forms a tentative friendship with his co-worker and neighbor Lil' Bit (Christina Woods). Lil' Bit lives her own life of struggle and servitude – working on the side for a small-time hustler named Capone (Danny Trejo). As Jesse's relationship with Lil' Bit intensifies, he decides that he must confront Capone if he wants a chance at freedom for himself and for Lil' Bit.



At **Ranchero**'s climax all three main characters must accept that life's challenges, as well as the obstacles to their own happiness, are best met and not avoided.

Ranchero is an examination of the journey we all take when we leave behind the past and finally grow up – at whatever age that might be.

Production History

“As a director, I’m always on the lookout for fellow filmmakers, actors, etc.,” jokes director Richard Kaponas. “Basically anyone with a talent I can exploit for my own nefarious purposes. I saw Brian photocopying a script one day at work and I thought, ‘Aha, here’s someone I can work with! Another victim!’”

“Of course, I looked to Rich as a means to my own selfish ends,” chides writer Brian Johnson. “If I can sucker some poor fool into reading my script, I’m half way down the road to convincing them to direct it.”

Brian Johnson and Richard Kaponas struck up an instant friendship based upon a mutual love of film and raw, stubborn ambition. Working the night shift at a post-production facility in Hollywood, Johnson and Kaponas would discuss future projects whenever they had a chance, hoping to one day make a feature together.

“Having written and produced several shorts it was time to step into the big leagues,” says Johnson. “Maintaining an audience’s attention over an hour and a half is the true challenge.”

After working on Kaponas’ short film “Two Devils Lunch,” the two partners decided it was time to pull their resources together and make that feature. “We’d been throwing ideas back and forth for awhile but hadn’t settled on a specific project to pursue,” says Kaponas. “Brian brought in his script for **Ranchero** and I read it that night. I loved the characters and the mood of the piece. I wanted to make this movie. I wanted to *see* this movie!”

Things moved quickly in the pre-production stage with Johnson and Kaponas assembling a team of talented friends and associates to help make their vision a reality. “That’s the thing about working on the periphery in Hollywood,” jokes Kaponas. “It’s an industry town and not everyone is interested in making independent films in their off time. Some people hit a saturation point with movies where



they're burnt out on it. I guess it would be like working in a steel mill all week and then your buddy calls and asks if you want to smelt some iron on the weekend for no money. Most people would say, 'no thanks'. Building a team can be difficult but once you do find that key group of motivated, film-crazy people, you can count on them again and again. I've been lucky enough to find a lot of those people."

The script had been written with specific actors in mind for the key roles – actors Brian Johnson had worked with before in other film and theatre projects. The role of 'Jesse Torres' was written specifically for actor Roger Gutierrez.

"Roger and I have been working together since we first met in an acting class several years ago," Johnson says. "Having played opposite Roger in many stage shows, I knew both the quirks of his personality and the depth of his talent. I attempted to endow the character of Jesse with Roger's deep passion and uncompromising ethics."

"As for Christina Woods," Johnson continues. "She's brilliantly talented... and she's my girlfriend. Nuff said."

"I've always been fascinated by the Rockabilly world and the Latino Rockabilly scene in particular. I love the music, the car culture, everything about it, really. It's a vital, tight-knit community with some interesting crossover elements into the Punk, Goth and old school Country scenes," says Kaponas. "Reading the script for **Ranchero**, I was struck by the iconic nature of the Jesse Torres character - the timeless, stoic quality of his character - and I thought it would be great to make him a greaser. Giving him these interests and characteristics allows the film to be evocative of 50's melodrama, westerns, classic heroes and it also gives us a good excuse to have a cool soundtrack. Roger Gutierrez was already a part of the Rockabilly scene so the change to his character was virtually seamless. Honestly, **Ranchero** isn't solely about Rockabilly. It's just one element of the film. I wanted it to be authentic but not overwhelming. No one wants to make the Punk rock episode of 'Quincy' again."

After a couple of months of pre-production and rehearsals, **Ranchero** started filming on a ranch in the town of Herald, just a few miles outside of Sacramento. It was a very personal experience for Brian Johnson whose cousin owns the ranch on which the film was shot.



“When you’re working with no money,” Johnson laughs. “You shoot where you can for free.”

Ranchero finished production in Los Angeles. Johnson and Kaponas kept their night jobs throughout the shoot, working before or after filming each day and swilling Red Bull by the case. Cast and crew alike scavenged for equipment and locations – everyone involved seemed to know someone who had an available apartment, a pickup truck, some paint rollers or a free Saturday. This potent mix of ingenuity and resourcefulness helped bring the film in on time and under budget.

“It’s been a great experience,” says Kaponas. “Working with this cast and crew has been wonderful! There are days where we all go home sore, dirty and sun burnt but I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world. I can’t wait to do it all again!”

“Don’t worry,” Johnson quickly retorts. “I’ve got another one.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Director's Notes

“If it stands still long enough, I’m going to shoot it.”

Ranchero is, to me, a film about willful stasis and the courage it takes to break old, entrenched habits. Apathy, entropy, and the slow dissolution of hope and self can become so familiar and routine that we sometimes find a sort of sick comfort in its dire predictability. We’ve all been in dead-end jobs, bad relationships, poor living conditions, etc. and had that feeling of hopelessness – the sense that where you’re at is where you’re doomed to remain. In that dark place, people can convince themselves that they somehow deserve what fate has thrust upon them.

It is also a film about legacies - individual, familial and cultural - and about the sacrifices made by those who came before us. It is about acknowledging these debts while being free to pursue individual dreams...at the potential cost of tradition and parental expectation.

Ranchero presents several unsuccessful options for escaping these situations. Characters disappear into drugs, will themselves to remain childlike, or affect the signifiers of a romanticized past. When Jesse, the main character, leaves the ranch for the city after the death of his father, he must decide if he will allow the weight of history to hold him forever fixed in time or if he can take the steps necessary to become an active participant in his new life. He must also negotiate new relationships: reconnecting with his old friend Tom while tentatively reaching out to his new neighbor Lil’ Bit, and finding a place for himself in Los Angeles – a city that doesn’t always live up to its idealized image. Each of these characters must find a way out of the darkness - each working to overcome his or her own weaknesses, to get out of the shadows of the past, and find direction in a harsh, chaotic world.

When Brian Johnson showed me his script for **Ranchero**, the damaged but dynamic characters immediately intrigued me, and we both wanted to see them fully realized on film. I was fortunate enough to work with a great crew who enthusiastically helped to create a stylized urban universe. Los Angeles as depicted in **Ranchero** is bright but lonely, a town where our protagonists are decidedly on the outside of opportunity. From the intentionally simplified interiors to the avoidance of recognizable L.A. landmarks, we worked hard to present a non-traditional version of an often-stereotyped city.

This is a film about a photographer and I wanted the story to be seen through his eyes. Shooting in strict, rigidly composed frames and only breaking free when the scenes became chaotic or unstable, D.P. Michael Bratkowski and I collaborated to achieve a very specific visual design. Later, with editor



Don Burton, I was able to expand on this idea – at times, jumping from “portraiture” to “landscape” in a single cut to establish Jesse’s simultaneous involvement with and separation from the events and personalities depicted. The camera itself is a character in **Ranchero**. It reflects Jesse’s evolution and point of view. I wanted the audience to be aware of the frames within a frame, to be gradually drawn in to the film along with our protagonist.

Throughout rehearsals and production, I was privileged to work with a talented ensemble of actors who portrayed their luckless, struggling characters with dignity and considered nuance. Independent films are notorious for challenging conditions and tight shooting schedules. Our cast was always prepared, quick thinking and ready to adapt to overcome any and all obstacles encountered.

I had a great time working with everyone on this film. We worked long hours (many of us also working day or night shifts at our regular jobs throughout the shoot). There were cold nights on the ranch location when we slept on bare floors, and sweltering days spent tripping over each other in a cramped Valley apartment full of equipment. There were times where I’m sure every person on the set questioned his or her own sanity and/or career choice. We struggled toward a common goal and I think we achieved it. It was never easy but it was always worth it.

Ranchero is a cowboy song. A simple, melancholy film. A film about stagnancy and loneliness but also about hope.

- Richard Kaponas



Writer's Notes

The core of **Ranchero**, a fish-out-of-water tale, came from childhood memories of my cousin's ranch. My parents and I would celebrate most holidays at their cattle ranch in Herald, California, just outside of Sacramento. I was always excited to go because I idolized my big cousin, Gary. He was four years older than me and just way cool. He would ride horses, shoot guns, and drive around on a three-wheel ATV. He was tough, and I wanted to be just like him. However, I was the city kid; scared of the cattle, wrong clothes, and terrible hay fever. Try as I would, I didn't quite fit in. With the character of Jesse, I kind of wanted to reverse those roles. Of course, times have changed, and the difference between country and urban living has lessened. When I went to the ranch as a kid, there wasn't another house for miles. When I was there to film **Ranchero**, there were three residential developments and a strip mall just down the road.

In **Ranchero**, I also wanted to address the theme of "the grass always being greener." That's not to say we shouldn't strive for our full potential. And sometimes, geography does matter. It's just that I believe our true potential lies in our character, our self-esteem, and our ethics, not in our vocation or zip code. I feel that's the realization Jesse comes to by the end of the piece. Tom represents the fact that anger, resentment, and low self-worth will follow you wherever you go. The change needs to be internal, not external. With Lil' Bit, you have someone trapped by their circumstance. They understand the need to overcome and move on, but struggle with the courage to do so.

I feel extremely fortunate to have found such an excellent director and talented cast to bring these characters and story to life.

- Brian Johnson



Cast Bios



Roger Gutierrez (Jesse Torres) is an LA native, born and raised in Canoga Park. After appearing in several indie films, Roger booked the leading role in **The Learning Curve**. He followed this by writing, producing and starring in the film **One Night in Canoga Park**. His original play **Mr. Thirteen Episodes** garnered critical success in the NoHo Arts District. Roger has appeared on many of the area's stages, most recently in his co-written piece **That's My Desire** at LATC. His latest work is a supporting lead in the television pilot **Boyle Heights**.



Brian Eric Johnson (Tom McCoy) began his career pursuit onstage in his hometown of Sacramento, but has acted in Los Angeles for the past decade. He starred in the indie feature **Rites of Spring**, an intense drama that explores the dynamics of hate groups. He also performed as the co-lead in the original play, **That's My Desire**, which was produced as a gala fundraiser for inner city youth at LATC. In 2004, Brian was acknowledged citywide as Best Lead Actor by Reviewplays.com. Brian has appeared on the television series **Baywatch**, in several feature films including **Internal Affairs** and **Side Out**, and in many television commercials.



Christina Woods (Lil' Bit) is an Indiana native who graduated from Purdue University, where she studied Theatre and Communication. Since moving to LA to pursue acting, she has landed roles in various independent features and shorts. Christina has also appeared on television shows such as **The District**, **Strong Medicine**, and **The Shield**.

RANCHERO



Danny Trejo (Capone) is best known for his roles in **Heat**, **Con Air**, and **Spy Kids**, but has also appeared in over one hundred other films. Danny relates, "I love playing the bad guy in movies, because the bad guy always dies. That's the real world. If someone asked me to play a bad guy that always gets away with it, I'd pass. That's the very message I preach to youths who are in crisis and in trouble...the bad guy always loses and the good guy always wins. It's the one thing movies and real life see eye-to-eye on."



Ruth Livier (Carmen) was a series regular on the groundbreaking Showtime drama **Resurrection Blvd**. She also can be seen as "Marta" in the upcoming feature film **Oranges** with Richard T. Jones, Tom Sizemore and Heather Locklear. Ruth recently toured in Rick Najera's **Latinologues**, and starred in **A Perfect Wedding**, the premiere show at the Kirk Douglas Theatre, under the direction of Gordon Davidson. A member of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers, Ruth is the creator of a bilingual educational quiz show, BECA. Partnering with the Latino Book and Family Festival, BECA will be introduced this summer to the cities of Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles and Chicago. This continues Ruth's heartfelt desire to encourage Hispanic youth in their educational pursuits. Although Ruth Livier and Danny Trejo voice characters on TV's **King of the Hill**, **Ranchero** marks the first time they have appeared together onscreen.



Jade Gordon (Claudia Ross) is an actress, singer and artist. She is a founding member and co-director of the art collective My Barbarian, in which she performs internationally at galleries, theaters, museums and rock clubs. Gordon has acted in many films over the past ten years. Notably in 2000, she was nominated for an IFP Independent Spirit Award for her lead role in Allison Anders' film **Sugartown**. That same year, Gordon had a guest-starring role on TV's **That 70's Show** and was given a deal at Castlerock Entertainment. Most recently, Gordon worked with **Curb Your Enthusiasm** actress Cheryl Hines in the comedy short **Goodnight Vagina**.

RANCHERO



Rodger Hoopman (Mr. McCoy) is a Sacramento-based actor, director, theatre producer and teacher. Most recently he played the role of Robert in an acclaimed production of **Proof** for Capital Stage, Sacramento's newest Equity company. He is founder/ producer/ artistic director of the Chautauqua Playhouse, the Sacramento area's oldest community theatre. He has taught theatre arts at Sacramento City College since 1980 and Sierra College since 1997. He has performed roles as Equity character actor for the Sacramento Music Circus in over 25 productions. Other favorite recent roles include George in **Moon Over Buffalo**, Otto Frank in **The Diary of Anne Frank** and the title role in **Dr. Jekyll and Mr.**

Hyde. Film and television credits include **The A-Team**, **Fortune Dane**, **Undercover with the K.K.K.**, numerous commercials and industrial films as well as voiceover talent on many local and regional commercials.



Blake Kushi (Apartment Manager) is originally from the rainy town of Hilo in sunny Hawaii. He holds degrees in Music and Theatre from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He has been in over forty stage productions and has a wide range of theatre experience, which includes improv, Shakespeare, children's theatre, and even Chinese Beijing Opera. Blake has starred in numerous short and feature-length films at USC, Loyola Marymount University, The Art Institute of California – Los Angeles, Chapman University, and the New York Film Academy. He is also active in independent movies playing the title character of the comedic feature **I Am Charlie Wong** and the soon to be released

Finishing the Game by Justin Lin (director of **Better Luck Tomorrow**, and **The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift**).



Crew Bios



Richard Kaponas (Director) is an accomplished screenwriter and prolific artist. Kaponas' short films (**Mustard Secret**, **Senioritis** and **Two Devils Lunch**) have been shown at various film festivals and galleries throughout the United States. He studied film at the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, where his instructors included experimental video and filmmakers such as Mark Lapore, Tony Oursler and Saul Levine. Kaponas says, **Ranchero** is a film about the choices we make and those that are made for us."



Brian Johnson (Writer/Producer) has written and produced in Los Angeles for the past decade. He co-wrote and produced the short film **Daydream Believer** and the indie feature **Rites of Spring**. Brian also produced the acclaimed short **One Night in Canoga Park**. His screenplay **Home by Dark** is currently under option and he is actively marketing several others. Brian's writing and producing credits for the stage include **That's My Desire**, which was performed as a fundraiser for inner city youth at LATC, **Games**, **Pieces**, and others.



Michael Bratkowski (Director of Photography) has lived in the LA area since 1984, and thanks God every day for the sun we get, having grown up in Vancouver, Canada. He's worked for a lot of great people over the last two decades: John Toll, ASC; Jordan Cronenweth, ASC; James Chressanthis, ASC; Ed Lachman, ASC and Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC. While working, he has had the great fortune to shoot in many places, seeing 46 US states, the Yukon, in Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Projects have had him in Washington D.C., lighting the interview of FBI Director Robert Mueller, operating a handheld camera in the pits at the California Speedway (with tires and car parts whizzing through the air),

shooting from helicopter to helicopter in the mountains above LA, walking backwards with an HDCam down a pier in St. Maarten, riding on the trunk of a Mercedes 530SL down the Las Vegas strip, and shooting 2nd Unit with a Panaflex for Sony on **Twin Falls Idaho**. Michael says, "It's been a ton of work, but a great life!"



Don Burton (Editor) has worked with **Ranchero** director Richard Kaponas since 2001 and brings with him 10 years' knowledge and experience as a creative director and editor developing feature-length documentaries, DVD featurttes, multi-media convention pieces and narrative film productions. He holds a BFA with a concentration in sculpture from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth where he worked primarily with multi-media installation and large-scale outdoor sculpture before entering the film industry. His work can be seen on HBO Latin America, the Golf Channel and on numerous DVD's for MGM, Warner Brothers, Fox and Disney. Additionally, Don has consulted for

productions in LA, New York and Boston as well as co-produced documentaries in South America and Europe.



Music



Don DiLego wrote and performed the original score for **Ranchero** as well as contributing songs to the soundtrack.

Drawing comparisons to the likes of Wilco, Beck, Ryan Adams, and even the Beach Boys, Don DiLego continues to develop as an artist who refuses to be categorized.

Don's first release, "The Lonestar Hitchhiker", was recorded for Universal Records shortly after his move to New York City. Featured musicians included Jay Bennett (ex-Wilco), Gregg Williams (Sheryl Crow, Wallflowers), and Paul Garisto (Jesse Malin, Ryan Adams). Don's follow-up, "The Lonestar Companion," prompted Rolling Stone to state that, "New York City's emerging folk-twang songsmith, Don DiLego, is alt-country's next poster boy." His latest album, "Photographs of 1971" was self-produced along with Portland's legendary Gregg Williams (The Dandy Warhols).



Ranchero boasts an authentic Rockabilly sound thanks to songs provided by the **Cadillac Angels**. Hailing out of Santa Barbara, California, The Cadillac Angels are: singer/guitarist Tony Balbinot, bassist Steve Carter, and percussionist John Palmer. With several CD releases and countless miles on the road, the Cadillac Angels have shared the stage with such music legends as Dick Dale, Carl Perkins, Bo Diddley, Wanda Jackson and Link Wray. They serve up their own brand of a roots/rockabilly/surf hybrid that never fails to bring the house down, whether it's performing at L.A.'s House of Blues on the Sunset Strip or Austin's South by Southwest (SXSW) Music Showcase.



Film Credits

CAST

Jesse Torres	Roger Gutierrez
Tom McCoy	Brian Eric Johnson
Lil' Bit	Christina Woods
Capone	Danny Trejo
Carmen	Ruth Livier
Claudia	Jade Gordon
Mr. McCoy	Rodger Hoopman
Apartment Manager	Blake Kushi
Homeless Man	Baldwin Sykes
Young Thug	Brandon Brown
Drug Dealer #1	Nate Williams
Drug Dealer #2	Jeff Hampton
Orange Peddler	Dave Silva
Hopscotch Girl	Tatiana Guevara
Receptionist	Nicole Wordes
Mr. Torres	Ramon Ayala
Ranch Worker #1	Elias Chairez III
Ranch Worker #2	Ricardo Villalpando
Ranch Worker #3	Martin Carrillo
Young Jesse	Ricardo Villalpando Jr.
Young Tom	Hunter Hansen
Sign Acrobat	Anthony Montes
Skateboarder	Jesse Freeman
Biker	Robert Botteri
Dope Man	Gary Eddington
Girl in Breakroom	Elisa Dyann
Barber	Poli
Girl in Bar	Maleri Mitchell
Art Gallery Patron	Scott Lurie



FILMMAKERS

Director **Richard Kaponas**
Writer/Producer **Brian Johnson**
Associate Producers **Richard Kaponas**
Marc Wielage
Christina Woods
Executive Producer **Brian Johnson**
Unit Production Manager/1st Assistant Director **Dennis Curry**
Art Director **Kathryn DiLego**
Director of Photography **Michael Bratkowski**
Editor **Don Burton**
Composer **Don DiLego**
Script Supervisor **Jim Clayton**
1st Assistant Camera **John Graham**
Jeff Johnson
Guy Olds
Cory Shiozaki
2nd Assistant Camera **James Cross**
Marisol Montoya
Greg Gerardo
Gaffers **Doug Cragoe**
Justin Wolak
Dave Cramer
Electricians **Greg Capp**
Greg Brezovec
Matthew Daniger
Mark Evans
Grips **Jessica Spuehler**
Eric Castro
Saybyn Mayfield
Mark Patton
Sean Piper
Matthew Whitted
Brian Boyle
Production Assistants **Dan Hefner**
Dave Hefner
Daniel Weisman



RANCHERO

Production Mixers **Marc Wielage**
Glenn Porter
Brandon Griffith

Boom Operators **Sean Lile**
Trent Corbett
Nate Williams

Makeup **Tracy Moeller**
Cassandra Helfard

Locations **Daniel Weisman**
David Booth
Gary Silva Jr.

Catering **Café Carolyn Catering**

Craft Service **Benjamin Bailey**

Still Photographers **Jesse Freeman**
Stephen Liu
Steve Roosa

Videographer **Daniel Weisman**

Post Production Supervisor **Matthew Daniger**

On-line Editor **Patrick Bellanger**

On-line Supervisor **Anton Linecker**

Color Timer **Marc Wielage**

Tape Operators **Kevin Shepherd**
Jordan Fox

Visual Effects Artist **Trey Freeman**

Supervising Sound Editor **Brandon Griffith**

Sound Editor **Deckman Wyatt**

Re-Recording Mixer **Brandon Griffith**

Trailer Editor **Mike Clark**

Titles **Christina Denicola**

Web Design **Ralph Kai Marketing Design**

Web Development **BrainBoy**

Music **The Cadillac Angels**
Don DiLego