

## Valley Sessions gives voice to the creative community

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Las Cruces Bulletin

Music is an important part of any community, and Las Cruces is no exception. Though the city now supports more music venues than it did even a decade ago, it can still be difficult to know who the individual players are – musicians young and old who rely on live venues to get their work out. A group of enterprising young filmmakers and sound engineers have set out to change that.

Calling their project Valley Sessions, they have created a safe place for serious musical artists to show off their talent, for little or no cost, through a series of beautifully curated diegetic – or live performance – videos dropping every month on the project's YouTube page. Since January of

2023, twenty videos have been made and there is no indication that the group is slowing down anytime soon.

Season one consists of twelve sparkling performances, each set in a different location across the city. Some rely on multiple camera shots, like the six used for the Stoney Blue Fish video. Compare that to the incredible single take one shot used for the Papayas con Chile video, and the innovation becomes clear. Bathe them with expert lighting and you've got a series of masterful productions that showcase the incredible talent to be found here.

Among the other performers appearing in season one are local musicians Era Snow, Nick Brower, Taylor Paul, Desirae Price, Jenna Ivey, C.W. Ayon, M.qu, Anibal and Tucson-based band

Female Gaze. Through word-of-mouth, Valley Sessions finds its reach expanding to include acts either passing through town, or who come here specifically to shoot with them. To date, season two consists of performers from Arizona, Wyoming, Nashville, Albuquerque and El Paso.

The brainchild of Ryan M. Robson, Kent Harkey, Zane Chaffee and Aaron Walterscheid – all products of Las Cruces' burgeoning film scene who were looking for projects to fill their downtime between film projects – Valley Sessions has grown to encompass other willing volunteers from film, music, photography and other artistic pursuits. The result is a richness of visual splendor that reveals far more than musical prowess.

"I wanted to have some-

thing that local filmmakers and creatives can devote their time and energy to that would reflect back on the community," Robson says. "I like the idea of giving information and experience to people who are just trying to make a living here. Not just to students, but to anybody who wants to know how the industry works."

Chaffee, lead singer for Stoney Blue Fish and a music producer in his own right, agrees. "Being able to record on set is something I had never

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**FROM TOP:**  
Local bluesman CW Ayon prepares for his shoot at the Elephant Ranch Bar.  
COURTESY PHOTO BY SAI TAFOYA

Director Ryan M. Robson prepares M.qu for his video shoot in an empty studio at 828 Productions.  
COURTESY PHOTO BY SAI TAFOYA



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**SESSIONS**

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done before,” he admits. “It’s a new challenge each time and though it is difficult, it’s also really rewarding. And now I have people contacting me to do recording and sound mixing for them.”

Robson has also taken his project into the classrooms at local high schools, in order to share the wealth. “A lot of those kids are very interested in volunteering with us to learn more about how this stuff works. There are so many aspects of this project to learn about, including film, music, photography, set dressing, lighting, sound, and they can learn them on the job from people who do this for a living.”

The results, he says, have been very rewarding all the way around. The first

performer ever filmed by the group, Era Snow, used her video to get into a songwriting competition. Local bluesman C.W. Ayon got an entire tour booked, based solely on the video created for him. Stoney Blue Fish used theirs to get into a battle of the bands show in El Paso, which netted them second place. The testimonials go on and on. It has also added a new list of invaluable credits to the filmmakers and sound engineers working on the videos.

Eventually, Robson and his crew would love to be able to put the music they have recorded up on Spotify and Apple Music, to further spread the word about Las Cruces’ hidden talents. But that takes money, which is in short supply. Until they can find grants or even spon-



Taylor Paul records his video at Downtown Blues Coffee. COURTESY PHOTO BY RYAN M. ROBSON

sors to help them, they’ll keep on creating fresh content, and counting on the community to help get the word out.

The videos can be viewed online at ValleySessions.com, and if you have an interest in working with Valley Sessions, or recording your own video, hit them up. They’re always looking for new talent.

**Desert Exposure changes editors**

**BULLETIN REPORT**

Elva K. Österreich is leaving the Las Cruces Bulletin after 10 years at the helm of Desert Exposure, the arts and culture monthly also published by the Bulletin. Elva also reported for the Bulletin on a range of topics including local arts, historical preservation, cultural events, Spaceport America and much more over the years, earning a stack of New Mexico Press Association awards.

The Bulletin welcomed David Salcido this week as Desert Exposure’s next editor. David previously worked as a staff reporter at the Bulletin from 2012 to 2014, and over the past year he has been a regular contributor of arts reviews and other articles for the Bulletin as well as Life is Good in Las Cruces, our annual free community magazine.

Elva and David are working closely together on the August edi-

tion of Desert Exposure while she prepares for a position at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

“Elva’s leaving behind some pretty big shoes to fill,” Salcido said, “but I’ve got big feet and a closet filled with shoes.”

Desert Exposure was founded in 1996 in Silver City, acquired in 2014 by OPC News and is currently held by the Osteen Media Group, owners of the Las Cruces Bulletin. The free paper is distributed in Grant, Luna, Doña Ana and Otero counties.



LAS CRUCES BULLETIN PHOTO BY ALGERNON D'AMMASSA

Elva Österreich and David Salcido look over Desert Exposure at the Las Cruces Bulletin's downtown office on July 3.



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