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Tony Vidal is Bringing Laughs and Life Lessons in Baja

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Tony Vidal is a Bay Area filmmaker and director of the upcoming road comedy, *Baja*. He's also a man who has lived a full life—

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emphasis on full! From working directly in film to managing real estate, he has a wealth of diverse experiences that have informed his work onscreen. In anticipation of [Baja's opening this week](#) in select markets, we got to ask Tony a few questions about his life and his unique approach to the craft of storytelling with film.

Where are you from? What got you into filmmaking?

I grew up in San Rafael. In college, studying English Literature at UC Davis and Trinity College, Dublin, I was inspired by great stories, which helped expand my awareness and transformed my life. I wanted to do the same for other people and, to me, the medium of film felt like the most dynamic storytelling medium of our time. So I went to USC film school and was on my way.

What are your favorite films? What inspired your style and approach?

I have many favorite films ranging from *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, to *The Shawshank Redemption*, to *Breaking Away*, and even *Borat*, and many others. I especially enjoy comedies with characters that are grounded in reality and arc. I love to laugh, so the humor of real life is always a part of my films. I also like to weave in an extra dimension of depth, usually derived from the growth or learning of the central character(s). My aim is to make films that make people feel good, and that are spiritually uplifting.



Courtesy of Prankster Entertainment.

You've been in the industry for a long time –from being head story

analyst at Orion Pictures to doing a stint in tech (as we all do it seems haha) as a senior writer and director – what has kept you going? What brought you back to film and production?

If one truly feels a passion for great storytelling, it never goes away. At the same time, life takes us in other directions for many good reasons. After all, life isn't about film, film is about life, and to be a good storyteller, one has to live a little and reflect on life. So I had many years away from the film business, traveling, making a living in a family real estate business, raising my own family, and figuring myself out. As fate would have it, I have been privileged with an opportunity to make some films later in life. This is a blessing which I also consider a responsibility. I want to share whatever wisdom and insight I have garnered on my journey in my films.

What stories do you like to tell? Why?

First and foremost, film stories must entertain. There is a fairly limited number of genres to work in that the general audience responds to. I favor comedy over tragedy because I am a hopeful optimist who believes people can learn and grow without having to go through great suffering, although that is obviously a path many experience. I choose to tell fun, uplifting stories to provide enjoyment to the audience and, hopefully, provide some insight into life.

Where does Baja fall on that spectrum? 

Baja is exactly that kind of movie. It's a road comedy, which is a fun genre, and quite literally offers the opportunity for expanding vistas. I think we accomplished a first by shooting a road comedy about a trip to Mexico, entirely in Mexico with a Mexican crew, that heavily features the landscape and culture of that great country. In addition to the cross-cultural experience, *Baja* touches on the mysticism and spirituality of Mexico, which is an added dimension.

How did the story for Baja come about? 

I am half-Mexican and have made numerous trips to Mexico, so

that was a subject I felt comfortable with and enthusiastic about. And, of course, as I said, I love comedy, especially road comedies. Generally, I think that travel offers a great opportunity to broaden one's world view and gain new perspective on life. So, taking that genre and placing it in Mexico seemed like a natural to me.

What did you enjoy most about making the film?

No doubt, what I most enjoyed about the film was actually being in Mexico and working with an all-Mexican crew. The cast and I were having our own adventure in Mexico while filming the exploits of our story's fictional characters. Personally, I gained an experience of the people and culture that I never would have as a tourist. And, of course, this only helped strengthen the authenticity of the film.



Mark Margolis as "Don Primo" in the 2018 comedy, Baja. Courtesy of Prankster Entertainment.

In the past, you've expressed a need to infuse traditional genres with more meaning for audiences. For instance, with The Prankster, you balanced traditional Hughes-era high school narratives – like The Breakfast Club and Sixteen Candles – with, as you said "an additional dimension of depth." How did you apply that approach to Baja?

I believe the best film stories operate on a number of levels. First and foremost, as entertainment. So we were sure to craft a story with a plot and characters that would be engaging and funny. Then, there's the additional element of a respectful experience of

Mexico and Mexican culture. Finally, there is a bit of magical realism in the story, as one of the characters communicates with a spiritual entity. Also, there's a mystical *curandero* (medicine man) named Don Primo, played marvelously by Mark Margolis (known for his role as Hector Salamanca in *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*). Don Primo's nuggets of wisdom hint at a larger reality.

Your team at Prankster Entertainment describes itself as "a conscious media company whose goal is to awaken slumbering spirits through entertaining stories geared for a mass audience" what was the impetus behind making that the core mission statement of prankster?

Feature filmmakers have a huge platform that is both a privilege and responsibility. Joseph Campbell, in *The Power of Myth*, said storytellers of today need to take this responsibility seriously, and strive to accomplish what great storytelling has always done – putting people in touch with deeper truth, what some might call the sacred. The trick is to do this subtly, leading with the entertainment aspect. An overly serious approach risks being pretentious or boring, and therefore ineffective. We hope to wake people up through joy and laughter.

Considering your experience and journey, what advice do you have for young filmmakers here in The Bay and beyond?

Live your life and learn about yourself, and other people. Don't seek to make a film just to make a film. Rather, make a movie to enhance lives – your own, the lives of people making the movie with you, and the audience. Process is everything. A positive process will always yield a beneficial result. Conversely, a negative process is doomed.

What's next for you?

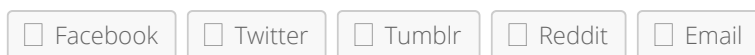
Glad you asked! I have a really fun "Hollywood Journey" movie called *45 Minutes to Nowhere*. It's the odyssey of a film student, in film school, then breaking into the industry, and beyond. I also have multiple other projects that I've written that are ready to go and listed on the [Prankster Entertainment](#) website. Ideally,

we're looking to get a multi-picture package financed. Hopefully, *Baja* will open the door for that possibility.



Dap owns Timberland boots and is committed to loving black women, eating good food and diversifying media as he sees fit and while he can. He can be found yelling into the abyss and being snarky on the following: [IG](#) | [Twitter](#)

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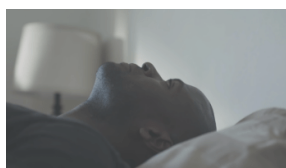
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