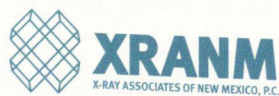
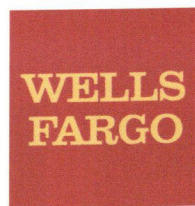


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# A R M I E N T A

WORLD PREMIERE!



Sunday • February 18, 2018 • 2 pm  
 Wednesday • February 21 • 7:30 pm  
 Friday • February 23 • 7:30 pm  
 Sunday • February 25 • 2 pm

Music and Libretto by Héctor Armienta,  
 based on the novel by Rudolfo Anaya

## CAST

Ultima, a curandera .....Kirstin Chávez  
 Antonio Márez, a young boy .....Daisy Beltran\*  
 The Owl, Ultima's "familiar" .....José Luis Muñoz\*  
 Gabriel Márez, Antonio's father .....Javier Abreu\*  
 Maria Márez, Antonio's mother .....Carelle Flores\*  
 Narciso, the town drunk, Gabriel's friend .....Javier Ortiz\*  
 Tenorio Trementina, saloon-keeper .....Carlos Archuleta

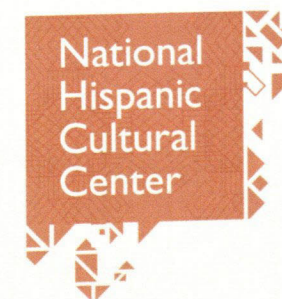
## CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor ..... Guillermo Figueroa\*  
 Stage Director ..... Octavio Cardenas\*  
 Scenic Design ..... Joe Stephenson  
 ..... Jeff Benham  
 Lighting and Projection Design ..... Daniel Chapman  
 Costume Design ..... Dorothy Baca\*  
 Puppet Design ..... Robert Secrest  
 Stage Manager ..... Susan Stone Li

\* Opera Southwest Debut

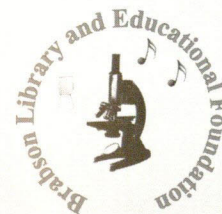
Approximate running time: 2 hours including one 20 minute intermission

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# BLESS ME, ULTIMA

## Note from the Composer

### BLESS ME, ULTIMA

Five years ago, I began the journey of creating the work you will see during this, the 45th anniversary season of Opera Southwest. As a Mexican-American composer/librettist, I felt compelled to tell Rudolfo Anaya's epic novel *Bless Me, Ultima* through the power of opera. I'm very grateful to him for entrusting me with this thrilling and challenging task.

When adapting a work as revered as this novel to another art form, great care must be taken to hold true to its principal themes. And so, I consulted often with Mr. Anaya on what characters and scenes were essential to telling his story. I listened carefully as he

described the characters, many of them drawn from his life as a young boy. I visited some of the settings where the novel takes place, and I researched the music that was prevalent in New Mexico during the 1940s.

Yet, opera has its own way of storytelling. While the opera is based on the novel, it cannot replace the novel. It is grand theater and the orchestra is a character that informs us differently than words. The opera must stand alone. As you watch and listen, it is my hope that you will find the essence of the story – family, destiny, good versus evil, and the hidden power of the natural world – as seen through the eyes of a young boy named Antonio.

Héctor Armienta

## SYNOPSIS

New Mexico circa World War II (1940-50)

### ACT I

Curious villagers wonder what Tony's destiny will be as his father Gabriel arrives to take Ultima to live with his family. Ultima and Tony meet for the first time; and as night falls, Gabriel and his wife Maria argue about

Tony's destiny. Suddenly, their friend Narciso arrives, pleading with Gabriel to help stop the revenge murder of the war-veteran Lupito who, overcome by PTSD, has killed the sheriff. Gabriel and Narciso leave and Tony sneaks out behind them. Gabriel and Narciso try to stop Lupito's murder to no avail, and the victim dies at Tony's feet.

The next day Tony and Ultima are picking herbs by the river, and Ultima begins teaching Tony how to let nature guide his destiny. The scene is interrupted by the saloon-keeper Tenorio's three daughters who cast a spell cursing Tony's Uncle Lucas for his witnessing the murder of Lupito.



Héctor Armienta

*Intermission*

### ACT II

A group of men are carousing with Tenorio in his saloon. Ultima arrives to entreat Tenorio to make his daughters undo the curse; he refuses, calling her a liar and witch. She leaves, and Tenorio reveals that he feels betrayed by his pueblo and Tony's Uncle Lucas in particular. Ultima, Tony, and others visit Lucas as he lies ailing from the curse. Ultima's spirit guide, an owl, joins them and encourages Ultima to heal Lucas but warns that her actions will likely be seen as witchcraft. Lucas is healed, and Tony's parents again argue about their son's destiny. Suddenly, Narciso appears to warn Ultima that Tenorio and his men are after her, saying she's a witch and the cause of the recent death of one of Tenorio's daughters. Ultima diffuses the situation, and Tenorio swears revenge.

### ACT III

Tenorio returns to try to kill Tony and Ultima but is thwarted by Narciso. He shoots Narciso, whose death is witnessed by a frightened Tony. Ultima's owl appears, calms him, and reveals to him the legends of his people. Later, at a farewell party for Tony who has spent the summer with his two uncles, his Uncle Pedro hears that another of Tenorio's daughters has died and that Tenorio blames Ultima. Tony is excited to return home to see Ultima but is confronted by Tenorio who tries to shoot him. Ultima's owl swoops in to protect him and takes the bullet instead. Ultima's connection to the owl means that she shares its fatal wound, and she says her last goodbye to Tony before dying.

