'Bless Me, Ultima' opera dates set

Composer is Hector Armienta, who worked with author Anaya on libretto

BY ADRIAN GOMEZ
JOURNAL ARTS EDITOR

It's seen success on the stage, on the silver screen and on paper.

Now the dates are set for the opera, "Bless Me, Ultima." And fans will have to wait until February 2018 to see it.

The 1972 critically acclaimed novel — and one at the forefront of Chicano literature — is being brought to the opera stage by the National Hispanic Cultural Center and Opera Southwest.
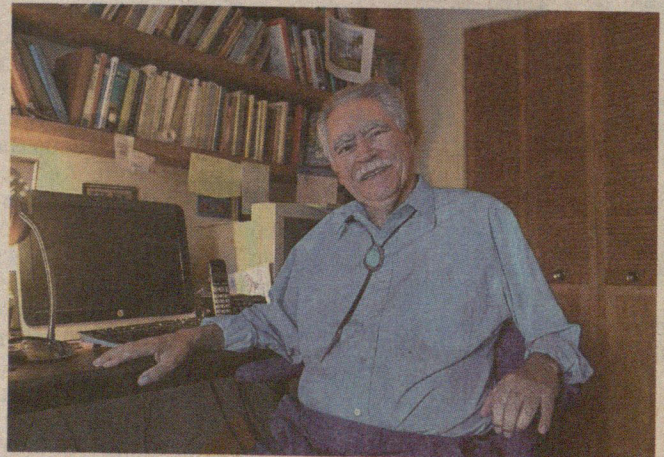
The opera will run Feb. 18, Feb. 21, Feb. 23 and Feb. 25, 2018. Individual tickets go on sale in July at operasouthwest.org. It has been a year since the announcement of the project.

The two entities, along with New Mexico Mutual, commissioned California-based composer Hector Armienta for the work.

Armienta has worked with Anaya on the libretto.

"Hector had reached out to me and the NHCC back in 2012 and 2013," said Tony Zancanella, executive director of Opera Southwest, in an earlier interview. "We've had it on the back burner for some time, and we've just pulled the trigger on it all recently."

"Bless Me, Ultima," is set in the small town of Guadalupe, N.M., during World War II. The novel follows the story of Antonio Márez, who has a *curandera* named Ultima come

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Author Rudolfo Anaya at home in Albuquerque in June 2016.

live with his family when he was 6.

The main plot line involves Ultima's struggle to stop the witchcraft of the three daughters of Tenorio Trementina, the book's main villain. Antonio, who witnesses several deaths, is forced to deal with religious and moral issues.

Support for the development and commission of the work to date has been provided by the NHCC Foundation, New Mexico Mutual, Opera Cultura, Opera Southwest, Al and Carmen Castellano and the Knight Foundation.

Guillermo Figueroa will conduct and Octavio Cardenas will stage direct. The cast has yet to be determined.