



Administrative: 612-333-2700
Patron Services: 612-333-6669
Fax: 612-333-0869

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Lani Willis, VP, Advancement, lwillis@mnopera.org, 612-342-9579 (o), 612-207-5703 (m)

Gretchen Halverson, Marketing and Communications Director, ghalverson@mnopera.org, 608-290-8489 (m)

MINNESOTA OPERA OPENS ITS 2023-2024 SEASON WITH *CRUZAR LA CARA DE LA LUNA*

**The world's first mariachi opera is a company premiere for MN Opera,
with a brand-new orchestration by David Hanlon**

MINNEAPOLIS (October 9, 2023) – After the sold-out world premiere of *The Song Poet* last March, Minnesota Opera continues to spotlight the vibrant communities of color that call the Twin Cities their home. Minnesota Opera opens its 61st season with a new production of the world's first mariachi opera, *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna (To Cross the Face of the Moon)*, by composer José “Pepe” Martínez, with lyrics by the composer and Leonard Foglia and book by Leonard Foglia, featuring a new, fully orchestrated score by David Hanlon.

The opera parallels the migration of the Monarch butterflies and tells the story of a multigenerational Mexican American family separated by countries, cultures, and consequences in search of new possibilities. As their grandfather journeys back in time to reflect on his life in his final days, the members of the Velasquez family must make their own migration across land and through memory, searching their hearts to discover where they belong.

The opera's composer, José “Pepe” Martínez, was born in 1941, in the southern Jalisco village of Tecalitlán, where he demonstrated a natural talent for music as a young boy. Mariachi music was deeply rooted in his local community and was a primary inspiration to him as a young musician. In 1975, Martínez joined the famed Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán and embarked on a journey to write a new chapter in mariachi music, establishing himself as a prominent composer, and the ensemble as a leader in the world of mariachi. Martínez served as Music Director of Mariachi Vargas from 1975 through his final season with the ensemble in 2014. His first opera – and the world's first mariachi opera – was commissioned by Houston Grand Opera and premiered with acclaim in 2010. Martínez collaborated with Foglia again to write *El Pasado Nunca se Termina (The Past is Never Finished)* before he passed away in April of 2016 at the age of 74.

Audiences across the United States and abroad have enjoyed performances of *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, which critics have called “richly affecting” and a “tearjerker.” Minnesota Opera’s commissioning of a fully orchestrated score powerfully combines the opera’s mariachi roots with the musical forces available in opera companies, unlocking future potential for this work to further cement its place in the repertoire and impact audiences around the world.

“The ways that mariachi and opera singers use their voices to sing are remarkably similar,” says Minnesota Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. “Minnesota Opera’s vision is ‘to sing every story,’ and this story will be powerfully sung in a beautiful new production that we hope will deeply resonate with the experiences of many members of our community who choose to take journeys with the faith that the outcome will exceed the risk.”

The production is directed by an alum of the MN Opera Resident Artist Program, David Radamés Toro. The new production’s design is influenced by both the vibrant color and joy of Mexican culture and the realities of life for migrant workers. Arnulfo Maldonado, who was nominated for a Tony Award for his design for *A Strange Loop*, drew his inspiration from the renowned Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta and the colors, textures, and traditions he experienced growing up in the South Texas border town of Eagle Pass.

At its presentation of *¡Ópera Afuera!* at Allianz Field during the 2021-2022 season, Minnesota Opera featured newly orchestrated selections from *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* sung by one of its original cast members, the ranchera legend Vanessa Alonzo, who will return in this new production as Lupita. Additional original cast members making their Minnesota Opera debuts are baritone Octavio Moreno as Laurentino and mezzo-soprano Cecilia Duarte as Renata, and baritone Efraín Solís makes his Minnesota Opera debut reprising the role of Mark. Making their role debuts in this production are Zulimar López-Hernández (*Edward Tulane*) returning to Minnesota Opera as Diana, Resident Artist tenor Efraín Corralejo as Rafael, and Resident Artist alum tenor Daniel Montenegro as Chucho. Isaac Quiroga appears as Victor, and Mateo Huber debuts as Young Rafael.

Minnesota Opera welcomes local mariachi musicians Israel Aranda, Ivan Fontánez, and Resident Artist alum Rodolfo Nieto to the production, performing onstage in tandem with the musical forces in the pit. David Hanlon, who served as Music Director for the 2010 Houston Grand Opera premiere, conducts the Minnesota Opera Orchestra and the Minnesota Opera Chorus through his new orchestral arrangement of the work.



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Following each performance, all audience members are invited to stay for a post-performance fiesta in Ordway's Target Atrium, featuring live mariachi music and sweet treats hosted by generous members of Minnesota Opera's donor community.

In advance of this production, Minnesota Opera will present a thought-provoking "Off Stage" evening of conversation with community leaders discussing the risks and rewards of the Latinx immigrant journey on Wednesday, October 25, at 6:30 p.m. at MetroNOME Brewery (385 Broadway Street, St. Paul). Panelists include Katya Zapeda, legislative and policy director for the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs; Xavier Tavera Castro, a photographer, activist, and Carleton College professor; and Mirdalys Tweeton, executive director of Centro Tyrone Guzman.

What: *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*
A Mariachi Opera
Music by José "Pepe" Martínez
Lyrics by José "Pepe" Martínez and Leonard Foglia
Book by Leonard Foglia
Performed in Spanish and English with English captions projected above the stage

Where: Ordway Music Theater, 345 Washington St., St. Paul, MN 55102

When: Saturday, Nov. 4, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Nov. 9, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Nov. 11, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, Nov. 12, 2023 at 2 p.m.

Tickets: \$25-\$228. Call Minnesota Opera Patron Services at 612-333-6669, Monday–Friday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., or purchase online at mnopera.org/cruzar.

Media: Digital assets are available on our [Online Press Room](#).

Creative Team

Conductor and Orchestrator | David Hanlon
Stage Director | David Radamés Toro*
Scenic and Costume Designer | Arnulfo Maldonado
Lighting Designer | Carolina Ortiz Herrera

Cast

Laurentino – Octavio Moreno**
Renata – Cecilia Duarte**
Mark – Efraín Solís
Diana – Zulimar López-Hernández
Lupita – Vanessa Alonzo**



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Chucho - Daniel Montenegro[°]
Rafael - Efraín Corralejo*
Victor - Isaac Quiroga
Young Rafael - Mateo Huber

Mariachi Musicians

Guitarrón - Israel Aranda
Guitarra - Ivan Fontáñez
Vihuela - Rodolfo Nieto[°]

*MN Opera Resident Artist

[°]MN Opera Resident Artist Alum

**Original cast of *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*

To learn more about *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, please visit mnopera.org/cruzar.

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Minnesota Opera advances the art of opera for today and for future generations
by expanding the circle of musical storytelling.