

# Community of Báthory Scholars & Enthusiasts



COBSAE is a community of enthusiasts dedicated to research, discussion, and the appreciation of one of history's most enigmatic characters, Countess Erzsébet Báthory.

Dear Friends,

Your support and enthusiasm for *Infamous Lady: The True Story of Countess Erzsébet Báthory* has been so wonderful! I'd like to take a moment to offer you my sincerest thanks, and also, to ask you to share the same level of enthusiasm and support for Mr. Dennis Báthory-Kitsz and his amazing project about the Countess: "Erzsébet: The Opera".

For nearly twenty years, Dennis has been working on creating a musical masterpiece about Her Ladyship and it is nearly ready to come to life; all he needs is your support! We are very proud to dedicate this issue of our newsletter to sharing Dennis' story, offering a glimpse into the opera, and most important, how you can help make this vision a reality!

We encourage you to visit Dennis' site: [Bathory.org](http://Bathory.org), and you can also receive updates on [Erzsébet: The Opera's page](#), and our [Infamous Lady Fan Page](#) on Facebook! Many thanks for your continued support and enthusiasm!  
~Kim Craft

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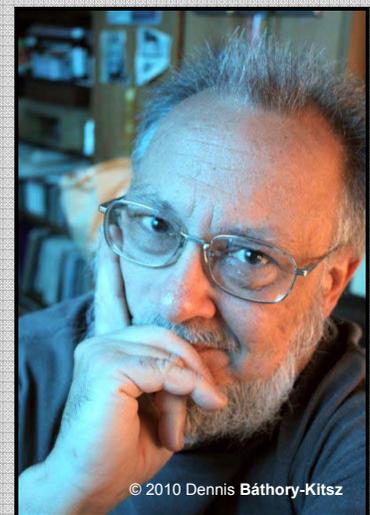
## D E N N I S B Á T H O R Y - K I T S Z : A P R O F I L E

Descendant of the Countess...Acclaimed Composer... Artist... Scholar...and Entrepreneur

Many fans of the Countess are familiar with his name...His work involving her has been featured on the Discovery Channel's series, "Deadly Women" and Travel Channel's, "World's Bloodiest Dungeons", as well as the UK series, "Martina Cole's Ladykillers." He has created nearly 1,000 works for orchestras, sound sculptures, soloists, chamber ensembles, electronics, theater, installations, dancers, interactive multimedia, and performance events, as well as writing about music and multimedia arts.

Since 2005, he has co-hosted the award-winning "Kalvos & Damian" non-pop radio show, and he created the "We Are All Mozart" productivity project, composing 100 works in 2007.

His music includes uniquely designed electronic and acoustic instruments; computer software and hardware; synthesizers, e-boxes, electronic costumes, and the Rhythmatron; as well as his own extended voice performances. His lifelong non-pop advocacy has included directing the Trans/Media Arts Cooperative, Delaware Valley Festivals of the Avant-Garde, Kaxpiksu State Arts Festival, Vermont Composers Festivals, Amsterdramm, and Ought-One Festival of NonPop. In addition to all this, Dennis co-founded the Vermont Composers Consortium and the NonPop International Network .



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Dennis at work in his Vermont studio...

# THE MAKING OF "ERZSÉBET: THE OPERA"

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS BÁTHORY-KITSZ



*The life and death of Erzsébet Báthory, the "Blood Countess", has been a fascination, even an obsession of many for 400 years. This project is to finish and stage "Erzsébet: The Opera" as a monodrama with chamber ensemble. The libretto is now finished and published, two musical sections are complete (one of which was heard in part on the Discovery Channel's "Deadly Women" feature) and the singer and instrumental musicians are committed. The website dedicated to [\*Erzsébet: The Opera\*](#) details the past 10 years of progress, with images, journals, artwork, commentary, and videos.*

"Each time we see these great works of art, we come away questioning our own humanity ... and who we might be when placed within the same circumstances."

**COBSAE: Twenty years in the making... what has driven your passion to create this opera about the Countess?**

**DB-K:** "As an indirect descendant, I have a family interest in her story. A few things come into play. One is that I thought I was related to her, which has caused some controversy and personal dismissal of me and even antagonism toward me. Here's what happened. My grandfather, Josef Báthory, talked about this evil woman who was his ancestor; he didn't know much beyond her name and that she killed people...it was all spoken in hushed tones...it was the late 1950s, well before the vampire interest of the 1980s, and it was a shameful relationship to have. Why would the old man admit to such a thing unless it were true? I took it as such. Once the project was underway, though, it became clear Erzsébet had no direct Báthory-named descendants; it must have been that Josef was descended from her branch of the family.

In 1987, I began researching aspects of her life and death for an opera. The idea was kindled when I received McNally's biography "Dracula Was a Woman" from a friend. . The Erzsébet opera tells a story -- and getting the story right was the tough part. By "right" I don't mean factually correct but rather compelling and strong enough to be told in just a few words. An opera libretto is little more than a short story where the second character is the music itself.

A side story was Andrei Codrescu. I'd heard

a radio report that he was working on a biography, and got in touch with him. We spoke extensively about him writing a libretto, but things broke down after he wrote, "The Blood Countess," which I didn't like. It was a kind of time-travel novel rather than a biography. We cooled to each others' ideas, and I set the whole opera idea aside for a while.

Then the Internet era dawned about the time as the vampire interests grew dramatically. Soon I had heard from hundreds, later thousands, who were entranced by her life. Legend built upon legend, most of them in the realm of Gothic horror —and my website became a source of some useful information.



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**Never before seen photo of the tower ruins where the Countess was imprisoned. Courtesy of Dennis Báthory-Kitsz.**

## THE MAKING OF "ERZSÉBET: THE OPERA" . . . CONTINUED

Bands like "Bathory" and "Cradle of Filth" came along. She was now a commodity.

The constant stream of email over 15 years kept my attention, and brought to light aspects of her life and the life of the times that were actually very exciting: the multiple religious forces, the family rivalries, the general awfulness of existence even at the royal level. Cable networks showed up asking me for interviews, and I obliged ... meaning I had more research to do. For the Discovery Channel, I composed one scene of the opera and brought in musicians, including singer Lisa Jablow, who, herself, had a long-time interest in the Countess.

I'd visited the castle while I lived in Europe, and in 1997 worked with Czech sculptor Pavel Kraus on an unrelated project, presenting a piece in Prague in 1999. He was interested in working on set design for the opera should it come about. Then in the early 2000s my father Zoltán died, and I wanted to finish this opera for him. And finally I did my PhD thesis on the opera in 2006 -- including a virtual opera as a multi-player networked game, an aspect that I haven't talked about publicly before. It's not ready yet. In fact, the technology itself isn't ready for my approach yet.

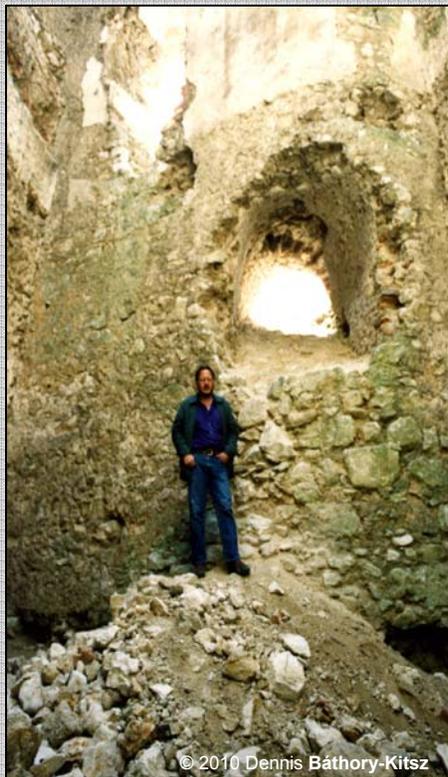
In other words my "passion", as you put it, came from being unable to escape the topic. So I gave into it and wrote the libretto myself in 2009, published it, and dug into actually composing the full opera this year."

All Images courtesy of  
Dennis Báthory-Kitsz  
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**COBSAE: What elements of her ladyship do you wish to bring to life and what aspects of her story will the Opera portray?**

**DB-K:** "As you know from my review, I didn't like what Juraj Jakubisko did in his recent epic film, "Báthory." I thought he basically gutted her character, reducing her to a caricature.

That's the opposite of my portrayal. She was brilliant, she was a great mother, she spoke several languages, she negotiated treaties with warring forces, she protected Vienna with her wall of castles, she sat down with scientists and artists. And yet she is alleged to have committed heinous crimes. So first, I want it to be clear



Dennis Báthory-Kitsz standing inside the ruins of the "Death Tower"

that there was a normalcy at the time to dispatching underlings. We haven't grown out of it as a species, but we have moved away from it as the usual state of civilized affairs. Yet there it was, as part of her childhood, young adulthood, and married life. And, there's a good chance she was excessive at it — a gentle way of approaching what she did, no? She might have had a sadistic streak, or she might really have been a madwoman with a kind of schizophrenia that was ignited by being obsessive-compulsive about order and beauty.

I first portray her through memory of the likely apocryphal story of the rebel sewn into the horse's belly combined with a kind of aural phenomenon that equates singing and screaming. Together with her reminder that she is from a family whose very name means "valiant", I set her character as one of normal with a hint of imbalance ... in other words, like most of us! As the opera progresses, we hear Erzsébet the historian talk of events, her husband, her name, her children and her linguistic skill. It is plain and genuine ... She also speaks/sings these thoughts to someone clearly intimate: Anna Darvulia, reputedly her lover. Finally, Act I ends with a joyous Erzsébet singing and playing with her children. In other words, we see a multi-faceted, strong, and deep woman who is a leader and intellectual. Those are the elements that remain important and in which I cast the more complex and terrifying part of the story...

In Act II, I let her discover some mysterious sensation in blood that makes her become wild-eyed and show a mad side. But, she is able to restore her own equilibrium, and

THE MAKING OF "ERZSÉBET: THE OPERA" ...  
CONTINUED

"The strong Erzsébet that has fascinated so many women is the Erzsébet that I try to portray in this opera...I want to pose the question "Is she you?"



Entrance to the Castle Csejte before its restoration

sets off to sing a lullaby to her children. This lullaby is actually the history of the Báthory family, so it is a dramatic respite and stable moment in the middle of the opera.

Act III tells the story in quick succession of the death of minor noblewoman and singer Ilona, the Countess's arrest by Thurzo, the trial and conviction and the final scene of regret. I portray her as impatient with Ilona's hesitancy and anger with her impertinence as she perceives it. That allows it to devolve into a murder — the only murder actually portrayed in the opera. Erzsébet's crimes are merely implied. What has she really done?

I've tried to portray her as typical nobility, save for the fact that all her actions were done with enormous conviction — whether learning languages, negotiating treaties, raising children, or punishing servants.

The strong Erzsébet that has fascinated so many women is the Erzsébet that I try to portray in this opera."

**COBSAE:** What do you wish to the audience to feel during and/or after the performance?

**DB-K:** "I'd hope they would feel horror, but also see themselves in a position of power. You see, I want to pose the question "Is she you?" I've struggled with this over the years, because I've been often accused of glorifying a serial killer while fomenting further ethnic rivalry. Of course that's nonsense. She is a fantastic character for an opera. The great operas had lots of murderers in them, as did great literature. Blood is everywhere on stage with the corpses piling up in "Hamlet", and it's one of the greatest examples of literature in the English language. "Der Untergang" was a brilliant movie about the truly evil Hitler. What is Picasso's "Guernica" if not the depiction of slaughter?"

Each time we see these great works of art, we come away questioning our own humanity ... and who we might be when placed within the same circumstances. How would we behave faced with a moody and crazed Hamlet? When covering the massacre of Guernica? When standing inside Hitler's bunker? How would we behave when living within Erzsébet realm?"



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What was left of Erzsébet's realm in modern day Slovakia

**S U P P O R T I N G   A   M A S T E R P I E C E :**  
**T U R N I N G   A   V I S I O N   I N T O   A   R E A L I T Y**

Funding and support of the arts is often sadly neglected. Grants and endowments are few and far in between, as is the support of benefactors and philanthropists, whose selection criterion is often based upon the kind of tax shelter they receive for their donation instead of the merits of a project or the need of the artist or community. So what's left? How can piece of history be told? How can an artist share a their work? How can an amazing piece of music ever be heard? It's up to us...the fan, the enthusiast, real people...real patrons and now it's easier than you think, there's nothing to lose and everything to gain! Read on to find out how. Dennis truly needs your help and time is running out!

Right about this time people usually ask, "why an opera anyway"? It's a good question. The form has undergone a resurgence in both large and chamber versions. Operas put a frame around larger-than-life stories of personality and drama and even politics. In this case, it puts an artistic distance between the audience and the Countess...song is such an intimate expression of the human spirit, whether good or evil. It's really thrilling. Creating an opera, even a monodrama where one person carries the story, is an expensive business. Unlike ordinary new music concerts, an opera also requires stage design, costumes, lighting, a video/audio team, plus additional musicians, a lead singer and a director. The publicity for 'Erzsébet' has been great, but by itself, hasn't resulted in financial backers coming forward.

"I've answered requests for information from more than 1,650 people via my Bathory.org website. Correspondents say they are thrilled to help out. But when it came to fundraising, only nine of them pledged to the opera's production. And, unlike

"radiothons", I'm shy enough that I don't want to follow it up with a whining repeat request." Báthory-Kitsz said. Luckily there is a solution: [Kickstarter.com](http://Kickstarter.com)

Kickstarter is an extension of social networking. The web site offers explanations, a demo video, links, and secure processing of credit card authorizations via Amazon Payments. "Kickstarter doesn't ask for 'donations' or 'contributions' – it asks for 'backers'. The pledges are authorized but not charged unless the goal is met. Project people like me are expected to provide rewards or incentives, such as tickets, books, T-shirts, CDs or DVDs, and even dinner with the composer," Báthory-Kitsz said. The incentives for pledging to 'Erzsébet: The Opera' are exactly what he mentioned. For as little as \$2.00, a backer can receive a download of the music.

This makes it a winning situation for the backer, as they have nothing to lose and an incentive to gain. "It's an all-or-nothing proposition, so if on June 15 I have \$11,999, the project receives nothing," Báthory-Kitsz

said. (More than \$5,000 has been pledged so far by over 70 people.) "There's a lot of pressure to let everyone know, which is why the process is quite social-media based — an update runs on [Facebook's 'Erzsébet: The Opera'](https://www.facebook.com/ErzsabetTheOpera) and related pages, on my Facebook page."

But, time is running out, as June 15th, the last day of project fundraising, is around the corner!

So, what exactly does the cost of becoming a backer amount to in real world dollars? Let's take a look:

**\$2 = Bus fare (one way)**

**\$5 = One Dozen donuts**

**\$10=Two large lattes**

**\$25=Two adult movie tickets & small popcorn**

**\$50=Oil change for the car**

**\$100= Pair of designer jeans**

As you can see, for less than the cost of a cup of coffee or fast-food lunch, you and a friend can help make history. Click below and visit Erzsébet's page on [Kickstarter](http://Kickstarter) to make the vision a reality!

**Click on the links below to learn more about how you can help Dennis make "Erzsébet: The Opera" a reality...**

Visit *Erzsébet: The Opera*  
@ [kickstarter.com](http://kickstarter.com)



Visit Dennis' site:  
Bathory.org



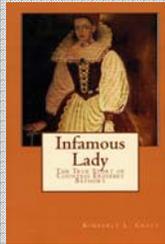
Read Steve Layton's article:  
"Make It So"  
@ [Sequenza21.com](http://Sequenza21.com)

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Read Jim Lowe's article  
"Funding an Opera Over the Web"  
@ [timesargus.com](http://timesargus.com)

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WE ARE VERMONT

## THE LAST WORD ... NEWS & REVIEWS



If you've read *Infamous Lady*, we'd love to hear your feedback! Please share your reviews with us! Drop us a line at:

[COBSAE@infamouslady.com](mailto:COBSAE@infamouslady.com)

From [Goodreads.com](http://Goodreads.com): "Great Book!" ★★★★★

Christopher Pierce wrote:

The author approaches the legends of Lady Bathory like a lawyer, examining the evidence and letting the reader make a conclusion about her guilt or innocence. There are two types of books about this historical woman: gothic fiction which paints her as a sadistic, blood-bathing vampire on a killing spree, hell bent on preserving her beauty through the witchcraft of bathing in virgin blood; and then, accurate, historical accounts of her life and times. Von Elsberg attempted this in the 1800s, and then Raymond T. McNally in the 1980s. Tony Thorne followed in the 1990s. Prof. Craft's new book stands on the shoulders of these previous works and adds material that the serious scholar or enthusiast has likely never read in English. The first few chapters give us a running history of the Bathory and Nadasdy families, and then the fun begins in a chapter titled, "Strange Goings On." The murders start, quietly at first, and the countess blames the death of her servant girls on disease. She and her local clergy participate in their burials. But then the rumors begin, and sometime later, the clergy begins to make accusations that she and a servant are actually torturing and murdering these young girls. The author weaves the testimony of actual witnesses, much of which was taken under King's Orders in 1610, into a fascinating story which is highly readable (the actual testimony is provided in the appendix, written in the flowery style of the time and not quite as interesting as the author's reconfiguration for the modern reader). This is a must read for anyone who is serious about learning the truth about this woman.

**Thanks so much, Christopher! We're glad you enjoyed the book and really appreciate your support!**

Many thanks to the members who have so generously contributed to the creation of this newsletter:

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"Supporting a Masterpiece" Contributions by Steve Layton (Sequenza 21) and Jim Lowe (Times Argus)

Images Courtesy of: Dennis Báthory-Kitsz

Last Word Review: Christopher Pierce

We hope you enjoyed this issue! We look forward to your thoughts and feedback! If you're a fan of the Countess and would like to contribute to a future issue, please let us know! We'd love to hear from you and feature your work! Send your inquiry to:  
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[www.infamouslady.com](http://www.infamouslady.com)