



Photo by Juraj Kojš

## ***The Black Queen Project* Descends on Miami With Female Power and Humanity**

**JULIANA ACCIOLY** | SEPTEMBER 25, 2018 | 10:05AM

This Thursday, the MDC Live Arts Lab will transform into a medieval castle, shrouded in a mysterious creepiness that evokes the tension of falling into a trap and not quite believing you can get out. Enter the world of Barbara of Celje, the notorious Black Queen, a powerful ruler who lost an empire to the forces of misogyny and intrigue, her life rewritten as that of a sorceress, sexual deviant, and evil myth.

Uniting medieval melodies, contemporary poetry, and real-time electronics, the show gives the queen's trajectory a new perspective, a surreal sonic meditation based on Slovakian historian Daniela Dvoráková's recent book *Barbara of Celje, the Black Queen*, which sheds fresh light on Queen Barbara's legend by claiming it was distorted in a systematic attempt to erase her from history.

"There's nothing scarier than an intelligent, powerful woman," pianist Adam Marks says. Mezzo-soprano Jennifer Beattie, composer Juraj Kojš, and Marks deliver stagecraft that gives form to a depth of anguish that is "no well-worn narrative," he explains, citing parallels in modern memory such as the overshadowing of Nobelist Marie Curie's accomplishments by an adulterous love affair and the vilifying of Hillary Clinton during the last presidential campaign.

The Slovakian-born Kojš, an assistant professor at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami, says their passion for the material was fueled by extensive research and visits to eight European castles to further their understanding of court culture, communication, and everyday life in the Middle Ages. "We were deeply interested in this game of thrones, this kind of life we can't imagine," Kojš says.



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What the trio found through a two-and-a-half-year journey was as far removed from the historical cliché as possible: a 15th-century woman who by marriage was crowned queen of Hungary, Bohemia, and Germany as well as holy Roman empress, a ruler with incredible intelligence and ruling capability, who served as a judge, managed budgets, and was admired by the people and loved by her husband, King Sigismund of Luxembourg, a man 30 years her senior. Upon the king's death, Queen Barbara was arrested and exiled, a victim of a sinister male conspiracy that saw no objection to her public demonization.

Beattie, who portrays the queen, says that in her process of creating the character, there were many discussions on the meaning of humanity and the intersection of public and private life. The project became an act of reclamation, like brushing the dust off an old portrait and finding the whole woman the audience will see onstage.

"We feel like another side of her story needs to be told, that there should be more insight into the life she lived," Beattie says. "We want to show her in her full humanity."

*The Black Queen Project. 8 p.m. Thursday, September 27, and Friday, September 28, at MDC Live Arts Lab, 300 NE Second Ave., Miami; [mdclivearts.org](http://mdclivearts.org). Tickets cost \$10. Goth attire is welcome.*

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