

BERLIN

'The Blood Countess' Review: Isabelle Huppert Bites Into a Gloriously Costumed, Deeply Silly Vampire Tale as Erzsébet Báthory

Berlin: The star is murderously brilliant in Ulrike Ottinger's dark comedy about the infamous Blood Countess, but this very long two-hour movie crams in too many slapstick side characters to justify the blood-letting.

BY RYAN LATTANZIO

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'The Blood Countess' *Amour Fou Vienna, Amour Fou Luxembourg, Heimatfilm* / P. Domenigg

Isabelle Huppert, the all-time monumental French actress, **famously said** she's always wanted to play a "sadistic, manipulative murderer." She gets her chance in Ulrike Ottinger's dark vampire comedy "**The Blood Countess**," here as Hungarian noblewoman serial killer Erzsébet Báthory.

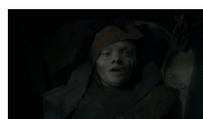
But Huppert, hilarious and brilliant as she ever is and serving crimson-colored looks here that are *to die*, doesn't just suck blood: She also sucks the air out of the room of a crammed gaggle of goofy, slapstick side characters that push "The Blood Countess" more toward the realm of a feature-length, less-funny "What We Do in the Shadows."

The best **Isabelle Huppert** performances, which are all of them, are founded on her implacable gaze, eyes like clouded cough drops, and creamy, ivory skin peeking out from below a costume that either works to embellish her low-key persona or play it down even more. The wardrobe that costumer Jorge Jara applies to Huppert as Báthory, here re-emerging after decades of deep sleep to put a stop to a mysterious book that could potentially end her reign, is undeniably delicious.

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She surfaces from a catacomb in the first scene on a barge, looking killer in a red-robed dress with a train that's more like a pool forming around her, arriving in a Vienna unstuck in time but with recognizable modern accoutrements. And Huppert's performance beneath these costumes is a master class in side-eyes and barely perceptible facial digressions: She's still dead-inside Huppert at her finest, but one here looking to become, well, permanently undead.

The budget on the gowns and sets must have been prodigious, or the below-the-line folks were just crafty, because this is a visually ravishing movie. But fans of the myth of Erzsébet Báthory, who was accused circa the early 17th century of killing young virgins to bathe in their blood for her own beautification, might be let down by what's ultimately a silly, madcap Vienna

adventure.

Avant-garde, queer German filmmaking legend Ottinger and co-screenwriter Elfriede Jelinek (author of the novel “[The Piano Teacher](#)” that inspired Michael Haneke’s unsparing romance movie starring Huppert as a masochistic musician) find freedom in a sort of timeless limbo version of Vienna, bathed in gauzy lighting and a coziness that’s hard not to warm to. Christina Schaffer’s beautifully detailed production design feels, at times, like stepping into a 1970s Rainer Werner Fassbinder [film](#) or one of those old-world European hotels where the toilet shares space with the shower, and a jaunty bellhop awaits in the lobby downstairs to deliver travel tips.

Make no mistake that “The Blood Countess” is gorgeous, but its cabinet of curiosities, like a subway peddler opening up his coat to the trinkets for sale therein, are mostly revealed to be a disappointment.



'The Blood Countess' Petro Domenigg / FILMSTILLS.AT K

They include a kooky cast of characters that only distract from Huppert’s towering turn (which is also a reminder of Huppert’s rarely exploited gift for

comedy). This is an extremely long two-hour movie, padded out by an overstuffed ensemble. There's the handmaid Hermine (Birgit Minichmayr, in Sally-Bowles-meets-German-expressionist makeup and hair), now working as a housekeeper in the Vienna hotel Báthory returns to. Huppert entreats her to help locate this potentially deadly ancient tome, and assist in furnishing an all-out vampire gala in the process (replete, again, with dazzling looks). This dreaded book can make a bloodsucker mortal again if touched by a vampire's tears, so cue the panic from within the community.

Then, there are the pesky vampirologists Theobastus Bombastus (André Jung) and Nepomuk Afterbite (Marco Lorenzini), who've arrived at this hotel for a vampire conference and are fascinated by Erzsébet's legend, and my god, her gowns, too. Plus "[Afire](#)" star Thomas Schubert as Erzsébet's vegetarian vampire nephew, eager for a taste of mortality and potentially proving to thwart her mission to annihilate this book that could also end her. You might start to literally lose the plot as Erzsébet and those on her tail head off into the alleyways and canals of Vienna — here, rickety noir-like shapes blanketed by a cold air — sucking what blood she can. Chase sequences through streets and down staircases are more thuddingly deadpan than raucously camp.

There's a silent-film quality to the overacting on display from everyone except Huppert, whose wild outfits and impeccable comic timing fashion her Erzsébet Báthory into one of the actress' flashiest (and best) recent creations. But she deserves a better, more compelling costume in the shape of a film to outfit a bloodsucking turn that will inevitably beg for camp recreations down the line. You'd think with Jelinek on the horn — whose masterful "The Piano Teacher" is now responsible for one of the most beloved rediscoveries of the 21st century — a richer script could be in order. The anemic plot of "The Blood Countess," however, nearly doesn't justify the blood-letting needed to fully take a bite out of Huppert's performance.

 **Grade: C+**

“The Blood Countess” premiered at the 2026 [Berlin Film Festival](#). It is currently seeking U.S. distribution.

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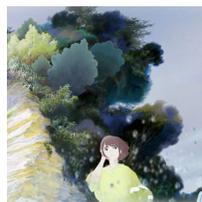
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