

DECIBEL

Negură Bunget 8
Vîrstele Pământului
Code666

We Transylvanians always look on the brighter side of death. As the first Negură Bunget post-breakup album (read all the semi-sordid details in *dB* #067), *Vîrstele Pământului* is surprisingly consistent in comparison to the two celebrated full-lengths—*'N Crugu Bradului* and *Om*—that preceded it. There's tons of arboreal atmosphere, folky interludes, weird vocals in weird languages (one, actually) and bits of black metal thrown in for balance. Essentially, this is the very same Negură Bunget responsible for transcendental journeys from the top of the Făgăraș Mountains to the sprawling Wallachian Plains and every sounds-like-fiction-but-it's-real point in-between. Perhaps *Vîrstele Pământului* isn't a visceral experience like *'N Crugu Bradului* or as cathartic as *Om*, but drummer Negru's (a.k.a. Gabriel Mafă) new five-person team is well versed in blending the two. Actually, *Vîrstele Pământului* is the least black metal of Negură Bunget's oeuvre. It takes the full seven minutes of intro "Pămînt" and four minutes of "Dacia Hiperboreană" before Corb's anguished screams and Spin's lilting guitar lines penetrate the Dead Can Dance-like New Age instrumentals. Black metal surfaces again on segments of "Ochiul Inimii," the Isengard-styled "Chei De Rouă," "Țara De Dincolo De Negură" and "Arborele Lumii," but it's tightly controlled, rarely blasting off or necro-transforming into something grim or frostbitten. In fact, most of *Vîrstele Pământului*—in particular closer "Întoarcerea Amurgului"—reminds of the rework of "A-Vînt În Abis" off *Măiestrit*, with its strummed 'n' plucked acoustic pieces, aerophone accompaniments, odd rhythms and strange spoken words. Certainly, fans of old mourn the loss of songwriters Hupogrammos and Sol Faur, but *Vîrstele Pământului* is of sufficient quality to transport the disgruntled right into the unforgiving court of Vlad Țepeș. Just don't expect much black metal along the way.

— Chris Dick