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## Negura Bunget

### Virstele Pamintului

Review by Mike Korn

You're going to hate this if you like music wrapped up into neat little categories. I honestly have a hard time describing what *Virstele Pamintului* sounds like...at least, without going into an awkward exposition of the multitude of sounds found here. Above all, let's say the record is "mystical." That's the overwhelming atmosphere one gets upon hearing Negura Bunget.

After that, let's call them "Romanian," or better yet, "Transylvanian." This is a very important distinction to make, especially to the band. Although they hail from the country of Romania, they belong to the land of Transylvania. The translation of "Pamintului" is "ages of the Earth" and this music does indeed sound like the foggy, forbidding mountains and forests of ancient Transylvania. Despite using modern instruments like electric guitars and synthesizers, the music has a very archaic sound, like something from the dawn of history. The lyrics won't help you much unless you speak old Romanian, but even so, you'll understand the feeling the band is trying to transmit.

How again to describe Negura Bunget? They started as a raw black metal band and there is certainly black metal remaining in their style, but there's also a huge preponderance of authentic Romanian folk music as well as eerie keyboard ambience. Add in a very progressive tendency towards complex layers of sounds both ancient and modern and you have a very unique band - and a very mesmerizing one. Few bands can claim to inhabit their very own genre. Negura Bunget is certainly one of these. Adventurous listeners should have a field day here.

### Track by Track Review

#### Pamint

The album begins in very pastoral fashion with the clink of what sounds like cowbells and a mournful sounding flute. Tension begins as the strummed tones of a balalaika or mandolin chime in. This song is a gradually building tapestry of earthy, mystical sounds, with wooden percussion and droning keyboard tones adding to it. We are waking to the dawn of another world. A spoken voice incants in a foreign tongue and rises in intensity until it becomes a hoarse shout and a shriek. Finally, electric guitar, bass and more typical drumming join in. It's a mysterious, powerful cut!

#### Dacia Hiperboreana

Haunting high pitched ambient tones kick this off, soon joined by a wonderfully eerie chorus of electronic voices. It sounds like we are floating above storm clouds, looking down on the world below. A simple but insistent guitar arpeggio again adds tension to the sound and we have another tune built upon constantly growing layers. It becomes more folksy, almost gypsy-like, as another spoken voice again chants in ancient Romanian. The voice gets hoarser and there's a sound almost like a scream in the background. A heavy electric guitar buzz adds its weight and the track ends almost triumphantly...a hymn to the glorious world of the past.

#### Umbra

A hunter's horn calls us to this showcase of percussion. It's a great workout from the drummer, featuring booming kettledrums, xylophone and a cascade of pounding tribal drums, all over more melancholy keyboard ambience. It builds up to another huge climax.

#### Ochiul Inimii

This is the first really black metal song on the album, yet it also features plenty of traditional folk instruments and atmosphere. It's a very dark track even when the more traditional instruments dominate, as they do in the beginning. The moody gypsy-like folk and somber spoken vocals proceed for a while before a raw black metal scream announces that metal has finally arrived. Blasting away at a fast pace, the song is still pretty complex, shifting riffs and never entirely losing the keyboards or ancient instruments like flute. It's a perfect mixture of dark folk, raw black metal and progressive elements.

#### Chei De Roua

Continuing in much the same vein as the previous track, this is another mixture of metal and gypsy-like folk elements. These two styles don't exist independently of each other, they are constantly intertwined. Some of the folksy vocals

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seem kind of corny to me here, but like the rest of the album, the song exists in its own universe. The heavy parts this time around are really heavy and the harsh vocals are pretty extreme.

### **Tara De Rincolo De Negura**

That mournful horn is heard again, a call to battle, and it introduces the heaviest cut on the album. Even though the lyrics are a mystery, I'm pretty sure this is the tale of some huge battle or massacre. It's quite aggressive and war-like but again features some mystic, eerie atmosphere. Viking metal fans should really love this one...I know I did.

### **Jar**

A spooky woodwind tone leads back to the more ambient side of Negura Bunget. This is a creepy soundscape full of eerie keyboard tones, dripping water and whispered vocals. This stuff should be on the soundtrack of "Lord of the Rings" ...I can see hooded figures moving through the depths of Fangorn Forest during a drizzling mist. This is an amazing exercise in moody sound manipulation.

### **Arborele Lumii**

A harder, guitar-dominated feeling takes root here. I wouldn't describe this as "black metal," but there is a dark feeling amidst the strong guitar hooks and Negru's drumming is also powerful. Differing from most of the other songs, this has a strong and recognizable chorus. A sort of loud hollering type vocals mixes with the most typical rasps and a brief acoustic interlude makes an appearance. I'd say this one was a tad longer than it needed to be.

### **Intoarcerea Amurgului**

A huge bassy boom serves as an intro to this tune. As is typical of the album and Negura as a whole, other elements start to gradually appear and soon we're in a very sprightly, peppy bit of acoustic folk that will almost make you feel like dancing. There's more solemn spoken vocals and the song becomes huger and darker sounding with layers of keyboards. Then, believe it or not, the xylophone takes over for a while! This is quite the progressive epic to cap off a pretty amazing record.



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