

104.1 WIKY
 is Your Christmas Music Station!

24/7
 Holiday Music
 On-line

www.WIKY.com

The WIKY
 Christmas Channel

**Jesse McReynolds & Friends – Songs
 Of The Grateful Dead
 (Woodstock Records)**

★★★★



I've never been a fan of the Grateful Dead, but mandolin innovator and country and bluegrass legend McReynolds and friends are, and here they ably translate the Dead's material (songs written by Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter) into timeless songs that resonate with warmth and old-time country honesty. From the folksy Americana of the opener, "Black Muddy River," the songs of Hunter and Garcia are re-imagined in a fresh and enjoyable fashion, with a down-home flavor

that wouldn't be at all out of place on a Tennessee stage. It's no surprise that Jesse McReynolds is a 45-year member of the Grand Old Opry and member of both the Country Music Hall Of Fame and the Bill Monroe Bluegrass Hall Of Fame.

Standouts include "The Wheel" (with some great harmonizing), the lament of "Loser," the elegant "Stella Blue," and the ultra-catchy "Deep Elem Blues."

"Day By Day" is a beautiful closer, and is actually a new song co-written by McReynolds and Robert Hunter. It works well to close out this cool collection of roots music that combines two unique legacies into a cohesive whole.

-- Todd Zachritz

**Negura Bunget – Virstele Pamintului
 (Code666/Aural Music)**

★★★★



This veteran pagan black metal outfit from Romania has definitely evolved far beyond the stereotypical with this album, which as I understand is their first with a new lineup and new vocalist. Exploring the band's native roots with plenty of synthesizers and folk melodies, *Virstele Pamintului* opens with the surprisingly atmospheric soundtrack of "Pamint," which comes complete with flutes and a very Earthly, primitive vibe. Only within the final couple of minutes

plus does it erupt into a more traditional black metal sound. Recorded in a secluded forest, "Virstele Pamintului" roughly translates to "Age Of The Land/Earth," and indeed that concept is evident throughout this diverse and visionary album.

Often mixing pagan folk, progressive rock, black metal, and symphonic elements within their tracks, Negura Bunget have created a conceptual monster here. The album flows from track-to-track as a whole, so choosing individual cuts to comment on seems fruitless. Suffice to say, Negura Benget bring out non-traditional instruments like flute and xylophone to add mood to their aggressive and epic metal. It's as if early Dead Can Dance met up with Watain and had a wicked jam – that worked. I give these guys credit, as they are certainly expanding the language of black metal. This album is a true journey, ripe with medieval adventure, drama, and maybe a little bloodlust. Yes, these guys have more to offer than just blastbeats and juvenile aggression. Kudos to them for breaking the mold and convincing me listen multiple times!

-- Todd Zachritz ●