

## Negura Bunget - Virstele Pamintului

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Negură Bunget - *Virstele Pămîntului*

Review by JJ Koczan (StonerRock.com/The Obelisk)

Aural Music/Code666

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The 2006 release by Romanian folk-inspired black metallers Negură Bunget, titled simply *Om*, was a landmark for those who heard it. Up and down, the record was praised for its masterful balance of influences, its groundbreaking genre-defiance, and the fact that, where so much "folk metal" is goofy beyond repair, Negură Bunget seemed able to affect a serious and dark atmosphere that was neither laughable nor steeped in black metal cliché (some would argue the two aren't mutually exclusive).

The story goes that after *Om*, the central parties responsible for Negură Bunget - namely multi-instrumentalist/vocalist Hupogrammos Disciple's (real name Edmond Karban), guitarist Sol Faur and drummer Negru (real name Gabriel Mafa) - had a falling out, and the band effectively broke up in 2009, only to be revived by Negru alone, with a new lineup, whose first album together is *Virstele Pămîntului* (Aural Music/Code666). Joining Negru in this new Negură Bunget are guitarists Corb (also vocals and dulcimer) and Spin, bassist/flutist Gădineț, keyboardist Inia Dinia and vocalist/percussionist aGer (real name Ageru Pămîntului), who's been in the band since 2003 and also handles pan flute and sundry folk instrumentation I'm not even going to pretend to know the first thing about.

In a way, it's silly to expect this lineup of Negură Bunget to be able to top the majesty of a record like *Om*, since *Virstele Pămîntului* is more like a band's first album than it is their fifth - though it should be noted that Negură Bunget's *Măiestrit*, which showed up earlier this year, is not a new full-length, but rather a re-recording of 2000 opus *Măiastru Sfetic*, so technically speaking this isn't the first time we're hearing this new incarnation of the band, just the first time we're hearing them perform new material. In any case, to think these players will be able on their first outing to stand up to the fully realized vision that was *Om* is nonsensical. Rather, in listening to *Virstele Pămîntului*, one hopes Negru will be able to get his band to that point again, or even surpass it in terms of s t y l e and atmosphere.

For now, *Virstele Pămîntului* shows marked potential for Negură Bunget to do just that, and for anyone who's never heard the band before, which should be plenty of people, they'll be thrilled to discover the moments where the band issues sonic references to Enslaved, Drudkh or even early Opeth, deftly switching back and forth between black metal and folk, and, at its finest moments (see the eight-minute "Ochiul Inimii"), blending the two so seamlessly that the listener doesn't think to question what they're hearing. The blending of acoustic and electric guitars (they often play simultaneously) heightens the folk ambience without sacrificing sonic heft or distortion, and there are plenty of black metal squibbly lines to keep the purists in line.

The production, always a sticking point for black metal, introduces Negru's double kick bass drum so gently almost three and a half minutes into "Dacia Hiperboreană" that you almost don't notice when it shows up amidst the flute, keys and vocals. I point this out not as a complaint, but rather as an example of the intricacy of *Virstele Pămîntului*, on which the ambient/folk moments of "Umbra" and "Jar" are every bit the highlight as the blasting, blistering metal of "Arborele Lumii." Despite essentially having to be reborn, Negură Bunget are able to pull off a complicated sound and present an album that, while given to flights of incredible self-indulgence, also stands up to anything any lineup of the band has accomplished prior. *Virstele Pămîntului* is the kind of record you could sit for a week and point out all the sonic turns and twists, which elements are in what balance where, but what it all adds up to is the spirit of not being held into one genre is alive and well for Negru and company, and especially for those who never encountered *Om* or any of Negură Bunget's previous work, this latest outing should land with a remarkable impact.

I don't speak Romanian and I don't consider myself much of a fan of black metal, but Negură Bunget's sheer creative will and obvious drive to follow inspiration wherever it takes them is respectable no matter what you listen to on any given afternoon. *Virstele Pămîntului* is a work of impressive depth and scope, and if you take anything away from listening to it, take away the impression that this band, this Negură Bunget, are only getting started.

URL: <http://www.myspace.com/negurabunget>

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