

# people

**Boston vampire researcher Scotty Stets and his Phoenix Rising band performed live at Castle Dracula in Transylvania.**

The old crone pointed a shaking finger up towards the summit of Mt. Albina. Through the mist of the Carpathians, at last I could see it... Castle Dracula!

As I had got off the rickety bus in the middle of the Carpathian Mountains, I had asked the nearby peasants, feeling as though I were in a Hammer Film. In my best Hammer English accent, I asked quite loudly: "Excuse me, can you tell me 'ow to get to Castle Dracula?" You could've heard a pin drop. I couldn't believe the reaction I got, just like in the novel and the movies! So I further antagonized: "What the bloody 'ell is wrong with everyone 'ere?! Madame, do you know the way to Count Dracula's castle?"

I bought a few beers and a bottle of water and began the long, arduous ascent to the top. The path to the top is very dangerous: there are places where no guardrail exists and it was then I knew, what with the sun rapidly descending in the western sky, that I would be spending the night in the castle. Gulp! I had to hurry too, in order to get some great pictures of the castle for Dr. McNally. Granted, weather permitting, I could get a few in the morning as well... that is, if I survived the night there!

Besides the danger of falling from the path and down the steep mountain side, there is also the very real danger of bears and the venomous Carpathian viper which allegedly uses the castle for shelter. Not to mention the possibility that all the tales of Dracula...

As I walked, I remembered the story of how Vlad Dracula made a human chain

up this very same path to the top; this chain composed of his boyar enemies and their wives and children. They had to pass bricks baked in the kilns of Arefu and they hauled them up to the top in order to strengthen the castle's walls. By the time their work was over, many had fallen to their deaths down this mountain side, while the survivors had been whipped so badly; they were all naked save for their shackles, their best Easter clothes having been beaten off their backs or simply worn away over time. Many, I am confident, would later be impaled. Did they haunt this mountaintop too?

It took me about half an hour to reach the castle. I had to cross a very rickety, old bridge over a ravine to get into the castle. When once there, I started taking photographs and documenting what I saw. I had little time to spare since my best friend, the sun, at this point in time was fast running away in fright. I drank my beers in celebration that I had finally arrived.

Then, breaking my peace and solitude, came... the sound of the Wallachian eagle flying high overhead. He probably was mad at me for scaring away all the rodents that I was sure he hunts up here in the castle. When I first walked into the castle, there were animals scurrying to hide from this invader. And I saw the nests of the Carpathian Viper. It's bad enough to have to take the risk of being bitten by a vampire... but snakes! I hate



snakes! Then, from out of nowhere, came voices. Human voices. A whole chorus of them! Had I disturbed the sanctity of Dracula's home? It was a horde of a hundred college students from Bucharest who, upon seeing my Martin Backpacker guitar, demanded I play a concert for them.

Although I didn't have my backup band, Phoenix Rising, with me, they were there with me in spirit. I played every song I could think of, from the blues of Stevie Ray Vaughn to the haunting melodies of Led Zeppelin's acoustic numbers. I got a lot of requests throughout my gigs in Romania for the Eagles' "Hotel California" so I played it. And they went wild! They love this tune! And I played a few of my own songs: "My Love Remains (A Song For Karen)", "Nero's Song (fiddlin' while Rome burns)" and a few others.

As it started to get dark, I ended my Castle Dracula gig. The audience applauded loud enough to wake the dead. Then they left. The smart thing to do would've been to go with them in one group down off the mountain, but I still had some work to finish for Dr. McNally so I stuck around. Besides, I asked myself, am I gonna let superstition and myth rule my life? I felt galvanized by my performance and the great acclaim and warm applause these students had given me. Then, as silence once again reared its monstrous head, and a voice in the back of my mind started to whisper all the legends I had researched so deeply with Dr. McNally, a certain uneasiness set in on my senses and began to devour me as it sipped and sucked the energy from my veins. To be continued...