

In the distant year of 1987, a bunch of teenagers in the South of Brazil decided to record one of the most underrated albums of that glorious Brazilian 80's scene, the mighty "Rotten Church". The name of the band was Panic and they were almost alone in their state simply trying to make a more brutal metal without even imagine that this effort would be recognized all over the basements of the underground 30 years later! As some of you may suspect, they even didn't know exactly how to label what they were doing, because they simply "wanted to play fast, scream and make everyone terrified". This and some other stories you can check here, in this brief but very interesting interview we did with Regener Fortes, the vocalist of that classic piece of old extreme metal.

1. Hello, pal! First of all, I would like to say that it is an honor to have the legendary band Panic on the pages of Oldschool Metal Maniac. After all, you were one of my first references to extreme sound in the 1980's. Alright?

REGENER FORTES – Yes, it's alright! Thanks for your words!

2. Although Panic is a quite underground group, the band's name is still well remembered in the scene in general. How do you feel about it after almost 30 years since the album "Rotten Church" was released?

RF – It is a recognition of our work, for sure. At the time of the release of the album, several friends criticized us, because the sound was too extreme and few bands played in that style, in the South of Brazil. But now, I see that we were on the right path.

3. By the way, I realized that you were surprised to know that there were people interested on

you even in Poland, hehehehe! Can you tell me a little about this?

RF – Hehehe, it was really a surprise, because at the time of “Rotten Church” 3000 copies were pressed and we thought that the disc would be restricted to Brazil. But we already had reports of some people selling the album in France and after you told me that the editor of this magazine (Note: Oldschool Metal Maniac) enjoys the band, I see that the album went much further.

4. According to Metal Archives, you had two names before moving to Panic (Tormentor and Massacre). In what year was Tormentor formed and what led to the name change?

RF – When I joined the band, its name was Massacre. That was in 1985. The suggestion of the name Panic was given by Valcir of Woodstock Records, which pressed “Rotten Church”. As I recall, there were already other bands with that name, and he suggested the change to highlight the work in the market.

5. Did this first band already have a more extreme orientation or was it still a heavy/speed metal band, like many of the era?

RF – I heard a demo tape of the Massacre, and the sound was heavy, but it was not in the Panic's style yet. I believe that when I entered the band, the style of the group changed (holy humility, Batman!). Joke aside, Massacre songs were instrumental, and when I started showing the first lyrics (“Satan Shall Return” and “God's Death”), the style began to change radically.

6. In that initial period, which other bands already existed in the region of Porto Alegre? I remember Astaroth, Câmbio Negro and Leviaethan, which were the best known, but I read in the book “Tá no Sangue” (Note: a book on the history of metal and rock from Rio Grande do Sul, Panic's state) that there was also a band called Nightmare. Did you have relationships with these bands? Was there already a “scene” in the city, or were each band by itself?

RF – At that time, the main bands were these you mentioned and the scenario was kind of each one by itself. It was a lot of teenagers, wanting to show who was the most fucking band

(HEHEHE). One of the first concerts I went to was to see Astaroth, and that's when I thought about joining a band. The guys were really good people and several times we drank a lot of beer after the show with the members. Leviaethan was the band whose music was closest to Panic's sound, but I remember some quarrels among us, because as I said, it was a bunch of teenagers, and the ego war was strong. Nowadays, we are all great friends.

7. I remember the scene in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul too, which was fertile in terms of extreme metal, with bands like Dissector, Nuctemeron, Psychopathic Terror, Apostasia and Sarcastic, just to name a few. Did Panic have contact with this ultra underground scene?

RF – Dude, honestly, because of the jobs and studies of the band, we have always played in Porto Alegre (Note: their city of origin), and there was not a big interaction with the people from the countryside (mainly considering that having a phone at home was a privilege at the time). The internet has changed everything, so much that I'm in São Paulo, being interviewed by a magazine from Poland (hehehe).

8. How did you get in the band? I think Panic was the first group from Porto Alegre to use guttural vocals, right? Was your characteristic that counted when they chose the band's lead singer?

RF – The place where the headbangers joined at the time was Megaforce store, at Galeria Independência. It was a "branch" of Woodstock (Note: a famous store and label from São Paulo), as they brought t-shirts and vinyls from São Paulo and we watched VHS tapes with the live shows. I was there every single day after school. One day, I got to know that Massacre was looking for a vocalist. I spoke with Eduardo Martinez, took their demo tape and went home to listen. I liked the sound, but I had no idea how to compose lyrics (HEHEHE). On the test day, they had three other people there. When it was my turn, they started to play, and I screamed! No lyrics or anything! It was an outburst of general laughter and I was approved! Hahaha!

9. Well, as there were practically no band with the same Panic footprint in the region, how did you get to the sound of "Rotten Church"? I mean, how did the idea of making a faster and noisier music was born, since that was not the trend at that time?

RF – Once more, it was an influence from Megaforce: there we knew bands like Voivod,

Hellhammer, Celtic Frost, Anthrax, S.O.D., Possessed, bands were out of the commercial circuit, which had no distribution in Brazil. However, Woodstock used to import them and Megaforce took all this noise to Porto Alegre.

10. What were the basic influences of the band when the classic tracks of the first album were composed?

RF – In my case, it was Slayer, Anthrax and S.O.D.... when I heard Slayer's Raining Blood album, I freaked out! And when we heard the first CD of S.O.D., it had the song "Chromatic Death", which was the main inspiration for "Fuck or Die!": fast music with little lyrics.

11. In addition to these more extreme groups, did you have access to lesser-known bands through tape-trading or did not Panic have much contact with bands from other states and countries?

RF – Man, as I said, in the 80's, having a phone was very expensive in the South of Brazil, and every trade was a "legend": it took a long time for you to meet new bands and if you wanted to speak with the band the only way by mail. Hard times, my friend ...

12. Despite all the precariousness of the time, Panic got quite an achievement, for recording a complete album in 1986. How was the recording process?

RF – It was SURREAL! Hehehe! We recorded "Rotten Church" in the studios of the now extinct ISAEC, which was a good studio at the time, but it belonged to the Catholic church! Hahaha! The sound technician came from the studio "Nas nuvens", which was one of the best in Brazil, he did some "magic" and the album was born.

13. By the way, how did you get this deal with Woodstock, considering that Panic was dislocated on the national scene, because you were in the south of the country?

RF – Honestly, I don't know how that happened exactly, hehehe! The sound of the band was different at the time, and as Ademir, Megaforce's owner, enjoyed it, he took our demo-tape to Valcir, from Woodstock, who bought the idea. Recently, I've heard that the SP bands have come up against this, because Korzus, Vulcano, Viper, Sarcófago, to name a few, were born here (Note: he now lives in São Paulo, in the southeast of Brazil) and the owner of the main metal store decided to call an unknown band from the south of the country.

14. Has this distance from you in relation to the Southeast scene affected the band in any way?

RF – Certainly, because if it was difficult to stand out in the music market, because we played metal, imagine over there in the south.

15. By the way, did you get in touch with the bands from the southeast of Brazil or did you work in isolation in the south of the country? Did these more extreme bands from that region, such as Dorsal Atlântica, Vulcano, Sepultura and Sarcófago, for example, influenced the sound of Panic?

RF – No, we had no contact with these bands, but certainly they influenced us: I had the records of all these bands. I almost "drilled" the first Sepultura's album... hehehehe ... and I heard Vulcano's "Live" every day... This year (2016), I went to a Vulcano gig and I was drinking a beer with with Luis Louzada, the present vocalist, and he told me that I had influenced the his way of singing... SURREAL!

16. Well, since you mentioned them, let me ask one thing: when one listens to "Rotten Church", the impression is that your vocals are very similar to those of the great Angel, from Vulcano. Does this comparison make sense?

RF – Dude, that's crazy! Really? Hehehe! Actually, my main influence was Lemmy! When I heard the album "Iron Fist", I started to "dub" the songs at home, and it was the first time that the police came up, hehehe! I've always been a fan of Tom Araya, but since I couldn't do the high notes, I decided to use the low-pitched voice.

17. Particularly, I think the album was excellent and a great milestone of that decade. In fact, a lot of people still like that album a lot for the right punch, the violent vocals and the fast drum. However, I've read that the band didn't like the final result. Why?

RF – So, here comes a mistake, in my opinion, committed by the Ademir, from Megaforce Records: after the mixing was ☐ over and the sound technician had already returned to São Paulo, Ademir told us that he was going to a studio to remix everything, since the guitars were not OK. I remember Martinez and I arguing with him, but there was no negotiation. When we listened to the new mix of the album, the guitars were very aggressive, but the vocals sounded distant, as if they were "over there on the corner", because the remixing was not performed by a person with technical knowledge, and the result was way below than it was supposed to be. Recently, the album was re-released on CD, with the original mix, and finally we can hear the mix that was made by the sound technician. Excellent!

18. In my view, "Rotten Church" is a death metal record, despite some people label Panic as a thrash metal band. What, in the end, was Panic's intention? Was it really playing death metal or did it sound like death metal for lack of enough musical maturity to make a more aggressive thrash metal?

RF – Man, at the time, I remember that there were bands of rock, heavy metal and metal. And we wanted to be in the last group ... hehehe ... we did not have something well defined, like "we want to be in such a style"...we wanted to play fast, scream and make everyone terrified ... HAHHAHA ... As I told you, it was a group of teenagers who heard noise every day.

19. Well, having an album recorded in those days was a remarkable feat. However, Panic was able to release the album, but the band was soon over, right? What was it that the dream of having a growing band across the country was abandoned so quickly?

RF – Good question, sir ... hehehe...Honestly, I believe we had no idea about what we had done and we didn't take it so seriously. The drummer who recorded the Rotten Church, Marcelo, left the band for an silly discussion that we all had (again, the teenagers), and 3 other drummers were tested by the band until Claudio Calcanhoto appeared, who recorded "Best Before End". As far as I remember, he started to propose some changes in the style of the band and that bothered some members, so we called our quits. But, in short, I believe our immaturity brought the band to an end.

20. How many copies were made of "Rotten Church"? Did you have any control over the album sales in terms of quantity and to where the material was traveling?

RF – The official number we have is 3.000 copies. We received 300 copies for promotion and I do not remember receiving any value from other copies. We were a bunch of crazy people who still lived with our parents and having the record in our hands was more important than having money in our pockets...crazy thing...hehehe!

21. What was the repercussion of this release for the band? Did you get many letters from other Brazilian states and from abroad as well?

RF – Man, I do not remember, but who could tell you better it would be Martinez (Note: Eduardo Martinez, the old Panic's guitarist and founder of the band), because he was responsible for the contact with Woodstock.

22. What about the shows? Were they frequent? I think it was very difficult to leave Porto Alegre to play in other cities at that time.

RF – The shows were few. I remember doing 6 shows in Porto Alegre. The best shows were in the extinct Porto de Elis, where the sound quality was better, as well as the stage.

23. Well, Panic was reformulated soon after, with only one member of the original line-up (Martinez), but the musical direction was quite different. What happened to cause such a radical change in the musical conception of the band?

RF – Man, only he could tell you...

24. Speaking specifically of your position, what made you leave the group at that time? Do you

regret having left or was it really inevitable?

RF – So back then, I was the only member of the band that worked. The rest of the group had the support of the family to focus on the band. And since I worked out of Porto Alegre, it was complicated to rehearse every day until 10:00 pm, and then to be at 8:00 am at work. I suggested we reduced the rehearsal days, but Martinez and Claudio Calcanhoto were relentless: we should rehearse or the band would not evolve. So I got out and play my career in the "wonderful world" of computing. I sure regret it, but at the time I had no option: I should focus on the band or pay the bills...sad, but true... :(

25. And after that, did you continue to play with other bands? If so, talk a little about these other projects.

RF – Strangely enough, I did not take part in other bands. As I said before, we were much criticized in Porto Alegre, and I believe that this marked me somehow, because I did not seek new groups.

26. You got to record the two later demos "Seeds of Hate" and "Demo-lition", right? Can you tell us a little bit about this period? Why did not the band take off again in this second phase?

RF – So, I participated in the recording of "Demo-lition tape", which had "Seeds of Hate" and other songs, which were recorded in "Best Before End". The recording process was very funny and the sound technician was Carlos Garcia, aka Miranda (Note: a very known Brazilian producer who worked with several mainstream bands and was not famous then.). But, right after the recording, I left the group, for the reason I said before. When I heard the album, I liked the result, but that was not Panic anymore, honestly. I think it was this that did not help the promotion of the work, because it was very different from the first album.

27. Well, of course the scene has changed a lot from that time to today, but what is your view about these differences? What do you think that has changed? Were these changes positive, negative or simply natural?

RF – Sorry, but I have nothing to say about it.

28. In the recording of "Best Before End" and "Boiling Point", did you have any participation or even contact the band at that time?

RF – I made a participation in the recording of "Shoobydahbydoobah, Porto Alegre é o meu lar", but later I did not have any contact with them, since I left Porto Alegre and moved to Fortaleza and then I went to Rio de Janeiro.

29. What do you think about these records? How would you rate them compared to the debut "Rotten Church"?

RF – It's hard to talk about it, but like I said before, I personally enjoyed the songs, but it was not Panic anymore. My humble opinion...

30. Do you still listen to this band's first album these days? How do you see it in terms of importance to the underground scenario?

RF – Yes, sure I listen it...Hehehe... the CD that came out with the original mix was very good and whenever any friend shows up at home, we end up listening. About the importance of the work, it is a good question, but as this album was listed in a selection of Rock Brigade, as one of the 60 best metal albums in Brazil, I think it had a good deal of collaboration to popularize the style here.

31. Panic even rehearsed a return to the stage in 2009, but it looks like the band stopped again. Do you have any idea about what happened?

RF – This is another question that only the other members can answer you.

32. And now, is there any chance for Panic to be back on track? Assuming the band resumed their activities today, how do you think Panic would sound? Would it be a more extreme sound like at the time of debut or would it be a return to the thrash metal phase?

RF – I was in Porto Alegre in August and I spoke with Rexx, who was the bass player during the “Best Before End” time. In fact, there is really a good chance for the band to come back. As I understood, he is talking to the old members to align that possibility.

33. Do you still have contact with the members of the classical formation? Can you tell me where those “Rotten Church” members are and what they are doing today?

RF – I have contact with them, sure! Martinez was playing in Hangar, but due to personal problems, he took time out and is enjoying the coastline of RS (Note: State where they were born in Brazil). Rodrigo Terra is running a pub in Porto Alegre and plays there. Ricardo Olsen opted for a similar path to mine: he left the band and dedicated himself to a professional career as an electronic engineer. Marcelo Russowsky is a university professor and coach of the Brazilian Padel team. Certainly, 30 years did a great difference in the adolescents who recorded that album...Hehehe.

34. Lastly, I would like to thank on behalf of OMM for your attention. I leave this last question open for your final comments. Thank you very much!

RF – Sincerely, I thank you for the invitation! Thanks anyway! As a final comment, I would like to say: follow your dreams and do not freak out! Even if people do not understand a particular style of music or personal project, move on! Better to regret about what you did, than to regret about what you didn't do!

Cristiano Passos