

An interview with Frederyk Rotter (Zatokrev)

April was the month when the debut album of a band Zatokrev was reissued. It's definitely not a trivial matter since the album was released on nothing else but vinyl. This was the main incentive for me to have a fairly short conversation with Frederyk Rotter – the guitarist, vocalist, and at the same time the only original member of Zatokrev. Frederyk also runs his own label named Czar Of Crickets Productions, and that's why I did not refrain myself from asking him a few questions concerning the business. Enjoy!

1. Hi Frederyk! To begin with, I'd like to ask you a really urgent question that bothered me from the very beginning – was the name of the band Zatokrev influenced by Czech language? Do you have Czech roots or kinship? Maybe you have any particular memories about that?

-This is correct Piotr. The name Zatokrev developed from the same called song Zato Krev and means as much as "...for it blood". When you do something with a big passion then you say in German language you do it with "Herzblut", which means heartblood / blood from the heart, that was one of the main reasons why chose this name name. My parents were both Czech. They imigrated in 1968 after the "Prague Spring" when the sovjets occupied the country. I'm a Czech born in Switzerland.

2. Let's begin with some kind of a curio. You decided to put out the debut album by Zatokrev on vinyl via your own label. The full-length got a completely new life, a new layout. How did you come up with that idea? Was it a deliberate operation or just a gift for your fans?

-A good friend of us came up with the idea of organising an anniversary show with the original lineup 15 years after we played our first gig at the legendary punk venue called "Hirscheneck" here in Basel. We liked the idea and as until then our debut was the only album that has never been released on vinyl, we took the logical step to combine all these ideas. Already for years we were talking about putting the debut out on vinyl but just now if felt as the right moment to do, so at first we made ourself a gift, haha. I hope some fans can appreciate it as well.

3. Who's the author of the new layout?

-It's Marco Grementieri, the bass-player from the first two albums. But the original pictures are from the CD version that came out in 2004, which was layouted by Duncan Dinsdale, back then the owner of Code:Breaker Records.

4. Is it the beginning of a broader idea according to which all Zatokrev full-lengths would be released in this format?

-Vinyl is a very attractive format and all of our albums took a lot of effort. It would be a shame to not have all albums on vinyl, haha. Until now the debut album was the only album that wasn't released on LP format.

5. You're the only original member of Zatokrev, everyone else is no longer a part of the band. Are you the absolute leader or is there some kind of democracy in the band? Be honest!

-I'm kind of in a constant difficult situation. I think I can say with calm conscience that I am not a dictator and I really like if my band mates can enrich our music with their creativity. Just I am kind of addicted to express myself in different ways, but mainly with music, lyrics and album concepts. So I go forward usually a bit faster than the rest of the band, I always have to be careful to not bring any disbalance because of my strong need. Regarding this I'd say I learned a lot during the years and I try to be patient with everybody and especially with myself as much as I can. Another problem is that I made music to be my most important purpose in life, which often was not the case with my band mates. But everybody in the band is aware of that and we always try to find the best solutions, which usually works quite fine. Just I am the only one who had the chance to evolve in this project during 16 years. Since the beginning I am constantly working on new songs, even if I don't grab the instrument, in my thoughts I'm often with a song. So even if I don't play I'm writing songs in my head. At a certain point this can overwhelm my bandmates, so one day I realised that I need at least one other project next to Zatokrev, just to have another space where to place my output. This way I hope to keep some kind of balance for myself and in Zatokrev as well.

6. Back in April you gave three gigs. Does it mean that you're coming back to active touring?

-We played the anniversary show. Beside this we are currently in a songwriting process. Although we usually have quite many offers to play gigs in spring we decided to play only two Italy shows, especially because we wanted to play at the Tube Cult Festival. And yea, we'll tour Europe in autumn.

7. How about visiting Poland then?

-Poland is on the list of the autumn tour. Can't wait, as somehow it happened that we never played in Poland before.

8. Reissue is of course a thing of much value, but tell me, are you currently working on new material? Your last album came out already three years ago.

-Yes, we are working on the follower album of Silk Spiders Underwater...

9. Are you able to estimate when the new work of yours will come to light? Or is it much too early to tell?

-I hope we'll be able to release it next year. But it's hard to tell as we don't put any deadlines while we write songs. I mean we plan things, but when songs need more time to evolve we give them the time they need. And this autumn we'll put out something else, can't tell much more for the moment. More news soon, I promise.

10. There are two types of bands: those that strictly cling on to their already solidly paved way, and those that are not scared of experimenting, not afraid to divert from their earlier style. What type of band is Zatokrev?

-Definitely the second.

11. Discography of Zatokrev comprises four full-lengths. You've also played a fair number of live gigs so far. You've been appreciated by your quite large fanbase. Are you content with the place where you're standing right now?

-Yes I am actually. Due to our good partners and supporters we have a perspective, which is always a good thing.

12. Labels across the entire world are suffering much worse statistics when it comes to album sales. Was the reissue limited to some really low number of copies?

-We did 300 copies only. It's a pretty "small" release, I mean we did only one show in our hometown to promote it anyway. Doesen't make really sense to make more of a debut reissue for a band of our ranks.

13. Between 2006 and 2012 apart from releasing the split the band had quite a long creative break. What was the reason for the downtime? Was it because running a label is quite a time-consuming activity?

-By that time I wasn't really busy with the label. We toured in 2007 and 2008, but then I started to feel a lack of motivation from the others after that. In 2010 both of my band mates, who were also both former members, left the band, which was kind of a shock for me. I wasn't even sure if I wanted to look for new musicians and make the whole effort to build up the band again. I decided to make a break. However, it was a very intense period. My father died in 2009 and I owed his car. I wrote a dark folk solo album under the name Fredy Rotten, released it on my label and booked a 10 weeks tour in Europe. I quit my job, my flat and I made the driving license to be able to tour with the car during the next few years. Within this time I also decided to build up Zatokrev again and I found new band members. We wrote The Bat, The Wheel And A Long Road To Nowhere together and started to work with Candlelight Records.

14. Let's elaborate on the topic of the label. Why did you split the label in two parts? Was the division caused by taking up various music subgenres? If we were to look into other labels, Polish Mystic Productions has quite an abundant scope. In hindsight, can you say that it was a good move?

-Due to the fact that over the years I released many bands from very different genres the label started to feel a bit confusing. So I split the label in 2 sublabels, one especially for the metal bands and the other for all others. It was a logical move which totally made sense back then. But during last 2 years I released many bands who aesthetically match together, so I'm thinking again to dissolve the 2 sublabels and run only one. Time will tell.

15. Are there any genres or projects that you reject on the spot? Could you tell us what kind of music you'd never be eager to release? How does everything work when a completely unknown and obscure band approaches you and offers cooperation?

-Generally I like to release music of which I think it's special, if I don't feel the spark I can't work with it. I'd probably never release pagan party metal or a band which follow a style which is currently hyping. I like bands who do their own thing.

16. Do you feel as if music was an inseparable part of your life? Do you imagine how would it be if it was to disappear from your life? Let's say that you close your label, put aside the guitar and put the microphone in your wardrobe...

-I think about it probably more often than you can imagine as some time it brings as much pressure as fun. But I can say that music saved my life, music was the reason which kept me here and saved me from mental break downs again and again until today. If something like this enters the life of a young human it becomes its island which is going to get protected. I need music to stay fine. However I'm 41 now, I have no education, I made a decision. I didn't really learn anything else. I have no idea what else I could do. I could imagine one day to leave the label as it's a fucking exhausting job, but I will probably never be able to leave especially the real creative side of music.

Author: Piotr Czwardkiel

Edits: Joanna Pietrzak

Translation: Marcel Szczepanik