

## “There’s Never Any Bullshit When We’re Playing,” Q+A With Reunited Punk Icons the Red Aunts

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*In 1991, in Long Beach, California, the Red Aunts were born out of a group of friends with no formal training or experience playing in bands that decided they “could do it better, and be way cooler” than their boyfriend’s bands. And they did.*

With Terri Wahl on guitar, Kerry Davis on rhythm guitar, Debi Martini on bass, Lesley Ishino on drums and sharing vocals between them, the Red Aunts created their own complex sound that maintained a raw punk energy while incorporating influences from garage, blues, and grunge.

Along with their sound, the Red Aunts had attitude, raw energy, and genuine abandon on stage and off. Red Aunts were going to play what they wanted, their way. In 1998, after seven years together and five full-length albums under their belt, the band members decided to go their separate ways. Then, in 2014, In the Red Records released, *Come Up For A Closer Look*, a 26-track double LP of the Red Aunts’ “greatest hits.” This summer, The Red Aunts reunited onstage for the first time in 18 years to play in the Red Records’ 25th Anniversary.

She Shreds spoke with the Aunts about playing together again, the history of the band, and what fans have to look forward to in the future.

### She Shreds: How did it feel to be back playing together?

**Terri Wahl:** Playing together again was amazing. It was like we never stopped. Playing live was always my favorite thing. It’s a high like no other.

**Debi Martini:** Getting back in the studio and on stage with the Red Aunts was transcendent. The highlight for me was watching my best friends rocking hard.

**Kerry Davis:** I was thinking about getting together to play and how it was going to sound, and a couple times I did tear up, I just couldn’t believe we were actually going to do it. It went well and I can say without feeling like a jerk, that we just nailed it, we killed it and we had a really good time doing it. It was a really happy night for us.

**Lesley Ishino:** It felt totally natural and as if it had only been a few years. There’s never any bullshit when we are playing – everyone is encouraging, not critical or difficult. The whole thing was a highlight, but I am always amused by the banter on the mic.

### What made you decide to reunite for the In The Red Records’ 25th Anniversary?

**TW:** I have known [ITR founder] Larry Hardy since we were in high school back in the 80s. He always had amazingly perfect taste in music—the shit I liked! He turned me on to the most amazing stuff, like Pussy Galore. There was a time in the 90s that In the Red seemed so magical and untouchable. To this day he puts out the best stuff ever.

**KD:** Larry is so cool and his label is so cool. He released our greatest hits record, so we finally made it on to his roster and had the opportunity to do something with the label.

### Tell us about your songwriting process and working together as a band.

**TW:** All four of wrote songs. It was so amazingly creative and cohesive. One of us would come in with a riff, another with vocals, the other with a beat. We all wrote them together. That’s why it would never work with anyone of us gone.

**KD:** Essentially we’d practice a lot, we had a very strict practice schedule that we stuck to for years. We were always a democracy, we split everything four ways, even if someone wrote the whole song, so there was never any pressure or competition. At home we’d come up with riffs and then we’d get to rehearsal and try to stick them together, we’d just work together assembling these parts, trying to get them to make sense.

### What’s the importance of finding a label and producers that understand you?

**LI:** We are very DIY and have always had a big hand in everything we do, from artwork to touring, but when a label understands you, they can market you better and put you with the right bands or tours. Having producers that understand you makes recording and mixing so much easier and good ones have great ideas that can help make things more dynamic.

**KD:** When you’re in a punk band no one is trying to produce you or tell you what to do. It wasn’t until we made our last record with Epitaph, *Ghetto Blaster*, that we asked for Mick Collins [The Gories, The Dirtbombs] to produce our record because we just wanted to make a dirty, crazy, noisy sounding record. That’s when we got that this was our chance to really have the production that we wanted, so we did that and then we broke up.

### What gave you the initial idea to start a band?

**KD:** It was Terri’s idea, she called me and said, “What instrument does your boyfriend have?” He had a guitar. “Ok, you are going to be the guitar player.” We just learned together. A lot of people said that made our music interesting. We weren’t following any rules because we didn’t know of any rules.

**DM:** I recall going out with Terri and Kerry and seeing shows and bands and saying, “we could do better than this.”

**LI:** Just the need to rock.

### Tell us about the gear you used to create the Red Aunt’s unique sound.

**TW:** I can only talk about mine. I wanted to be Keith Richards. Period.

**DM:** I bought a Traynor amp and Ampeg cabinet from an older punk rock woman in Long Beach, and I have recently continued the tradition by passing it on to Ryan Spoto from Las Hormiguitas.

**KD:** We just knew what sounds we wanted because we listened to records, went to shows, and had a brain like anyone else. Our friends had good taste in music, very early on they helped us find amps and guitars that sounded the way we wanted. Then it was just a matter of experimenting with people’s things and with backlines at clubs.

**In L.A. there were so many cool little guitar shops with vintage gear. Sometimes the guys would ask me stupid questions, trying to embarrass me. I was like, “you can take that beautiful old amp that I’m going to buy, that my record label is paying for and you can fucking shove it, go back to working at Guitar Center motherfucker. I’m going on tour.”**

### How has being in the Red Aunts prepared you for and influenced your current creative endeavors?

**DM:** Being in the Red Aunts gave me the courage and confidence to express myself, my way, without compromise.

**LI:** Because of our collaborative methods and tendency to piece together songs, it really shaped my style. I still write drum parts like I learned to do with the Red Aunts and sometimes they’re too weird for the bands I’ve been in since.

**KD:** I started a band after called the Two Tears which is essentially anything I do by myself, I learned to simplify things a little bit. Lesley and I also played in the Kills for a couple years and there we learned just to be professional and polite.

**TW:** I am a chef and own a restaurant and you have to be a tough girl to do that. You also have to be very creative. It was an easy transition.

### Considering how great the show went, do Red Aunts fans have anything to look forward to down the road?

**TW:** I hope so!

**LI:** We definitely want to do more shows! We’re putting ourselves out there now, so we hope to see some offers.

**DM:** Ask the universe, and the universe shall answer!

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