

Fire Bugs

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BY DAVID HOLTHOUSE

Angel hates hippies. "They smell bad and their music sucks." She also doesn't care for yuppies ("hair-gel assholes"), ravers ("Mickey Mouse idiots") or being called a riot grrl ("don't even start with that shit").

Myrtle Beach, Florida, isn't high on her list, either. "It's fucking boring here," complains the gutter-mouthed guitarist for the all-girl L.A. punk band Red Aunts. "All these little brown-wrapper towns across America—I can't stand them."

You can practically hear Angel shuddering on the other end of the line, where she's hanging out in a "chintzy" motel room with Red Aunts lead singer Kerry D (stage name Sapphire), who's recovering from her virgin experience with the new line of St. Ides fruit-flavored malt liquors. "They're putrid," Kerry reports. "Tastes like melted, watered-down Now & Later."

Angel's in better shape. The night before, she smartly stuck to white spiders ("vodka and creme de menthe") and red deaths ("about seven different shots and some red shit. . . . What else are we going to do here but play the show and drink?").

Not that she or the other two Aunts—EZ Wider (bass) and Cougar (drums)—are above hoisting a 40-ounce when the mood's right. Two albums ago, they put out a recording called *Bad Motherfucker 40 oz.* on Long Gone John's Sympathy for the Record Industry label. And just after the band formed in Long Beach in 1991, Angel says, the members used to chill and drink malt with their neighbor—an up-and-coming rapper who called himself Snoop Doggy Dogg. Snoop even co-wrote two songs with the Aunts: "Roller Derby Queen," from their last album, *#1 Chicken*, and "Suerte," from the band's latest, *Saltbox* (named after a style of square, tall houses common in the South).

"The real Snoop is a teddy bear," says Angel. "He's super sweet." The Red Aunts are not. *Saltbox* and the rest of their discography represent the best music of its genre—namely, ferocious, gasoline-fumed punk played by sweaty women who sound highly pissed off. "We're really not that angry," says Angel, "we just have a lot of energy, and people usually confuse the two."

Whatever, the SoCal foursome shreds its more popular "riot grrl" contemporaries from the Pacific Northwest like 7 Year Bitch and Bikini Kill. The name "Red Aunts" may not stick as fast to memory, and Angel's band may not sing as much about gender politics, but when it comes to estrogenized, bared-teeth garage rock, the Aunts are the band to let have your neck. Incredibly tight, fast and loud as fuck, their last two recordings have both clocked in 14 songs at exactly 23 minutes (a coincidence, the band swears).

The Aunts' only hit so far has been the blistering "Freakathon" off #1 *Chicken*, their first effort for former Bad Religion guitarist Brett Gurewitz's now-famous Cali punk label Epitaph Records. Gurewitz produced that album, and nicely lashed together a sound that, like the Aunts' live shows, deserved respect for its pure adrenaline factor, but was too often out of tune and out of control.

Saltbox is even better—the Aunts have shined their blade more without shaving an inch off its serrated edge. The album cuts deep and hard on hyper-melodic tracks like "The Snake" and "All Red Inside," and speedy whip cracks like "Whatever" and "\$5."

The band flirts with experimental instrumentation throughout *Saltbox*, sprinkling in piano, harmonica, lap-steel guitar (on the bluesy, strung-out closer "Goin' Downtown") and moody lines from a Hammond B3 organ, which Angel says did not make it into the van for the band's current U.S. tour. "Fuck no, we didn't bring that thing. We can barely get our shit together to the shows when we're just dealing with our guitars. It's hard to keep them in one piece, we thrash them so hard."

The best new Red Aunts songs are two numbers on *Saltbox* that drip contempt like venom—a chugging ode to self-loathing called "I Can't Do Anything Right," and "Fake Modern," built around the super-sarcastic refrain "Why can't I-I-I be like you?"

"That one's for about ten people I really hate who just bug the shit out of me," says Angel. "I'm not nice to most people. I'm nice to my friends, my family, and my teacup Chihuahua, but people I don't know can usually just fuck off."

Angel counts among her friends the members of Azatlan, a Chicano gang that runs the meaner streets of the Silver Lake district of L.A., where she now lives. "They are rad, tough motherfuckers, and I'm really glad they like me and my teacup Chihuahua."

Recently added to Angel's shit list, however, was Tony, a bartender in North Carolina who invited the band to crash at his house after a gig, with ulterior, prurient motives.

"He had this cool, funky, 100-year-old house and said he was going to throw a party, so I thought that was cool, and we got there and I was like, 'Where am I going to sleep?' and he said just put your stuff in that room, and it turned out to be his.

"I was in there all nice and warm on the floor in my sleeping bag and he comes in and he's like [Angel affects an Elvis accent], 'Hey there, honey, why don't you hop on up here in this bed with me.'

"I just started fake snoring, but he kept after me. He said, 'Seriously, darling, I spent \$1,200 on this bed. It's like sleeping on a big ol' marshmallow.' I just grabbed my stuff and booked. Maybe he'll get a song someday."

Called?

"I don't know. 'Dickhead' has a nice ring to it."