

LITA FORD

LIVING LIKE A RUNAWAY

THE LEGENDARY AXSLINGER UNMASKS HER HEART AND SOUL IN A BITCHIN' Q&A.

LITA FORD IS BACK! The former lead guitarist for the groundbreaking girl group the Runaways and undisputed queen of 1980s heavy metal has emerged after enduring years of musical discrimination, personal battles and an ugly divorce. And she's ready to fucking rock! We sat down with Lita poolside at a Sunset Strip hotel to discuss her former band, polite groupies, working with Ozzy Osbourne and her kickass new CD *Living Like a Runaway*.

HUSTLER: What did you think of *The Runaways* movie?

LITA FORD: I didn't see it. I didn't want to see it. It just felt like it was more of a movie about Joan [Jett] and Cherie [Currie]. It didn't feel like a real, true Runaways movie. I felt like I'd be better off not seeing it because I know I would have my comments. Now when people say, "What did you think of it?" I can just say I didn't see it.

Why did you and Cherie fight so much while in the band?

We just didn't agree on things. I hate to talk about Cherie, because I love her. People always get it wrong and think we're still arguing. We were at some point, but we've cleared up our differences now.

When we interviewed Cherie for an upcoming issue, she hinted at a possible Runaways reunion.

I would like to play with her and Joan again. It's really up to Joan. I'm there. I told Cherie what I would do is find a kickass rhythm section. Whether it be guys or girls, it doesn't matter, so long as me, Cherie and Joan front the band. I think it would be great. Timing is everything, and the timing is perfect now. They approached me about 15 or 16 years ago, and the timing was wrong then. Many years have gone by, and the movie has come out. The timing is perfect.

Do you think a reunion will happen?

I asked Joan what she thought. I said, "You can tell me to fuck off. That's fine. Just give me a yes-or-no answer." She didn't. (Laughs.) So I'm stuck.

What do you think Sandy West would have thought of a reunion?

Sandy would freak out. I would love it if Sandy was here. [The Runaways' drummer died of lung cancer in 2006.] As a matter of fact, if she were still here, I would probably have had her in my new band. She abused herself big time, and it caught up with her. There aren't a lot of girls who can play like she did. She was one of a kind. Unfortunately, she's not here. If we do a Runaways reunion, somebody will have to play drums.

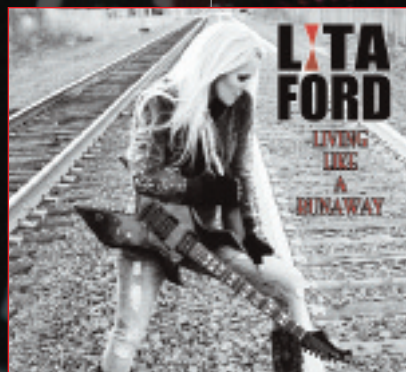


PHOTO COURTESY MARK WEISS

What frustrations did you face after the Runaways broke up?

As a solo artist, I wasn't being recognized as a guitar player. I thought, *How the hell can I capture people's attention and really get recognized as a woman playing guitar?* I'm playing the solo, but the camera would be on the guy. It was just ridiculous. Obviously, he's not playing the fucking solo! I thought the best way to do it would be to put together a three-piece band like Jimi Hendrix. I would front it, play it [guitar] and sing and have a male rhythm section backing me up.

I had to teach myself how to sing and play guitar at the same time, which I didn't know how to do. I rented a warehouse and filled it full of my favorite amps and a P.A. system. I would go in there every night and just scream and play and sing. At one point, I took all the frets and dots off my guitar neck so I'd have to feel my way through. Some guitar players just stare at the neck of their guitar. That drives me nuts! Dude, look at something else besides your guitar!

Some people still say, "I love 'Close My Eyes Forever.' Great song. Who played guitar on it?" I just wanna smack them. Then there are people that recognize me more as a guitar player. Some will only see me as a singer. On this new record [*Living Like a Runaway*], I think I'm really doing both. I actually feel like a real singer for the first time.

Did the fashion of the 1980s make people lose focus on the music?

As a woman, you want that. You wanna look good. I love the style. I love to design my own clothes, but it does take away from your musicianship. It's hard to be seen as a serious musician when you're wearing hot pants. It just doesn't work. (Laughs.)

Was it a blessing or a curse when "Close My Eyes Forever" became a hit?

No curse, an absolute blessing. "Close My Eyes" was Ozzy's first hit too. Because his music was so heavy, he couldn't get a top-ten hit single. Then "Close My Eyes Forever" came along and went top ten. It was a blessing for both of us.

What was it like working with Ozzy Osbourne?

During that time, I was managed by Sharon Osbourne, and there was a lot of weirdness between Sharon and Ozzy. It was personal between them, but it was affecting me. I had to let Sharon go as my manager, and it broke my heart. But I think she thought I was doing

something with Ozzy that I wasn't because he was doing it with everybody else.

Why did you title your new CD *Living Like a Runaway*?

I recently filed for divorce and ran away from home. There are a lot of people that run away from demons in their lives. The title track is a very deep song that refers to the band the Runaways. "Riding in the back of a black limousine. Remember when I was 17." Just being a kid living the life of a rock star. "I never knew where I was going. I never knew where I was gonna stay." We never asked where we were going. When you're in a group of crazy 16- and 17-year-old girls, you just say, "Let's go!" Someone asks, "Where we going?" You say, "Don't know. Don't care! Let's just go!"

What did you do in the 15 years you were away?

The music industry had changed. Grunge came along. From there it went to rap, and there really was no place for '80s and '90s rock. It got rubbed out and became a dirty word. People were making fun of the long hair and big hair. Who fucking cares what your hair looks like? I thought it would be a good time for me to have children.

I had two boys, and I spent those years bringing up my kids. The boys got a little older, and the music scene seems like it has come back around. It seems like the music industry has butted up against a wall and gotten stuck. They are now taking old Bon Jovi songs and putting dance loops over them. What the hell is that?! That's called having nowhere to go. So the only place they have to go is to back up, turn around and go back the other way, which leads us back to rock 'n' roll. That's why I think the timing is perfect for the Runaways and for a new Lita album.

Is *Living Like a Runaway*, which deals with divorce, the ultimate break-up album?

I don't know if it's a break-up album. It's definitely an angry album. My manager called me when I was first writing the songs and said, "Lita, can't you write something happy?" I said, "Okay, I'll try to write something happy." I wrote for a month and came back with the song "Love to Hate You." I told him this is about as happy as it's gonna get! Happy ain't happening!



PHOTO: REDFERNS

The Runaways circa 1970: Cherie Currie, Joan Jett, Sandy West, Lita Ford and Jackie Fox.



PHOTO BY DAVE KAPP

Is it easier to write angry songs?

No. It's easier to write happy songs. All these happy songs I hear make me wanna throw up. *(Laughs.)* Even though the album has a dark and angry vibe, it's still an empowering vibe. It's "Fuck you! You ain't gonna bring me down, motherfucker! I'm gonna get through this. So kiss my ass."

What is the song "Branded" about?

This is "Branded" right here. *(Reveals a giant hourglass tattoo on her inner arm.)* This used to say "Jim" *(Nitro singer Jim Gillette is Ford's second husband and the father of her two kids)*. I had to cover it up. It's the black widow spider symbol. It's also on my butt; you don't want to see that. From there the songs poured out: "Into the Asylum" and "The Mask," which is about how you don't really know who a person is. I think it goes for a lot of different people.

Is "Mother," which deals with being separated from your sons, the most personal song you've ever written?

It's pretty personal. Every time I listen to it, I cry my fucking eyes out. I skip it when I'm listening to the CD if I have makeup on that day. I start thinking about my kids. When the divorce happened, my ex-husband alienated them from me. So they don't know me now. I'm fighting for the right to get them back in my life. The song "Mother" is my way of explaining to them what happened in case they want to know the truth.

What compelled you to cover Elton John's "The Bitch Is Back"?

It was just appropriate. I listened to it and thought, *Fuck yeah!* I remember that belt buckle I used to wear when I was in the Runaways that said "Bitch" on it. I used to wear it with a silver jumpsuit. Everybody loved that belt buckle. That song came on the radio, and I thought, *I have to do this!* *(Sings.)* "Stone-cold sober as a matter of fact. I'm a bitch."

What is the best part of being Lita Ford in 2012?

I feel like this is my new beginning again. I really get to be me now, and I don't have to answer to anybody. I can just do what the fuck I want. It's great to still be here. I was here before a lot of them, and I'll be around long after them.

Do you have groupies?

My groupies are pretty respectful. It's different being a woman. Female groupies, they know what men want. They want tits and ass. That's it. Men are a little more respectful. A female groupie who goes to a male rock star automatically wears the short skirt and pops out her tits. Men aren't like that. They say, "Can I put my arm around you? Can I kiss you on the cheek? Would you kiss me?" I usually say no. They compliment my guitar playing. They wait in line for autographs. They don't come through the freaking air vents. 🌐