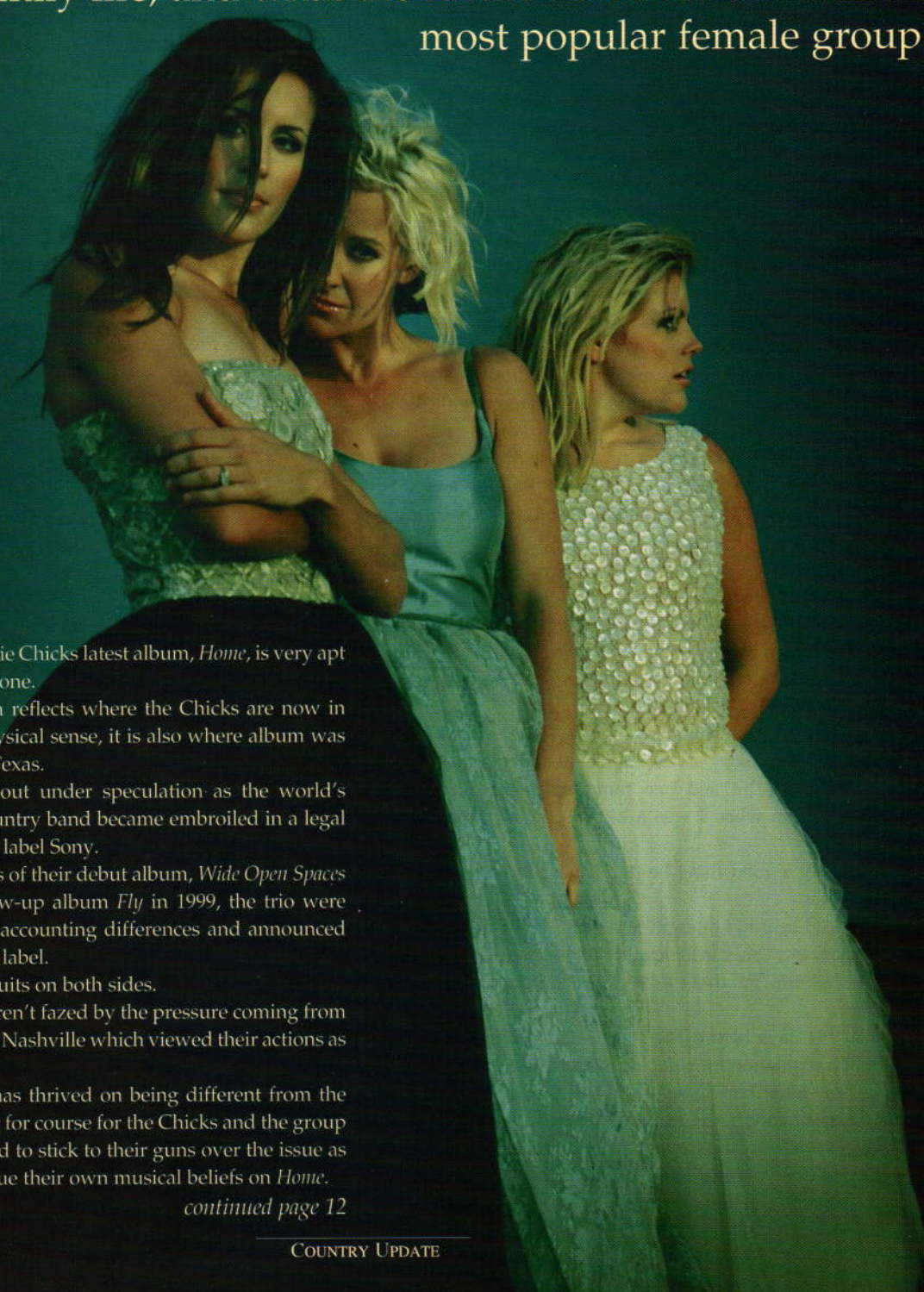


# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

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THE Dixie Chicks are flying high with the success of their new album *Home* and Bob Anthony Jnr managed to speak with fiddle player Martie Macguire about the album, family life, and what the future holds for the world's most popular female group.



THE name of the Dixie Chicks latest album, *Home*, is very apt in more ways than one.

Musically, the album reflects where the Chicks are now in their lives, and in a physical sense, it is also where album was recorded - at home in Texas.

The album came about under speculation as the world's number one female country band became embroiled in a legal battle with their record label Sony.

Following the success of their debut album, *Wide Open Spaces* in 1998 and their follow-up album *Fly* in 1999, the trio were unhappy with alleged accounting differences and announced they had split from the label.

This prompted law suits on both sides.

The Dixie Chicks weren't fazed by the pressure coming from both the label and from Nashville which viewed their actions as "bucking the system".

For a group which has thrived on being different from the norm, it was all just par for course for the Chicks and the group remained as determined to stick to their guns over the issue as they have been to be true their own musical beliefs on *Home*.

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# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME



Emily, Martie & Natalie – The Dixie Chicks

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In many ways, the legal brawl which surrounded the Dixie Chicks worked in their favour with the public and the industry anxious to hear just what their latest album would be like, especially since this album was produced without Sony looking over the trio's shoulders.

The result has been an album which simply has "blown everyone away", selling more than 780,000 copies in its first week in the US and the first single, 'Long Time Gone' rocketing to the top of the charts.

And for fiddle-playing Martie Macguire, the album is the one which she felt most comfortable with.

According to Martie, the fact the album was done outside of the major label meant the Chicks could achieve their goal of having an album which was more reflective of what they wanted to have heard.

Under the guidance of lead singer, Natalie Maines' father, steel guitar legend Lloyd Maines who helped to co-produce the album, the trio was able to allow their instrumental prowess to come through.

"On previous albums, we wanted to have certain instrumental segments louder but that wasn't the case," Martie said.

"As a fiddle player, I felt buried. But on *Home*, we knew what we wanted and Lloyd knew how to push us to do better and the result is an album which has more of the type of music which has influenced us coming through.

"For me, there's far more bluegrass on this album which is great considering I spent a lot of my early days listening to it."

Sadly, Martie's love of bluegrass wasn't shared by her friends.

"I couldn't drag them along to a bluegrass show and at times, I wouldn't even admit I liked it," she laughed.

"Now there seems to be new interest in the genre which is great because when we were working on the album, we weren't sure if our audiences, which are mainly young, would go for it.

"But thanks to the *O Brother* soundtrack, there is more acceptance of bluegrass and you have its influences creeping into a lot of country music these days."

One of those who she singled out is Australian Keith Urban who is a good friend of the band.

"Keith is such a great player and his new album has far more of a bluegrass sound to it," Martie said.

"I actually got the record label to send over an advance copy of it so I could hear it before it went out to the shops. We are very pleased for him and the new album is a winner."

High praise from the group that has sold more than 24 million albums worldwide.

But despite the overwhelming success, family life and being with friends remains as much of a priority to the Dixie Chicks as their music.

And *Home* reflects where the trio is now in their lives, family-wise.

Natalie Maines is married with a child, Martie's sister Emily is expecting any minute and all three are very settled in relationships.

The excitement of the new album and its success is almost as exciting for Martie as the prospect of becoming an aunt again.

"I already have a niece and two nephews but because my sister and I are so close, I am very excited about this baby," she said.

"It's been tough for Emily on the road. Her feet have swollen and she has to try and fit the banjo strap around her so I know she is looking forward to the break."

The Dixie Chicks have settled in Texas where they were raised.

Natalie lives on a 1000 acre farm with her husband, while "city girls" Martie and Emily (and her husband Charlie Robison) live close by.

The fact they have settled in Texas has been a bonus for the group according to Martie.

"It's great to be away from all the stuff and pressure which happens in Nashville. When the hassles with the album were going down, we didn't want to hear, 'oh you shouldn't have done this' or 'that won't be good for you', we just wanted to get away from that," Martie said.

"Actually in between *Fly* and this album *Home*, we kept doing other things like decorating the house.

"We didn't do much writing for the new album because we weren't ready.

"It was more important to be back where we felt we belonged and re-connecting with family and friends who we had missed, simply because we were so busy touring and with our music.

"Besides, Texans have their own way of doing things and that's nice. There's the view that you 'don't let anybody change you simply because you are from Texas'.

"People here are different because we tend to consider this a separate place from the rest of the States and that independence perhaps comes through in our music, especially on *Home*."

*Home* doesn't have the same flamboyance the previous album had but is a more intense, mature offering.

There is still an element of fun on *Home* but not to the same degree, the previous albums enjoyed.

Recorded at a studio in Austin Texas, the album had its beginnings in Natalie's living room and with the prospect of putting out an album which was true to them, the Chicks literally funded the album on their own.

Conviction in the principle which caused the rift with Sony, conviction in their own musical beliefs and conviction in knowing that no matter what, the Chicks would remain together as friends has paid off in the new album bringing global acclaim once again.

Not only are the Chicks huge in the States but also in Europe and of course, Australia.

It's that sort of popularity which makes them very much in demand but with the arrival of a new little "chicklette", travel may be put on hold for a little while according to Martie.

"I won't mind being the defacto baby sitter and am looking forward to when we get back on the road," Martie said.

And that looks like being a major undertaking in itself with the band possibly having to consider a crèche at the rate it is expanding.

But one thing that is firmly on the Dixie Chicks' travel agenda is a return visit to Australia in the near future.

"Our record label wants us to go to Europe where the album is doing really well but we want to have Australia also included on our schedule as well," Martie said.

"We had such a great time when we were there last time, we definitely want to come back.

"It wouldn't just be a promotional tour either. If we are coming, we'd bring the band and perform as well so it could be like a two week tour, maybe in March."

With the popularity of the new album and the single, any tour by the Chicks is bound to be a huge success.

After all, if you're a Chicks fan, there's no place like Home. ■