



POPI!

The recent feud between Toby Keith and Dixie Chick Natalie Maines continues country's long line of fussin' and fightin'

Story by Chris Neal

SMAACK

KEITH: TAYLOR/DREAMWORKS

We've got a real barn-burner tonight on Country Wrestling Spectacular! Let's meet the contenders!

In this corner, standing 6 feet 4 inches, in the red, white and blue trunks, "Big Dog" ... TOBY KEEEEEEITH!!!

And in the opposite corner, 5 feet 3 inches tall, in a stylish peasant blouse and jeans, "Dixie Chick" ... NATALIE MAAAAAAAAAAIIIIIIINES!!!

OK, so no one actually resorted to meet-in-the-ring violence. But the recent war of words between Toby Keith and Dixie Chicks lead singer Natalie Maines over Toby's No. 1 hit "Courtesy Of The Red, White And Blue (The Angry American)" was a blast from the past, a throwback to the feuds that have always enlivened country music.

The dustup began when Natalie offered a newspaper her opinion of Toby's tune. "I hate it," she declared. "It's ignorant, and it makes country music sound ignorant."

Natalie objected to the song's gung-ho reaction to last year's terrorist attacks, and Toby's memorable promise to the perpetrators to *put a boot in your ass, it's the American way*.

"You've got to have some tact," postulated Natalie.

"Anybody can write, *We'll put a boot in your ass*."

Toby is especially sensitive about "Courtesy" because its lyrics mention his father, who passed away in an auto accident in March 2001. "That's why I'm so defensive when somebody jumps on that song," Toby explained. "You get on that and you just turn into a commie heathen with me."

But Natalie insisted she objected only to the song's quality. "I understand that song is about his dad, and really personal for him," she said, "but I don't feel like that should make me feel guilty that I don't like it."

Toby counterpunched by asserting that Natalie's own songwriting wasn't up to snuff.

"You've got to be in my league as a songwriter before I'll even respond to you," he rebutted. "If she had written some songs like me, then we'd talk about the inside of the song."

Toby had already engaged in a public spat with ABC news anchor Peter Jennings, who canned the singer's appearance on the network's July 4 special after hearing the song. Toby suggested the Canada-born Jennings lacks patriotism – and Natalie complains that she's now being tarred with the same brush.

"People have labeled me 'unpatriotic' the same way they did Peter Jennings," she said. "That's ridiculous, to think that because you don't like a song, then you must not like your country. I've got an American flag outside my home just like every other normal American."

Natalie figures her honesty should count for something. After all, Toby maintained all along that his real argument with ABC was that the network had claimed he was never booked to appear – he says he was, indeed – and not that they didn't like his song.

"I figure Toby should be calling and thanking me!" Natalie said. "His big beef with ABC was they wouldn't buck up and say they didn't like the song. I came right out and said I don't like the song. So I just assume he's going to send some flowers over."

Don't hold your breath, Natalie.

BANG!

DOWN!