

'HOME' FIRES BURNING



The landslide of protest against the Dixie Chicks turns ugly, but country's sassiest act keeps rolling

CAMERA PRESS/ETHE NELSON

The more flack I get for it, the more proud I am," declares Dixie Chicks lead singer Natalie Maines. What she's getting flack for, of course, is her now-infamous slam of President Bush: "Just so you know, we're ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas," the Lubbock, Texas, native told a London audience back in March.

In response, radio stations dropped their songs, listeners burned and destroyed CDs, and fellow stars Toby Keith and Travis Tritt publicly bashed them. Their No. 1 hit "Travelin' Soldier" fell off the chart instantly, and sales of their *Home* CD plummeted. The South Carolina state legislature even passed a resolution demanding a free show for the state's soldiers.

But now the outrage has turned *really* ugly.

"We've gotten a lot of hate mail, a lot of threatening mail," admits Martie Maguire, Natalie's bandmate in the Chicks along with Emily Robison. "Emily had the front gate of her ranch smashed in. It puts my well-being in jeopardy."

"I'm in complete shock," says Natalie. "There are boycotts, threats to our families and to us. It's out of hand."

While Natalie apologized for her comments days after making them, she now sounds newly defiant. "I was an American citizen who used my First Amendment right," she says. "I had no idea that people wouldn't allow me to do so. So I guess I'm glad it's out there."

Now that the Chicks have begun their American tour, everyone is waiting to see whether the controversy will die down or just keep roiling. Martie admits she's unsure what to do next. "Either I want to speak out more, or I'm scared to say anything," she says.

"What is wrong with the world when what the Dixie Chicks say is more important than the war?" wonders Natalie. "Why does anyone care what we think?"

— Chris Neal