

# FACING THE MUSIC

**Bombarded by controversy, the Dixie Chicks fight back**

**Outrageous? Of course.  
Controversial? Obviously.  
Un-American? Absolutely not.**

**T**hat's how the Dixie Chicks explained themselves to America during their first extended interview after singer Natalie Maines' anti-President Bush comments in March.

Just before the war with Iraq, Natalie infamously told a London audience that the group is "ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas," which is their home state as well. The Chicks were widely jeered for criticizing the war, something many felt was equal to not supporting America's troops.

"We support the troops 100 percent," clarified Natalie in the ABC-TV interview with Diane Sawyer. "People have said we don't support the troops, which is the *opposite* of anything we have ever said."

"I will *not* let somebody tell me I'm unpatriotic," added fellow Chick Martie Maguire.

"Martie and I have family in the military," pointed out Emily Robison. "We want our troops be safe and successful."

The Chicks protested that the reaction against them has gone too far – they've received death threats, and Emily's home gate was damaged by a protestor.

"We know some of our fans were shocked and upset, and we are compassionate to that," said Martie. "My problem is, when does it cross the line? When is trashing Emily's property OK? When is writing a threatening letter OK?"

The mess didn't hurt ticket sales much – the Chicks' current American tour was already nearly sold out when news of Natalie's London comment drifted ashore in the States – although sales of their *Home* album have gone down, then up again during the fracas. "I think we're dealing with bigger issues than record sales," said Emily, dismissing any such worries. "I'm concerned about my safety. You know, when you're getting death threats ..."

Things have gone so far that the president himself has weighed in on the subject. "The Dixie Chicks are free to speak their mind," Pres. Bush noted, showing little sympathy for their plight. "They shouldn't have their feelings hurt just because some people don't want to buy their records when they speak out. You know, freedom is a two-way street."

As for the comment that started it all, Natalie shed some light



The Chicks responded to the controversy in a prime-time interview with Diane Sawyer, and by a provocative pose on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* (below).

on what led her to say what she did. "At that moment, on the eve of war, I had a lot of questions that I felt were unanswered," she said. "It was the wrong wording, with genuine emotion behind it. Am I sorry I said that? Yes. Am I sorry I spoke out? No."

Fellow country stars like Travis Tritt and Toby Keith have bashed the Chicks for their anti-Bush stance. Vince Gill expressed support for the group's right to speak out, then quickly clarified, saying he holds "the completely opposite view of Natalie Maines." Martie claims stars have expressed solidarity with the Chicks privately, but don't feel free to do so in public.

However, at least one rock legend has thrown them his unqualified support. "To me, they're terrific American artists expressing American values by using their American 'right to free speech,'" said Bruce Springsteen on his website. "Right now, we are supposedly fighting to create freedom in Iraq, at the same time that some are trying to intimidate and punish people for using that same freedom here at home."

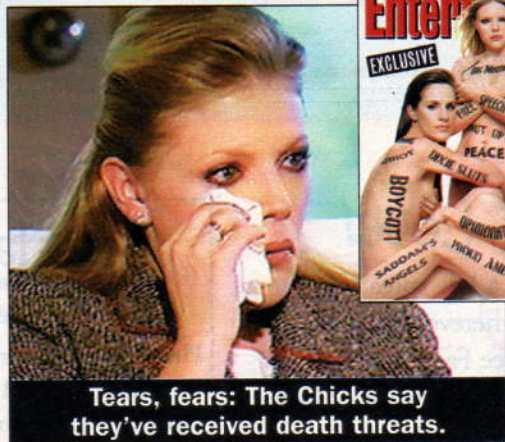
They've apologized and expressed surprise at the extent of the controversy, but the Chicks have also fanned the flames. Natalie said she grows "prouder" as the outcry grows, and the group posed nude for the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* magazine with contradictory slogans written on their bodies: OPINIONATED ... PROUD AMERICANS ... TRAITORS.

Do they want forgiveness, asked interviewer Sawyer?

"Accept an apology that was made," said Natalie. "Accept that what we're saying right now is heartfelt, full of compassion, and honesty. But to forgive us?"

"Don't forgive us for who we are."

— Chris Neal



Tears, fears: The Chicks say they've received death threats.