



The Dixie Chicks

Unruffled by rising stardom, the trio brings their own unique sound to a greater audience

By Kelly Roberts

THE DIXIE CHICKS BEGAN playing for tips on a Dallas street corner seven years ago. It wasn't long before the musical trio's Bluegrass-Country-with-an-edge sound began popping up all over the metroplex, then around Texas, then everywhere else.

Journeying towards fame and fortune, they began to tour full-time with performances in Europe and Japan, a half-time show for the Dallas Cowboys, and at such high profile venues as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Grand Ole Opry. In just a few years, the band was opening for such greats as Garth Brooks,

Alan Jackson, Loretta Lynn, and Emmy Lou Harris. These ladies are no chickens, and with all the determination and energy one group can muster, they have stuck it out through the leaner years to become one of the most talked-about groups of 1998.

The two original Chicks are sisters Martie Seidel and Emily Erwin, who have played music together since childhood. The Chicks have included Robin Macy and Laura Lynch, but both left the group by 1995. Natalie Maines was found by the duo three years ago.

Lloyd Maines, Natalie's father and an acclaimed steel guitar player and pro-

ducer, had slipped the sisters some of Natalie's demo tapes. After hearing Natalie's voice, they both knew she had phenomenal talent and would be a perfect addition to the Chicks. Natalie had received a scholarship but had changed her major four times and did not know what she was going to do with her life — she just knew she wanted to sing. She recalls she was eating macaroni and cheese one afternoon when Seidel phoned to ask if she would be willing to join the band, move to Dallas, and drop out of college. Her answer was yes, and the stellar trio was re-born.

With three independently-produced CDs under their belt, the Chicks were still unrecorded by any record label. In fact, they were the only group booked by Buddy Lee Attractions who were *not* signed to a label. Then, Sony Nashville's Vice President, Blake Chancey, saw them in a show in Austin and was impressed. He immediately asked the Chicks if they would be the first act to be signed to Sony's recently revived Monument Records. This was the label that had previously launched legends like Roy Orbison, Dolly Parton, Kris Kristofferson, and Larry Gatlin. Without hesitation, the Chicks agreed to be the label's flagship act, and fate began charting their course to stardom.

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With Chancey crazy about their sound and Sony's President, Allen Butler, considering them the "real deal" in Nashville, the Dixie Chicks have quite a powerful team of players on their side. Not only are they still determined and energetic about their career, they are all very talented musicians who have brought their own songs to a newly released album, *Wide Open Spaces*.

The Chicks have said of it, "This is us, this is who we are." Their thumbprints are all over the album; all three women chose the songs, sang the vocals, and played the instruments. When asked what kind of music they sing, Natalie Maines responds, "Good music." With their music not easily

classified, it was difficult for the Chicks to be recognized by label executives in the early years. No longer.

The time is right for the trio now. With female acts soaring to greater heights, and Pop influencing Nashville, being different is not just a preference in Country music — it is a requirement. The Dixie Chicks fit the bill — they are not just straight-down-the-road-Country with a loud percussion section. They are contemporaries in their field, evolving Country Bluegrass, Blues, and Country music to a higher level, intertwining all three.

The Dixie Chicks will be heard over the airwaves plenty in 1998 and for long after that if they continue to play their kind of music — good music. With their already debuted single "I Can Love You Better Than That" topping the billboard charts, the other 11 songs on *Wide Open Spaces* will no doubt blaze a similar trail.

With a glamour and style Tinseltown would be proud of and a sound that Sony loves, they have fortune on their side. Having shed their fringed shirts and cowboy boots, and with their fashionably platinum locks, the Chicks have put a new spin on Country music. And despite their success, their feathers seem unruffled by it all.

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