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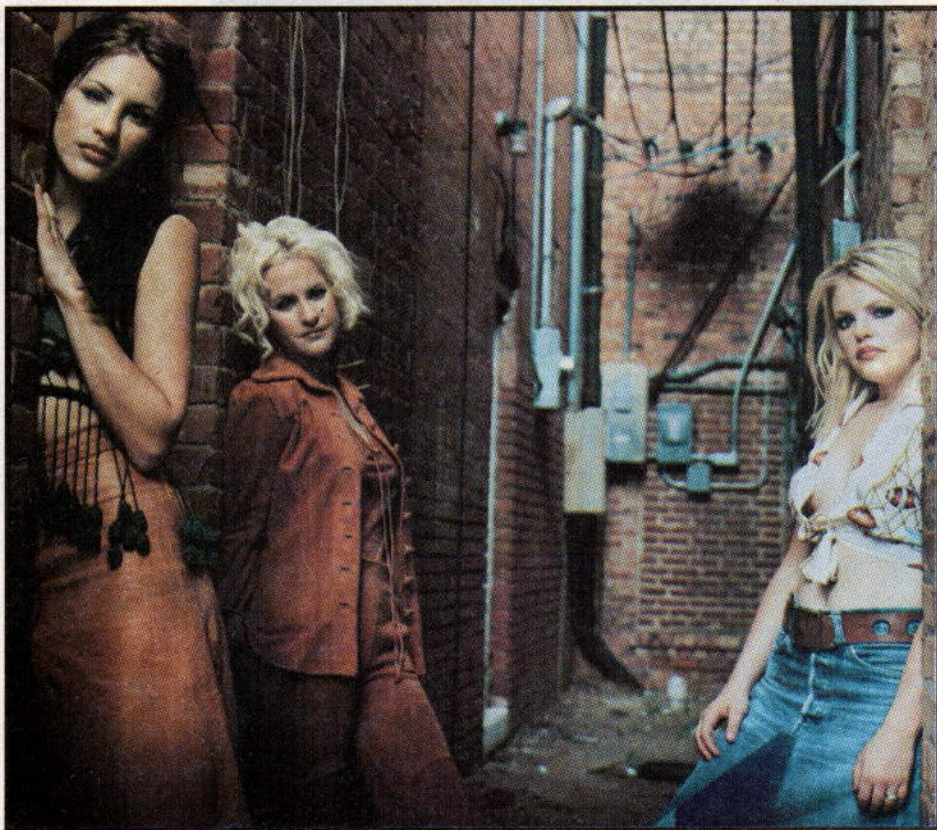
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# Homeward Bound

The Dixie Chicks Get Back to Basics



by Elianne Halbersberg

**W**hen the Dixie Chicks began recording their new album, *Home*, they had no idea that the bluegrass-flavored demos they were cutting could debut on the *Billboard* 200 and *Billboard Country Albums* charts at No. 1.

In fact, lead vocalist Natalie Maines, fiddle player/vocalist Martie Maguire and multi-instrumentalist/vocalist Emily Robison didn't know whether the material would ever be released, given that the group was in the midst of a lawsuit with their label, Monument/Sony Nashville, over royalties the Chicks claimed were owed to them for record sales of 20 million units.

"We had no label, we didn't know what we were going to do," says Maines. "We took a year off and needed to rejuvenate after working for five years, and the Fly tour took a lot out of us. We weren't feeling creative, and we thought we'd go in the studio and record whatever we wanted to. We were all inspired by acoustic music lately and wanted to record something acoustic based.

"When we say demos, we go in thinking that we'll just play around, but we're not the type of people who can do that. We worked out the arrangements meticulously at my house before we entered the studio, and as we became more serious we knew that it had gone beyond demos, but we had no idea what it would be."

The Chicks reached a settlement with Sony, and *Home* was released on the trio's new Sony imprint, Wide Open Records. It was produced by Maines' father, Lloyd, legendary in the music industry as a producer and pedal steel player, and recorded with top bluegrass musicians from the Chicks' hometown of Austin, as well as stellar Nashville players.

The album made immediate history as it entered the charts with the highest first full week's sales of any female group, and any Columbia Records album, in the SoundScan era. *Home* also set the record for the highest first week's sales for any female country artist and any country group, breaking the Chicks' previous title in both categories (for *Fly*). The Chicks are now the only country group and the only female country group to have two No. 1 debuts on the *Billboard* 200.

The group selected Cedar Creek Studio in Austin, where Lloyd Maines produces many of his projects. According to Natalie Maines, the change in location "was way more low-budget in cost, not quality. People don't charge in Texas what they charge in L.A., Nashville and New York for studio time, and it always bothered us how much it costs and that the labels pay it."

Not only did the Chicks change venues; they also changed producers, musicians and labels. While the circumstances surrounding the making of *Home* put them in complete control, Maines says it wasn't

