

# on the COVER

## Single gives Dixie Chicks something to crow about

By WILLIAM KERNS  
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Dixie Chicks sisters and co-founders Martie Seidel and Emily Erwin are not spring chickens when it comes to the business side of the music business.

The two have been performing — primarily with lead vocalist Laura Lynch, who was replaced about a year or so back by Lubbock-born singer Natalie Maines — for more than a decade. Yet it was only months ago that the trio was invited to sign a major recording contract with Sony's Monument Records.

The first single, "I Can Love You Better Than That," already is receiving national radio air play and the trio's first studio album, "Wide Open Spaces," arrives at music stores on Jan. 27.

Look for it to knock listeners for a loop with an array of great material including the heart-breaker "You Were Mine" and the bold, defiant "Let 'Er Rip."

Each member boasts years of experience, yet each Chick is still in her 20s. Clouds appear to be clearing but, according to Erwin, frustration never set in even when the trio's future seemed more iffy than bright.

After all, the Dallas-based Dixie Chicks earned enough to record three albums on their own. The band was named Dallas' best in the country category by *The Dallas Observer* three consecutive years. Never mind that few were listening to the group's harmonies on the radio outside of Texas. Regionally, the band made a name for itself.

"I don't think we ever really had a game plan," said Erwin.



Provided by Front Page Publicity

Enjoying the momentum of a hit single and a new album on the Sony Monument label are, from left, Dixie Chick members Martie Seidel, Natalie Maines and Emily Erwin.

"We considered our albums milestones. The first time we opened for Emmylou Harris, we were thrilled. Having a radio station play one of our songs was a thrill. We all recognized in the early days that we weren't commercial enough, but regional success was OK. I guess ignorance really was bliss for us.

"We couldn't land a major label deal, but we really weren't sitting back feeling disappointed. I guess we just basked in what little glory we had."

Erwin and her sister both were introduced to music at an early age, with Seidel playing fiddle at age 5 and Erwin picking up the banjo at age 10.

The duo toured the country for six years in the bluegrass band Blue Night Express before co-founding Dixie Chicks after

performing on Dallas street corners with Lynch for tips.

Mind you, Erwin didn't always view music as a career.

She explained, "Martie has always known that she has a gift, that there is this one thing (music) that she is really good at. Music was how she got attention. And Natalie? God, her voice is so strong; she's probably been singing since the womb.

"I guess I was different. I always loved playing music, but I thought it was a weekend hobby. I never saw any banjo players driving around in Porsches, not that I wanted a Porsche. So I intended to go to the Air Force Academy and become a pilot. During my junior year of high school, I realized I was horrible at math and science."

So much for the Air Force.

"Yeah, but I still get a little teary-eyed whenever I go through Colorado Springs," she added with a slight chuckle.

She turns serious once more when stressing that while, avoiding career frustration, the band never viewed the future through rose-colored glasses or with "a Pollyanna attitude."

"The hardest year for us was the one before Laura left," noted Erwin. "It had been two years since we'd made an album and we were still shopping that around. ... At one point I guess I opened a dialogue and asked if we were all going to stay in this for the long haul.

"Laura was having a tough time. She missed her daughter; she didn't see herself doing the same thing five years down the line. So it was a joint decision when she left. Then Martie and I went to Lubbock and asked Natalie to sing on one of our demos.

"We loved the way our voices blended and the change actually was made rather quickly."

The Dixie Chicks' sound already was changing. Seidel, a championship level fiddler, played more mandolin. Erwin began playing dobro. Bluegrass

was giving way to country and with the addition of a backup band, notably a drummer, fans now could get up and dance.

Change was met with some resistance. "Oh there's that Texas scene vs. the Nashville scene argument," said Erwin. "But we're still very much Dixie Chicks. We have no reservations about the songs we picked to record. This album is still us."

As for those early independent albums, "Those are snapshots of who we were at the time, although I wish I could go back and change my hair style." Erwin's goal hasn't changed, though. "We already proved we can entertain folks without a label. We just keep doing it."

In fact, ask the young banjo player/dobro player/harmony vocalist what fans should expect from a Dixie Chicks live show now and she responds, "Some old, some new. A lot of our musical roots come out. Natalie will have to get at least one of her blues numbers in there, and Martie and I are still pickin'."

"Oh heck, we're still a mish-mash. We're still the who-are-they band that has fun and plays everything under the sun."

### CONCERT INFORMATION

**HEADLINER:** Country recording act Dixie Chicks.

**OPENING BAND:** Renegade.

**WHEN:** 8:30 p.m. today.

**WHERE:** Country Live, 910 Slaton Road.

**TICKETS:** General admission tickets, priced at \$10, can be purchased at the door or reserved in advance by calling 745-3300.