

Blues/Jazz Special: Muddy Waters, remixing jazz, Ellington

PULSE!



Dixie Chicks

What part of "cute"
don't you understand?

Guided By Voices
Randy Newman
Folk Implosion

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Step aside, Shania!

Dixie Chicks

invade the land of Lilith

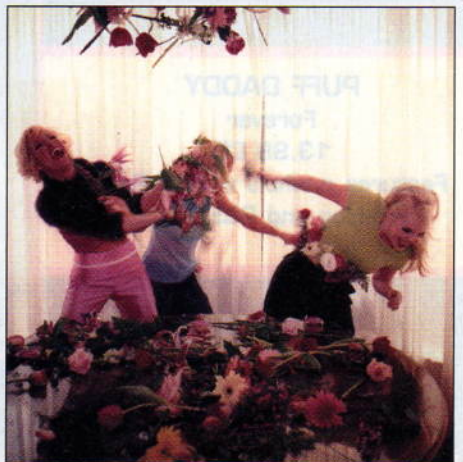
We really are down to earth girls," Emily Robison assures me, "but we love to dress up." Robison is sitting in the Dixie Chicks' dressing room, backstage at the Lilith Fair's San Diego stop. She's wearing a lightweight lime green little summer dress. Crowning her lank, blonde hair is a kind of novelty beret—something that the late Groucho Marx might have worn in his declining years. It's fashioned out of Astroturf; and the top is supposed to be a golf course putting green, with a little white flag and full sized golf ball dangling from a string.

The Dixie Chicks also do lots of cute photos: Posing with big cigars. (They're tycoons!) Three blonde heads lined up along a recording studio mixing board. The fact is, the Dixie Chicks would be unforgivably nauseating if they weren't the front end of one damn good country band. Robison plays banjo and dobro with the easygoing mastery of a seasoned Nashville studio cat, while her older sister Martie Seidel channels Chubby Wise on her fiddle and mandolin. Singer Natalie Maines possesses one of the gutsiest voices in contemporary country.

She can go from dulcet high notes to a barnyard howl and make you glad to come along for the ride. She grabs hold of a song and throttles it good, singing with a kind of barely controlled emotiveness that sometimes brings the late Patsy Cline to mind. The Dixie Chicks have accomplished an admirable musical feat. They've injected a note of genuine roots country and bluegrass into their state-of-the-art Nashville pop arrangements. This sets them apart from "designer country" counterparts like Shania Twain, and is frequently used to deflect criticisms that the Dixie Chicks are just the Country Spice Girls—the backwoods Bananarama. The Chicks come on stronger than ever on their newest album, *Fly* (Monument/Sony), the follow-up to their sextuple platinum Grammy magnet *Wide Open Spaces*. They've upped the rock quotient on tracks like "Hole in My Head" and "Some Days You Gotta Dance." Of course, the album contains a good measure of lavish, chart-friendly ballads ("Cold Day in July," "Without You," "Heartbreak Town"). But the Chicks and their backing band also show how they can tear the top off a

Not just a backwoods Bananarama: (l-r): Martie Seidel, Emily Robison, Natalie Maines

PHOTOS BY JOHN DUNNE



By Alan di Perna

