



Clockwise from top left: Emily Erwin, Martie Seidel and Natalie Maines.

THEY'RE NOT JUST WHISTLING DIXIE

Two possible explanations exist for the abundance of ten-gallon hats in this Las Vegas club: either the Dixie Chicks are performing or the National Finals Rodeo is in town. Actually, it's both, and from the looks of the audience more than a few roughriders snuck away from the arena to catch the Chicks' show this evening.

After a couple of raucous songs, Natalie Maines, the trio's rambunctious, angel-faced lead singer, calls out, "Any cowboys here tonight?"

"Yee-haw!" the wranglers hoot and holler.

Maines, 24, smiles mischievously, then yells, "Any chicks ►

The Dixie Chicks are taking country music to another level with their **sassy attitude** and spunky debut CD, *Wide Open Spaces*. by Laura Jamison



“I’m in it for the **money**. Didn’t I **tell y’all** that?”

here tonight?” and the women in the audience make even more noise than the men.

Fans of the Dixie Chicks come in all flavors, but nobody loves the trio more than the young women who embrace the band’s unabashed “chickness.” The Chicks aren’t afraid to be feminine (feather boas are their trademark), have a good time (at this show, Martie Seidel, 29, teases her little sister, Emily Erwin, 26, by cracking on her bra size) or sing songs that are a far cry from the stand-by-your-man sentiments country music fans have come to expect from Nashville’s female singers.

The Chicks’ appeal extends beyond their personal style, attitude and good sense of humor. Their rock-inflected sound and tight three-part harmonies are the real reason for the band’s phenomenal success. Since its January 1998 release, *Wide Open Spaces*—the Chicks’ debut CD—has gone quadruple platinum. At the Country Music Association Awards last September, they won the Horizon Award for best newcomer and beat out country institution, Alabama, for Vocal Group of the Year.

The Dixie Chicks have been around for almost 10 years, though they only recently hit the big time. Seidel and Erwin started playing bluegrass when they were tots. The sisters are not only good singers but talented musicians, too: Seidel plays fiddle and mandolin, and Erwin plays Dobro, banjo and acoustic guitar. They formed the band with two other women, Laura Lynch and Robin Macy, in 1989 in their native Dallas, playing on street corners and at conventions. “It was a way to avoid waiting tables,” Seidel says. Later, when Lynch and Macy left the group, steel guitar legend Lloyd Maines inadvertently came to the sisters’ rescue. “He gave us his daughter’s tape, and we were both secretly listening to it,” says Seidel. “I had to call him and ask for another because I thought I lost it. It turned out that Emily was hoarding it.” When the sisters realized they were thinking the same thing about fellow Texan Natalie Maines, asking Maines to join the band in 1995 became a no-brainer.

Maines, who had attended the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston, jumped at the chance—with one stipulation: “I wouldn’t wear the clothes they were wearing,” she says with a laugh, mocking the Chicks’ southwestern wardrobe of spangles and fringe. “But they were ready for a change anyway.”

“We were really looking for a soul sister,” Erwin says. “Someone who was in it for the music.”

“I’m in it for the money,” Maines cracks. “Didn’t I tell y’all that?”

The bandmates all laugh, which they do a lot. But their quest to win the respect of the country music establishment was no joke. “When you’re three blond women in this industry, you’re at a disadvantage as far as perceptions go,” Seidel says. Erwin ►

