

SEPTEMBER 1999 • \$3.95

Texas Monthly

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE TEXAS TWENTY

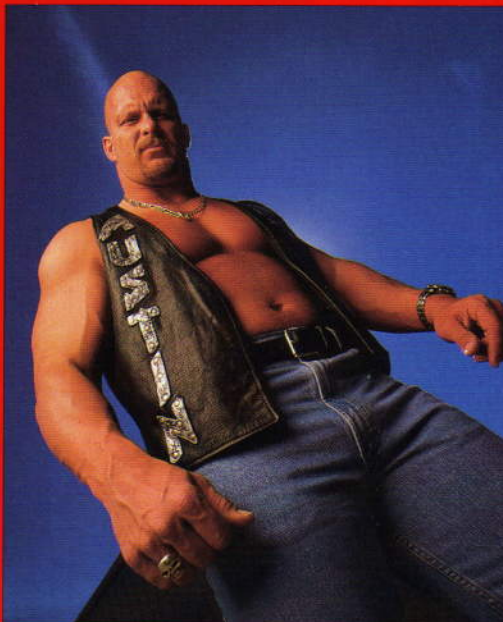
The most impressive, intriguing, and influential Texans of 1999.

DIXIE CHICKS



LANCE ARMSTRONG

STONE COLD STEVE AUSTIN



- PLUS HENRY THOMAS
- RED MCCOMBS
- KAREN HUGHES
- MARK CUBAN
- AND TODD WAGNER
- PHILLIP MCGRAW
- KATE BREAKER
- EDWARD W. GUINN
- LOUIS SACHAR
- JOHN CAMPBELL
- STEVEN GONZALES
- JAMES BYRD, JR.
- JOSE E. LIMON
- CHARLOTTE BEERS
- BARBARA R. FOORMAN
- MARJORIE SCARDINO
- LAUREN BUSH
- TIM DUNCAN





Hot Chicks: Robison, Maines, and Seidel won two Grammys in 1999.

Nashville **Music**, Texas style

Roberts—Richard Gere movie, *Runaway Bride*. They've won too many awards to mention, but since you ask, they have two Grammys (one for Best Country Album), two Country Music Association Awards (one for Group of the Year), and three Academy of Country Music Awards; they've been nominated for another four

CMA awards this year. At the end of August the trio wraps up tours with Tim McGraw and Lilith Fair.

The Dixie Chicks

These brash, beautiful blondes are the rock stars of country.

by Jamie Schilling Fields



NOW THAT THEY'VE SOLD their album *Wide Open Spaces* to every girl, woman, and old lady in the United States, the Dixie Chicks are finding real career opportunity. It seems that Hollywood has

homed in on our pretty country threesome much as it did on Trisha Yearwood, who sometimes plays a forensic scientist on the CBS drama *JAG*. These days banjo picker Emily Robison, fiddler Martie Seidel, and lead singer Natalie Maines are fielding scripts written for them too. One has an exciting plot: Natalie gets kidnapped! That's the script that would have her deliver the line "He's as slippery as a pocketful of custard."

Plums like that go only to the most successful country acts, and the Dixie Chicks surely fit the bill. They've sold six million copies of *Wide Open Spaces* (Sony Monument), their breakthrough CD, and may well surpass that figure with their follow-up, *Fly*, which hits stores August 31. It can't hurt that its lead single, "Ready to Run," is the theme song for the new Julia

The excitement centers on three gorgeous blondes, two of them sisters who founded the Dixie Chicks in 1989. Emily, who is 26, plays banjo well enough to impress ace picker Roy Clark, who says, "I would not want to be against her in a contest." Her work on dobro—a cousin to the slide guitar, played face-up—brings a loose, soulful twang to Bonnie Raitt covers. Her 29-year-old sister, Martie (short for Martha), cooks on fiddle, having placed second in the prestigious Winfield fiddling competition when she was 16. She stars on doleful ballads and hoedowns, as you'd expect, but also on Celtic jigs. Then there's the lead singer, 24-year-old Natalie, whose fireball soprano can lay [CONTINUED ON PAGE 150]

Dixie Chicks

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 120] low stadiums of 40,000 fans. A voice unlike anyone else's—it's a growl, a punch—it won the Lubbock girl a scholarship to Boston's hoity-toity Berklee College of Music before she joined the band in 1995.

But musical talent alone doesn't explain the Dixie Chicks' appeal. We love them because success has only strengthened their integrity. Now that they've entered the stratosphere, don't expect to see them with fellow club members on a daffy TV drama. Nor will they remix their singles to be disco hits, as Shania Twain and LeAnn Rimes have, or shoot fiddle-free videos for VH1, though they've been asked to. They say fiddlesticks to such moves. "We'd rather be the rock stars of country than the lame-asses of rock," explains Natalie. And so, as Nashville churns out tedious product and its sales and radio audiences dwindle, the Dixie Chicks succeed with a different tack. They color outside the lines, take chances, fight for what they want, and offend. In short, as Natalie says, "I think we've brought Texas to Nashville."

As Willie and Waylon did a generation ago, our threesome projects a certain outlaw style. The self-described "girly girls" have 750 outfits (capri pants, skintight camisoles, enormous bell-bottoms, headbands made of bra straps) and dozens of pairs of Mary Janes. They hire designer Todd Oldham, a fellow Texan, to outfit them for awards shows and tours. He's put them in tie-dyed lingerie, glamorous gowns, and black matte jersey covered in safety pins, a look he calls "punkin'," for "country punk." "There's no reason to head down any path that anyone expects them to," he says. The hallmark of Chick style is brash color—fuchsia, lemon, turquoise, orange. "They can wear anything," says Susan Kittenplan, the senior features editor at *Harper's Bazaar*. "And they're not afraid to do that."

They're not afraid to take risks either, even if it means alienating fans. Most purchasers of *Wide Open Spaces* have been the pop-loving 24-and-under crowd, a big chunk of them kids. On that release the label wielded a good deal of control. For instance, their rip-roaring bluegrass instrumentals would never have been permitted, the Chicks say, for fear they might be a turnoff. But with executives now giving the trio carte blanche on *Fly*, they're rubbing our noses in *Beverly Hillbillies* riffs on "Sin Wagon": "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition!" hollers Natalie as a good woman gone bad; she plans to get drunk on some "12-ounce nutrition" and do "a little mattress dancin'." Another

pearl tells how two friends, one with an abusive husband, put poison in his black-eyed peas and stuff his body in the trunk of a car ("Earl had to die!"). Is the label nervous? "A little," says Allen Butler, the president of Sony Nashville. "But I'm not going to argue with success."

And that success stems from the group's naive belief that the record business in Nashville should be like it is back home. Natalie grew up watching her father, Lloyd Maines, produce albums for the likes of Jerry Jeff Walker and Robert Earl Keen, and assumed that all artists played their own instruments in the studio. In the early nineties the pre-Sony Dixie Chicks had done as much on three CDs, two of them featuring Lloyd on steel guitar. But in reality few big-name country acts do their own sessions work. Take Brooks and Dunn: On videos the earnest duo strums up a storm; on their latest record they just sing. The same goes for veteran foursome Alabama, whose lead guitarist, Jeff Cook, and drummer, Mark Herndon, don't play at all on a new CD. Even George Strait's near-perfect Ace in the Hole Band stays away from the studio for most recordings. So by playing their own instruments on *Wide Open Spaces*, the Dixie Chicks earned the adulation of their peers, which they think is pathetic. "In Texas that's a normal, everyday thing," says Martie.

Perhaps the strongest sign of their heritage is that they refuse to be told what to do. Paramount Studios, which made *Runaway Bride*, offered to pay for the "Ready to Run" video if 20 percent of it would be clips from the movie. But all of the treatments the Chicks proposed got nixed. "They wanted us to do something really tame, like sing on a big wedding cake," says Emily. So the girls dumped the studio and coughed up the money for their own video, in which they run from a triple wedding, steal bicycles, and have a food fight. They stood their ground even before they had clout—as when Sony told them "Dixie" was too regional and "Chicks" was politically incorrect. If the three had listened to executives, they say, their biggest hit, "Wide Open Spaces," would never have been put out as a single. The coming-of-age anthem, with its alternative-sounding arrangements, struck the label brass as too left of center for radio.

All three Dixie Chicks are now stars, but one of them always was—at least to everyone who knew her. Visiting her mother, Tina Maines, at the doctor's office where she worked, four-year-old Natalie sang on a desktop to the adults. In the second grade she announced that she didn't need to learn math: She was going to be a star. Show business, after all, was in her genes; her grandfather had sung in the Maines Brothers band, a respected country group

