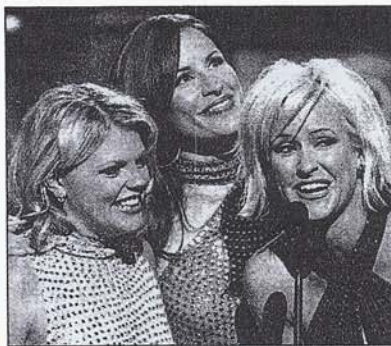




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By Michael A. Schwarz, USA TODAY

Chicks take charge

After suing their label, the Dixie Chicks roar back with a new album and more control over their music and career ■



By James Minchin III

Texas trio: Martie Maguire, left, Natalie Maines and Emily Robison may have the clout to persuade country radio stations to play more traditional music.

Dixie Chicks in charge

By Brian Mansfield
Special for USA TODAY

What a difference a year can make.

On Aug. 27, 2001, the Dixie Chicks filed a lawsuit against Sony Music, accusing the company of "systematic thievery," fraud and racketeering. Today, exactly one year later, the group releases its new album, *Home*. Through Sony.

Much has changed for the Texas-based trio, whose two previous major-label albums, *Wide Open Spaces* and *Fly*, have sold more than 10 million copies each. Coming from the hottest group in country music, the nearly all-acoustic *Home* is a bold, adventurous move.

Though it's not the bluegrass album early gossip suggested, it's a drastic departure from the arena-size country on which the Chicks made their reputation, and it's a nearly 180-degree directional shift from the rest of today's heavily pop-influenced country radio.

On the personal side, lead singer Natalie Maines and husband Adrian Pasdar had their first child, son Slade, last year. Banjo player Emily Robison and country-singer/husband Charlie Robison are expecting a child, also a boy, in November. Martie Maguire, the group's fiddler, married teacher Gareth Maguire, Maines' brother-in-law, and is trying to get pregnant.

Success comes 'Home' to roost as fight with Sony is settled

Cover story

The Chicks made *Home* in Texas during the band's 10-month battle with its label, rehearsing at Maines' house in Austin, then producing the album with Natalie's father, noted Texas musician Lloyd Maines.

"I recognized it would probably be the only album that we would ever make without a label," Natalie Maines says. "So I really tried to enjoy that."

As a result, the album features versions of songs by some of the band's favorite singer/songwriters, such

as Patty Griffin, Radney Foster, Darrell Scott and Tim O'Brien. There's a cover of Fleetwood Mac's *Landslide*. The band cut four original songs as well, two of them written with country singer Marty Stuart.

"We didn't have any set vision that this was going to be the third record," Lloyd Maines says. "We just went in and experimented with the acoustic aspect of it."

What began as an experiment and a bit of a risk could pay off big for the group. Initial reaction to the music has been strong: The first single, *Long Time Gone*, recently peaked at No. 2 on the *Billboard/Airplay Monitor* country chart. The group will cap an extensive round of TV appearances with an NBC prime-time concert special in December. And, having almost single-handedly reintroduced the banjo to country radio four years ago with such songs as *There's Your Trouble* and *Wide Open Spaces*, the Chicks have made an album that the rest of country music must likely reckon with. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* may not have had the clout to get acoustic instruments and bluegrass sounds onto the radio, but the airplay-staple Dixie Chicks sure do.

"They've got a big enough fan base that they can stretch right now," says *Home* engineer Gary Paczosa.

Please see COVER STORY next page ▶

