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THE DIXIE CHICKS

NATALIE MAINES,
MARTIE MAGUIRE,
& EMILY ROBISON

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THE DIXIE CHICKS MOVE ON

BY STEVE BALTIN

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STYLING MARJAN MALAKPOUR

“**T**he comment,” as Natalie Maines calls it, has been talked about. The band’s politics, the controversy, the outrage, and the death threats have all been highly scrutinized and placed under the media microscope as well. In fact, the only thing that hasn’t been talked about much in regards to the Dixie Chicks of late is the music.

And with Emily Robison, Martie Maguire, and Natalie Maines, it is still the music that comes first. Or to put it in perspective, if not for the fact the Texas trio were the biggest selling female act of all time no one would’ve given a damn that Maines had insulted the president. But well before Maines made that fateful remark in London on the eve of the Iraq war, the Dixie Chicks had established themselves as a

superstar act, one capable not only of selling out arenas around the world, but reaching across genres to meld country with the singer/songwriter movement of the ‘70s.

The Dixie Chicks have perfected that science on *Taking The Long Way*, an album that just debuted at number one with over 526,000 copies sold in its first week. The trio is thrilled with the numbers, but on this, their most personal album to date, the effort was its greatest reward. Working with producer Rick Rubin (Johnny Cash, the Red Hot Chili Peppers), as well as an array of songwriters from former Crowded House leader Neil Finn to Sheryl Crow and Pete Yorn, the Chicks call to mind the heyday of bands like the Eagles and James Taylor throughout the impassioned 14-song collection.

Venice had a chance to speak to Robison and the lively Maines about moving on, parenthood, and the music.





Emily Robison



Martie Maguire



Natalie Maines

Venice: You guys are very much in demand these days.

Emily: It's good to be busy.

Natalie: *[laughs]* That's a good thing. I live mostly in L.A. and I am here and we are off until Friday, when we go to London.

What are the L.A. hangouts of choice?

Natalie: We have beach day every Saturday and we play volleyball and just lots of people come over and it's a whole day of that fun. I like being with friends. I like playing games. *[laughs]* I'm really nerdy. I like charades and I'm pretty obsessed with Yahtzee. I like to go to the movies.

Back to the album, could you have ever imagined that when you put it out there would be this much interest?

Emily: I don't know. I would always go back and forth between how many fans did we lose versus how many fans could we potentially gain. And I think the last couple of weeks has been very telling as to where people's support lies. I think a lot of people bought the record as a vote to how they feel about things. Hopefully, the music will speak louder than anything else from now on, but I think it has been the main question because we've been gone for two years. But now that the album is out people can start to talk about the music because they've heard the music.

How exciting is it for you to have music out again after two years?

Emily: That's the best part. You start talking about this music and you start doing interviews about the music, but the most gratifying thing is when it finally gets in people's hands and it finally gets heard because that's your baby. This is what you've been working on for the last year, so it's definitely the most gratifying part of it all and especial-

ly touring. We're going to tour right away, which is new for us to tour right off the bat, so we'll get that instant gratification. To me that's the best part.

What songs are you most looking forward to doing live?

Emily: The ones that seem to have risen to the top just based on when we do shows where we play five or six songs, whether it be for internet shows, things like that, are of course the single, "Not Ready To Make Nice," "The Long Way Around" has been a staple of the set. "Easy Silence" is one, "Voice Inside My Head" has been a favorite of some people. "Lullaby" has been a favorite. We haven't performed that yet, but that will probably be in there for the tour. "Lubbock Or Leave It" is on that list too. So those have been the favorites. We'll probably play about 80 percent of the album on tour.

My favorite song on the album is "Silent House." I don't know how well it will work in the show necessarily because it's a long song and it's a song that takes a lot of attention to listen to and clue into, but I love that song and love playing that song.

Natalie: Well, "Not Ready To Be Nice" because I still can very easily tap into the emotion and the pain that goes along with the song. Often times I'm making a grocery list while I'm singing that one. *[laughs]* I'm not even thinking about the song sometimes. If I think about it too much I can easily just start bawling right there on stage while I sing it. But I love playing "Lubbock Or Leave It," "Taking The Long Way," and then, lots of times, the new songs we've been playing lately, most of the things where we get to play more than one song it's an acoustic sort of internet show. So I'm just excited to play all of them full band because we haven't really gotten to do that for an audience.

"Easy Silence" is such a sweet song.

Emily: Kind of political at the same time, but, yes, very sweet.

I think the mark of great art, though, is stuff that can be interpreted in many different ways.

Emily: If there's one thing that we consciously do when we write, it's that. We try to write so that people can interpret things in their own way and can take things a number of different ways. We don't like to spell things out too much. So I'm glad that people do find their own meaning to songs that we may not even have thought of.

Congratulations, by the way, on your impeccable taste in co-songwriters.

Emily: *[laughs]* Thanks. Rick Rubin had a lot to do with some of those co-writers, most of those co-writers. He was very instrumental in hooking us up with them and they were big masters; we loved all of them.

How did getting to work with all these different artists influence you as a musician and what did you learn from them?

Natalie: Ah, so much I don't even know where to begin. But Rick, at every level of the recording process, is a great teacher and he's not trying to teach. He really gets you to shut out any thoughts of what other people would think of something. It's just about creating music. It's the most fun I've ever had in the studio because it was the most experimental we've ever gotten. We've always sort of thought if we laid it down then it had to be on the song. I don't know why we made that rule for ourselves. Probably because we're cheap and didn't want to waste the money. *[laughs]* So Rick is just like, "Try everything." Amongst the three of us we would debate if on a song

