



The singers who sparked a controversy, *from left*: Martie Maguire in Robert Best; Natalie Maines, in Carolina Herrera and Cartier earrings, with her son, Slade; Emily Robison, in Calvin Klein Collection, with her son, Gus. Hair, Ken O'Rourke for Streeters; makeup, Gucci Westman. Details, stores, see In This Issue. Fashion Editor: Tonie Goodman.



DIXIE CHICKS *musicians*

For Natalie Maines, the feisty young lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, the low point came when her husband, the actor Adrian Pasdar, was roundly booed during a charity baseball game at a stadium in Texas. For Emily Robison, the banjo-plucking brunette, it was when she found out that the Red Cross had refused the trio's charity money. For Martie Maguire, the fiddler, the ugly truth hit her when she was told that the White House had released a statement on the Dixie Chicks boycott. It read, simply, "Their fans have spoken."

In case you somehow missed it, the trouble started back in March, when, on the eve of war in Iraq, Natalie, almost as an aside, told a packed concert hall in London, "Just so you know, we're ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas." When it was picked up by the media in the good ole U.S. of A., the backlash was swift and brutal. Country radio stopped playing their music, while one station in Louisiana staged Dixie Chicks Destruction Day, during which children stomped all over their CDs before a tractor rolled over and crushed them. Their single at the time—a touching song about a young soldier heading off to war—fell right off the charts. They received death threats. Sony, their label, had to beef up security at its New York headquarters, and both their management and publicity firms' computer systems had to be shut down because of the flood of angry, hateful E-mail. During the Country Music Awards in May, the Dixie Chicks were the butt of jokes all night, and when the women appeared via satellite they were drowned out by boos.

In early October, as their six-month tour is just two shows away from over, the women take a minute to reflect on their "year in the barrel," as they say in Texas, the state all three women call home. Sitting in an elegant bistro in Chelsea—the gayest neighborhood in New York—eating French food while listening to Frank Sinatra, they look utterly *in place* and at ease. The culture clash somehow makes complete sense. They look and seem nothing like *(continued on page 333)*

cleaned my closet. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end!" She was now laughing again, obviously tickled by the thought that folding a pile of sweaters could be an antidote to trying to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons. But for Clinton, someone who thrives on doing, it probably is. "I'm a problem-solver," she said, finally. "That's what I love to do."—SUSAN ORLEAN

DIXIE CHICKS: MUSICIANS

(continued from page 279)

bluegrass-lovin' country-music stars, which in their case is a probably a good thing, since they may have to find a new musical genre in which to ply their trade and salvage their dignity. The Chicks have always been a bundle of contradictions: three very modern women . . . who play foot-stompin' fiddle-and-banjo roots music. Even their name suggests a certain tension: While *Dixie* conjures the ghosts of Southern conservatism past and present, *Chicks* packs a distinctly ironic, postfeminist punch. Their fans should have known that these girls had a fight in them.

Despite the attacks on their personal and professional well-being, the women remain defiant. Especially Natalie. "I don't want to be played on those stations," she says. "And when I watched people smashing our CDs I just thought, Good. Smash 'em. Please don't listen to me. I had no idea you thought I was one of you, because I'm not." Wait. She's not done. "And I don't want to go to any [country music] award shows. And if we did win, what would I get up there and say? I have nothing to say to these people." In fact, Natalie, who issued an apology at the height of the dustup, says that today it is the apology, not the original offending comment, that she'd take back if she could. "It was all mine—nobody made me apologize and nobody wrote it for me—but when I look back and read it, I don't stand behind what I said. That will make people extra-mad, because some were like, Well, at least she apologized."

Ten days before that fateful March night in London that changed their lives, the Dixie Chicks broke a concert-sales record by moving \$49 million worth of tickets in a single day, prompting one writer to observe that they're "quite simply the most important act in the contemporary history of country [music]." Their first two albums—*Fly* and *Wide Open Spaces*—sold more than 10 million copies apiece. Their latest effort, *Home*, has sold only 6 million, most of which were bought before Nata-

lie's Bush-whack. "Our manager will so try to pull the 'Oh, you would have had a natural drop-off in sales after the Grammys,'" says Natalie, "and it's like, Shut up. No, we wouldn't. Gimme a break. We're not stupid. We're lucky as hell that the tour went on sale before I said what I said, because it would not have sold out in one day and broken all those records. The sales of our next CD will really tell us a lot." Indeed, it will tell them—and us—whether there is room in country music for artists with liberal politics.

Because we are celebrating heroines, I ask them who, if any, are theirs. Emily says Emmylou Harris, whom she admires because she doesn't get played on the radio yet soldiers on out of passion for the music. "Rosa Parks," says Natalie. "And Oprah, because she uses her show and her celebrity to make such a difference." Martie, who is Emily's sister and the oldest, at 34, thinks about it the longest. "I don't think I've ever identified with a female role model very strongly. I guess we need more." And then she says, "Celebrities are the least heroic of anyone." She laughs. "I certainly didn't do anything heroic." Pause for effect. "I'm just riding on Natalie's coattails."

"Or going down on my sinking ship!" says Natalie, and the three of them laugh uproariously. Whatever happens next, one thing is clear: Their friendship will weather the storm. "It's weird when you're one of three and you stick together," says Martie. "It's amazing how empowered you can feel when you're not alone. It takes that for me. I'm not the bravest person around."

"Martie, you are such a liar!" shouts Emily. "You've always stood up for yourself."—JONATHAN VAN METER

LAURA HILLENBRAND: AUTHOR

(continued from page 280)

a disabling bout of nausea, fever, fatigue, and vertigo so intense she eventually had to drop out of school. "After reading it," she says of the article, which took two years to write, "I think people understand that CFS is not being tired at the end of the day, it's being afraid that you are too weak to breathe." Despite the obstacles she has overcome, in her mind she's no hero. "On the contrary," she says, "one of the frustrating things about being incapacitated is that your life becomes utterly selfish. You exist only to get your body to the next day. It's frustrating, not heroic."