

COUNTRY

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Dixie Chicks

Wide Open Spaces

(Monument)

Although this is their major-label debut, the Dallas-based Dixie Chicks are not newly hatched.

The trio, who have performed for eight and a half years, already have three acclaimed independent albums to their credit.

Named for a Little Feat song, "Dixie Chicken," the Dixies have opened concerts for country music notables including Loretta



Lynn, George Strait and Alan Jackson. The women have performed at such prestigious venues as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Grand Ole Opry.

All the preparation shows.

With Martie Seidel on fiddle, her sister Emily Erwin on banjo, Dobro and guitar, and Natalie Maines providing lead vocals, the Dixie Chicks pepper *Wide Open Spaces* with expertly played acoustic arrangements and fine vocal harmonies.

The first single, "I Can Love You Better," is a breezy country ditty with a Dobro's twang beneath a longing and soulful lead vocal. The dreamy title cut is the story of the ladies' pursuit of a musical career. Fiddle and steel guitar power the moving "Tonight the Heartache's on Me," that recalls Patty Loveless' best. "Let 'Er Rip" rocks with the sassiness of The Judds.

"Once You've Loved Somebody" and "I'll Take Care of You" are fine country ballads. Album closer "Give It Up or Let Me Go" delivers a shot of the blues.

Releasing *Wide Open Spaces* as the first album on the newly revived Monument Records label shows the belief that parent company, Sony, has in Dixie Chicks. My prediction is that fans will agree.

— Tom Weaver

MUSIC**3 girls who know how to 'Sing It!'**

Dixie Chicks: A major-label debut for fiddle/mandolin player Martie Seidel, left, vocalist Natalie Maines (daughter of West Texas steel-guitar legend Lloyd Maines) and multi-instrumentalist Emily Erwin

**Dixie Chicks give
'Wide Open Spaces'
plenty of distinction**

By Brian Mansfield
Special for USA TODAY

MUSIC REVIEW

When the three members of the Dixie Chicks signed their record deal, they insisted on playing on their album. So in addition to their three-part harmonies on *Wide Open Spaces* (★★★ out of four), the three play all its fiddle, dobro, mandolin and banjo parts. And it's those instruments that help give *Wide Open Spaces* its considerable personality.

Named for Little Feat's country-rock favorite *Dixie Chicken*, the Dixie Chicks formed nearly a decade ago in Dallas, though *Wide Open Spaces* is the band's major-label debut. It's also the first new album for the revived Monument Records, one-time home to Roy Orbison, Dolly

Parton and Larry Gatlin.

The eclectic tendencies of fiddle/mandolin player Martie Seidel, multi-instrumentalist Emily Erwin and vocalist Natalie Maines (daughter of West Texas steel-guitar legend Lloyd Maines) fit nicely into Monument's legacy of country and pop. The tunes range from hillbilly swing (a cover of Bonnie Raitt's *Give It Up or Let Me Go*) to catchy commercial country (*There's Your Trouble*). The group also covers tunes by Radney Foster, J.D. Souther and Maria McKee. All that, plus the bluesy, rapidly rising single *I Can Love You Better*, means the Dixie Chicks are shaping up to be the first breakout country act of 1998.

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MUSICROW

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DIXIE CHICKS/Wide Open Spaces

(Monument NK 68195) *Producer: Paul Worley, Blake Chancey*

Prime Cuts: "I Can Love You Better," "Wide Open Spaces," "There's Your Trouble," "Let 'Er Rip"

Critique: For me, this trio lives in the same musical neighborhood as The Ranch. Those of you who remember how much I liked *that* group's debut realize this is extremely high praise. There is an acoustic instrumentalist's sensibility they share that seems the perfect mix to court and keep the young adult audience the broader country genre must attract. Added bonus: *Wide Open Spaces* is yet another album that may help revive the banjo in commercially viable country music. The first thing to strike you about their sound is lead vocalist Natalie Maines. She is possessed of a Voice. It is contemporary and country in the same instant—most importantly, it *speaks* to you. The songs cover love found and lost, desired and dismissed. Longing for an otherwise-involved man is the subject of two of the best songs, "I Can Love You Better" and "There's Your Trouble." Blistering solos populate "Let 'Er Rip" and Bonnie Raitt's "Give It Up Or Let Me Go"—several provided by Chicks Martie Siedel on fiddle and Emily Erwin on various stringed devices. On the safe side, the Dixie Chicks temper some of their more free-wheeling material with a heavy dose of contemplative and conventional material. It is on the title track, however, where Dixie Chicks transcend the genre to explore lightly trod ground, both literally and figuratively. The deep-rooted need to find a



place, physically and metaphorically, suits the life-building crowd who either will or won't be the country listeners of the future. For that reason, among others, let's hope these Chicks fly.

—Chuck Aly

MONDAY

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MUSIC CITY: ENTERTAINMENT

ALBUM REVIEWS

Dixie Chicks tackle country wide open

By TOM ROLAND

Staff Writer

The Dixie Chicks

Wide Open Spaces

★★★

The first release on Sony's reactivated Monument label is a hodgepodge of modern female sounds. The Dixie Chicks provide a cool, three-part feminine harmony with a spunky attitude that draws casually on plenty of influences, while keeping a sound all its own.

In the opening *I Can Love You Better*, they come across as a country Wilson Phillips with those lush, tight stylings, though they spice the proceedings with a touch of blues. In a re-make of the Dobie Gray/Elvis Presley classic *Loving Arms*, they're mindful of The Forester Sisters, almost perfectly synchronized, yet more worldly than The Foresters. In the album's title track, lead singer Natalie Maines becomes a twangy Alanis Morissette — the phrasing and the confidence are there without so much of the attitude. Meanwhile, the country ballad *Never Say Die* finds Maines a bit mindful of Lee Ann Womack.

The Dixie Chicks cover a lot of territory with this debut: the snarling blues of *Give It Up Or Let Me Go*, the country shuffle of *Tonight The Heartache's On Me* and the angelic balladry of *I'll Take Care Of You*. Invariably, the lush harmonies stamp the songs indelibly, though — unlike Wilson Phillips — The Chicks wisely avoid overusing their uniqueness.

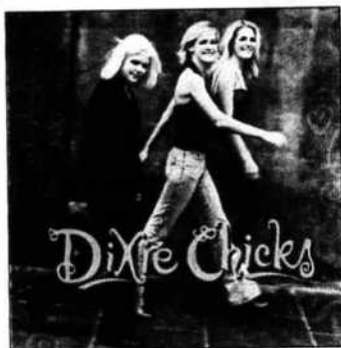
And, unlike The Foresters, who seemingly ran their material through a family values test, The Chicks aren't afraid of a little darkness. *Tonight The Heartache's On Me* has a rack-'em-up-bartender vibe that would've been too unladylike for The Foresters, and when they sing "There is a wound inside me, and it's bleeding like a flood" in *Am I The Only One (Who's Ever Felt This Way)* — well, it's hard to imagine too many country women willing to take on a line like that.

The Dixie Chicks have the ability to take country's already-strong women into even edgier territory.



The Dixie Chicks

They're Not Just Whistling Dixie



**Dixie Chicks, *Wide Open Spaces*
(Monument/Sony)**

★★★★ out of five stars

The Dixie Chicks might just be the best things to come out of Dallas since Troy Aikman.

Wide Open Spaces is the debut album of lead singer

Natalie Maines and sisters Emily Erwin and Martie Seidel, and it's characterized by strong singing, strong material and solid playing. But the Dixie Chicks differ from the average, hyper-competent Nashville ensemble in a couple of ways.

For one thing, there's a sense that these three are a real band.

According to their record company, the trio honed their chops singing on street corners in Dallas, and it's easy to believe.

There's an organic feeling to the way their bluegrass-style harmonies set off the sassy voice of Maines, daughter of legendary country steel player Lloyd Maines, and they actually play their own instruments — Erwin on dobro, banjo and acoustic guitar and Seidel on fiddle and mandolin.

The Chicks are also unapologetically country in a way that many '90s artists aren't. They have an unselfconscious inflection that bespeaks childhoods spent absorbing George Jones and Bob Wills, so you almost hear the glasses clink and the honky-tonk door swing shut on the ballad *Tonight the Heartache's on Me*.

Other highlights include a tender version of the 1984 J.D. Souther buckle-polisher *I'll Take Care of You*, a Maria McKee tune, *Am I the Only One (Who's Ever Felt This Way)*, and the Bonnie Raitt blues *Give It Up or Let Me Go*.

The acoustic production of Paul Worley and Blake Chancey gives the Chicks plenty of room to fill the spaces with attitude and some of the punchiest harmonies to come of Nashville in a long time. These Chicks aren't just whistling Dixie.