

DIXIE LAND

The Dixie Chicks fly the Texan coop to bring their raunchy country music to Australia

When celebrating milestones, country music's Dixie Chicks know how to make a moment last. Shortly after the 1998 release of the Dallas-based trio's debut album, *Wide Open Spaces*, lead singer Natalie Maines had a wild idea: she and her bandmates, Martie Seidel and Emily Robison, who are sisters, would commemorate each gold record and No. 1 hit with a tiny chicken's foot tattooed on an ankle. "We said, 'Yeah, sure,' thinking it was way down the line," says Robison. "Then five months later we were going gold and we said, 'Oh, no! We're getting a tattoo!'"

Wide Open Spaces went platinum and is still in the US Country Top 10, and their recent follow-up, *Fly*, also winged it to the top of the US charts (and made the Australian Top 20). Last month at Nashville's Country Music Association Awards the glam-happy, barnstorming trio won single of the year with "Wide Open Spaces," as well as best music video and top vocal group, and now they're touring their harmonies with attitude Down Under. "What the girls are trying to do is bring people back to country," says the band's manager, Simon Renshaw. "Natalie had a great line about it, which was they'd rather be the rock queens of country than the lame queens of rock."

It is the group's genre-bending that has normally too-hip-for-country teens saddling up. A growing posse of young female fans are decking themselves in "Chicks Rule" T-shirts and waving "I Want to Be a Dixie Chick" signs. Raunchy and outrageous they may be, but the Spice Girls of country they're not. "People show up thinking, 'They're cute and I kind of like that one song they do,'" says lead singer Maines, 24. "I just love watching them react when Martie [the fiddle and mandolin player] and [guitarist and banjo player] Emily rip into a bluegrass instrumental."

Growing up in Dallas, the two youngest of teachers Paul and Barbara Erwin's three

"Other musicians would die for what we've got now," says Robison (left) with Maines (centre) and Seidel.



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