

COSMOPOLITAN

October

FUN, FEARLESS FEMALES

Country Cool

Cosmo goes behind the scenes and into the closets of the Dixie Chicks.

By Martha Frankel

■When the Dallas-based Dixie Chicks released their CD, *Wide Open Spaces*, in January 1998, no one thought they would make it very far. After all, they were just three pretty blonds with funk-ed-up black leather outfits who were being compared to the Spice Girls (and we all know what happened to them). But then people everywhere started humming the title song, "Wide Open Spaces," and "There's Your Trouble," and within months, the country diva's slogan, Chicks Rule!, began appearing on hats and T-shirts—the girls had a *big* following.

Now, the band's new CD, *Fly*, is poised to soar up the music charts. Just wait till you hear the frankly frilly way the Chicks - Natalie Maines, 25, and sisters Emily Erwin, 27, and Martie Seidel, 30 - got started and how they turned into sexy Southern standouts.

From Gingham to Glam

Sisters Emily (who plays Dobro, banjo, and guitar) and Martie (who plays the fiddle) jammed together 10 years ago as the Dixie Chicks in Texas with different lead singers, more of a bluegrass sound, and well, a slightly different look. "We were obsessed with this frilly gingham cowgirl stuff," Emily says. But after years at bars and state fairs, they heard Natalie's sultry voice in 1995 and knew she had to be part of the band.

Natalie, who came from a Texas country-and-blues background, brought the music to a new rock-country level. Oh, and she demanded a bit of a change in the fashion department too. "I told them I'd love to join the band, but the cowgirl outfits had to go," says Maines. Now



Chicks Rule! From left to right: Emily, Natalie, and Martie

they opt for a sexy, modern look - just shy of the Shania Twain bandeau-of-a-skirt thing. And with the success of their last album, they have designers like Todd Oldham outfitting them for concerts.

But these tough-as-nails Texans with attitude won't change *everything* to make it big. On their latest album, the song "Sin Wagon" seemed to create a stir at the record company, thanks to the sexy line about "mattress dancing" (oh, the horror). "They didn't want that song on the album," says Natalie. "But luckily, we're calling the shots now. And you should see the crowds go nuts and sing out that line at the concerts."

In and Out of Love

The thing that hasn't gone so nuts is their behavior. "The tabloids are really disappointed in us," Natalie laughs. "We don't fight, we don't carry on in public, and we don't make fools of ourselves."

Of course, it doesn't mean all's perfect in Dixieland. Emily recently married singer/

songwriter Charlie Robison. At the same time, Natalie was in the process of divorcing a bass player named Michael Tarrabay. (Martie has been married to Ted Seidel, a pharmaceutical rep, since 1995).

"It was a big bummer," Emily says, referring to when she was planning her wedding and her sister was off with Natalie in a corner of the band's bus talking about Natalie's divorce. "But you can't let other people's experiences taint you."

That's why these ballsy women didn't worry about going on tour with Lilith Fair this past summer, even after hearing stories from past performers about the grueling 40-date schedule. After all, they were the first country act ever to play on Lilith's main stage. "Yeah, that, and we've always been Sarah McLachlan fans. But it's one thing to be a fan; it's another to play on the same stage she did," says Emily.

The way the Chicks are going, some hot young performer will soon be saying the same about them. ■