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DIXIE CHICKS

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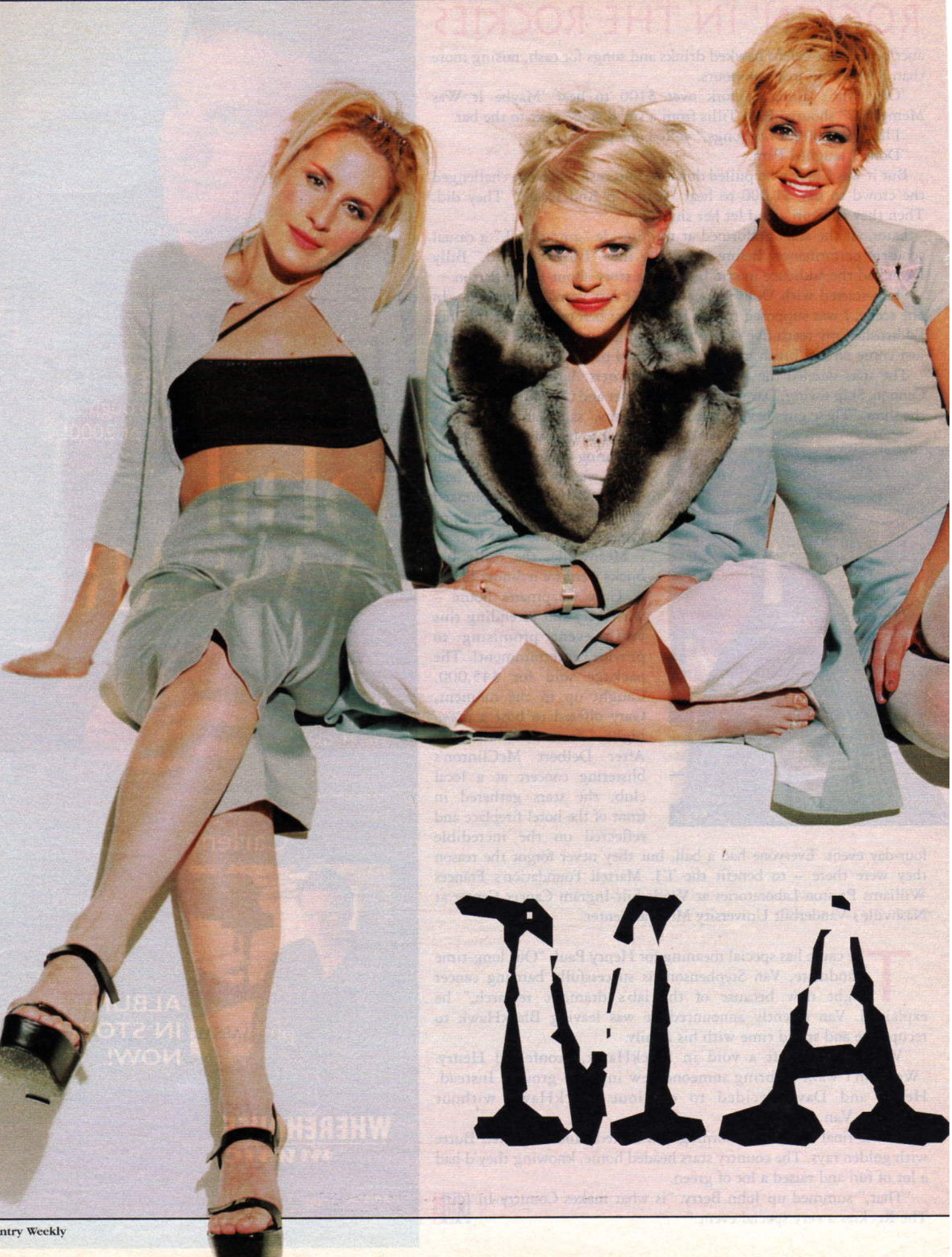
mURder

Behind the mayhem of their explosive
PLUS — The rocky start to their runaway success story

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Album

MURDER

On the set of the Chicks' new video

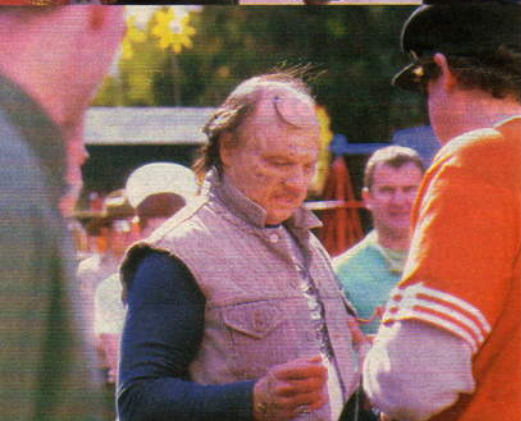
Pushing the envelope is nothing new to the Dixie Chicks.

With sass, flash and attitude in spades, they're on a roll — 12 million albums sold, a steady string of No. 1s and a mantel full of awards.

Now they're setting the bar even higher with a new single that delivers a chipper take on a dark topic — murder.

By Larry Holden

WHY



Video out-takes (top to bottom) reveal Jane Krakowski as Wanda in happier times; the Chicks clowning at the hospital; policeman Michael DeLuise subduing Emily and Martie; Dennis Franz as decomposing Earl; and Franz in the dance finale with Chicks and cast. With Earl's body in a tarp (above), *Chicago Hope's* Lauren Holly, Martie, Natalie, Emily and *Ally McBeal's* Jane Krakowski help the wife beater to his final resting place. Chicks (below right) ham it up with Franz.

Photos By Paul Natkin

Dixie Chicks

For the song and video for "Goodbye Earl," the Chicks light-heartedly serenaded the killing of a wife beater, who dies after being poisoned by his battered spouse. In the whimsically gruesome song, the Chicks chirp:

*Goodbye, Earl
We need a break
Let's go out to the lake, Earl
We'll pack a lunch
And stuff you in the trunk, Earl
Well, is that all right?
Good! Let's go for a ride*

For months, concertgoers have cheered wildly whenever the Chicks launch into "Goodbye Earl." Now the trio has enlisted top TV stars — *NYPD Blue's* Dennis Franz, *Ally McBeal's* Jane Krakowski and *Chicago Hope's* Lauren Holly — for a zany music video faithfully scripted around the song's storyline of the beaten spouse turning the tables on her husband.

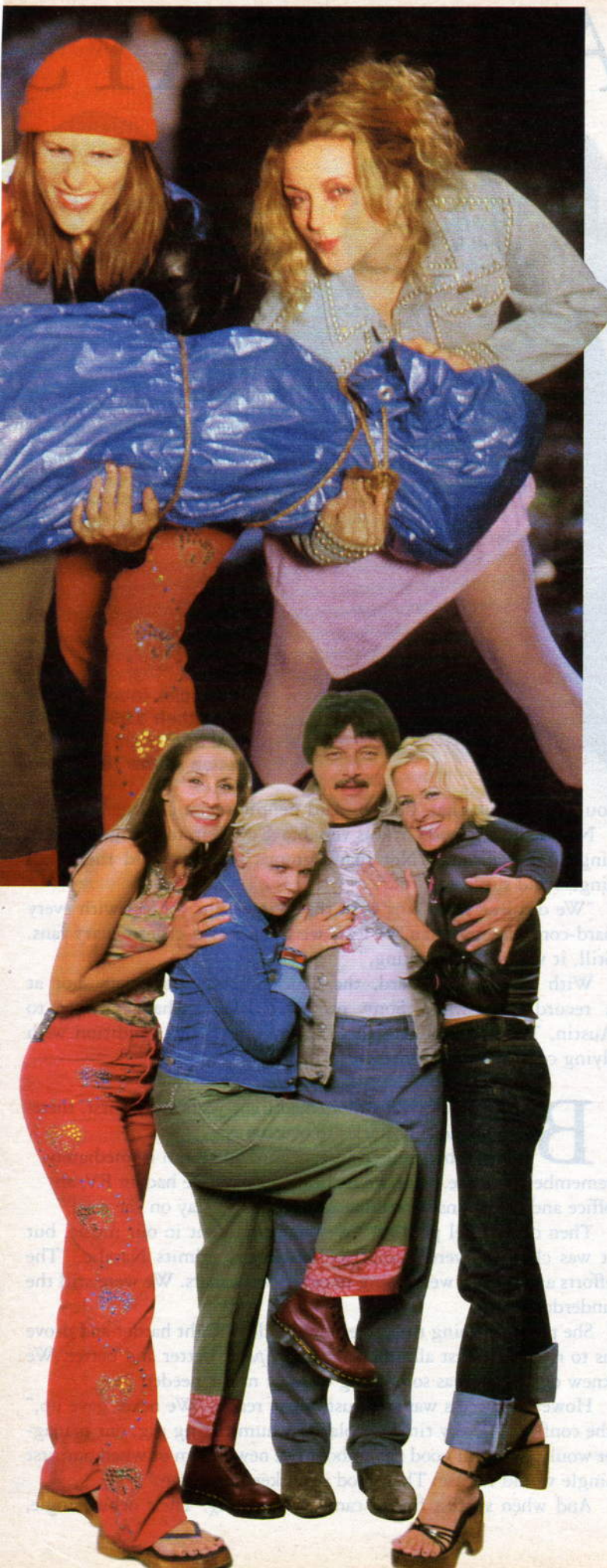
"The song is our attempt to put a Dixie Chicks spin on a serious subject — we do it with humor," declares Emily Robison, after the Los Angeles video shoot. "Sometimes things are more palatable when you treat them with humor."

Despite the chilling nature of the tune, Emily's sister and bandmate, Martie Seidel, believes its message is helpful. "We hope the song will cause women to take charge of their situations and leave bad relationships before any violence occurs. But we're not going to stand on a soapbox by any means."

In the video, the Chicks leave the soapbox behind and go straight for yuks.

Franz portrays the brutal Earl, Krakowski is his abused wife, Wanda, and Holly plays Wanda's high school girlfriend, Mary Anne.

"The character of Earl was as far away from *NYPD Blue's* Andy Sipowicz as you can get," says four-time Emmy-winner Franz. "Andy sometimes puts despicable wife abusers away, but this time, despicable



wife abuser Earl got put away — permanently.

"I used blue jeans, boots, muscle T-shirts, sleeveless jean jackets, cheesy sunglasses and a big hairpiece that looked like a bad Elvis wig to become Earl."

The Chicks play themselves in the clip — with a twist. "We're invisible to the other characters," explains lead singer Natalie. "In the high school scene, we slide into the frame. During the abuse scene, we're on the couch observing. When Wanda is poisoning Earl, we're right over her shoulder."

By the end of the video, the Chicks become visible to the players in the video, and Earl even comes back from the dead in a big, *bizarre* Broadway musical finale.

Franz laughs, "I'm decomposing during that scene. I look like I've been in the ground for a while. Worms are coming out of me, my face is all white, my hair is rotting away and my clothes are ripped."

Natalie recalls another of her favorite moments. "When Wanda steps into the law office, there's an

advertising poster of the scuzzy lawyer leaning on his desk with big-boobed girls standing on each side. The poster proclaims 'Over 10 million dollars won!'"

Two actors, who play cops looking for Earl, have a special connection to the video. Adrian Pasdar is Natalie's boyfriend, and Michael DeLuise played Franz's son on *NYPD Blue*.

"Michael and Adrian came in like Andy and Barney," notes Natalie. "They were sort of dumb and dumber. When they dug in the couch looking for clues, they found change and put it in their pockets! We laughed harder at that scene than any other."

The director's first draft of the video script called for the cops opening a drawer and finding a vibrator. But that didn't fly with the Chicks. "We nixed that," assures Natalie. "Our fans' parents probably wouldn't think that was very funny."

More Dixie Chicks on next page

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The surprising story behind the Chicks' struggle to stardom

DARK DAYS

The Chicks' new single "Goodbye Earl" already has tongues wagging, but it seems destined to become yet another chart-topper. If it appears that this Texas trio has the Midas Touch – that they can take a song about murder and turn it into a sing-along radio hit – well, they *do*.

But it hasn't always been that way.

When edgy lead singer Natalie Maines joined founding sisters, Emily Robison and Martie Seidel, in 1995, the act was struggling. The truth is, the Chicks nearly didn't make it into the national spotlight at all.

"When I came along, we were still a working band with bills to pay," explains Natalie. "We were playing every gig we could find, including grocery stores. We did a lot of embarrassing gigs. We were definitely paying our dues."

"We were still using the pink RV the band had for years, and we took turns driving," she continues. "When we finished a show, we'd go out and sell our own T-shirts and CDs."

"We all slept in the same Motel 6 hotel room and flipped coins to see who'd sleep with Emily – 'cause she's a bed hog."

Bed-hog Emily also remembers those days. "We couldn't afford an office manager, so Natalie took over that job. I was the tax person. And Martie was the road manager."

"When we'd pull into a gig, we set up our own equipment. Then at the end of the night, we'd settle up with the club manager, even when they didn't want to live up to the amount agreed in the contract."

The worst part was when the crowd didn't even listen. "You were lucky if they could hear you over the clicking of forks on their plates at corporate gigs," says Natalie. "We had to play those places to pay the bills, but it was excruciating for me."

"Heck, sometimes they'd want us to model the auction items, like furs and outfits! We'd have to tell them, 'We play music, we're *not* models.'"

The Chicks also paid their dues behind the scenes.

"We knew we had one shot to land a record deal and we needed a new lead singer," recalls Emily of the band's pre-Natalie days. "We needed to be re-inspired. We needed someone to give us a new spark – someone who'd make Martie and I feel like we wanted to get up every day and beat the pavement."

Natalie was that inspiration. "It was a really tough time," Martie confesses. "You take a risk when you change lead singers. Plus, we had a core fan base in Texas. Even though Emily and I had faith in Natalie, we had to go onstage with a different



The Chicks (above) after landing their 1996 record deal and (right) today's version of the Texas trio

THEN

sound and look than before. And people resist change."

Natalie understood. "It was very brave of them to change the lead singer," she admits. "Not many groups have changed their lead singers and survived."

"We did lose some fans with the switch. But we feel with every hard-core bluegrass fan we lost, we gained two other *country* fans. Still, it was nerve-wracking."

With Natalie on board, the Chicks finally got their shot at a record deal when Sony producer Blake Chancey flew to Austin, Texas, to evaluate them. They passed their audition with flying colors and he signed them in 1996.

But the pot of gold still seemed light-years away. First, there were financial obstacles to overcome.

"The label wanted us to record an album immediately," remembers Natalie. "But we had bills to pay. We had an RV, an office and musicians on retainer, so we had to stay on the road."

Then came label politics. "We were confident in our music, but it was clear we weren't the label darlings," admits Natalie. "The efforts and money were going to other performers. We were still the underdogs."

She pauses. "Being the underdogs made us fight harder and drove us to make our first album, *Wide Open Spaces*, better and better. We knew our sound was something country music needed."

However, success was still just out of reach. "We never gave up," she confides. "Every time we played a humiliating gig, our manager would call with good news about the new album or when our first single would release. That good news kept us going."

And when success finally came, it came *big*. Their debut single,

IN THE HEN HOUSE

"I Can Love You Better," landed them their first Top 10 hit. That was followed by four No. 1s, including the recent "Cowboy Take Me Away." Sales of their first album, *Wide Open Spaces*, have almost reached the nine million mark – the biggest-selling album ever by a country duo or group. And their follow-up, *Fly*, has already sold four million in just eight months.

And after five years of mind-boggling success, the Chicks recently found themselves in serious need of rest. Admitting burnout, they took off five months to recharge. Natalie and Martie wanted to put the pain of their recent divorces behind them. Emily wanted to spend time with her new husband, Texas singer-songwriter Charlie Robison.

"The best part of married life is having a husband like Charlie," says Emily, beaming. "He's my best friend. I feel like I'm completely focused now. And we support each other in our music. We're constant cheerleaders for each other."

A special surprise was waiting for Natalie at Emily's wedding – a man who would become her boyfriend: Adrian Pasdar.

"Adrian was a groomsman and I was a bridesmaid," says Natalie with a smile. "We walked down the aisle together. So," she says laughing, "we feel like we've done that already. We started at a wedding instead of ending there! And we really haven't been apart since then."

"I love Adrian very much. I now live in California where he is, and we have our dogs. I have a Bulldog puppy, Ralph. He'll be on tour with us. And Adrian has Marley, a Staffordshire Terrier."

So, Natalie, what's the best thing that could happen to you in the near future?


"Babies!" she blurts without hesitation. "That's the meaning of life."

Martie has one child from a previous marriage, but Natalie and Emily are still waiting for a visit from the stork. And though no one has announced immediate plans for a new Chicklet in the nest, Natalie is clearly looking forward to the day when she'll be a mom.

"We *all* have plans to bring our kids on the road," she says. "Separate buses. Little families."

Re-energized, the Chicks are ready to tackle their headlining *Fly* tour, which starts in June.

"We're working very hard on it," explains Emily. "We're spending a lot of time and energy looking at every detail. We want to sell out our shows – and we think we can. We'd love for this summer to be incredible."

If the Chicks' track record is any indication, it will be. 



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underwear
thrown at us
yet. But if
we do –
boxers,
please.

No briefs.
— **Martie
Seidel**
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Dixie Chicks

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