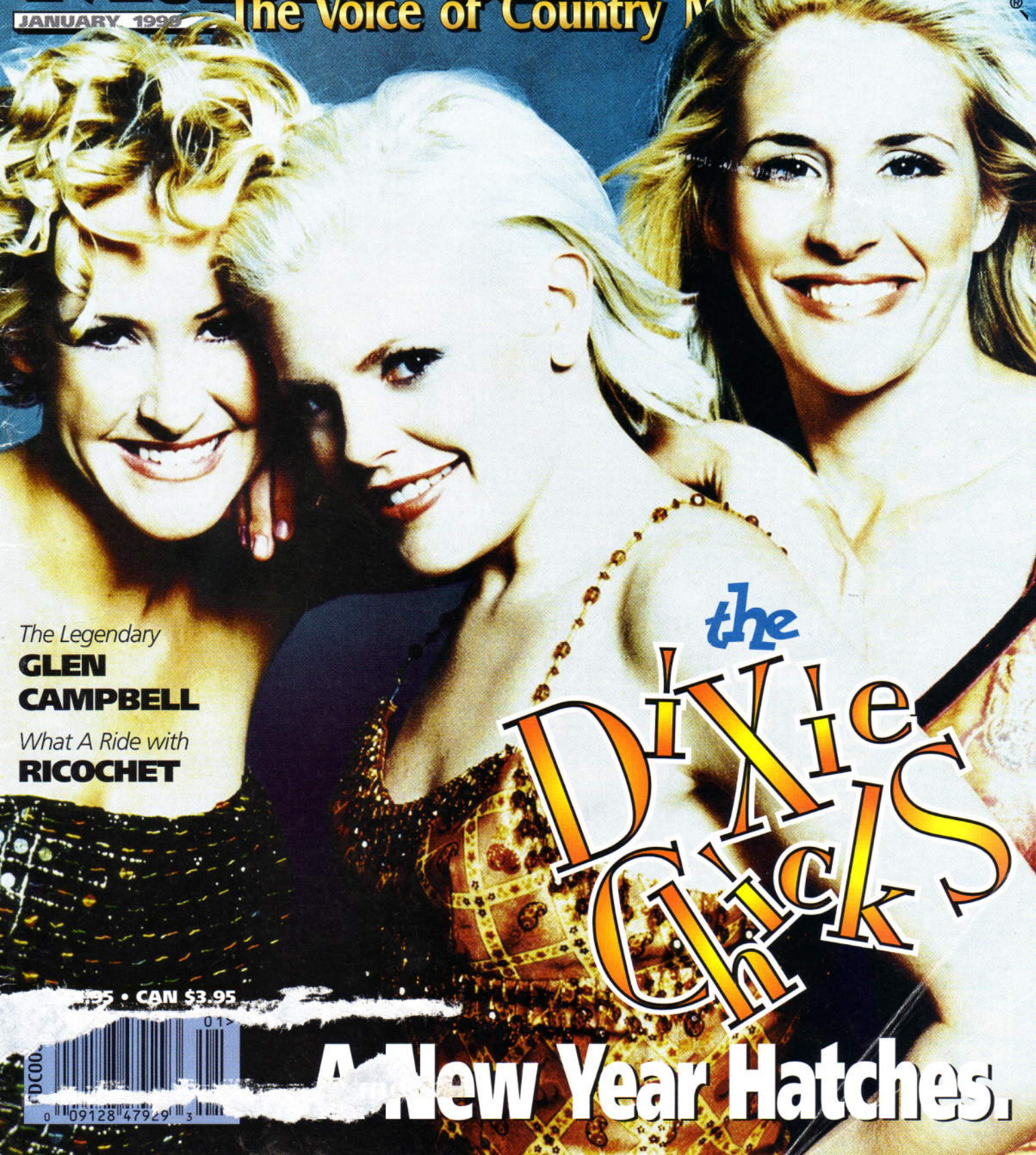


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MUSIC CITY NEWS

JANUARY 1998

The Voice of Country Music



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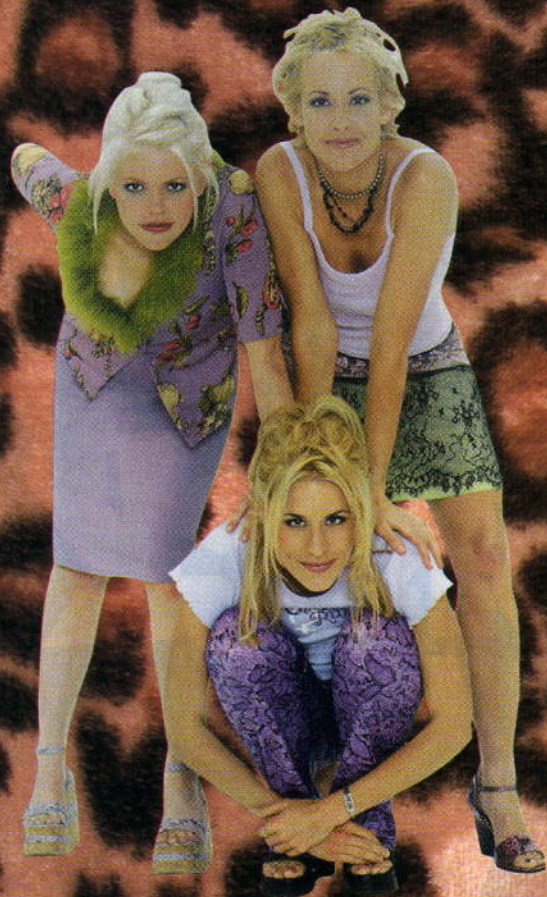
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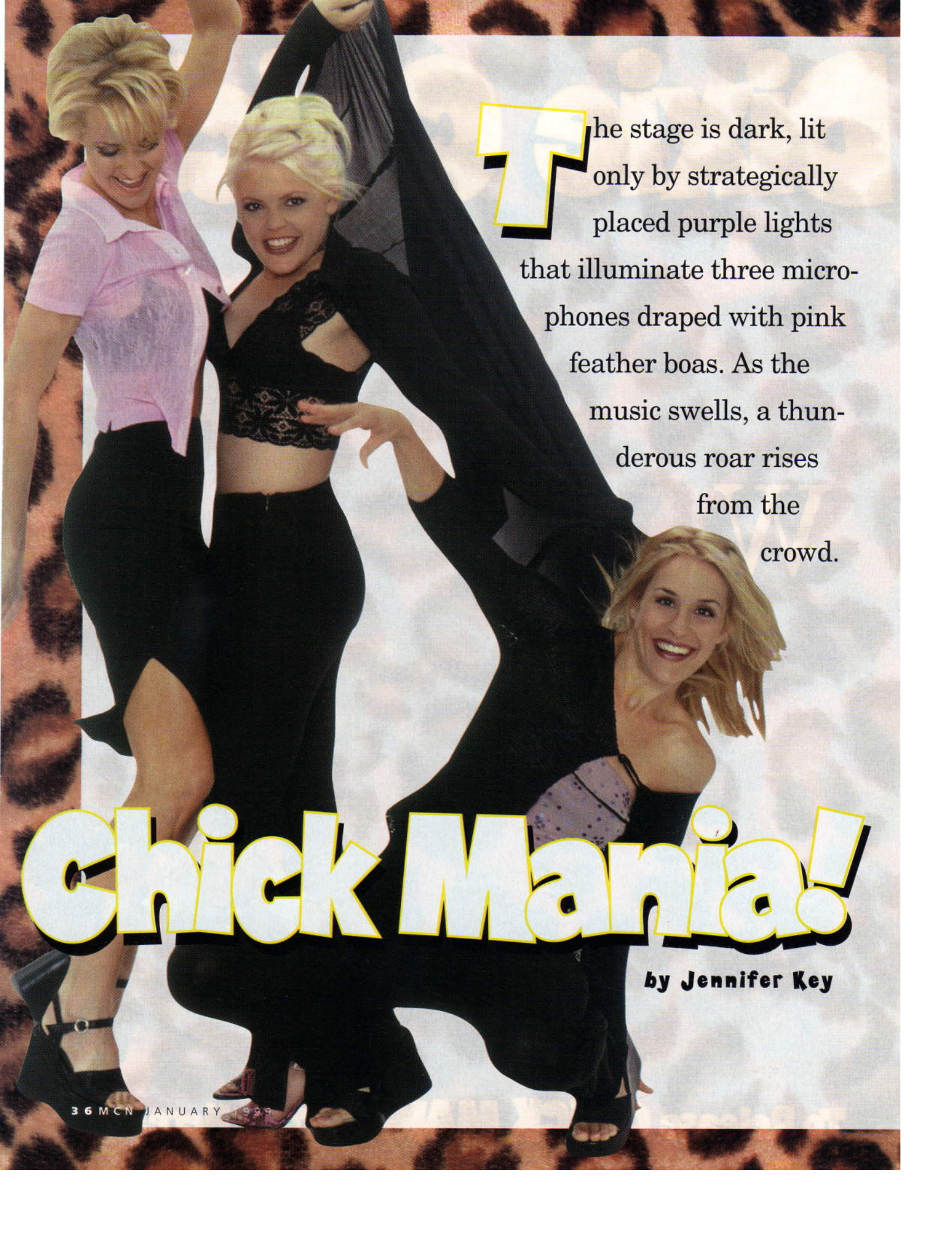


Dixie Chicks

With a double-platinum album and two No. 1 hits under their belts, the Dixie Chicks are sitting on top of the world. During a stop on their tour in Evansville, Ind., *Music City News* got the chance to check out their show and talk with country's hottest act.



To Release **CHICK MANIA**, Turn Here! 



The stage is dark, lit only by strategically placed purple lights that illuminate three microphones draped with pink feather boas. As the music swells, a thunderous roar rises from the crowd.

Chick Mania!

by Jennifer Key

When the Dixie Chicks take the stage, the cheers become deafening. "This is for everybody who wants to go out and chase their dreams. Cause it ain't too late!" Lead singer Natalie Maines shouts before she and sisters Martie Seidel and Emily Erwin break into their current No.1 hit, "Wide Open Spaces," also the title of the Chicks' debut album.

If ever an album title was prophetic, it's *Wide Open Spaces*. Indeed, the Dixie Chicks have claimed the world as their very own wide open space, as they've proven with their quick successes since their momentous debut in early 1998. Adding to the phenomenon is the fact that in a time when country as a whole has experienced a down spin, the Dixie Chicks have defiantly broken rules, boundaries and records. Gone are the days when the "hat acts" ruled the world of country—the Dixie Chicks have taken their crown, and it's not likely that they'll relinquish it any time soon.

Case in point: In less than a year, the Chicks have seen their album reach not platinum, but double-platinum status. They've garnered two No. 1 hits ("Wide Open Spaces" and "There's Your Trouble") and one Top-10 hit ("I Can Love You Better"), making them the highest debuting country act of the 1990s. They've gathered their share of awards, too, when they were honored with the Horizon and Best Vocal Group awards at the 1998 CMAs.

Chick Mania is upon us, and it looks as if it's here to stay. The Dixie Chicks have been featured in countless magazines and have

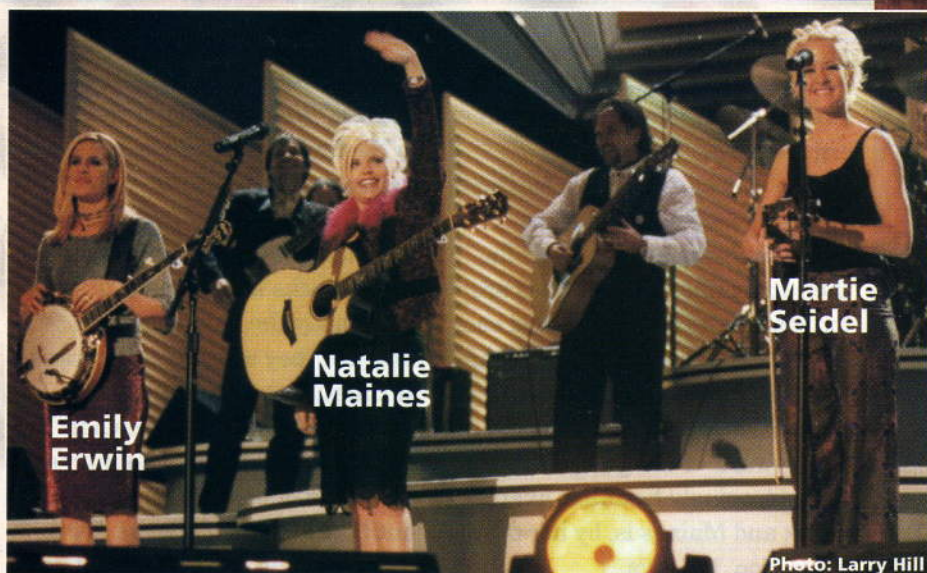
been interviewed by everyone from Gary Chapman to Regis and Kathie Lee. They've acquired a large group of die-hard fans who imitate their stylishly quirky way of dressing and flip manner, wildly waving hand-made signs that proclaim "Chicks ROCK" and "Chicks Kick Ass" at their concerts. They're the trailblazers of a funkier, hipper age in country.

But there's more to the Chicks than meets the eye. They're not just a trio of pretty faces with wardrobes any Generation-Xer would surely envy. They've actually got talent. It's apparent the moment the trio burst on stage and begin performing. I watch with interest as they pick up their instruments and begin to play, so furiously bobbing their heads to the beat of the music that I fear for their equilibrium. That's the norm for the band of twenty-somethings lauded for its high energy live performances, however, and fans can expect to hear championship fiddle playing from Seidel, spirited dobro, banjo and guitar expertise from Erwin, and the unmistakably sassy voice of Maines. Each of the three women play an integral part of the band's

distinct, mixed-bag of pop and country, a sound that's entirely their own.

The band's history began nine years ago in Dallas, when Seidel and Erwin, along with two other original members, began playing on street corners. The band garnered regional attention almost immediately, becoming known by the moniker of "Texas' Only Cowgirl Band." Wearing frilly, fringed Western blouses, boots and prairie skirts, they were a far cry from the platform-shoe-wearing, midriff-baring Dixie Chicks of today. The Chicks have called their previous image a "shrewd business move," and it was. The group sold over 50,000 albums during their first eight years, an impressive feat for a band not signed to a major label.

But something was missing, and it turned out to be Maines. The daughter of renowned steel guitarist, Lloyd Maines, she'd grown up with a love of country music, and had even used her talents to win a scholarship to Berklee College of Music. With her bigger-than-life, malleable voice and dead-on pitch, Maines was the key element that complet-



ed the group musically and steered it in a newer, more modern direction.

The Chicks are known for their vivacious personas almost as much as their music. And while their individual personalities are too complex to be pigeonholed easily, the Chicks sum themselves up like this: Seidel is the resident mother hen, the nurturer and "worrywart" of the group. Erwin is the endearingly hesitant, likable Chick and Maines is, by her own admission, the diva.

Talking with them after their show, the Dixie Chicks both prove and disprove these generalities. Led to their tour bus by their road manager, I find the trio in a comfortable, '70s-style room in the back of the brown-interior bus. They're energized—and hungry—after their performance. Munching an array of junk food along with healthier fare, the women discuss the night's show and chat happily about their significant others. (Maines is married to bassist Michael Tarabay, Seidel to pharmaceutical rep Ted Seidel. Erwin is engaged to country artist Charlie Robison.) They've all changed into more comfortable clothes, sitting cross-legged on the big leather banquette.

Martie's barefoot, showing off three tiny tattoos on her ankle that all three members sport. It's the stuff of Dixie Chick legend: Just before *Wide Open Spaces* was released, the trio vowed to document their successes (every No. 1 single and gold or platinum album) by tattooing their ankles with a "chick-print." "We should have four now," Natalie says, referring to the group's recent achievement of reaching double

platinum status for *Wide Open Spaces*. "We're waiting to get back to Nashville so we can go to the [tattoo parlor] we know and trust."

Country's changing, as the Dixie Chicks have proven. They're not exactly the Outlaws of the '90s, but they are outrageous, and at times, they tell me gleefully, they've shocked the somewhat staid music industry. "Country's been kind of politically correct up until now," Seidel tells me. "Not that we're the opposite of that, it's just that everyone wants to say the right thing, which is great, but it ends up being kind of vanilla."

Vanilla's one thing the Chicks will never be called, not with their cutting-edge designer duds, on-stage antics (At the Evansville show, Erwin moonwalks a la Michael Jackson and Maines makes a rather naughty reference to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal) and exuberantly outspoken natures. "We always say we scare people," Natalie says, not quite jokingly.

The Chicks are the "real deal," a phrase coined by Sony record head, Allen Butler, to describe their original style of music as well as their genuine, no-holds-barred personalities. "I think we didn't know how to be (politically correct)," Erwin says, "because we never rubbed shoulders with the people in country music, so we didn't know what the protocol was...and then, when we got in it, we realized it's just kind of reserved."

"I feel like what we bring to the industry is honesty," Maines says. "We say what we feel and we don't really care what...we care what people think in that we want them to like our music...but we don't

worry about what we did or what we said. It doesn't control us. And I feel like that's what brings a younger audience to rock 'n' roll music. It's one thing I maybe worry about getting into this [country] industry, because I have to be allowed to be myself. Or else."

At this point, the Dixie Chicks become a little, er, uninhibited, or maybe they're just proving that, no, they're really *not* afraid to show their true colors. "They say I have the ugliest feet in the world," Emily says, pointing to the other two Chicks. "I don't care if they say it—I'm not gonna hide 'em."

"Cause you know half the people out there have ugly feet," Maines giggles.

"I have toe fungus," offers Seidel. "See?"

Sensing my surprise at their less-than-glamorous confessions, Maines pipes in. "Somebody's gonna make up something about us, why not let it be the truth?"

The Dixie Chicks have already seen the ugly side of fame. Recently, an unofficial Dixie Chicks Internet newsletter ran a headline proclaiming that Maines had had an affair with Seidel's husband. Surprisingly, the Chicks are amused. "The headline said, 'Natalie, Caught In Bed By Ted,'" Maines tells me. "And I said, 'By who? Did Martie catch us?'" All three Chicks laugh at the ludicrousness of it all. So humorous is it to them, that they can't wait to make the major tabloids. "Maybe they'll shave [our pictures] all down real skinny and say we're anorexic like Ally McBeal," Maines guesses.

But most of the trappings of fame are wonderful, the Chicks agree. They got to meet one of

their heroes, Buck Owens, himself a Dixie Chicks fan, who presented them with three of his famous red, white and blue guitars when *Wide Open Spaces* went gold. Despite their own success, they say they still get nervous when meeting celebrities, especially legends like Owens. "We have his phone number," Maines says, "and Martie was calling him to wish him a happy birthday, and I'm reading the number out to Martie and she's on the phone, going, (whispers) 'I can't believe I'm calling Buck!' We're usually way too scared to call anybody [famous], we just have their numbers to say we have the numbers." "We just know what dorks we are," Erwin adds, "and so we say, 'Do we want to bother them? No, they wouldn't want to talk to us.'"

Musically, at least, the Dixie Chicks say success has given them confidence. "I believe this is my destiny now," Erwin says. "I didn't always believe that. I didn't know we would be in this place." Finding success also means that the group's stress levels have lowered considerably. "Since it's taken off, I've been a lot more laid back cause I feel like, 'we're doing something right, and I'm not going to over analyze it.'"

As happy as they are over their recent successes, on this cold November night in Evansville, their thoughts turn home-ward and the conversation becomes more contemplative as the interview wears on. They've been touring almost nonstop since the release of their album, and naturally, they're a little weary from the road. In fact, they're counting the days until Dec. 6, when they'll finally get a much-needed break to spend the holidays with their families. In January, they'll be recording their sophomore album. Their goals are simple. "We want to make an incredible second

album," Erwin says. "We want to go back in the studio with the same, nothing-to-lose attitude that we had on our first one."

Still, the Dixie Chicks know that when life's this good, it's best to simply enjoy it. "We haven't had a stitch of bad news," Seidel says. "We live from good news to good news. It just keeps us so happy, and we're doing what we love. It's the best job in the world."

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