

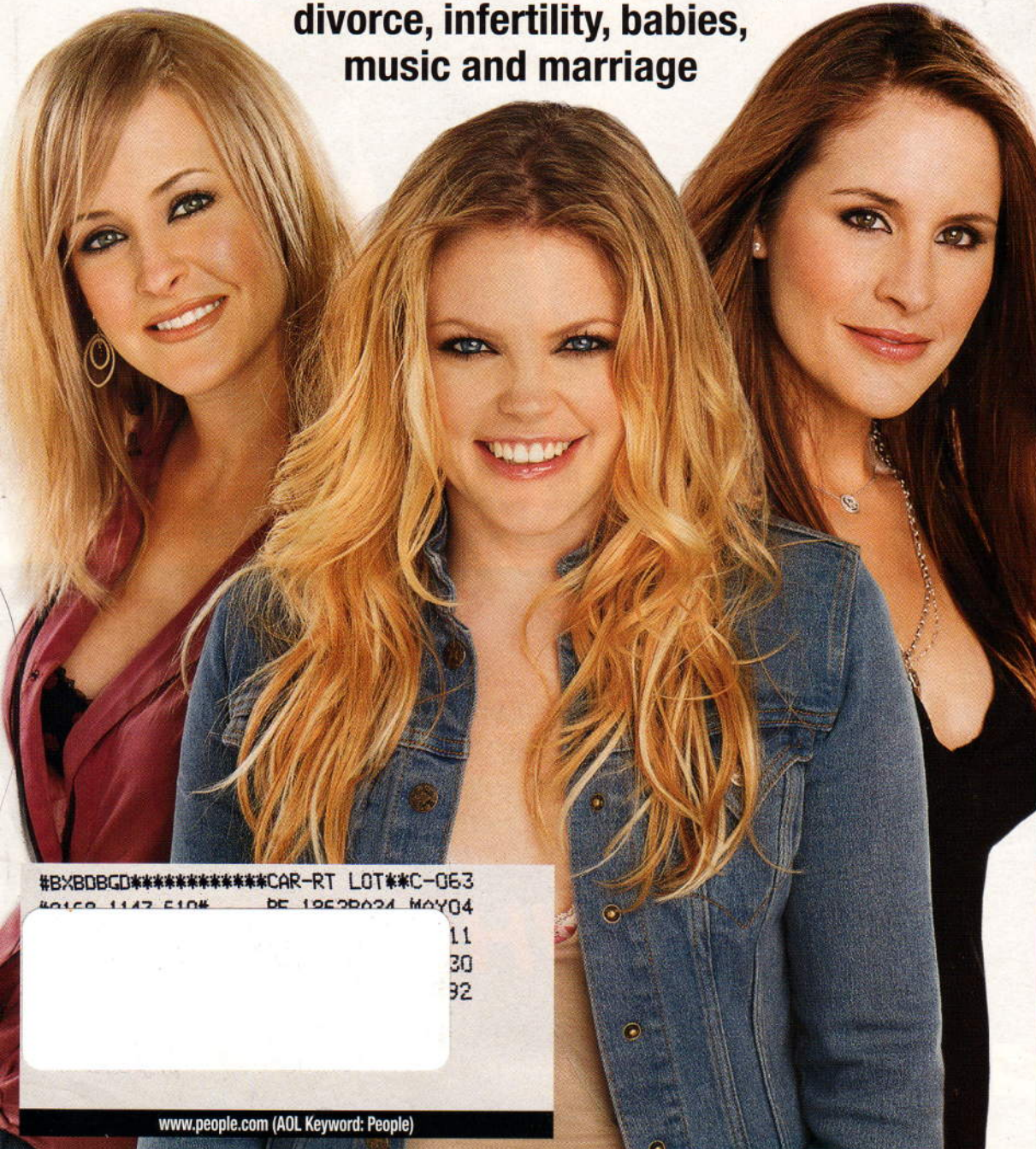
FEBRUARY 3, 2003

People

The Dixie Chicks

FEUDS, FAME & FAMILY

Country's coolest girl group opens up about divorce, infertility, babies, music and marriage



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MICHAEL O'NEILL

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94 COVER In Austin Dixie Chicks Emily Robison and Martie Maguire admire Emily's infant son Gus. "Family comes first," Maguire says.

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Friends' Jennifer Aniston sported diamond Bulgari earrings and bracelet when she won the Golden Globe for best actress in a comedy series.

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COVER Photograph by Michael O'Neill. Styling by Marjan Malakpour for Margaret Maldonado, Inc. Hair by Roque for See Management. Makeup by billy b for Streeters. Clothing: (Martie) Costume National, (Natalie) Loy and Ford at Barney's, jacket by Frankie B. (Emily) Loy and Ford at Barney's. INSETS by (from top): Fred Prouser; courtesy Peterson family

cover



"We're all more centered, stable and mature in our personal lives," says Natalie (at her Austin home with, from left, Martie, son Slade, Emily and baby Gus).



Photographs by MICHAEL O'NEILL

Three chicks go into a bar. Seriously. “We go to trivia night,” says Dixie Chick Natalie Maines, explaining why she and her fellow Chicks, sisters Emily Robison and Martie Maguire, turn up most Tuesday nights at an Irish pub near their home base of Austin, Texas. “They call out questions, and every table is a team.”

“Don’t say our team name,” blurts a mortified Maguire, sipping a glass of red wine in an Austin restaurant. “We’re going to lose fans.”

Maines is undaunted. “The name of our team is Kenny Chesney Stuffs His Pants with a Pimento Cheese Sandwich”—a bawdy reference to the hard-bodied country star whose jeans appear not so much fitted as painted on. “Isn’t that a great trivia name? They say it every single round! They’ll go, ‘Kenny Chesney Stuffs His Pants with a Pimento Cheese Sandwich, 23 points!’ And everyone laughs.”

No, the Chicks have never been the shy sort. (Chesney, for the record, takes the ribbing in stride. “They said *what?*” he asks, cracking up at his former tour mates’ gag. “Least they’re *lookin’*.”) Gutsy and confrontational, the trio rocked Nashville off its formulaic hinges with their 1998 debut, *Wide Open Spaces*, and since then have sold 25 million CDs and racked up four Grammys and 10 Coun-

TRIO GRANDE

Through career highs and offstage heartaches, the Dixie Chicks make success a sister act *by Jim Jerome*

Before They Were Chicks



Martie (home in Dallas at age 4) fell in love with bluegrass after getting fiddle lessons for her 12th birthday.



"I always knew music was what I would do," says Natalie (in her native Lubbock at age 3).



With music lovers for parents, "it was practice before homework," says Emily (at home in Dallas at age 3).

try Music Association awards. "The Chicks are my favorite singing group," says Stevie Nicks, whose 1975 Fleetwood Mac hit "Landslide" is covered on the trio's recent CD *Home*. "If I were younger, I would at this minute be convincing them that I should be the fourth Dixie Chick."

Careful what you wish for. Not only do the three women work and tour together, they shop together, work out together (yoga is a current passion) and even play bingo together. Their homes are within driving distance, and all three turned up in the delivery room when Robison gave birth in November to son Charles Augustus. "We're *all* sisters out here," says Maines. As with any siblings, sometimes tempers can flare. But if one acts up, adds Maines, "we're close enough to go, 'You're being a bitch, you need to stop.' Just like sisters would."

Now, after a three-month break from the limelight, the Chicks are set to sing the national anthem at the Super Bowl Jan. 26 and perform at the Grammys Feb. 23, where they are up for seven awards, including Album of the Year.

Would they like to win? Sure. But the Chicks say they're looking for other rewards now. "I neglected a lot of loving relationships to pursue this ultimate goal—success," says Maguire, 33. "Now we take the time to realize what's important. Family comes first."

But not always easily. After Maines gave birth to Jackson Slade, almost 2, her son with actor husband Adrian Pasdar, in March 2001, she and Maguire watched Emily and her husband, Charlie Robison, struggle to have a baby of their own. "It was a journey," says Emily, 30, who married in May '99. "Our frustration level was high." Over the course of two years, she underwent laparoscopic surgery to rule out physical problems, endured several failed artificial inseminations, then finally received daily fertility injections and had her eggs harvested for in vitro fertilization. Maines, 28, who got pregnant "first try," tears up at the memories. "You ask why is this happening to



her?" For Maguire, the experience was even more personal. "It's tough having to watch your sister give herself injections, worry about a million medications and see different doctors in different cities on the road," she says.

Which made things that much more joyous when Emily—with her sister and Maines on hand—delivered 8 lb. 13 oz. Gus in Methodist Hospital in San Antonio. "She was at, like, two centimeters," says Maines, "and she saw where this was going and said, 'Drugs, please!' She's not even in the pain club." Or, for that matter, the privacy club. "I said, 'Y'all come on in.' I wanted everybody to enjoy it." Martie, eyeing her sister, says, "You were in the best mood—you were on Demerol! Then Charlie came out and said, 'Emily'd like you, Martie, to videotape and Natalie to take pictures.' We were elated."



Gus fades but Slade jams in his jammies as the Chicks sing "Old MacDonald" on Natalie's couch.



"We've all just gotten into a rhythm of how to be together," says Martie (right, performing with Maines and a pregnant Robison in a *Today* show concert in August).

Maguire, who has been trying for a year to get pregnant naturally with second husband Gareth Maguire, 28, admits her sister's ordeal concerns her. "I'm 33 and I realize fertility's not a given, it's a gift." Diagnosed last December with endometriosis, she underwent laparoscopic surgery to remove the growths and improve her chances of conceiving. So far she's not ready to take any more proactive steps, noting her older sister Julia, 35, an administrator at Stanford University Law School, easily conceived her two kids in her 30s. "There's no reason to get aggressive yet," she says.

For all three Chicks the embrace of music and family has always been tight. Martha and Emily Erwin, daughters of music-loving teachers Paul (country) and Barbara (classical), grew up in Dallas, where Dad was headmaster of a private school. They studied violin at home and joined a kids band by the time they were teens.

In 1989 the sisters formed the Dixie Chicks with Robin Macy (guitar) and bassist-singer Laura Lynch. (The name comes from Little Feat's '70s hit "Dixie Chicken.") Even as Emily finished high school—"She faxed her calculus homework in before gigs," says Martie—they played street corners in spangled cowgirl garb, with Emily on banjo and Martie on fiddle. "In our first hour," says Emily, "we collected \$375. So we thought we might want to do something with this."

Maines, meanwhile, grew up in Lubbock, Texas, one of two daughters of veteran sessions pedal steel player Lloyd Maines and his wife, Tina. Natalie was, says Lloyd, a born belter: "Even at 6 she could sing totally in tune and hear harmonies. She absorbed everything. She was fearless."

After graduating from high school in 1991 she briefly attended several colleges, including Boston's Berklee College of Music. "No one knew what country or bluegrass was, so I became the country flag-waver to be different."

By the mid-'90s the Chicks were selling their three self-made CDs out of



"He's got the energy of a kid," says Natalie of Pasdar (in Nashville in '99).

their RVs. Their steel player was often Lloyd Maines, who proudly gave the sisters daughter Natalie's Berklee audition tape. If they were blown away, it wasn't mutual. "We'd play Lubbock, and Lloyd would have us for dinner," says Martie, "but Natalie always had something else to do. She thought we were so uncool." In a rut in late 1995, the Chicks fired Lynch (Macy left early on) and invited Natalie in as lead singer. Immediately her high-octane swagger and powerhouse pipes recharged the Chicks. "It was destiny," says Emily.

Personal bonds took longer to forge. "We knew nothing about each other," says Natalie. Then in 1999, as the trio's debut CD took off, Maguire's and Maines's marriages collapsed. "One day I just burst into the studio and said, 'I'm getting a divorce,'" recalls Natalie, then married for 19 months to bass player Michael Tarabay. "And Martie burst into tears and said, 'I'm not happy either.' It broke down a wall between us. We hadn't been honest with each other about our lives outside the Chicks." Natalie, who blames her breakup on being "too young," offered support to Martie, who says long times apart caused her eventual split from drug firm rep Ted Seidel. "Night after night," says Martie, "Nat and I had



"She's very grounded," says Gareth of Martie (in Ireland in '02). "I got a good one."



"Emily is amazing," says Charlie (at their May '99 wedding in Marfa, Texas).

facing bunks in our RV and we'd have our curtains drawn and talk. Our divorces made us real to each other."

And almost too real for Emily, who was planning her wedding to musician Robison, 38. "They were trying to save me from the drama," says Emily. "I just wanted to know, 'How much is the caterer?' I was on cloud nine, and my way of empathizing was staying out of their way."

There's no staying out of anyone's way now. Maines met Pasdar, 37, at Emily's wedding, where he was a groomsman to pal Robison, she a bridesmaid (they married in Las Vegas in June 2000); Martie met husband Maguire when he was best man for his brother Shane, who married Natalie's sister Kim

in August 2000. At the time, Martie was not looking for a serious romance. "My divorce had been final for two days," she says. "I wanted to play the field." "You were in the mood for a fling," says Natalie. The Irish-born Gareth, too. "He had a girlfriend in Ireland and another at the wedding," says Martie. "I was third string." Not for long. "As soon as I saw her, my heart leapt," says Gareth. "She was the one." (They married in Hawaii in August 2001.)

It all makes for one gnarled family tree. "Martie," Maines notes, "is my sister's sister-in-law, and we're both aunts to her baby." Says Lloyd Maines: "It's not inbred at this point, but sort of. It works."

Certainly the threesome are never far apart. Maines and Pasdar live in a colorful, quirky Austin home with Mexican folk art, primitive masks, a slot machine in the living room and a velvet Elvis flanked by Jesus and Mary on the deep-red dining room wall. Martie and Gareth live 20 minutes away in a 5,000-sq.-ft. home in a gated community outside Austin, where he acts in local theater. "It's very private. I can go skinny-dipping in the pool," she says.

The Robisons, who began dating after Nashville's Fan Fair in '98, live in a 70-year-old stone and cedar-beamed farmhouse about two hours south, in Medina, Texas. The home is part of a 1,200-acre working ranch with eight horses and 75 head of cattle. "Charlie does all the hands-on ranch stuff,"



"People think women bicker, but we don't have egos the way men do," says Natalie (cuddling Lab Mabel). "I think it's easier."

says Emily. "I write the checks."

The family groove continues even on workdays. Slade was in the studio every day when they cut *Home*, and "he learned to crawl there—on the nasty, crunchy carpet," says Natalie. Last month Robison had Gus on the same carpet. ("He was on a blanket," she points out.) And when they hit the road in spring for a U.S. tour, they'll be riding in Faith Hill's old bus—child-proofed for her two young girls. "All the doors," says Maines, "are sound-proofed and padded, no doorknobs, nothing the kids could bump their heads on. A big sink so you can bathe the baby. And a full-size refrigerator

for Emily to store her bottles." Full-time nannies for Slade and Gus will be in tow, but the Chicks are quickly learning to mix babies with business. "Emily will be burping Gus in one arm and on the phone with the other making business decisions," says Robison.

Like their 2001 claim against their label, Sony Music. The Chicks accused Sony of "systematic thievery," saying they had been cheated out of millions in royalties. Sony responded with a \$100 million suit, then settled, offering the Chicks a reported \$20 million to stay, plus a steep royalty raise. "We hash things out. We're equals," says Emily of the band's one-for-all strategy.

Natalie agrees. "We do have egos," she admits, "but if anyone acted alone, the trust would be out the window."

In fact, wherever Chicks fly, instinct seems to guide them to do it in formation. Last August Maines and Pasdar bought an apartment in New York City, where they enjoy getting away to visit pals. Martie decided to get a place too—and ended up looking at more than 60 before striking gold. "We walked in," she says, "and Gareth said, 'I can picture us here.' I said, 'I love it.'" And that's when the Realtor said, "Well, look out the window because that's Natalie's apartment." Says Martie: "We can't get away from each other." ●