PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: DIXIE CHICKS

A candid conversation with the best-selling female group in music history about fickle fans, angry DJs, friendly critics and pissing off President Bush

It is March 10, 2003. The Dixie Chicks—Martie Maguire, Natalie Maines and Emily Robison—are playing an SRO show in London at the height of their astonishing career. The band is the biggest-selling female music group of all time and one of only eight bands in history, on a list that includes the Beatles, the Eagles and Pink Floyd, to have more than one record sell more than 10 million copies. It also happens to be the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and singer Maines, before belting out their current single—ironically enough, a lovelorn GI's lament called "Travelin' Soldier"—quips, "Just so you know, we're ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas."

It was a line heard round the world. Though rock stars from John Lennon to Bono and Bruce Springsteen are well-known for their liberal politics and activism, country musicians and the industry behind them are solidly red-state conservative. The backlash was instant and fierce. The Dixie Chicks were lambasted by radio jocks, denounced by their country-music peers and blacklisted by the same country radio stations that had helped make them stars. At his concerts Toby Keith projected doctored photos showing Maines embracing Saddam Hussein. At organized protests bulldozers buried tens of thousands of Dixie Chicks CDs. There were death threats, and the White House released a simple statement: "Their fans have spoken."

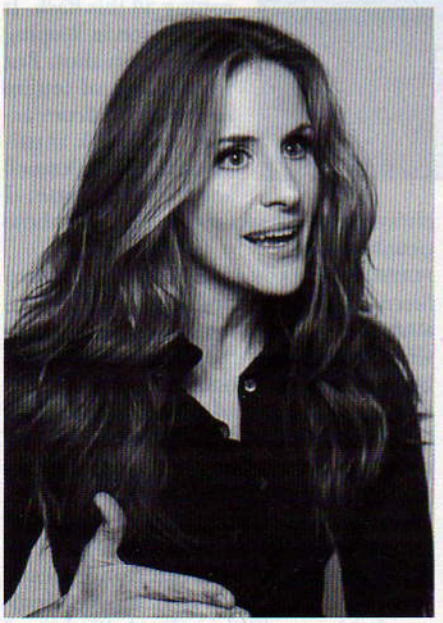
Many people wrote the Dixie Chicks off, and indeed the band could easily have faded from the spotlight. Rather than back down or beg for forgiveness, however, the musicians fought back in ways that further inflamed their original fans. They posed nude on the cover of Entertainment Weekly, their bodies painted with such slogans as "Saddam's Angels." Newly politicized, they were committed participants in the Vote for Change tour leading up to the 2004 presidential election. In interviews they continued to speak out against the war and the president.

Meanwhile, no longer embraced by the country-music establishment, the band changed artistic direction, enlisting master producer Rick Rubin (Red Hot Chili Peppers, Beastie Boys, Johnny Cash) for its newest CD, Taking the Long Way. The album's first single, "Not Ready to Make Nice," is a defiant response to the detractors. Though the song was predictably barred from most country radio stations, it sold briskly to a new fan base, and music critics raved. The CD hasn't sold on the scale of the band's earlier releases, but it went double platinum, selling more than 2 million copies by our press time and becoming one of 2006's best-sellers.

The band also went on the road for what it wryly dubbed the Accidents & Accusations Tour. Although the shows sold out quickly in some cities, other performances were canceled or postponed because of slow ticket sales. But the band was undeterred, continuing to add new dates to coincide with the release of Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing, a documentary by Oscar-winning filmmaker Barbara Kopple and Cecilia Peck, which got good reviews at the Toronto Film Festival. Variety said the movie "should win over fans of the Chicks on the fence...and perhaps create a cultural stir as well."

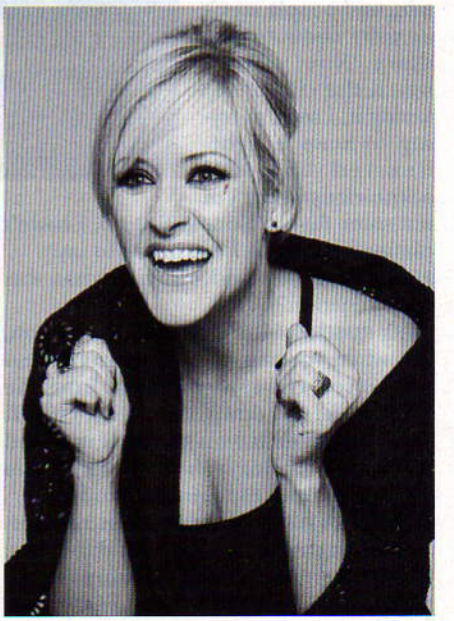
The Texas-based Dixie Chicks have humble roots as an old-school cowgirl-style string band. Sisters Robison (banjo) and Maguire (fiddle) first formed the group with two young female singers backed by a band that sometimes included pedal steel guitar player Lloyd Maines. They took their name from the Little Feat song "Dixie Chicken."

Maines had a daughter named Natalie who was a singer and had briefly attended the Berklee College of Music. When the vocalists left the group, Natalie joined Robison and Maguire. The combination took them to unprecedented heights in country music. Their back-to-back albums Wide Open Spaces (1998) and Fly (1999) each topped the charts for months. Their tours broke ticket-sales records, and they racked up numerous Grammy awards. The band's 2002 CD, Home, featured a more intimate, acoustic-based sound than the buoyant country pop that had defined them, but it still sold 6 million copies.



ROBISON: *"Read the stuff on the Internet: 'Just tell that bitch to shut up.' They don't want to hear mouthy women. A guy would have been an outlaw, the Johnny Cash or Merle Haggard of his generation."*

MAINES: *"Some people call me brave because of what I said, but I don't think it was brave at all. Brave is Kanye West, after Hurricane Katrina, saying George Bush doesn't care about black people. I'm a coward compared with him."*



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ROSE

MAGUIRE: *"Maybe I'm a snob, but in my mind, stuff that sells the best usually isn't the best stuff. How many records does Sheryl Crow sell? Not 10 million. Maybe it's snotty to say, but I think the popular stuff is the crappiest."*

Maguire, 37, Maines, 32, and Robison, 34, are all married (or remarried) and mothers of children under the age of five. We sent freelance journalist ***Alan Light*** *to talk to the Chicks as they hit the road with a retinue including three nannies who take care of the women's seven children. Light, who met with them at Atlantic City's Borgata Hotel, Casino & Spa during a stopover on the tour, reports: "The girls are smart, funny and at ease with one another—and truly fearless, too. They casually offer their thoughts on even the most sensitive subjects. Maines is both the focal point and the ringleader, but the other two can give as good as they get.*

"While their kids went to the pool and hung out in the playroom next to the band's dressing room, the trio—in jeans and flip-flops, with no makeup—sprawled across the suite's sofas for a lengthy discussion of music, marriage and their unlikely role as the world's most notorious band."

PLAYBOY: Natalie, when you went onstage that night in London, did you think you were about to rip into the president of the U.S.?

NATALIE MAINES: I don't even remember. We had talked beforehand about how lame it felt to be doing shows on the eve of a war. I needed to acknowledge that we weren't oblivious to what was going on in the world, just not to feel shallow. But I never liked to get serious onstage. I felt pressure to entertain, and people aren't at your show to feel down. Now, when I watch the clip of my saying it, I see I'm trying to keep it lighthearted but still acknowledge that I'm not some flighty blonde. But no, I hadn't planned out what I was going to say.

PLAYBOY: Emily and Martie, what was your reaction?

EMILY ROBISON: I had a physical reaction, like when you slip in the lunchroom and wait to see who saw you. Heat from the head all the way down, that's what I felt. It was the president, you know? It was kind of like the feeling you'd get when you were called into the principal's office.

MARTIE MAGUIRE: I didn't even remember her saying it. A couple of days later, when the news started coming back really bad, I thought, I could easily have said it. I would talk onstage too sometimes. To me it was just more patter.

ROBISON: We were playing a gig once in New Mexico at a time when a mystery illness was going around out there. Native Americans were dying in the desert, and they hadn't yet figured out that the disease was coming from deer urine. We were interviewed on the six o'clock news, and someone said, "You're the only band that would come here. Aren't you scared?" Martie said, "Well, only 12 people have died." [*laughter*]

MAGUIRE: That was just stupid, not controversial.

PLAYBOY: When did it become apparent to you that the Bush comment wasn't going to slip by unnoticed?

MAINES: When the AP picked it up. I knew we would be used to draw attention away from the things that were going on. I knew the far right and the religious right were capable of sabotage, so I wasn't surprised by any of that. Our manager said, "It'll blow over in three days tops," but right then I said, "You're wrong." Still, there were daily shocks.

"We never felt cool by any means. Shania was the hot one, and Faith was the beautiful one. And we were like, 'Well, we have talent.'" —Natalie Maines

PLAYBOY: Such as?

MAINES: The Red Cross not taking our money. It went way beyond people not wanting to buy our record or play us on the radio.

MAGUIRE: I couldn't believe people would bulldoze music.

PLAYBOY: Were you afraid of the fallout?

MAGUIRE: I wrote it off as being from stupid people—and you've got to ignore that kind of ignorance. But then I thought, Wait, the media is using *this* as their lead story? There's a war going on! What are they trying to cover up? It just made me sick. And it made me think, Well, I guess we must be pretty big. Nobody ever informed us we were this big, but we must be for people to be talking about what the lead singer of a country band said in a smoky little club.

PLAYBOY: Rock stars such as Bono and Neil Young have openly opposed the war. Was the difference that you were country stars?

ROBISON: To me, one of the big things we learned was how country radio could eat its own so quickly. There's the whole struggle between pop and country and who's going to cross over; they thought they were losing Faith Hill and Shania Twain. At the time, we felt we were sticking in there and waving the country flag, but everything turned so quickly. It put country music on the front page, and the radio people were kind of enjoying the limelight. They were doing it for their own purposes—not out of principle against what we said but because it was good entertainment.

MAINES: Country music was being talked about outside country music—that never happens. They loved that the words *country radio* were on CNN. They fed it, I think, innocently, not knowing how serious it was.

ROBISON: Yes. It got out of control. They fed the fire, and then it was too late to pull back. They did a disservice to themselves; a lot of people wanted us to remain a part of country music for the genre's sake. They shot themselves in the foot.

MAINES: At the Country Music Association Awards show, Vince Gill said of us, whether you agree with them or not, they've got the right to say what they want. Then he started getting all this flack. It was a lesson in keeping your mouth shut. But we got lots of letters and support from actors and rock musicians. Rosie O'Donnell sent champagne. I always felt more of a connection with those people anyway.

PLAYBOY: Were you surprised when Howard Stern came around and supported you?

MAINES: I was very emotional and happy when he did. He hadn't been nice to us, but he apologized because he was a Republican at the time and fell for all the links between Iraq and 9/11. He's very honest about admitting that now. I love it when people admit they were wrong. He wasn't apologizing for what he said; he was apologizing for being completely wrong.

PLAYBOY: You've generated more controversy of late. In New York you dedicated the song "White Trash Wedding" to Mel Gibson a few days after his arrest. Was that one planned?

MAINES: No, I didn't plan to say anything about him. It never crossed my mind until I said it.

PLAYBOY: As victims of attacks by the press, are you more sympathetic when someone like Gibson or Tom Cruise gets in trouble and the press runs wild with the story?

MAGUIRE: People put what happened to us in the same category as those sorts of things, but it's different. Those are character lapses or substance-abuse problems or whatever. This was not that. You can't go to rehab for feeling a certain way.

MAINES: No, but I could have been wasted and on drugs and gone to that kind of rehab.

PLAYBOY: Americans seem to love it when a celebrity blows it and then apologizes.

ROBISON: It's the redemption, the confession.

MAINES: The public like to see that you're more fucked up than they are.

MAGUIRE: "Oh, I screwed up; I was really drunk" is harmless because you're not going to be drunk every day of your life. But it's more dangerous for Natalie to really believe in what she said, for us to really believe in what she said. She said it sane and very sober and meant it. When you've got a fan base and you're selling that many records, that's propaganda they don't want out there.

MAINES: I think a lot of people look at me as if I'm nuts and that I care more about living with myself as a person than about my career. I start thinking, Maybe it is immature to stick to your guns that much; maybe there's something wrong with that. But people believe there's ultimately some plan because there's just no way I could be so stupid when it would have been so easy to make it all go away.

PLAYBOY: How important was the timing of your remark, Natalie? If you were to say it now, with the president's approval ratings and support for the war near all-time lows, would it be as big a deal?

MAINES: It would be a blip. Nothing. They might talk about it on some morning shows. But that just makes me feel more justified that I didn't do anything wrong.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel brave for having spoken out at a time when most Americans supported going to war?

MAINES: Some people call me brave, but I don't think what I did was brave at all. I do think we've been brave since. Brave is Kanye West, after Hurricane Katrina, saying George Bush doesn't care about black people. That was one of the greatest television moments of all time. I would never have said that. I'm a coward compared with him. It was so honest and sincere, and he knew what he was going to say. I would have chickened out. That was just so brave. And true.

PLAYBOY: How much of the negative reaction came because you are women?

MAINES: Some people say the anger was because we're women, but I don't believe that. I think it's because we were country-music singers. If Tim McGraw had done exactly what I did, he would have gotten the same fallout.

Honky-Tonk Women

Today's sexy stars are nothing like their big-haired predecessors

◀ Shania Twain

Her *Come on Over* is the all-time biggest-selling album for a female artist.

Appeal: Thanks to her famous midriff, even noncountry fans can stomach her poppy music.

Roots: Hundreds of miles from Nashville—she's Canadian.

Martina McBride ▶

The farmer's daughter has had five honky-tonk hits sit atop the country charts.

Appeal: Her piercing blue eyes and siren voice.

Dubious achievement: "Independence Day" is used as the introductory music for *The Sean Hannity Show.*

◀ Gretchen Wilson

Raised in a trailer park, this no-frills filly went on to win a Grammy for her debut record.

Appeal: Blessed with great lungs and a strong singing voice, she uses both to showcase a trucker's vernacular.

Before she made it: Pulled pints at a honky-tonk dive bar.

Carrie Underwood ▶

Since winning a contest involving Simon Cowell, she has received plenty of idol worship.

Appeal: Her precocious all-American charm.

Cause du jour: Following in Twain's footsteps, she was named the world's sexiest vegetarian by PETA in 2005.

◀ Faith Hill

Like many of the women on this list, she has crossover allure; her past three albums hit the top of the pop charts.

Appeal: The former face of CoverGirl possesses classic model looks.

Dateability: Has three kids with husband Tim McGraw.

SheDaisy ▶

Sisters Kasidy, Kelsi and Kristyn Osborn are country music's quirkiest girl group.

Appeal: Simple math makes them three times sexier.

Versatility: When Kelsi was pregnant with twins, Karli, a fourth sister, filled in on tour.

—Rocky Rakovic

MAGUIRE: I don't agree. There would have been some fallout but not even close.
ROBISON: It's way worse. A guy would have been an outlaw, the Johnny Cash or Merle Haggard of his generation.
MAINES: Yeah, but they didn't say what I said on foreign soil on the eve of war. Country has had rebels, but nobody ever did that.
ROBISON: Read the stuff on the Internet: "Just tell that bitch to shut up." They don't want to hear mouthy women to begin with. Forget about its going against their political grain.
MAINES: Well, I don't think so. I truly don't think it has anything to do with our being women. I don't.
PLAYBOY: Martie, you have said the experience helped you find out who you are. What did you learn?
MAGUIRE: That I was willing to lose everything for what I knew was right. It was what made me open my eyes to who I am and be proud of myself and my principles. In the past I had tried to micromanage everything to ensure that this career would last forever—that I could play music forever or at least until I couldn't do it anymore. I was willing to put that on the line. I didn't care at all. The light just went on. I went, Okay, now I know who I am and what I stand for, and it doesn't matter what we lose along the way. People said, "You don't question the commander in chief. You don't criticize the president." That went against everything I was ever taught, everything I ever believed about our country.
MAINES: I got in a huge argument with a DJ in Dallas last week. His brother is in the military. He said, "Don't you think about the soldiers over there, fighting for your freedom?" I personally don't believe they're fighting for my freedom, but I understand if they need to believe that to risk their lives; I would have to find a reason if I were giving up my life for something. Then later in the conversation, of course, he told me I'm not allowed to say what I said. So I stood up for myself and told him I'd said it because of his brother. I wish I had said, "I thought they were fighting for my freedom, but then I'm not allowed to use that freedom? I'm confused." They always do that: "They're fighting for your rights to be able to say that—but you can't say it."
PLAYBOY: Much of this is shown in the film *Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing*. What prompted the documentary?
ROBISON: It started three and a half years ago when we sang the national anthem at the Super Bowl. We felt we were at a point in our career when we could turn some day-in-the-life or year-in-the-life thing into a DVD or something for our fans. That was in January, and then, in March, Natalie said what she said. The second the shit hit the fan, it was clear this was about something heavier. We let it unfold on film, which is kind of scary because after about half a year you forget the cameras are there. Once we knew what the potential was, we took it a lot more seriously and let the cameras in when we ordinarily wouldn't. We felt it was important to have the good, the bad and the ugly. Barbara Kopple, the director, caught the humanity of it all. We were so demonized—made into these traitorous sluts. People forget we're also moms and wives and living a normal life outside this controversy.
PLAYBOY: How has the dispute changed your audience?
ROBISON: Almost every night on our tour Natalie asks if anyone has never seen us before. About half the crowd raise their hand, which is exciting.
MAGUIRE: We're playing to about half as many people a night as we did on the Top of the World tour, but if you're reaching that many new fans, you know you've won them over for the right reasons. It's either been driven by the music first and they don't mind our politics, or they're drawn in by the politics. Either way it's win-win. When you look out into the crowd, it's digging the music.
MAINES: On the previous tour, after what I said, we felt this returned love—as though the audience thought it was necessary to show support. On the new tour I thought that would be over. But for all the new people who couldn't see the past tour because it was already sold out, this is their first chance to come and show that support. In New York a fan printed hundreds of thank-you signs, and the crowd all raised them up. That takes you by surprise. I really had to focus on the song because you just don't expect to get things back from your crowd like that.

We heard about a DJ riding in a station van with our picture on the side, and a guy pulled out a shotgun as if he were going to shoot up the van. It takes only one wacko.

ROBISON: Another change is that there are lots of gay men in the audience. I think they rightfully assume that if you're liberal on one issue, you're liberal across the board.
MAINES: I feel we have a connection with them because we've felt discrimination. We now know what it's like to be hated for no reason, just because of who we are. The other cool thing is there are way more men in general. We never really had men in our crowd. Or it always seemed as if they didn't want to be there—that they brought their girlfriends, thinking for doing that they were going to get laid afterward.
ROBISON: Last night in Washington was the best crowd we've had for the whole tour, but it was interesting to find out after the fact that the venue didn't have metal detectors, as it's supposed to.
PLAYBOY: Metal detectors? Is that a precaution because of death threats? How serious were they?
ROBISON: We heard a lot of stories. We heard about a radio DJ riding in a station van with our picture on the side, and a guy pulled out a shotgun as if he were going to shoot up the van. It takes only one wacko.
PLAYBOY: How did that impact your lives?
ROBISON: We were always aware of threats as a possibility, yet we didn't want them to ruin our lives. But it was important to hire real security so we could sleep at night. They weeded out a lot of stuff we were never made aware of.
PLAYBOY: At least one threat was credible enough that you wrote about it on the new album.
ROBISON: That one was sent to a Lubbock radio station; it was a threat for a Dallas performance. The guy had made threats before and been arrested before. He had a track record. Martie and I told Natalie we would be happy to cancel that show for her sake, but she said, "No, I'm not going to let someone scare me out of doing my job." It was very brave, but it was a very scary night. I'm of the mindset that if someone's going to do it, he's going to do it if he's determined enough. There just aren't enough safeguards in the world to protect us. I just found out about Google Earth—anyone can basically zoom right in on your house—and how easy it is to get information these days. But I refuse to walk around with security all the time. I want to go to the grocery store, take my kids to school. I want to do normal things. If I've got security, I'd rather the guards go to the zoo with my kids and the nanny than stay with me. I'm more worried about their safety than my own.
PLAYBOY: After everything that has happened, do you still relate to your earlier music, the big country hits that came out before you became pariahs in the country-music world?
MAGUIRE: "Top of the World" has a whole new meaning to me now. Every time we sing, "There's a whole lot of singing that's never gonna be heard,/Disappearing every day without so much as a word," I think about soldiers being gone. They'll never be heard from again. I see that the crowd is thinking that too. So I still feel "Top of the World" every single time, but I don't feel "Wide Open Spaces" the way I used to.
MAINES: Yeah, on "Wide Open Spaces" I just feel the crowd. I remember when we recorded that song. It felt as though that was our journey. We were on the path to greatness—young and hopeful. Now we're pretty much jaded and over it. I see the young people; it's their anthem. It used to be ours.

PLAYBOY: For your newest record you came out swinging with "Not Ready to Make Nice" as the first single.

MAINES: We actually thought that was going to be the one song people wouldn't relate to, because it's very self-indulgent, specifically about us and what we went through. But we get a lot of letters from people who are in abusive relationships or any sort of struggle, and they find they're getting power from that song.

ROBISON: I didn't have any preconceived notions about how the album would do or who would buy it. I guess I'm surprised by how much word of mouth it's getting, because there's been no radio support. The music has gotten out there from fans talking on the Internet and from iTunes and the other ways people find music these days.

PLAYBOY: There have been more negative reactions, too. A country-radio program director said, "Putting that single out was just a fuck-you to our audience."

MAINES: I never believed radio programmers would play any of our songs, and I still don't. We gave them an easy song to distance themselves from, but they got another song after that and it didn't take off either. They're just not going to play us, and that is more than fine. It's bullshit to say we dissed their audience. The minute they got calls about any song, they would have taken it off the playlist because they're all looking after their own ass and their own job, and they are cowards. They're the ones who dropped us in 24 hours after a seven-year working partnership for country music—on a number one single about soldiers, no less.

MAGUIRE: It would be fair to say we didn't consider them or people who don't like us. It never entered our minds that they were people we had to answer to.

MAINES: If we had put out something other than "Not Ready to Make Nice," the grassroots passion would not have been there. That song got people active and moving and sharing it. Another song wouldn't have had that bang. Ultimately, I think you put your best song out first, and this was our favorite.

PLAYBOY: After your having two of the biggest-selling records ever, are sales of the new record—a million and a half at the time of this interview—disappointing?

MAINES: We care what critics think, so I wanted to be assured that it was a good record. Obviously, you want as many people to listen to it as possible, but it sucks when you're questioning what you're doing creatively. That would've been a hard place to be.

ROBISON: To me it was a matter of slow burn, and we're prepared to view it as a two-year instead of a one-year campaign. I think that's just part of the nature of rebuilding, and that's okay.

MAGUIRE: Maybe I'm a snob, but every time I see the shelf at the end of the row in the record store, with the featured artist or whatever, I always think I'm not looking for that music. In my mind, stuff that sells the best usually isn't the best stuff. How many records does Sheryl Crow sell? Not 10 million. So I just never gauge music by that. Maybe it's snotty to say, but I think the popular stuff is the crappiest.

PLAYBOY: But you are one of only eight bands to have more than one 10-million-selling album—a list that includes the Beatles, the Eagles and Pink Floyd. Does it mean anything to you to be in that exclusive club?

ROBISON: Like when the guy in the cafeteria today wouldn't let me get any Raisin Bran because I didn't have a pass? No, I don't feel that.

MAINES: Yes, it is bizarre to me that we can connect to that many people and still be unrecognized. We're able to walk anywhere and not be recognized. Then there's Jessica Simpson, who doesn't really sell records and can't go anywhere. I mean, it's a nice place to be, but I have no idea how to make sense of it or explain it. Bill Maher—if I may name-drop—was at my house the night we were on *Letterman,* and he heard David Letterman say we were the highest-selling female group of all time, and he looked at me and said, "You are not." Then I was kind of embarrassed and said, "Well, yeah, we are." And he's like, More than the Supremes? More than the this, more than the that? I said, "I know, I know. It's not right. I can't help it." I remember in the *Wide Open* and *Fly* era, people would ask us, "How do you stay levelheaded?" Any time there was too much good news or success Martie always said she would just look at her naked butt in the mirror.

ROBISON: Martie, who has the smallest butt of anyone, had a run-in with a homeless guy who told her she had a fat ass.

PLAYBOY: When did that happen?

ROBISON: She was lying out in the sun at the Hampton Inn in Nashville, and this homeless guy came up to the fence and kind of scared her. She grabbed her towel and was trying to be nonchalant, and he got pissed off, so he goes, "You got a fat ass, you know that?"

MAGUIRE: And I literally went up to my room and looked in the mirror at my ass and was like, "I got a fat butt?" This homeless person really affected my self-esteem.

PLAYBOY: Your recent tour hasn't sold as well as past tours; you've even had to cancel or reschedule some shows.

MAINES: I haven't had one letdown moment about album sales. Usually I've been pleasantly surprised. But yeah, the only letdown is the tour not selling. It's like a telethon where the phone doesn't ring. I felt bad for everybody around us, as though we'd let them down. We sold 6 million records in the past, or 10 million of certain records, and on a big sold-out tour, we played for a million people.

We always hash everything out, and I'm mad about the tour. I think the one big mistake we made was doing it so quickly. That was dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb.

MAGUIRE: We were so focused on the record, we never even talked about the tour in all the interviews. But it's so obvious: If you have new fans, they have to live with the music first. A lot of people bought the CD and kept it in the shrink-wrap for the first week. They bought it as a statement. We were confident they would love the music eventually, but you have to listen to it a few times.

ROBISON: It takes a lot of motivation to go to a concert. I think the lack of talk on the radio had an effect. That's not there anymore.

MAINES: Of course, Canada sold out in eight minutes.

PLAYBOY: And you continually piss off fans—even before you took on the president. It started when Natalie joined.

MAGUIRE: When Robin and Laura, the original singers, left, we would get messages like "You have to get Robin back in the band!" Why do these people care? They associate so closely with a music group, they feel as though you're theirs. One woman said we were the devil's spawn because we got drums.

ROBISON: This was back before the Internet was big. It was the anonymity of calling our office and leaving messages on our answering machine.

PLAYBOY: How did things change when Natalie joined?

MAGUIRE: One thing I knew about Natalie from day one is that she has to be her. She has to be real. I was raised to do the Southern-hospitality thing: smile at the gigs when people aren't listening, schmooze and all that. I'm proud I can do that, because I can be in any circle of people and do what I need to do—make them feel good. That gets you somewhere too. But I've always respected that Natalie is like, "No, that's wrong." That has led the way we're perceived now. It's changed me, too. Before she said what she said, I don't think I ever took a stand about anything. Then the bottom fell out, and I found myself at the age of 34. I knew what I believed in, but I always saw both sides. I was always the person at the Thanksgiving table going, "Yes, but you see their side and then their side," always trying to be the mediator.

ROBISON: Martie and I cared so much about what people thought of us, for whatever reason. This controversy taught me that not everybody is going to like me and that's okay. It's liberating. Enough people in the world will like me and my music. I don't have to work so hard to convince everyone. It has been a great growing experience. As artists, anytime you're not just in the middle of the road singing ditties, you're going to stir things up. To me, that has always been what endears people to us. You see sports stars who go through media training, and then when they're asked a question they say absolutely nothing. I don't think people can connect to musicians who do that.

PLAYBOY: What was your first impression of Natalie when you met?

ROBISON: Man, those mall bangs are big!

MAINES: It was the Lubbock version of the Jennifer Aniston thing.

MAGUIRE: I thought she was too cool for us.

MAINES: I was!

ROBISON: We were going to sing a demo just to see how our voices sounded together. I remember Natalie had gotten all made up, and her hair was done. Her dad didn't let her get away with it. He was like, "Ooh, you got all fancy for the demo session."

MAINES: Like in *Uncle Buck:* "What's all that makeup for? We're just going bowling." It was embarrassing. Well, Emily was a beauty queen.

ROBISON: Natalie's mom told her, "You better stand up straight. Emily was in pageants."

MAINES: Finally one day I said to Emily, "You were in pageants?" And everyone turned around and went, "What?" The pleasure I got from calling my mom and saying, "Emily wasn't in beauty pageants. Why did you think that? She's disgusting, as a matter of fact. And I stand up straighter than anybody!"

I felt that once people saw us live, the music would ultimately win them over. So we didn't have to focus on being PR or fashion darlings. That gives us confidence.

MAGUIRE: I wonder where your mom got that.

MAINES: In Lubbock we think anybody from Dallas is in pageants.

MAGUIRE: Maybe you saw her glamour shot in her high school yearbook.

ROBISON: Maybe it was the banjo.

PLAYBOY: Martie once said that in the Dixie Chicks family, she's the mom, Emily is the dad, and Natalie is the obnoxious teenager. Does that sound right?

MAGUIRE: We almost got in a fight over that. I don't think I'm the mom anymore. I've chilled out a lot. I used to think I could control everything and keep my chicks in line. It stressed me out because I knew I couldn't do anything else. "Please behave because this is my life, here." Now I'm way more laid-back.

PLAYBOY: Did the media storm change the dynamic between you?

MAGUIRE: It's hard to say because so much changed for us personally at the same time; we were having kids and giving up any sense of control over our lives. That changed our career just as much as the controversy did.

MAINES: I think we became more alike. I wouldn't call Martie the mother hen anymore. Now *she* may be the bratty one.

PLAYBOY: The homeless man's comments about Martie's ass notwithstanding, how do you feel when people talk about your being sexy or cool?

MAINES: We never felt cool by any means, and we were never talked about as being hot or pretty. Shania was the hot one, and Faith was the beautiful one. And we were like, "Well, we have talent."

MAGUIRE: I felt that once people saw us live, the music would ultimately win them over. So we didn't have to focus on being PR or fashion darlings. It was nice to have that security in our back pocket: We know we can play, and we know Natalie can sing. That gives us a confidence we can take through our career and all the highs and lows.

MAINES: I think we would've liked to have been called the pretty ones, but ultimately we always wanted longevity. So it meant more to be recognized strictly for our talent than to be the hot ones.

PLAYBOY: Natalie and Martie, was the demise of your first marriages the result of the band's success?

MAINES: Definitely. I remember standing in the shower a lot, just crying that I was so young and stuck in my relationship forever. I would truly think, How old will he be before he dies? Which is horrible. [*laughs*] I was never going to kill him, but that's how stuck I felt. Everyone who has been divorced has thought about that. It never even crossed my mind that I could get out of it with a divorce. My parents were married forever. When I got so happy in our career, it made me wake up and realize I should be that happy in my personal life. I was going to have to buck up and own up to my mistake. I didn't like making mistakes, and that was a huge one. I realized I'd rather be alone than with this person. Nothing against him—he wasn't mean or anything. I was just really young, and I still had that small-town mentality that getting married is something to check off the list. So yeah, if we hadn't been successful, I would probably still be married to him. If I had stayed in Lubbock and gotten some nine-to-five job, I wouldn't have known anything else existed. And then when I met my husband Adrian Pasdar, I wasn't looking, just being a ho. [*laughter*] Nope, never had the chance.

MAGUIRE: We've all tried. It just doesn't seem to work.

MAINES: I never even got to try!

MAGUIRE: I think I could have been a ho. I just didn't have time to prove I could be one.

PLAYBOY: Martie, was your divorce related to the band's success too?

(continued on page 192)

DIXIE CHICKS

(continued from page 74)

MAGUIRE: I think it made my ex-husband feel better that I could admit the divorce wasn't necessarily about him—that we did get married totally in love and for the long haul and everything. Like I said before, I didn't know who I was. I didn't get married that young. I was 25. I stayed in the marriage for four and a half years, and I had a stepson. It wasn't that I couldn't say the *D* word; I just couldn't desert this child who had already been through so much with a new stepmom. It was more about him and my guilt. Our parents got divorced when both of us were teenagers, a very pivotal time in our lives, so I was looking for something secure and safe. And my ex-husband was good-looking, successful, stable and didn't have baggage. He was that candidate for marriage who looks so good on paper, but he had none of the fire or creativity. My career showed me that somebody has to have some kind of artistic passion for me to fall deeply in love with him.

PLAYBOY: On the new record, in "So Hard," you sing about your infertility and the struggle to get pregnant. Were you reluctant to write about something so personal?

ROBISON: I don't think we set out to write anything about in vitro or infertility. The song had already been started and was more about a relationship. Then the infertility idea kind of came about when we began writing the second verse, when the question came up about how to make it palatable as a subject. The song had to be about the relationship aspect.

But two thirds of the band has had issues with infertility. It takes over your life for a period of time. I know when I was going through it Martie and Natalie had to go through it with me. And then subsequently Martie went through it, and the same thing happened. In hindsight it's so bizarre, all the frustration and the not knowing. I find it hard to remember a lot of it now that I have three children. Once I had my first son I was okay with whatever I had to do to get the other ones.

MAGUIRE: I forget how many times you had to have treatments before they worked—once or twice?

ROBISON: Three times. The third time I got pregnant but had a miscarriage. Then I got pregnant the next time. But now it's just like any struggle; you just feel you've gotten to where you are. And I look at my kids—they owe me a lot. [*laughter*] "You're going to build a fence on the ranch, kids!" I hate to complain about this stuff because, God, we had the means and the ability to do it, and so many people don't. I watched the heartache of friends who had run out of money. It's terrible. So I just feel lucky in so many ways that I was one of the success stories.

MAGUIRE: I learned a lot about different cities when I had to see doctors. I did the gynecological world tour. I can't tell you how many people have seen me naked. I'm very modest in general but had to lose all that. When I went to the doctor in—where were we? Germany? No—Sweden, I found out he was a trainer for the Klitschko brothers, the boxers. And I was like, "I'm going to see a sports trainer? I'm really going to spread them for a sports trainer?" The office had books stacked everywhere and papers and files and the table right in the middle. It felt as though I was in a backstreet abortion clinic. It was horrible. But he was so nice. And he was the one who told me I was pregnant.

PLAYBOY: Looking at other musicians who have weathered personal and political hailstorms, whom do you admire? Do you have role models in your business?

ROBISON: U2 has been great—musically reinventing itself, staying relevant, touring. It's rock and roll, though. It's hard for us to emulate because the rock world is so different.

MAGUIRE: Emmylou Harris. She's not selling that many records, but she still has the passion to go out and tour and work with all sorts of people. She has reinvented herself several times and continues to take chances and do things because they move her musically.

MAINES: I don't think there are any role models in our situation, with kids and a family. If you're a guy, it's okay to leave the family back home—not that I want to leave my family back home. But even Emmylou didn't take her daughter on tour. Faith and Tim have kids, but they tour only in the summer and live with the family on the bus. So I don't see anybody who's dealt career-wise with what we're dealing with. I take pride that maybe we're becoming role models. I can always sing and play music, but I don't have to tour or be in front of an audience. It's very expensive to live the life we live and be able to have our kids come along with us. It's not just that we want our kids with us; we can afford to have them with us. If we couldn't, I wouldn't be doing this. It's not worth it. I can play music, and that's what makes me happy. But I don't do it just for the fun of it.

PLAYBOY: How is it to tour for the first time with this fleet of kids?

MAINES: They're all different ages, so they're not all together that much. Mine are going swimming today. I think Emily's are going to go, but they're not all planning to go together; they'll see each other there. I think only once were all seven actually out on the same day.

MAGUIRE: It's hard to find nannies willing to live on a bus, sleep in a bunk and be in a different place every day, with the hours they're working, and just go with the flow. I found out my nanny was showering in the kids' bath—a sink we're using as a bathtub. She was crouching in there and showering. I plucked this great girl from waiting tables in Austin, and now she's living on a bus and showering in the sink.

MAINES: Are we living in a third world country? Didn't you ever wonder how she was getting clean? Did it ever cross your mind?

MAGUIRE: We kept asking her! Then we thought maybe she would be offended that we kept asking whether she'd showered, so we stopped. I thought maybe she's not the kind of person who needs a shower at least every other day, more like a go-three-days kind of girl.

PLAYBOY: Martie, you told *Time* magazine you wouldn't want your CD to be in a changer next to Toby Keith's and Reba McEntire's. Why?

MAGUIRE: I was trying to say that people are drawn to music that says a certain thing and are turned off by music that says something else. Our music says something very specific, so I would be shocked if I saw it in somebody's personal collection with music that was the polar opposite.

MAINES: Ultimately what you were saying is true. The problem came from naming names. But it's the same thing radio is telling us: "It doesn't fit with our playlist." And we're saying, "Yes, we agree. It doesn't fit."

ROBISON: I think people took it as though she were saying our music wouldn't be appreciated by all country-music fans, which I don't think Martie meant. But it's a mistake to think you can determine who your audience will be. The songs have to lead people, and I think that's happening right now. People are coming who react to this music versus other music.

PLAYBOY: And it's okay with you even if the other music—your older records—sells far more copies? People have felt sorry for you.

MAGUIRE: But why? What baffles me is that they would care. People bring that up a lot and feel so sorry for us, but I don't feel any loss at all. It is hard for certain artists to come down a notch from where they've been, but that can happen anyway. Being new on the scene and inspiring people with something fresh will wear off eventually. Even if Natalie hadn't said what she said, we could have been faced with a smaller audience.

ROBISON: Meanwhile it's such an exciting time. As far as energy and purpose go, it's like a breath of fresh air. I feel that fire you get when you've been knocked down. For a band going into—how many years has it been?—it's like being given a second life.