

he Disie Chicks could be seen as this year's Spice Girk, a bunch of Teas blondes brought together by recompany backroom boys to make a buck. Natalie Maines, the lead singer or threatens to blast the wrinkles from year could be Chariper Chick; Deliny Chick Spilly Robisson, the bunjo and guitar player, could be Chariper Chick; Deliny Chick, Butt for Could be Chariper Chick; Deliny Chick, Chick Butt the comparison would be

Chick. But the comparison would be wrong. These Chicks, as they say in the music business, have paid their dues. Now they're reaping the rewards.

Martic Seidel and her sister, Emily Robison --their madien name was Frwin -- how been working as the Dixic chlick for to years, Maines joined them in 1995, "All our success has come in this one short period." Martie says on the plone from the Texan home on the eve of their first Astralian tour. If fresh overwhelming at times, but the fact we've been together so long gives us the strength to cope with what's going on. We know how long we've wanted this and we certainly don't take it for granted. Having the three of us makes it easier because we can share the load."

The sisters grew up in the not-so-wild west of Dallas, the Texan oil city. From the age of five they studied classical violin and piano but, as is the Texas way, they joined a kids' bluegrass band, if you can imagine such a thing.

In best, or worst, country music tradition, their parents ended up getting a D+V+OR-CE, as Tammw Wynette spelt it out all those years ago. Suddenly, the centre was torn from their lives and a part of a new start they headed off on their own musical just $a_0 = a_0 + a_0 = a_0 + a_0 = a_0 =$

We were actually the Dixie Chickens for a week," Martie says.

"At the time, we were only a street corner band and kind of corny.

We had a rubber chicken and our tip jar was a chicken – everything
was chicken. We didn't take it too seriously, but the name stuck and
we shortened it to Chicks."

It was hardly the stuff of overright success and the sisters did the rounds, playing business conventions and political rallies, anywhere there was a dollar. Other not-so-memorable gigs included a funeral almost too morbid to be true. The widow was in the front row sobbiling her eyes out, "Martie recalls." We were singing The Rose, the Bette Midler song, and standing next to the open casket. It was borrible."

Back then, they were cowgif outfits – denim and checks, the whole Hickwile deal — and, hardly suprisingly, failed to move beyond the usual country music stereotypes. By 1995 they were thinking of throwing it in for real jobs when a new load singer arrived. She was Natalle Malines, from Lubbock in west Teass, the home of Buddy Holy and a bebted of alternative country the adventurous, unpredictable kind the conservatives up the road in the country music capital of Natswille. Termsees, shick one way from.

Natalie's father was Lloyd Maines, a virtuoso pedal steel guitarist and stalwart of the alt.country scene. He knew the Chicks, a baving played with them, and his daughter, then 20, had won a music scholarship and was hankering for the bright lights of a singing career. One story had her telling a maths teacher there was no need to do homework because she was going to be famous.

With new management and a revitalised can-do attitude, the D

Chicks scored a development deal with Sony Music. They spent the next two years on the road, shaping more interesting, self-empowering material and revamping their image – designer outflits and high heels took over from jeans and boots. Only then did they record what was to be their breakthrough album

Wide Open Spaces. Released in January last year, it relaunched the legendary Monument label, once home to another famous Texan, Roy Orbison. From a slow start, it became an unstoppable force. Still in the Bilboard charts, the leading US monitor of record sales, after nearly million copies. In Australia, where country music barely rises above a whisper on city radio, it has sold 53,000 copies and achieved gold record status.

The Chicks' follow-up album, Fly, was released in August and went straight to number one on the mainstream charts, a feat never before achieved by a country

band. Indeed, the only other country act to achieve such status was the biggest

cowboy hat of them all, Garth Brooks. Since then, critics have attempted to draw a parallel between the Chicks and Shanisi Twain, the Canadian country star who has crossed over so spectacularly into the pop mainterna. Her last allown, Came On Over, has sold ay million copies in the US and has been on the Billibard chart for two years: However, where Twain has blanded out her country roots for a pap audience, the Chicks have remained true. For them, Chicks have remained true for them, the country most for a pap audience, the Chicks have remained true. For them, the country most for a pap audience, the Chicks have remained true. For them, and the country most for a pap audience, the Chicks have remained true. For them, and the country most for a pap audience, the Chicks have remained true. For them, and the country most for the country most format in the country most format for most format for the country most format for most format for the country most format for the country most format for the country most format for most format for the country most format for most form

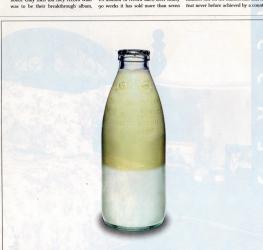
Interestingly, more than 60 per cent of Dixie Chicks' sales have been to under-25s, hardly the demographic most often associated with country Along with Twain they have revitalised the genre, something it was badly in need of after too many granite-jawed hunks in hats and prairie princesses with big hair and heartaches. They were the surprise hit of this year's Lilith Fair, the annual celebration of women's music in the US, where they wowed everyone from the lipstick lesbians to the hairyarmpit brigade with their brand of female assertiveness. Two songs in particular from Fly had the sisters swinging - Sin Wagon, which happens to be about "mattress dancin'", and Goodbye Earl, where a beaten wife gains the ultimate revenge on an abusive husband.

While their spunky image and girlpower attitude have undoubtedly helped, Martie says the music remains the core of their success. For all the years they've been on the road, she can recall only once, a high rollers' party in Dallas, where they were treated like "dumb blondes" a term that riles her. "I heard a guy turn to his girlfriend with the fake tits and say. 'Oh, we're getting a concert by the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders.' I remember my blood boiling and when I got up there I played the crap out of my fiddle. It empowered us. We wanted to show we were so much more than just three blondes. It's not feminism - we're just women who are proud to be women.

While unsure how they'll be received in Australia, it's part of the grand plan to spread their music beyond the usual country confines of the US. They also have a sense of humour. "Is it true every man down there looks like Mel Gibson?" Martie asks. "That's what we've be told—that's what we've beauting."

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Dixie Chicks: at the Cairns Convention Centre, November 8; Brisbane Festival Hall, Nov 10; Sydney Capitol Theatre, Nov 11; Melbourne Palais, Nov 13.



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