



DIXIE CHICKS

HOME IS IN TEXAS ★ BY DANIEL KELLER

Ask most people these days to name some of Nashville's biggest stars, and chances are pretty good **Dixie Chicks** will rank high on their list. With more than five #1 singles and three multi-platinum albums, the Dixie Chicks' highly-polished, radio-friendly music has come to signify country music at its best. All the more interesting, since the Chicks don't really consider themselves part of the Nashville landscape. No sir, these girls are from Texas, through and through.

Texas plays a major role in their musical heritage, and that Texas DNA is featured front and center on their latest album, *Home*. It's a more rootsy, bluegrass-based sound, less about pop and more about passion. These are intimate, organic performances that don't mind being a bit rough and spontaneous, and it's won the Chicks a whole new audience and a whole new credibility. In an industry with far too much window dressing, these Chicks don't just sound good and look good, they truly are talented artists.

On *Tour with Shure* caught up with Chick, Emily Robison in the midst of their current world tour, and got the lowdown on the album, the tour, and their very special connection with their audience.

ON TOUR WITH SHURE: *Home* is a big change from your previous albums. Did you all take a more active role in the recording process?

EMILY ROBISON: Oh, definitely. This album's much more our baby than anything we've ever done before. We were in litigation with

Sony at the time, didn't really have a label, and didn't know what was going to happen. So we didn't even look at it as making a record – we just wanted to go in the studio, relax and experiment. Since we didn't have a label, we had to be really hands-on, from finding the songs to financing the players.

OTWS: Was it liberating to not have to deal with a label, or was there an element of tension over the legal ordeal?

ROBISON: A little of both, really. We didn't know if or when we'd be recording the next album, so this just started as us just playing around in the studio. It was freeing in a way, because we never looked at any of the songs as being "on the album," or worried about how long a song was or if it was something radio would play. So it's really been an extra plus that country radio has embraced it.

OTWS: How was it working with Lloyd Maines [Natalie's father]?

ROBISON: It was wonderful. Lloyd gave us a lot of space to have

input into the process. It felt so easy to express ourselves and put ideas out on the table, 'cause it's pretty much like family. We've always had input on our records, but this time we officially co-produced it.

OTWS: Tell me about the writing process. Do you write individually or together?

ROBISON: The writing happens a lot of different ways. Marti and Natalie wrote two of the songs with Marty Stewart, and we three wrote together on a couple of tunes. It's odd, but this is the first time we've actually recorded songs that the three of us have written together. We knew what we were looking for, and just decided to write them ourselves.

OTWS: Do you all have home studios? Do you carry a recording rig on tour?

ROBISON: We don't do much writing on the road. We always say we will, but there's never time. We don't have home studios, either. I try to keep my home as an oasis away from the music business. If I write at home, it's just my guitar and a tape recorder.

OTWS: You've always had a great rapport with your live audience. Do you feel that playing live has helped keep you grounded during difficult times?

ROBISON: Definitely. I think the connection with the audience is really important. Of course it's good for the feedback on what songs work and all. But I think standing in front of all these people every night is the most fun aspect of our careers. And it's really been like therapy for us over the last couple of months, with all that's happened in the political world. Our fans are here, and they're cheering us louder than ever, they're saying "We're still with you." For us, it was such a positive thing, seeing the true sentiment, as opposed to what the press and radio stir up for their own entertainment value.

OTWS: How do you feel the Texas music scene compares to Nashville?

ROBISON: It's a very different style of music. Texas music is more based around the artist doing the songwriting, not casting songs for other artists. And it's okay with the music being a little gritty and raw, not smoothing it all out. There's no making sure you have the right outfit, or your hair is all in place,

BRINGING HOME ON THE ROAD

FERN (FERNANDO ALVAREZ, JR.) certainly has his hands full on this tour. He's watching no fewer than 100 inputs on the custom Showco/Harrison console and Yamaha 02R sidecar. And if that's not enough, he's mixing it in the round. "We've got a Showco Prism rig, with four 20-box arrays, so wherever you are in the hall you've got left and right channels." That stereo spread is essential to getting the Chicks' trademark sound, especially songs from the current album. "The frequency range is very great, because they're using a lot of acoustic instruments, and it really helps to be able to take stuff off-center a bit."

On Tour with Shure spoke with Fern about mixing the Chicks and getting that *Home* sound in all those wide enclosed spaces.

OTWS: I noticed all three girls come out wearing Beta 54 headsets. Is that a new addition?

FERN: This is the first tour we've used them. I'd presented the idea to the girls earlier in the year and they weren't interested. They just didn't want that "headset" look. So the plan was to put mics in strategic areas of the stage. But after seeing the mammoth size of the stage and the production, it was clear mobility would be a major issue. Then we tried out the Beta 54s, and they liked the look and we loved the sound. The cardioid pattern has no bleedover, and that's critical because the system's tucked well into the stage, and at times they're thrust out maybe 40 feet in front of the PA, yet I've got headroom for days. The sisters really like the headsets; they use them

it's just more raw and pure. Texas music isn't so concerned with the airplay aspect—I mean, you can have a good career just touring Texas alone, and a lot of artists are okay with that. Nashville's not the be-all and end-all to their careers.

OTWS: How long have you been using Shure mics?

ROBISON: Oh gosh, as far back as I can re-

more than I'd ever thought they would.

OTWS: But Natalie still favors the SM58®....

FERN: Natalie loves her handheld SM58. We've got U2 handhelds everywhere—the Chicks have up to 12 vocal inputs. It's all about the girls being all over the stage. We're running U4D systems, up to 42 frequencies. Kap (Kevin Kapler, Clair Brothers' RF tech) does an incredible job of keeping all the radio stuff straight for us.

OTWS: And you're also using KSM27s for vocals on the more acoustic stuff.

FERN: Yeah, primarily for Natalie's vocals. It's got this great breathy, high-end sound that's perfect for those tunes, and Nat loves the look and sound of it.

OTWS: Better than the KSM32?

FERN: For Nat's voice, yes. It picks up a bit more of what she wants to hear in her particular range. We use the KSM32 on lots of acoustic instruments, though. And I've also become a big fan of the new KSM137.

Part of the challenge for us is that we're essentially doing a bluegrass set within a rock show. So using the KSMs on the acoustic stuff really brings out those nuances that help to set it apart.

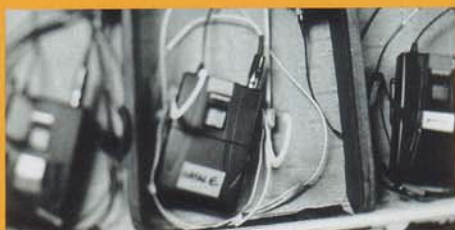
OTWS: I also notice a very clean stage. The whole band's on PSM, correct?

FERN: The whole band's on ears, and all the amps are under the stage, so it's nice and clean. We've got five PSM 600 systems for the girls, and six PSM 700s for band members and techs. The rest of the band's on wired PSM 600s. Johnny Branham does a heck of a job on monitors. At one point in the show we've got 15 people on stage—eight band members, four strings and the girls. The PSM sounds great, and helps the mix sound great, too.

member. I think every stage we've ever been on, there's been a '58.

OTWS: I notice the entire band is on PSM® as well....

ROBISON: The personal monitors are fantastic. We're performing on a big stage, in the round, and we really run around a lot. With the in-ears, the sound's always right, no matter where we are.



DIXIE CHICKS	THEIRS	ON A BUDGET
Lead Vocals	U24D/58* & KSM27	UT24/58* & KSM27
Guitar Amp	KSM32	KSM109
Guitar	U14D*	PT14*
Monitors	PSM® 600	PSM 200 *wireless