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# Taking the Long Way

Dixie Chicks

Reviewed by **David Browne**

▶ Taking the Long Way

GRADE  
EW Grade: A

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LEAD PERFORMANCE  
▶ Dixie Chicks

RELEASE DATE  
● May 23 2006

GENRE  
● Country/Bluegrass  
● Pop

PRODUCTION  
▶ Columbia  
▶ Open Wide

The Dixie Chicks don't wait very long to remind us of the dustup surrounding their Bush-bashing remark of three years ago. On "The Long Way Around," the opening salvo from **Taking the Long Way**, Natalie Maines recalls the time she "fought with a stranger" (Toby Keith?) and admits, "I could have made it easier on myself." The next tune, "Easy Silence," finds her searching for refuge in a world where "anger plays on every station." If you wonder whether they have regrets about the Incident, "Not Ready to Make Nice" makes it clear they don't. When Maines gets to the part about all the death threats, her voice rises and the strings well up; it's a true pop-money-shot moment.

Those first songs also demonstrate the Chicks aren't terribly interested in reconciling with red-state country fans. (On "The Long Way Around," Maines cattily sings that her teen friends married their school beaus and now reside "in the same ZIP codes where their parents live." Take

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that, CMT viewers!) But it's also apparent that the Chicks are thinking outside the Nashville box in more ways than writing defensive lyrics. The album, produced by the ubiquitous Rick Rubin, is a little bit country, a little bit rock & roll — but also a little bit power balladry, alt-country, and roadhouse boogie. Along with the comments that got them into their recent mess, it's the least wimpy thing the group's ever done.

For that, you can also thank a guest roster that makes the album feel like a support-the-Chicks rally. With Neil Finn, they come up with "Silent House," a lovely downer that brings out the best in the trio's layered harmonies; Gary Louris' input gives "Everybody Knows" the rainy-day jangle of a song by his band the Jayhawks. The Chicks are unabashedly, gloriously pop on "Voice Inside My Head," penned with unlikely collaborators Dan Wilson (Semisonic) and Linda Perry (Christina Aguilera). Everyone from Bonnie Raitt to John Mayer also pops up, yet the record rarely sounds like an overcrowded party. With Maines projecting more passionately than ever, *Taking the Long Way* remains intimate and personal; perhaps she should tick people off more often.

The album also rectifies something that's long been confounding about the Dixie Chicks. For all their feistiness and rebel-yell image, their records have been comparatively meek — the work of coffeehouse folkies rather than outlaw-country bad girls. On *Taking the Long Way*, most of that dichotomy vanishes along with quaint mandolin solos. Finally, they put their music where their opinionated mouths are. **Grade: A**

(Posted:05/19/06)

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below.

**Kathryn-** Sat, May 20, 2006 at 3:09 PM  
EDT

WARNING!!

Still a Chick Fan!

Thanks for the great review!! I have heard nothing but great things about the new album! Thanks for giving them the credit they deserve!! These are amazing women that can actually sing AND play their own instruments AND write a great song.

Thanks!!

Chicks Rock! Chicks Rule!

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**Leah-** Sat, May 20, 2006 at 11:24 AM  
EDT

oops! I meant their, not there. sorry.

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**Leah-** Sat, May 20, 2006 at 11:23 AM  
EDT

Thanks for your good review/grade of Taking The Long Way. I haven't heard it all yet, but I know it'll be there best yet.

CHICKS ROCK!!!

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