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Record Review: Dixie Chicks plenty of defiance on 'Taking the Long Way'

Web Posted: 05/24/2006 12:00 AM CDT

Hector Saldaña
San Antonio Express-News

Now, did we ever really think that Natalie the kind of girl who would have married her school sweetheart?

"Taking the Long Way" (Open Wide/Columbia) new Dixie Chicks album, opens with the autobiographical track "The Long Way Around" which begins by looking back at the path to school friends. And the defiance — and pop — begins there.

"I could never follow," Maines sings on the gritty, countrified pop track, not so different from the Chicks' classic, harmonized sound.

They are more than willing to play with the mythology that surrounds the firestorm created when Maines made offhand anti-Bush comments at a London concert three years ago. Even if that means fanning those passionate flames themselves on the first single, "Not Ready to Make Nice."

It doesn't take that obvious, heavy-handed single to see that these women aren't going to pucker up for anybody.

But that doesn't mean that the talented trio of Maines, Emily Robison and Martie Maguire don't feel under siege. "Easy Silence," a track that subtly approximates the U2 eighth-note-ballad approach, is about keeping the world at bay, praising peaceful



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quiet when it can be found.

"Taking the Long Way" is ambitious and reveals a band with an attitude that isn't about to be airbrushed out. This was supposed to be the disc finding the Dixie Chicks turning their backs on country. But they still sound epic, and those glorious, twangy harmonies are never lost in producer Rick Rubin's L.A. sound.

What is different is that Maines, Robison and Maguire co-wrote every song. There are 14 very personal numbers here.

The anticipation for country rock is finally satisfied with the stomping "Lubbock or Leave It," which melds the thin electricity of Bob Dylan's "Blonde on Blonde" with the vocal interplay found on old Buffalo Springfield and Poco records.

Startling sleepers include the drama of "Silent House," the Sheryl Crow contribution "Favorite Year," the surprise Motown twist buried in "I Like It," the chick flick-fulness of "So Hard" and the Memphis groove of the Bonnie Raitt-styled closer "I Hope."

The Dixie Chicks are back, without apology. But will they be welcome? Absolutely, for anyone who cares more about the band's music than its politics.

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