

Colorado disc jockeys suspended for protesting Dixie Chicks' ban

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As part of the ongoing vendetta against the country music group Dixie Chicks, two disc jockeys were suspended from a Colorado Springs, Colorado radio station for locking themselves in the studio while they took listener requests for the band's music. DJs Dave Moore and Jeff Singer were suspended May 5 for violating a boycott imposed by the management of KKCS 102 FM. The ban has been in place since group member Natalie Maines made a comment hostile to George W. Bush at a March concert in London just prior to the US invasion of Iraq.

The station's General Manager, Jerry Grant, declared in a media release justifying the reprisals against Moore and Singer that the Dixie Chicks were censored because the station had to be sensitive to its listening audience in a city with five military bases. He claimed that listeners wanted the music pulled until last week, when "the tide began to turn" in favor of the proscribed group.

Grant's memo described the controversial event: "Monday morning, Singer and Moore, our morning co-hosts, took it upon themselves to lock the studio doors so that no one could enter, and commenced to play the Dixie Chicks back to back, continuously for six hours, from 6:15am until noon. Just prior to noon, I called the studio to tell them that they had two choices, either keep playing the Chicks as they were doing, and they would have no jobs when they came out, or come out of the studio by noon and they would have a couple days suspension. They chose the latter."

Grant told a local newspaper that the DJs "made it clear that they support the president of the United States. They support wholeheartedly the troops, the military. But they also support the right of free speech."

Banning the group's music from the station's playlist was a difficult decision, said Grant, "because how can

you ignore the hottest group in country music?" He answered the rhetorical remark by emphasizing in his press release that "Colorado Springs is a military city." The independent station does not belong to any of the radio conglomerates, such as Clear Channel Communications, that were instrumental in organizing and continuing the witch-hunt against the Dixie Chicks.

The local television news reported that KKCS has been receiving hundreds of phone calls, with 75 percent of the callers favoring playing the band's music. "We've been getting hundreds of phone calls, both pro and con," said Grant, "It has not been a fun couple of days."

"The result of Monday's action is that we received another overwhelming response from our listeners to play the Dixie Chicks, which we have begun to do today," concluded the station's press release.

That the nationwide campaign against the Dixie Chicks—involving radio censorship of their music, CD burnings and death threats against group members—is anything but a spontaneous popular response to Maines' anti-Bush utterance is once again confirmed by the Colorado Springs episode. The fact that a town with numerous military bases was the scene of an extraordinary protest in support of the group reveals much about the state of popular opinion, including perhaps within the military.

When the Dixie Chicks kicked off their sold-out, 59-show, "Top of the World" tour on May 1, the opening concerts witnessed tens of thousands in attendance and only a handful of protesters. This disappointed the US media, which had predicted mass hostility to the group.

At the first concert in Greenville, South Carolina, Maines, sporting a "Dare to be Free" T-shirt, addressed the 15,000-strong audience: "If you're here to boo, we

welcome that. We're going to give you 15 seconds to do that." The fans opted to cheer instead. Greenville police reported that less than 10 demonstrators gathered outside the arena. An alternative "patriotic" concert organized by right-wing talk-radio host Mike Gallagher the same night had a small attendance relative to that of the all-female band.

The *Associated Press* reported that a lone protester stood outside the Orlando, Florida concert.

Knoxville, Tennessee, the fifth stop on the tour, had only 20 refunds on more than 18,000 tickets sold. A protest of about 100 people was organized by talk-radio host Tony Basilio, who broadcast his show live at the protest site outside the concert venue.

Instrumental in the efforts to censor the Dixie Chicks has been the media conglomerate Clear Channel, a company with close ties to the Bush administration. The campaign also involves the extreme-right FreeRepublic.com web site and Cox Radio and Cumulus Broadcasting, two large radio broadcasters who dominate the country music radio scene. The CD-smashing rally in Louisiana by a 33,000-pound tractor was orchestrated by KRMD, part of Cumulus Media, which has just recently lifted its ban against the group's music. The so-called 'grassroots' uproar against the trio is in fact a highly orchestrated phenomenon.

According to a report in *Launch*, *Yahoo's* music service, all three group members have 24-hour personal protection. Said spokeswoman Emily Robison: "I feel our safety is a huge, important issue right now. We officially have a posse now because we have to have security people with us at all times, and this has gotten to a point where enough is enough, you know! When you feel like your own safety is an issue, I think people [anti-group protesters] have to step back."

Recording artist Bruce Springsteen has come out in support of the Dixie Chicks. In a message on his official web site, Springsteen opined:

"The Dixie Chicks have taken a big hit lately for exercising their basic right to express themselves. To me, they're terrific American artists expressing American values by using their American right to free speech. For them to be banished wholesale from radio stations, and even entire radio networks, for speaking out is un-American.

"The pressure coming from the government and big

business to enforce conformity of thought concerning the war and politics goes against everything that this country is about—namely freedom. Right now, we are supposedly fighting to create freedom in Iraq, at the same time that some are trying to intimidate and punish people for using that same freedom here at home.

"I don't know what happens next, but I do want to add my voice to those who think that the Dixie Chicks are getting a raw deal, and an un-American one to boot. I send them my support."



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