

## And the Beat Goes On

by Ryan O'Malley



# Abilene back with same '70s energy



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Thirty years after their formation, Abilene is back with the same energy and appeal that made them one of the most sought after bands of the 70s and 80s.

Even though the members, who drummer Jim Musto says “always stayed close,” have had on and off reunions in the past, it was a Wilkes-Barre press conference that got the ball rolling for this summer’s reunion.

During the press conference announcing plans for the recently-rained out Bicentennial celebration in Wilkes-Barre, Mayor Tom Leighton spotted a couple of the members standing in the crowd and jokingly made a reference to the band performing.

Well, Leighton’s joke re-ignited a spark for the band, and left them pondering the decision of reforming or not.

“Yeah, it was a pretty easy one,” Musto joked.

Keeping their three decade legacy alive, Abilene – Musto, Chuck Artim on guitar/vocals, Lee Calabro on bass, Joe Pacuska on banjo/fiddle/guitar/vocals, Mike Garzella on guitar/mandolin/vocals, Joe Andes on keyboards/guitars/vocals and Larry Zick on guitar/lead vocals – will be sticking to their mixture of bluegrass, country, Cajun and rock during their reunion tour, which finds them at the Northeast Fair on Friday, July 28.

Their eclectic style might seem a bit out of the ordinary for people who aren't familiar with the band, but when you look at the wild ride they took, you have to know something is right.

Packed clubs and colleges throughout eastern Pa. Sharing the stage with acts like Ricky Skaggs, the Charlie Daniels Band, and the Flying Burrito Brothers. Multiple record labels showing interest. Oh, and within their first year they were asked to open for a new pianist/singer playing the CYC in Scranton – some guy named Billy Joel.

If that weren't enough, by today's standards the band might have had a harder time starting out, with mostly a catalogue of cover material, but the band's energetic live shows still helped them become one of the biggest local bands of the last 30 years. Having such a rabid fan base could prove hard at times, as there was a period in 1979 where Abilene tried to incorporate originals into their show.

“We would actually play originals and not tell the crowd they were originals,” Musto said.

For veteran musician Chuck Artim, the newest member of the band and a band mate of Musto's since 1990 – most notably in Southbound – making the transition from seeing the band in the 70s and 80s to being the guitarist in the current lineup came easy.

“This is the first band, for me, in a long time where everyone is so professional,” he said. “For me, it was a real easy thing to come into.”

As far as the new lineup, the band recently played to a capacity crowd at Rhythms and Brews, where the only advertising that was done was by word of mouth. According to Musto, who said the show felt “great”, the packed room was a mix of young and old, but the band stuck to their format, only adding a couple of new songs.

Even though the band has only played a handful of shows so far, Musto feels the band might stick around a while longer, noting that there are already some bazaars looking into booking the band next summer. Just don't expect to see Abilene at one of their famous venues, the former Hearth Stone Pub in Dallas. “That was probably everyone's favorite,” Musto said.

“Everyone has a story about that place.”

“We're having such a good time, we're going to try to see what happens,” he added. “It just feels so good playing together again that we'd like to continue.”

Abilene will be doing two shows at the Northeast Fair on Friday, July 28. The first show should start around 8, followed by a break and the second show. General admission to the concert is included in Fair admission, and VIP seating will be available.

*And the beat goes on....*

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