

Spotlighting artists who reside on the fringes of country music



Cabinet is (from left) Todd Kopec, Jami Novak, Mickey Coviello, Pappy Biondo, Dylan Skursky and J.P. Biondo.

# CABINET

**FOR FANS OF:**  
Grisman & Garcia,  
Old Crow Medicine Show

**SOME OF THE MOST** inspired, honest art often comes from the most beleaguered cities, like Detroit or Youngstown, Ohio, that have fallen on hard times. Likewise, bluegrass group Cabinet has risen from the culm banks of former coal capital Scranton, Pa.

Made up of singing cousins J.P. Biondo and Pappy Biondo, on mandolin and banjo, respectively, guitarist Mickey Coviello, bassist Dylan Skursky, fiddler Todd Kopec and drummer Jami Novak, Cabinet draws liberally from the experiences and imagery of life in northeastern Pennsylvania.

“I wrote a song called ‘The Tower’ [for Cabinet’s 2008 self-titled debut album]. There’s this old reservoir that was supposed to supply drinking water to Scranton and it never worked for some reason. So there’s a big tower there and it’s just rotting away, rusting,” says J.P. “Northeastern Pennsylvania, especially in the winter, it gets dark and cold and kind of dreary and sad, but it’s still filled with places that can inspire you.”

Cabinet’s acoustic-based songs aren’t geographically exclusive, howev-

er. The group has amassed a dedicated fan base throughout the northeast corridor and recently marked their first performance in Nashville, at the eclectic Music City Roots showcase, alongside one of their heroes.

“We got to play on the same stage as Rhonda Vincent, the bluegrass queen herself. My heart was racing about 500 miles per hour for that,” says J.P. “That was one of the highlights of my young musical life.”

Surprisingly, the guys in Cabinet never set out to be a proper bluegrass band. They simply picked up banjos, mandolins and acoustic

guitars and played what felt right.

“When we first started playing, I hardly even knew what bluegrass was. I started listening to it and kind of playing it because Pappy loved it so much. I was a rock ‘n’ roller,” says J.P., who credits his cousin Pappy for turning him on to old-timey music. “All of us enjoy playing bluegrass, but it wouldn’t have turned into the bluegrass it did if Paps wasn’t involved. He loves it deep down to his core.”

J.P. cites artists as varied as Hank Williams, Crosby Stills & Nash, the Grateful Dead and, especially, the Dead’s Jerry Garcia’s work with mandolin ace David Grisman as the band’s influences. “It’s hard to not be influenced by that stuff. As soon as you start playing music, it’s in your face,” he says.

Like other contemporary string bands, Cabinet is hesitant to describe itself as bluegrass, given the strict definition of the genre upheld by traditionalists. Still, J.P. finds solidarity in Ricky Skaggs, who subscribes to a no-boundaries doctrine.

“I love Ricky for that. I know he does a lot with Bruce Hornsby, too, so he’s ready to go out and expand it,” says J.P., who settles on “Americana” to best sum up Cabinet.

“At a recent show we played in Port Chester, New York, someone called us ‘dreamy Americana,’” he says, laughing. “I don’t know how dreamy we are, but Americana works.”

—JOSEPH HUDAK

## ESSENTIAL TRACKS:

- “Susquehanna Breakdown” - from the live release *This Is Cabinet: Set II*
- “Heavy Rain” - from *Leap*
- “The Tower” - from *Cabinet*



For more information, visit [cabinetmusic.com](http://cabinetmusic.com).