

Power Play Detroit's high-energy performances grow massive following

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Local hard-rocking band Power Play



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With the Renaissance Center towering in the background and a sea of freaking-out fans cheering as far as their eyes could see, [Power Play Detroit](#) found its comfort zone while opening for .38 Special at the Rockin' on the Riverfront music festival last summer.

Fueled by its energetic playlists that some nights change on the fly, plus a tireless desire to please their fans, the four-member Livonia-based music machine has evolved into one of the hottest weekend cover bands in metro Detroit — or, in the case of the riverfront festival, smack dab in the heart of Detroit.

"We've been playing a long time and we've played before some big crowds, but that night in Detroit was amazing," said Michael Smith, the band's lead guitarist and founder. "After each song, there was a roar from the crowd, like 'AAAHHH!'. It was unbelievable."

"I can't tell you how many people came up to us when we were done and told us, 'You're better than .38 Special!'" lead singer April Hudson said. "Hearing that makes you feel good."

They work, too



Power Play Detroit opened for .38 Special during last summer's Rockin' the Riverfront music festival in Detroit. (Photo: POWER PLAY)

Unlike the members of .38 Special, Power Play Detroit's key players have day jobs, making their crazy-good stage presence even more impressive.

Just think how good Smith and Co. would be if they could actually rehearse more than a handful of times a month.

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Smith is the owner of [Classic Finish Carpentry](#) — a business that specializes in high-end woodworking — and Hudson oversees a 15-member grounds crew at Schoolcraft College.

"Some nights, if the weather is bad, I'll go from my stilettos to my steel-toes in just a few minutes," Hudson said with a smile. "If we get a bad storm, I tell Mike, 'Hey, I have to skip (stage) teardown and go to work.' One minute I'm singing, the next minute I'm at the controls of a bulldozer."

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Hudson said. "One night last year, I had to pull a guy who had had a little too much to drink off the stage three times — all during the same song. He finally passed out."

The band's five-string guitarist, Gary Kosten is an executive for a health care organization.

"We're up to about 40-50 gigs a year now — and we're asked to do a lot more, but we're limited because we all work other jobs," Smith said.

Behind-the-scenes stars

Power Play Detroit's top two off-stage superstars are Smith's wife Tama, who tirelessly handles the band's scheduling and publicity, and Bob Hudson, who makes sure his wife and the other onstage performers remain safe during their concerts.

"Once in a while, we'll have some overly-excited people who want to get on stage with the band," Bob

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The members of Power Play gather in their Livonia garage-studio practice space on Jan. 25. From left is guitarist Michael Smith, singer April Hudson, drummer Bob Olds, and bassist Gary Kosten. (Photo: John Heider | hometownlife.com)

Power Play Detroit been creating good vibrations throughout metro Detroit and beyond for close to 10 years, while performing at community festivals, weddings, birthday parties — you name it.

Three-time winners of WDIV-TV's "Vote for the Best" local band and last year's recipient of the poll's best cover band, Smith and his band mates know how to have a good time.

"We always play two super-long sets — an hour and a half to an hour and 45 minutes — so people associate the name of our band with power, high energy," said Hudson, whose husband Bob serves on the band's security detail. "Most bands will put out 40 songs a night; we'll do 50 to 55-ish."

"We keep our playlist fresh, too," Smith added. "Some cover bands will play the same songs every night. The last thing we want is to get stale, so we add new songs every time we play. I think we'd risk losing some of the fans we've pulled in if we didn't keep it fresh."

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Power Play bassist Gary Kosten warms up on a Fender jazz bass in the group's Livonia practice space. (Photo: John Heider | hometownlife.com)

The band's ever-growing fan base — it has close to 4,000 followers on its Facebook page — is off-the-charts rabid.



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"I'm a big audiophile, so I love to listen to a lot of live music," self-proclaimed groupie Eric Apollo said. "The worst thing that can happen when you're enjoying live music is when all the members of the band stop, but the music and lyrics keep going. That never happens at a Power Play Detroit performance, because it's the only band I know of that plays 100-percent live music."

"When you listen to Michael Smith play, it's the closest you're going to get to Jimmy Page. He's at that level. And April is amazing. Her rendition of Tina Turner is unbelievable."

"Michael Smith is one of the best lead guitarists I've ever seen," longtime fan Suzanne Thomas added. "When he does Prince's 'Purple Rain' — playing the guitar behind his head like Prince did — it blows me away."



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Power Play has some fun their studio on a Friday night. From left guitarist Michael Smith, drummer Bob Olds, singer April Hudson, and bassist Gary Kosten. (Photo: John Heider | hometownlife.com)

Smith, who many people may remember from his days as the leader of the band Undercover at Jamie's on 7 in Livonia, built a super-slick recording studio/office in the garage attached to his Livonia home so he could continue to jam even during the decade-long hiatus he took to spend more time with his three sons.

"Once my boys got older, I put a band together and we played once in a while," he said. "About 10 years ago, I decided to get out and start playing regularly again. It took a while to get the right people together, but once we did, we got better and better."

"We could be playing twice as much as we do now, but we want to keep it where it's still fun and not to the point that we're saying, 'Gosh, we have to play again tonight?' We took two weeks off after Christmas and we all missed it so much, it seemed like six months."

Oh, say can she sing!

Hudson, who would love to someday sing the national anthem at a professional sporting event in Detroit, overcame some early-career stage fright before evolving into a crowd-pleasing singer and tambourine player.

"In the beginning, I'd get very nervous," she said. "Those who know me well know I'm very open and nothing embarrasses me, but I'm a perfectionist and I wanted every song to be perfect. Mike is the one who got me over it. He never pushed me and he always keeps it fun."

"I used to tell people I sang for the money, but now I'm not playing for the money because I love performing so much."

The feeling is mutual when it comes to their fans' affection for them.

During January's Plymouth Ice Festival, more than 1,000 people had to be turned away from the band's performance hosted by E.G. Nick's as the 1,200-person tent that served as the venue was jam-packed full.

"You always hate to turn people away," Smith said, "but on the other hand, I guess that's a sign of success."

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