



Photo by Eric Donaldson / Promo Photo

by Michael P. Jones

It has been said, "Don't accept any substitutes," especially when it comes to performing danceable classic rock songs. This, clearly and simply, defines the foursome Probable Cause.

The band is comprised of a collection of great musicians that are armed with a treasure trove of classic rock 'n' roll cover tunes just waiting to be unveiled on stage. In fact, it seems that there are few songs, if any, that this foursome doesn't perform, just as long as they're danceable.

Probable Cause hails from Portland and has taken to the stage together as a band for about 16 years. They have steadily gained a reputation as a vintage rock 'n' roll dance band that'll get you on your feet. This band's continued presence, performing in clubs, corporate casuals, private parties, wedding receptions and other engagements around the Portland Metro area, on Mount Hood and all over the State of Oregon, has steadily grown.

The members of Probable Cause have performed professional music collectively for over 100 years. The band is comprised of four dynamic individuals including Dana Watson on drums; who has been a member for three years; Mark F. McDermott on lead guitar and vocals has played for four years; Phil Susan on bass and backup vocals, has played with the group for six months; and Greg Dawson on rhythm guitar and lead vocals is the founder and longest surviving member.

Dawson has performed professional music for over 35 years in Portland. It was in 1987, however, when he "decided

to get serious." He started Probable Cause and hasn't looked back.

The music of Probable Cause is said to capture "the best of one's *deja vu*." They perform the songs of the '60s and the '70s, reaching into the '80s and '90s.

However, they even perform some tunes from the 21st century. Through the years, the audiences of Probable Cause have come to represent a diversity of age groups. The band tends to perform for ages ranging from 25 to 50.

Dawson explains that the "key" to the success of Probable Cause today, is exactly what it was when the band first came together; "danceable classic rock. If it isn't danceable, we won't play it," explains Dawson. "If the song doesn't get your ass out of the chair, don't look for us to perform it. The music that we play actually makes people relax and just want to get up and dance and dance and dance. We just don't play songs that you can sit there and drink and listen. No, you have to get to your feet and head out to the dance floor."

The songlist of Probable Cause has grown immensely. However, every tune they perform, from the '40s to the 21st century, are those that they know their fans can enjoy.

After watching Probable Cause and the people who have enthusiastically taken to the dance floor, one can't help but to understand why the band has chosen the motto, "Dance-until-you-drop." When the music starts, their audience gets to their feet and just seems to stay there.

Up on stage, this foursome serves healthy doses of Jimi Hendrix, Chuck Berry, The Beatles, Stone Temple Pilots, Roy Orbison, Johnny Rivers, Van Halen, Stevie Ray Vaughan, The Rolling Stones, Van Morrison, The Commitments, Three Doors Down, Good Charlott, Conway Twitty, The Doobie Brothers, The Ventures, Santana and a whole lot more. "The traditional rock 'n' roll that we perform are songs people can't help but to dance to," says Dawson. "It's feel-good music. Songs people haven't heard at a club for 25 or more years, like *Love Potion Number 9*."

It is more than just finding the right songs to get people dancing that has made Probable Cause popular. Rather, it's the dynamics of the band members' interactions with one another on stage, as well as how they perform those special classic rock tunes. In short, it is high-energy, which transfers to their audiences.

Yet, Dawson explains that today's Probable Cause has another ingredient that has helped to define its special sound; their lead guitarist McDermott. He's a "Jersey guitar-player," meaning someone who knows how to not only play that instrument, but make it come

alive. "The best guitar players seem to come out of New Jersey," says Dawson matter-of-factly. "McDermott's the best or one of the best in the Portland area today."

Although Probable Cause is known for its danceable classic rock, their original tunes are also catching on with their audiences. Written mostly by McDermott, they are possessed with deep lyrics and complex melodies. The lead guitar work is generally intense. These are rich rock ballads that easily merge with the band's danceable classic rock. And, although there are four primary ones performed today, the fantastic reception they are receiving, clearly means more and more of these originals are going to end up on the songlist. It is anticipated that by the end of 2004, Probable Cause will bring out a CD of originals. These will be the songs of McDermott, who has been able to maintain the same requirements of the other tunes.

After 16 years in existence, the life-expectancy of Probable Cause is perhaps timeless. "We're gonna do this until I can't sing a note," explains Dawson. "I'm the last founding member and I'm the senior member of the band and I just can't see doing anything else."

Dawson explains that the main ingredient in the music that the band performs is strictly the enjoyment of the band members creating it and the enjoyment of the people dancing to it. That is the band's primary secret of its success.

"I just love playing music", says Dawson. "If I can get up on stage and look out and see that people are having fun, it doesn't get any better than that." (See *Bandstand* for schedule and the print ad for booking.)

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