

Louisa May Alcott in her book "Little Women" stated the following: "I'd rather take coffee than compliments just now" ... This statement leaves one wondering if perhaps she may have stated it otherwise had she known that one day coffee itself would not be enough... However... In this Frapachino, Cappuccino, Multi- Soy Latte', Espresso Shot Grande, blah, blah, blah, World, most of Us are like good ol' Louisa... We still prefer an Original Cup of some Bust-Ass... Wake-Up Juice... and as always..... We are here to serve...

*Welcome Angels and Gentle Beasts*

*to this edition of:*

# *∞ The Dragon Line ∞*

*Open Stages ... Open Doors*

*Chapter II: The House Blend*

It occurred to us as we were preparing for this edition of The DragonLine that we live in a microwave society. Everyone wants what they want and they all want it yesterday, or at the very least, ASAP-PDQ. By this reasoning it could be argued that we are also living in a kind of societal microwave. I mean, things are heating up faster than a Cougar lover locked in a Victoria's Secret Store... All over the world, it seems as if all things of moralistic value are being bombarded by an electromagnetic wave of abuse, disrespect, and utter discontent directed solely toward any and all that stand for any type of principled discipline.

Cascading over us like gamma radiation that will eventually alter our body chemistry, is an attitude of conformity and acceptance, and if we allow it to reach the pinnacle of its growth in regards to anger & outrage, then we assure ourselves that the startling metamorphosis will occur, and then we will have no choice but to embrace the coming tolerance, and by the acceptance of that which has then become the norm, we will lose all control of that hidden strength that all humans have, the individual element of invention that drives us to explore with passion that which we ourselves create... So... Before we get to that point, let us ask a question... Can we find a way to control raging spirit that dwells within us... Sure... As long as we get our morning Coffee... and at least one Friday night out a month...







For just as it is prevalent to us that we exercise our daily routine in proper order, so that we may facilitate our navigation throughout our day without choking the crap out of somebody, we must also unwind with a little bit of R&R when it comes to the weekend, and there is no better place to spend a relaxing Friday evening-*{especially on the 2<sup>nd</sup> one of each month}*, than *Mulligan's* in the South Hills of Pittsburgh.

For our second venture into the depths of the *Pittsburgh Music scene* we will tell of the 12<sup>th</sup> night of the second month in the year of our Lord 2016...and as always, we will attempt to bring to you the first person feel of an *Acoustic night of Original and Classic Rock* that surpasses any and all in the area at this time...

Upon our arrival at *Mulligan's* we are welcomed once again by our good friend and Door-Man *John*, and as we make our way to the bar for some much needed refreshments, our evening bartender *Joe* is hard at work and in great spirits, as *Jason Novak* warms up the Stage with pre-show sound checks and microphone tests.



*Jason*, as many of our readers know from our *January-2016 Review* plays *Lead and Rhythm Guitar* for *the Valley Kings*, and this once a month show is the brain child of himself and his good friend *Steve O'Toole*, both founding members of *The Munhall Music Academy*, a Music Store which specializes in offering Music Lessons & Instruction...and it is his Band, *the Valley Kings*, that we have chosen for our featured act of the month of February.

*Jason* has been strumming the strings for a little more than 30 years and in 1996 he was the winner of the *Pittsburgh Guitar Wars*. He has played guitar with the band *Stoney Kurtis* on and off since the late nineties, and he has been teaching guitar for about twenty years. *The Valley Kings* began as a weekend get-together Jam-Session with fellow musicians and former classmates *Guitarist/Vocalist Brian Losz*, *Bass Guitarist Al Simm* and *Drummer Mark Chamber*. They define themselves as a "Bucket List" band that was formed out of the urge that *Jason* and his friends had to play the songs that they themselves would most like to play, as opposed to being restricted to a certain format such as *Classic Rock*, *Country* or *Contemporary*...and the results are an altruistic Creative endeavor that gives its audience one hell of a performance. These gentlemen bring a passion to the songs that they play. A passion that is, sad to



say, not as common with other bands who choose to pursue a certain genre in order to facilitate a following. We had a chance to have a sit down with Jason and Brian before the show and we got the Low-Down on how the Open Stage came about...

Early last summer, Mulligan's Management approached The Munhall Music Academy, and in turn the band the *Valley Kings*, and asked them to run an open stage starting in *June* of 2015. At first, the stage was open to any and all musicians, however it became apparent with the onset of winter that bringing a bands full gear out in Pittsburgh weather would pose too much of a problem, so it was decided that it would be an Acoustic Open Stage, and so, the stage has continued once a month and Jason told us that it may be going back to a full band setup in the spring of 2016...{*We will keep you posted on these developments*}.

Jason told us that he believes that a successful open stage relies on variety and surprise, and to have a place like *Mulligan's* where musicians can come together with other musicians, as well as with friends and family, to showcase their talents is not only enjoyable and inspiring but it is also relaxing, refreshing and well overdue in view of all the turmoil and chaos of the world around us, and it is *Jason's* intention, along with *Munhall Music Academy* Co-owner *Steve O'Toole* to utilize this *Open Stage* as a networking opportunity in order to connect people who are in search of entertainment with the bands that can provide them with it.

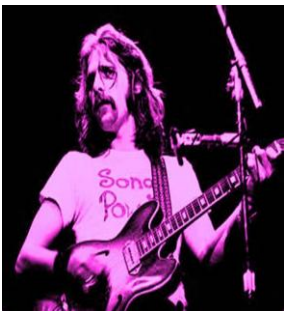
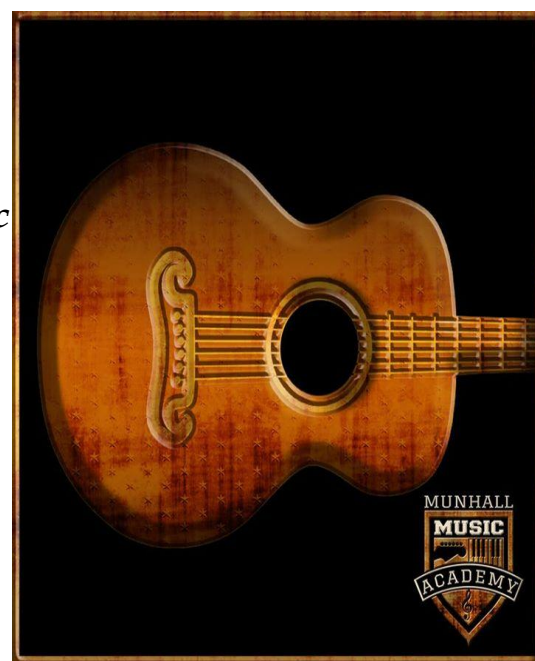
As we stated earlier, *Brian Losz* is the primary Vocalist for *The Valley Kings*, but that doesn't stop his friend Jason from challenging Brian to increase his musical vocabulary by encouraging him to venture into the realm of guitar solos, and one of Brian's favorite songs to solo on is *The Allman Brothers "Statesboro Blues"*. Brian and Jason agree that it is due to a lack of ego on the part of all of the members, and the cooperation and respect between them that makes the *Valley Kings* a successful and enjoyable endeavor from start to finish, and all of us here at *TheDragonLine* agree with that sentiment...They play *to* as well as *for* their audience... and as *William Shakespeare* stated and *Neil Peart* reiterated, "*All, the world is indeed a stage, and we are merely players... Performers and portrayers, each another's audience outside The gilded cage.*"





If you would like to learn more about the *Munhall Music Academy* or get more info on the *Open Stage* at *Mulligan's* you can visit their website by going to:  
<http://munhallmusicacademy.com/>.

*The Valley Kings* open up the night with a powerful version of *Stevie Ray Vaughn's "Pride and Joy"*, with *Brian* on Lead Vocals and Lead Guitar, *Al* on Bass and *Jason* keeping the Rhythm... They transition nicely into "*The Weight*", a song made famous by *The Band*. You may know it better by its parenthetical title, "*Take a load off, Fanny*". Showcasing an imaginative two part harmony, *Brian* and *Jason* encourage the audience "I want to hear everybody" as they sing out the well known Hook loud and strong. "*Take a load off Fanny... Take a load for free... Take a load off Fanny, and-and- and... you put the load-put the load... right on Me*" ... Next, *The Valley Kings* pay tribute to the late *Glenn Frey*, who recently passed away a few weeks ago due to complications from rheumatoid arthritis, acute ulcerative colitis, and pneumonia.



In true *Eagles* fashion with the Acoustic guitars strumming on "*Peaceful Easy Feeling*", *Jason* does this song justice with a beautifully intricate solo as *Al*

holds the low end firm on Rhythm Guitar. Then in a showcase of diversity, we see the progressive rock side of the *Valley Kings* with a precise solo intro by *Jason* into *Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here"*. The harmony in the choruses between *Jason* and *Brian* is an outstanding auditory blend and they top the Classic song off with more improv Lead by *Jason*. They end their set with the heavily rhythmic song by *Black Label Society, "Blessed Hell Ride"* with a bluesy lead by *Brian* who then introduces the next act, *Greg Iskat* to the stage.





*Greg Iskat* immediately grabs the audience's attention as a one man band, with a tambourine at his foot and a Lead right out *Jimmy Page's* playbook with *The Firm's "Satisfaction Guaranteed."* Strong vocals, and superb coordination between Rhythm and Lead Guitar while keeping the percussion with his left foot make for a real treat, both visually and auditorily. We are then treated to another tribute to the great *Glenn Frey* with *"You Belong to the City"*, *Greg* does the song justice as he sets his range between the soft and loud vocal dynamics of this *Classic 80's hit*. On *Stevie Ray Vaughn's "Cold*

*Shot"*, *Greg* showcases showmanship with a rhythmic lead and a tight call and response in true blues style. He then throws us for a loop by singing *Katy's Perry's "In another Life"* and makes the song his own by interlacing leads between strumming chords. He handles the new pop just as well as the classic rock. He engages the audience by encouraging them to sing along with *Bob Marley's "Don't worry"*. *Greg Iskat* is a strong performer with charisma and showmanship. Jason returns to the stage to announce the next act...*Al Lesutis*...

*Al* takes center stage and opens up with an original song Titled, {Oddly enough}, *"Open Up*, on which his warm vocal grows stronger leading into his second song, *"My Rock"* which features a catchy guitar hook with a very strong a-capella bridge that *states "When I need you, you help me to understand, where I am, where I've been, where I'm going..."* *Al's* third tune is quite relatable, *"Got to Be Crazy"* {to keep from going insane}. This mantra is familiar to all of us here at *TheDragonLine*; when the events of everyday life get to be unbearable, you have to go crazy sometimes to keep from going insane. The next song *"Still Me"* reveals the craftsmanship in *Al's* songwriting skills with a nice chord and melody change between verse and chorus. His last song *"Wake Up"* is a song is designed to do just that to the listener with its powerful chorus of *"Celebrate Life"*.





The song reminds all in attendance that each of us are an intricate part of the energy and atmosphere that is created when creative people gather together to support each other in their artistic undertakings.



*David and Lori G* take the stage next and decide to take us all on a little journey through the woods to meet of a wise old Sage in an Original work by *Lori* called *"Merlynz Opus"*. They then pay tribute to the Late *Brian Boone* with a song about the technological takeover of the world and the Big Brother threat that is cataloging our every move.

The song *"Calling' IBM"*, was written by *Brian* in the spring of 1995. He and *David* recorded the song in 2007, two years before *Brian's* passing. For their next song *David* and *Lori* invite us all to go along with them on the bus trip through hell with another of *Lori's* Original songs called *"Travelin' Greyhound Blues"* and they follow up on the other side of it with their final song an Original written by the two of them that asks the question...

*"What Do You Believe?"*

Next up we reacquaint with some characters that we met late in the evening on our January excursion to *Mulligan's*, *Jake* and *Jim*, whose upcoming release *"Naked on Broadway"* will feature fun original songs with strong lyrics and elements of California power pop. As they open with the original *"Days like This"* we get a feel for the smooth nature between the two of them, and as they move into a song titled *"California Baby"*, it becomes clear that we are witness to a great up and coming Acoustic Duo. Up next is a crowd favorite at *Mulligan's*, the song *"I Hate My Job*, which at one point states *"I could have been an astronaut or a rock star on TV... ..I hate my job..."*



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How many of us who grew up in the early days of MTV, {*Before all of the reality programming smeared itself across Our television screens like some kind of fungus designed to obscure our sense of individualism* }, can relate to that line...



...And what adult in the world today hasn't at some point throughout their course so far, hated their job and wanted to give it up in favor of a much more fun occupation. I myself have, and I have come to find that I enjoy this one immensely, However, I, probably like most of you in the 80's when MTV first came on the scene, knew that given the chance, I could do that. All of us at that time were given a front row seat to some really great entertainment... Hell... I never missed an episode of *MTV Unplugged*, But something happened in the nineties Man... It happened to MTV, and in turn it happened to society... It came on us like a shot... It hit us with its radioactive bursts and began to rework our chemical composition in favor of its matrix as it gave birth to shows such as "*The Real World*", "*MTV Cribs*", and "*Yo' MTV Raps*", which in

turn led us today to such *soon to be classics* as "*16 and Pregnant*", "*House of Food*" "*The Girl Code*", and the ever popular "*Teen Mom*"...

The great *Jack Nicholson* said it best in a line from the 1989 movie *Batman* with *Micheal Keaton*... "What kind of a world do we live in where a Man Dressed as a Bat gets all my press ... This town needs an enema" ... We can all share that sentiment today by asking...

"What kind of a world do *we* live in where the airing of all of our dirty laundry is televised twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, and we allow the results of which to govern our way of viewing reality" ... and if we do so we come to the same conclusion... "This World needs...an enema" ... The skewed tangent that has been birthed by this matrix is encircling the globe, Cooking our society in its juices of tolerance and conformity. The microwave is set on HIGH and we are being transformed into a culture that is strongly opposed to the one that we were intended to be when we started on this journey to Nationhood a little over 250 years ago... and it was in fashion with these thoughts that I was having while reliving those untimely blindly, 90's days, that *Jake and Jim*, for their last song of the



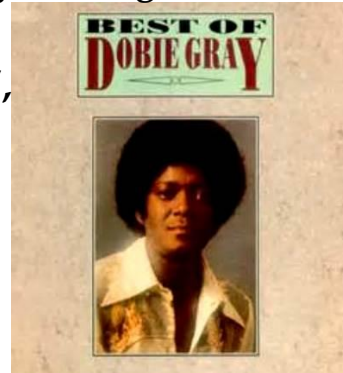


evening, chose to treat us all to a reworking of a 1996 hip hop hit Mark Morrison song "Return of Mack" parenthetically titled "{You Lied to Me}"...

Brian Losz re-enters the stage with Greg Iskat to play an emotionally moving rendition of Dobie Gray's "Drift away." Brian then continues as a solo artist with two originals, the first one, called "American Soldier", is a strong country type tune that Brian sings with a conviction and a passion reminiscent of an old Charlie Daniels or Hank Jr. ballad...

He then lightens the mood with a humorous original composition Titled "Phone Shoved up Your Ass", in which he pokes fun at people who are in love with their cell phones.

Ending his set with the Classic "Simple Man" by Lynnyrd Skynyrd is a delight as he treats the audience to a powerful Vocal display reminiscent of the original song...Brian is an in touch, creative entertainer who is not afraid to expand his horizons, and we wish him well in his career...If you would like to hear some of Brian's original compositions go to <http://bl-unplugged.com/>.





The next act of the night, *Dave Scarborough*, takes the stage and displays his grunge element with *Eddie Vedder's "Peace within Myself"* and *Pearl Jam's "Hearts and Thoughts."* Then he shows us the diversity of his voice with an acoustic version of *Lionel Richie's, "Stuck on You"* to commemorate Valentine's Day.



The Valentine's Day theme continues with *Jason Novak* re-entering the stage and making light of the holiday with the *Adam Sandler* song "*Somebody Kill Me*" from the 1998 movie "*The Wedding Singer*". He then introduces *Mark Chambers* to the stage.

*Mark Chambers* is an *Afghanistan War Veteran* and a *Pittsburgh Police Officer*. As the *Drummer* for *The Valley Kings* he holds down the beat, but now, Dressed up in a humorous tuxedo shirt, *Mark* shows a wide range of talent by singing and strumming guitar on a fun power pop tune from the band *Less than Jake*, titled "*The Brightest Bulb*

*has Burned Out*" parenthetically called "*I'm Feeling more dead than alive.*"

Keeping in that same vein, he busts out with a song by *Weezer* from 2009 called "*Put Me back together.*" *Mark* has a percussive style of playing and a versatile vocal range which he showcases in his next song as he sings about the growing pains of realization with the *Less than Jake* song "*The Rest of My Life.*" We are then treated to an acoustic version of the 1990 *Social Distortion* hit "*Ball and Chain*". This song has the hints of being an old blues ballad from the days when *Dobros* reigned supreme in the blues clubs of *New Orleans*. *Mark* then ends his set displaying his wide range of dynamics with an *Akon* tune called "*Beautiful.*"



*Mark Chambers, Jason Novak, and Brian Losz*, when together as the *Valley Kings*, an immensely entertaining spectacle, However it's a joy to see them each as solo performers as well. Each Man brings to the whole, his own reciprocity...No egos, No attitudes, No Monkey's with Big Red Asses, Just some Good Ol' - Down home - Freshly Brewed - Bust Ass - Wake Up Juice to get your motor runnin' ... Man... There ain't nothing like it...

The last artist of the night is *Jason Minkus*. His first song is a love song for Valentines weekend called *"You Have to be Crazy"*. For his second song, he chooses a song called *"Boxcar"*, which has within it melodies reminiscent of an old *Bob Dylan* folk tune. And to finish up, he throws a curve ball of humor into the mix with the 1985 *Bellamy Brothers* hit *"Old Hippy."* He then brings the night to a close with the Spiritually uplifting song *"Kingdom Come."*




*Jason Novak* returns to the stage and he is then joined onstage by *Greg Iskat* on Guitar and Vocals and a gentleman named *Todd* on a mean looking Five String Bass. They close out the night with the *John Cougar* hit *"Pink Houses"* ... ..

*"Ain't that America...for you and me, " "Ain't that America... something to see babe... "Ain't that America... The home of the Free... yea... yea yea... yea-yea-yea-yea... Little Pink Houses Babe ...for you and me...*



And so it is in America, Land of the Free...Home of the Brave, Where One can experience the Open Stages that Open Doors of Opportunity and expand to us All the versatility of our artistry that continues to develop the character of a Nation...

George Washington



No country upon earth ever had it more in its power to attain these blessings than United America. Wondrously strange, then, and much to be regretted indeed would it be, were we to neglect the means and to depart from the road which Providence has pointed us to so plainly; I cannot believe it will ever come to pass.



*Once again... our time dear friend... Is at an end... as this road bends...  
But fret not my Younglings... For we shall return... With another issue from  
which we may learn... and again we give a special Thank You...  
To The Munhall Music Academy... To the folks at Mulligan's and to all  
Dear Readers... That come to explore our strategy... To all of the Local  
Talent that shared... This vision long overdue... Thank you for allowing us  
to take part in these moments... God Bless... We will see you soon...*

*We again invite you to peruse our other endeavors into the field of  
Entertainment Review by going to: <https://thedragonline.wordpress.com/>  
... and with that we say goodnight to all of the Angels and Gentle Beasts,  
and we ask that you take a moment of pause before you go to sleep...*

*What lies Beyond the coming dawn is hidden and yet to Rise...*

*Remember My Younglings... ...Life is SpunJacked...*

*...Soak it up... ...Live it LIVE !!!*

# *The Dragon Line*



*Open Stages... Open Doors*

*Chapter II: The House Blend*