

SIGNAL VALLEY

Interviewed by *The Silver Age*, May 22, 2024

Signal Valley is the solo project of Dan Spizuco, a musician based in Mount Laurel, NJ. A multi-instrumentalist and self-described classic progressive rock nut, Spizuco has been performing as Signal Valley since 2020. Signal Valley's music, including their most recent album, *Watching Ice Melt*, is available on Bandcamp and Spotify. Follow @signalvalleymusic on Instagram for information about upcoming shows and releases.

ALICIA LOPEZ: Who is Signal Valley? Is it just you or you and other people?

SIGNAL VALLEY: Signal Valley is mainly just me. And live, basically just anyone else who I'm performing with.

A.L.: And so real name Dan... what's your last name?

S.V.: Spizuco.

A.L.: I've got your Instagram, @signalvalleymusic. I've got your Spotify. Are there other social media outlets you'd like us to link?

S.V.: I don't have any others.

A.L.: That's good. I looked and didn't see anything else but I wanted to be sure I wasn't missing something. How old are you?

S.V.: I'm 25.

A.L.: 25. A good age, I hope. I'm not there yet. Almost. Where are you based?

S.V.: I'm from Mount Laurel, New Jersey.

A.L.: Genre for your type of music? What would you say?

S.V.: Let's go with art rock and call it a day.

A.L.: Awesome. How long have you been playing music? Not necessarily Signal Valley, but just in general, how long have you been playing?

S.V.: That's a really good question. A long time. I don't know. Let's say since 2009. Let's say I've been doing this for 15 years.

A.L.: When did you do your first release as Signal Valley? Like when did you first write your first song?

S.V.: Well, this isn't my first project. I wrote music under a few names, but Signal Valley made its debut in late January 2020.

A.L.: Are you self taught? Are you musically trained? How'd you get into this?

S.V.: I had piano lessons as a kid; I'm self taught in just about everything else. I've always liked music. I'm a music person. I guess it kind of makes sense that I ended up writing my own songs. I kind of taught myself mixing. At least – well, I attempted mixing with an old MacBook and an old version of GarageBand. I went to Rowan University for music production so I could learn how to do it better.

COLE GABORIAULT: So you actually properly know what you're doing.

S.V.: I'd like to think.

C.G.: Yeah, I mean as much as anyone, I suppose.

A.L.: So you said you got piano lessons, taught yourself everything else – I've seen you play a couple things. What instruments do you play in total?

S.V.: Mostly, I would say I'm best at piano, and kind of keyboards and drums. I also sing, play guitar, bass, percussion. What else do I have? I have a mandolin I play sometimes.

A.L.: Got any musical influences you'd like to list?

S.V.: I would say I'm a classic progressive rock nut. There's a lot of Van der Graaf Generator. They're not as well known as some of their contemporaries, but they're really fucking good. I'm a big fan of Genesis and King Crimson as well. Who else do I like? I like XTC. XTC is a good band. King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard. I'm a fan of them as well. I'm going to throw in Gorillaz as well. I think that's a succinct list.

A.L.: How do you go about your music writing process?

S.V.: I tend to write the music first. Usually I'll have a musical idea, and I'll develop that, and then I'll sit on it for a bit, then the lyrics will come like a month and a half later or so. Not always the case, but it happens... I'd say that's what it tends to be.

C.G.: Do you usually write first on a particular instrument, or whatever is there?

S.V.: Generally piano or guitar.

A.L.: How do you approach writing lyrics?

S.V.: Well, I'll think of a topic of some kind, sometimes related to the music, sometimes not. And I say, "alright. I have this topic. What do I associate with this topic?" I'll think of things that I associate with that topic. I'll spread them out and say, "what words go with these words?" Like pairs, perhaps. Then before I know it, I have finished lyrics.

A.L.: Sounds like you're quite lucky or quite skilled in your lyrical discovery.

S.V.: I've been doing this for a long time.

A.L.: What are some of your favorite themes to explore in your music?

S.V.: I've been exploring a lot of environmental themes lately, I think. Generally, I – you know, it's never too hard to write about yourself, like stories. But my life is kind of boring. So there's been some scientific phenomena I've been writing about.

A.L.: Oh, like what?

S.V.: Have you heard of the Taos Hum?

A.L.: Um, no. Have you, Cole?

C.G.: No.

A.L.: I'll look it up. Let's see... "Unusual droning sound or buzzing. Low frequency humming, rumbling, or droning noise audible to many, but not all people." That's wild.

S.V.: Yeah, that's the kind of thing that really sat with me. It's like, not even everyone hears it. So, like, people go batshit nuts, people go insane over it. People, like, kill themselves over this.

A.L.: That's crazy. Wow. That's an awesome thing to do.

C.G.: Yeah, there's a wiki page for "The Hum." That's one of my favorite Wikipedia articles I've ever seen. It's just "The Hum."¹

A.L.: Okay, more on your environmental themes. Anything in particular? Are there favorite parts of that? What drew you to that theme?

S.V.: Part of it is that I listen to a lot of King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard, so you can't really escape it. I was reading – have you ever heard of the concept of overtourism?

C.G.: I think I have. That's just places being degraded by excessive tourist use, right?

S.V.: Yeah, I'm working on a song about that literally right now, as we speak.

A.L.: All right, so you're working on this song about overtourism. Are there other new projects you're working on now?

S.V.: I'm working on an album right now. I'm actually – this is going to be my first album where I'm trying to do it with a band. Admittedly, I've never had a band. It's something I kind of wish I'd done in college. But, let bygones be bygones. I'm working with a consistent group of musicians for the album. We're not all working in one place – we'll work our way to that if it goes well.

A.L.: Do you know roughly how many songs will be on it, or a general idea of the release date?

S.V.: For the one we're working on right now, either 12 or 13 songs. There's one song that's kind of up in the air right now. We'll see if that makes it to this album or if I'm going to save it for the next one. I don't know when it's going to come out. I'm shooting for, like, September, we'll see. Working with other people means these albums take a lot longer. Like, my last two, *Ridiculous Trinkets* and *Watching Ice Melt*, were just me. And those were done very quickly.

A.L.: Do you know what the album will be called in September, or not yet?

S.V.: Right now it has the name *Corpses of Castles*.

C.G.: That's a good phrase.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hum

S.V.: [unintelligible, about the album cover art] the outside of a Dead Mall in California, I think in California. My brother, who's also a musician – he moved to Philly only this year, I'll send you his stuff after this – he told me that he thinks my album covers are a bit lacking, which I think is fair. I don't have a lot of photo editing experience, so I downloaded Gimp, which is like Photoshop but free.²

C.G.: Yeah, I use that.

S.V.: Yeah, I just started messing around with stuff, because I was like, “you know what, maybe I should get better at this.” So I'm really proud of this album cover. A lot of bright colors.

A.L.: I'm looking forward to seeing it. *Corpses of Castles* – can we put that in our spotlight, or do you want to keep that secret?

S.V.: No, you can put that in. Because then if anyone knows about it, that means they read it.

A.L.: Okay. Let's see what else we got. So do you have – this is kind of a weird question. Do you have a real job, or are you just doing music?

S.V.: I currently am a part time music teacher at a music school. I'm currently job hunting for something full time as well.

A.L.: Apologies, condolences.

S.V.: Job hunting is the worst thing in the universe.

A.L.: Yeah, I know. Sadly, I'm full-time employed, which is a blessing in some ways, and in other ways, a large curse.

S.V.: On the one hand, you get paid. On the other hand, everything else.

A.L.: Exactly. Okay, you said you went to Rowan University for musical production, which is awesome. Was that undergrad?

S.V.: Yeah. No, I'm not doing grad school. I have some friends who are doing it; good for them. I don't think this is for me.

A.L.: Do you do any other types of art or have any other hobbies besides music?

² <https://www.gimp.org/downloads/>

S.V.: I play video games sometimes.

A.L.: Favorite video game?

S.V.: I'm a very simple gamer. I have a Switch. I'm very happy with it. I'll say I really enjoyed Super Mario Bros. Wonder. I think people who've got tired of the new Super Mario game will really, really get a kick out of it.

A.L.: Why are you a musician?

S.V.: I enjoy doing it a lot. It keeps me sane. It keeps me grounded. If I'm not like making music, or planning stuff, or stuff like that, I get very antsy.

A.L.: Cole, do you have any other questions?

C.G.: I think we answered all of them.

S.V.: I'm gonna ask *you* one question. What's your favorite solo Beatles album? Because I know you live in a house with Mike Auble. I'm sure he's got a bunch, so...

C.G.: I'm thinking – my knowledge of these is almost always through Michael. So I gotta remember the names of the albums that he's shown me different things from.

A.L.: Yeah, I definitely don't know any of them.

C.G.: I think I would have to go with the one – I cannot remember the name of it, but the George Harrison album where the album cover is – it might be in black and white, but I think it's like him in a field.

S.V.: *All Things Must Pass.*

C.G.: Yes, yes. Michael has shown me some excellent stuff from that album.