

VAGUE POSITIVITY

Interviewed by **The Silver Age**, August 11th, 2024

Vague Positivity is a Philadelphia-based alternative country and alternative rock band comprised of Andrew Rucker, Max Glazier, Mikey Siedell, and Silas Spooner. Founded when the members were students at University of the Arts, the band is working on two singles to be released soon. For updates on releases and shows, follow @vaguepositivity on Instagram and listen to Vague Positivity on Spotify and Bandcamp.

ALICIA LOPEZ: So then I guess, going around, name, age, where you're based, and what instruments you play.

SILAS SPOONER: I'll start us up. My name is Silas. I play the guitar and harmonica, and then I also sing. I, like the rest of the band, am based out of Philly, but I'm originally from New York.

ANDREW RUCKER: I'll go next, cause I'm in the same room. My name is Andrew. I also play guitar, and I'm based out of Philly as well, but I'm from just outside Philly. Bucks County.

MIKEY SIEDELL: Okay, I'll go. Alright, my name is Mikey. I play bass, and I sing. Also based out of Philly. I'm originally from South Jersey, but yeah, Philly.

MAX: I'm Max. I play drums. Also based out of Philly. I'm from right outside of Philly. Right now I'm on a highway in New Jersey.

MIKEY: Where in New Jersey?

MAX: Uhhh...

SECRET FIFTH MEMBER: I think we're in Central Jersey. We're close to like Metuchen.

MAX: Yeah, that's a can of worms. That's a can of worms. This is the secret fifth member of Vague Positivity.

ANDREW: Max's chauffeur.

SILAS: Max is actually being driven by the baby.

MIKEY: Yes, we do have a band mascot. It's a little cherub baby. It's golden with wings, and its name changes every show.

A.L.: Awesome. Well, if you have an idea of what the baby's name will be August 24th, please keep us updated.

MIKEY: We can think of one right now... let's go with Barry.

A.L.: Barry it is. So then what genre – what type of music would you say you all play?

SILAS: I would say probably mostly folk and alternative country. I think there are – we have songs that would branch more into, like, the alternative rock category. But at this point, the line is pretty blurred between the two of those. But I know a big influence for me is, like – and the band in general, is Wilco and that, like, hemisphere.

ANDREW: I would say it's all pre-jazz, country rock, new wave, indie.

SILAS: Yeah, I'd say somewhere in like the alternative country – alternative rock space.

COLE GABORIAULT: How'd you come up with your guys' name?

MIKEY: That's a good question, actually. I have no idea. How did you come up with the name, Silas?

SILAS: So previously, we – I think we were hanging out with our original bassist, who is Franny Lane, a very cool Philly musician. I think they currently have some music out on Spotify and everything, but they definitely play around. And at one point, we were playing with Max and – I forget – someone said “vague positivity.” And I'm fairly certain they were the one who was like, “that's a good name for the band.” And we just kind of stuck with it from there on out.

MAX: I'm pretty sure Franny was the one that said “vague positivity” originally.

SILAS: There you go.

A.L.: So, how long have you each been playing music individually and together as a band?

MIKEY: As a band, I think we've been playing for, like, probably a year and a half together, maybe a little bit longer.

SILAS: I recently found out that we just kind of decided Mikey was part of the band without ever really confirming that with them. We just sent them the schedule, I think.

MIKEY: Yep.

SILAS: But definitely for about a year and a half at this point.

ANDREW: I hopped in there somewhere. I don't really remember. Silas looked at me and said, "just play with us." And I was like, "okay." Oh, individually though. [to Silas] How long have you been playing music?

SILAS: I think I've probably been – I've been playing music for like six years, I would guess – like six years seriously. You know, I took piano as a kid and did not like piano as a kid. But I would say six or seven years – like, somewhere around 10th grade – was when I really got into it. And then I'd say I've been writing music for like five years.

ANDREW: And I've probably been playing – I've been playing guitar for about – probably around nine years, but I've been playing like in bands and stuff probably about seven to six years, probably, with all kinds of random stuff. What about you, Mikey?

MIKEY: I've been playing music kind of – I think since I was in like early elementary school. So a long time. I started with violin, then piano, and then bass, and I started learning guitar, like, within the past two years. But honestly, if you told any of my violin teachers that I was a musician, I think they'd laugh in your face. So, seriously, probably when I was like 14 or 15.

MAX: And I've been playing drums for, I guess, 12 years now. I started when I was 11. So 12 years, yeah.

A.L.: Yeah, wait, how old are you all?

MAX: I'm 23.

MIKEY: I'm 21.

SILAS: I'm also 23.

ANDREW: I'm also 23. Mikey's the young guy.

A.L.: So then are you guys self-taught or musically trained? Sounds like a bit of both.

MIKEY: Yeah.

ANDREW: I would say so, yeah.

A.L.: Did you guys go to college? If so, what for?

MIKEY: Yeah, we actually met through school. We all went to UArts.

ANDREW: Formerly known as UArts.

A.L.: How are you guys doing with that?

SILAS: Mikey's the only one still in school.

MIKEY: So I'm going to Drexel now, for – and then I'm graduating in June. It's been...wonderful. So great.

A.L.: I'm sorry about that.

MIKEY: Oh wait, but what did we all go for? Yeah. I went for MBET, which is like music industry pretty much. So did Silas.

ANDREW: And me and Max were jazz performance majors.

A.L.: And then how did you all meet at school? Just in a class, or?

MIKEY: Actually, I met Silas and Andrew at a restaurant randomly, called El Rey. I was there with my friends. Those guys were there. And then, literally, I just sat down in the middle of a conversation about their old roommate getting locked in the closet on acid. And I was like, "who are these people?"

ANDREW: Me and Silas have known each other for like four or five years.

SILAS: I decided I was going to UArts, and I was blessed with – I, like, commented on a post or something of my future roommate, Kyle, who is in Riko and Whaler. But I commented on, like, something Kyle had posted. And I ended up rooming with him and Andrew, and we have lived together for the vast majority of the time since. And then I think me and Max met in Ron Kerber's¹ class, Music Fundamentals. A really, really incredible music teacher and musician, and just a great guy in general. And I'm not sure what we bonded over. But we definitely met there.

C.G.: So then, moving towards your musical output, what are your influences? You mentioned one earlier, but generally speaking for each of you individually and as a group.

SILAS: I guess we can, like, move down the line maybe.



¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET2N1kpjXhg>

ANDREW: You're gonna get a kitchen sink of music.

MIKEY: And I think that's one of the things that makes us so great, is that we all, like, are very differently influenced, and we kind of bring something different to rehearsal and stuff, which I think is great.

SILAS: So, I'd say definitely, like, my biggest influence is I started writing when I heard *The Tree of Forgiveness* come out by John Prine. And I think Bob Dylan in general has probably been one of the most major influences for me. Jeff Tweedy has been – has taken over my life for quite some time. Yeah. I'd say that's a solid couple.

ANDREW: I could not – I have a hard time boiling down all the musical influences I have, but generally I think I went from liking metal music to prog rock to jazz fusion and kind of elsewhere. So probably, like, some of my biggest, like, writing and, like, you know, musical jamming influences are definitely, like, Frank Zappa and The Doors and probably someone like Bill Evans. I would say that's, like, a solid three. And the band Yes, as well. Those are probably, like, the big guys out there that shaped a lot of the stuff I do.

MIKEY: I started, like, my whole musical journey/awakening with Green Day's *American Idiot*. But I would say my biggest influences, especially for, like, my playing and writing are Paul McCartney, Chris Cornell of Soundgarden, Billy Joel for sure.

ANDREW: I called it. I was like, “they're gonna say Billy Joel.”

MIKEY: Yeah. What can I say? I love Billy Joel. He was the first concert I ever went to.

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

MAX: I think for this project and also in general, indie rock and indie folk, Bright Eyes and Wilco are probably the two bands that I think inform what I do in Vague Positivity the most. David Bowie is one I always come back to throughout my musical life. And then more recently, a lot of free jazz, a lot of avant-garde music... Sun Ra is probably the biggest one.

A.L.: So then what does your music writing process look like as a band?

MIKEY: I feel like as a band, we all kind of bring our own individual ideas, put them on the table, and then we all kind of build off of that and give our input and bring our style to whoever's idea.

MAX: Usually either Silas or Mikey, the main songwriters, will bring in ideas and then we'll do more improvisation over and kind of form it through jamming, especially like Andrew and I having the jazz background. Usually someone brings in an idea, and then we'll kind of just play around over it. Something pops out eventually.

ANDREW: These guys are the creatives, and me and Max are the editors. Editors-in-chief.

MIKEY: That's a great way to put that.

A.L.: Yeah, and I saw you all did a rendition of *The Avondale Mine Disaster*, which I guess was Max's grandfather's recording. You want to talk about how you all came up with that? Like, why you decided to do that?

MAX: Yeah. It's funny, I'm actually – my sibling and I are headed down to DC right now to see his archive in the Library of Congress. My great-grandfather, George Korson², was a folklorist who studied the folklore and the folk music of coal miners, originally in Pennsylvania and then all throughout the Appalachian region, in like the 40s and 50s. And that's something that's been a big inspiration to me, and I got pretty deep into listening to the field recordings that he took a couple years ago, and I've kind of always had the idea of doing some of my own arrangements of these traditional coal miner tunes and bringing them into a more modern indie-folk style. And, you know, Silas was kind of the perfect person to bring that to life since he's such a great authentic folk singer. It was originally actually for a class project at UArts where I had to just do something with that, and we kind of were all in the studio one night. I think I actually met Mikey in the studio that night...

MIKEY: Yeah, that's how I got roped into the band and joined the project.

MAX: Yeah and then you – we kind of forced you to join our band.

MIKEY: I was in the studio, like, mixing for another band, and these guys came in, and it was a classic, “I thought we had the studio.” “No, I thought *I* had the studio.” And then here we are.

A.L.: Okay, so then how do you guys approach writing lyrics specifically?

SILAS: I would say, thus far, either myself or Mikey has come with most of the lyrics worked out. We have – hopefully – a couple of songs coming soon, and I think the plan is to to expand out from there and include Andrew and Max – especially I know Max is some lyrics that we've been working with, so... but right now I would say, you know, we come with kind of a developed idea.

C.G.: What sort of themes do you guys typically explore, and is it different for each of you?

SILAS: Being tired.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Korson

MIKEY: There's a running thing that being tired is the general gist.

SILAS: I think – that's a good question. I don't know about Mikey... I definitely write mostly, like, experiential – like, I think a lot of my songwriting idols like Tom Waits and John Prine kind of – they prioritize, you know, inviting people in and then kind of letting their own experience inform how they're going to feel about, you know, your spoken experience and your lived experience. I think it's easy to get really hoity-toity if you try and, like – you know, I think I find it difficult to try and talk about higher ideas in the music itself. How about you Mikey?

MIKEY: Um, I was just trying to think of, like, adjectives... um... I don't think introspective is the right word, but definitely, I think, personal. I think Silas, honestly, you put it really well.

C.G.: So you said you guys are working on a couple songs, hopefully soon. Any more details on that? Any other stuff you guys are working on?

MIKEY: I think we just nailed down a time to get in the studio, right? We were gonna record earlier this summer, but unfortunately...

MAX: We're working on it. We were supposed to record on June 9th in the UArts studios, and then we found out on like June 2nd that UArts doesn't exist anymore. So that's a setback. So we're figuring it out.

A.L.: Are you guys hoping to put together, like, an EP, or release singles, or is there, like, a vision for how that's gonna go?

MIKEY: Um, that's a good question. We really need to nail down the details. We have an EP out on Spotify right now, actually, and it's looking like we're gonna have... I guess two singles, right?

SILAS: I think that's the plan so far, yeah. We've got two singles coming out. And then we do definitely play both of the songs that we are going to release soon, so at the at the upcoming show we'll talk a little bit more about those and probably have dates down.

ANDREW: And probably have a couple silly covers as well.

C.G.: We're sort of nearing the end of the set of questions, but before we hit the last big one, I want to just jump in with, like, what kinds of art – are there other kinds of art that you guys do other than music? What kinds of things do you like to do outside of music? Hobbies, interests generally?

ANDREW: Not to answer for him but he is – Silas is actively drawing.

SILAS: I have been, as a hobby, trying to learn how to draw and enjoying that. It's a skill I would have liked to have developed when I was younger, but I never did. I also am obsessed with the UFC and, like, martial arts in general. What about y'all?

ANDREW: I teach music. I teach guitar and piano and bass, and so I'm actively trying to get myself better at, like, drums and singing, which are instruments I'm not as qualified in. So, you know, it's still music, but, like, I'm always trying to learn more, you know?

MIKEY: I do a lot of visual art. Also an avid Real Housewives enjoyer. That is my guilty pleasure, and that takes up a lot of my time.

SILAS: I also think both me and Andrew are trying to work our way slowly more into composing for film, which – I don't know if that counts as a hobby, but that's definitely something that we are actively pursuing.

ANDREW: We try our best to do drag makeup as well.

MIKEY: Oh, wait! That's what I wanted to say. We play a lot of poker too.

ANDREW: Max, what you've been up to?

MAX: Oh, sorry, I keep cutting in and out. Yeah, I just play in, like, a ridiculous amount of bands and spend all my time playing drums.

A.L.: So then I guess the last main question that we have is just, why are you guys musicians? Why is this something that pulled you?

MIKEY: You know, I was actually thinking about this. So I – two nights ago, I went to the Green Day concert, and I was thinking about this because I saw Green Day right before I got to college, and it was, like, a crazy experience for me, and it made me kind of reflect about, like, why I got into music in the first place. And ever since I was like 15, I always wanted to – cause I was so influenced by music and, like, touched emotionally, like, it really helped me discover who I was, and – cause I went to Catholic school, and obviously that can be kind of hard if you are an artist, if you're queer, and music helped me. And my goal was always – I always wanted to just touch someone else with my music in the same way that music helped me.

ANDREW: Silas, why are you a musician?

SILAS: I think I've always really adored storytelling. I remember I used to go every weekend to the Bronx Zoo with my family to see LuAnn Adams³ tell, like – she would tell, like, traditional spoken word stories, like “how the turtle got its cracks” and stuff like that. And she would have, like, one of those, like – Max, I don't know, maybe you know what it would be called, but it's, like, the turtle thing that's made out of wood and, like –

MAX: Oh, a güiro.

SILAS: She would have one of those, and, like, I just remember – I can remember most of these stories to this day. I must have been like seven to nine years old and just being obsessed with them, and I think, as I've gotten older, it seems like the place that I have found my form of expression is the musical side, but I think it's still really the storytelling and the connecting with people through story that interests me the most. I think that's why live music and things like that have really attracted me.

ANDREW: I think one of the main reasons I ever got into music was, you know, I grew up in a musical family, like, a lot of theater and singing and all kinds of stuff, and one thing that kind of shifted for me was when I was around 13 years old I got really into punk rock. And I was supposed to be singing in this band with my friend, and he told me I should pick up some guitar and I had tried to play guitar in the past, and I was really bad at it, but I had this guitar teacher that I went to, and he was he's one of the best guitar players I know – he's the reason I went to school for music – and there was this one moment where I watched him play multiple genres at an insane level. I mean, he was joking and laughing; I could tell how much, like – how important this was to him, and I really liked the guy, and I think from that moment I was like, “I want to be this guy.” I want to feel the same feeling he's feeling, and I think that that has continuously driven me through a lot of this. Just, like, seeing one person experience music in a way that, like, I could tell it was the only thing they thought about, and I think I related to that a lot, so... and then that's kind of, just, like, what has brought me to where I am today.

MAX: This is pretty much the only thing I've ever really wanted to do. It's the greatest thing in the world. I think that music has really been kind of the primary way that I, like, connect with other people for the better half of my life. I kind of started playing drums because I had a friend when I was 10 years old that played guitar, and I wanted to jam with them, so I figured I'd pick up drums. And, you know, pretty much throughout my life, like, all of my best friends are people that I've met through playing music. Yeah, just the experiences and the relationships that music has brought me to and the act of playing music itself is just such a constant source of joy in my life. I think a lot about folk music playing in this band, and the way that folk music kind of, like, interacted with society at times when folk music was the only music, and, you know, people played music kind of recreationally – like, you would get together with your friends and your family and your neighbors and you would sing songs together, you know, and that was a way to build community and connect with people, and that's something that I think has kind of driven me, especially in Vague Positivity.

³ <https://luannadamsstoryteller.com/>