

Matthew Bargar

Working Between Artists and Technicians

by Noah Keteyian

Matthew Bargar moved to Portland because it was the kind of place where he wanted to work. He didn't come because there was a job waiting for him; he brought his work with him to a place that had many of the amenities of the metropolitan Boston he was leaving behind, amenities like walk-ability, cafes, and youthful energy. Maine also offered more of the small community feel he grew up with, not to mention natural beauty to spare.

Matthew Bargar is a multimedia developer who focuses on creating educational games for children. As a multimedia developer, he 'bridges the gap' between hard-core programmers and visual artists. In this work, Bargar says, "I need to be comfortable in both environments;

using software tools to create an environment in which artists' work and peoples' concepts of a product can come to life."

After an initial meeting with a software product producer, Bargar sits down at his computer and builds some of the basics. While he figures out how the program will function, an artist somewhere else designs the "look." Bargar takes the artist's drawings or music (or whatever work is relevant to a particular project) and makes it move and function. He takes the artist's renderings of buttons and makes those buttons work on screen, so that you or I never have to think about the difference between how it looks and how it works.

"It is important for me to be able to understand what an artist, a musician, or a producer had in mind and translate their concept to an actual, finished product." By tying the technical and the artistic into a cohesive whole, he helps to achieve a successful result for the entire development team, and ultimately, the person who uses the product.

Recently he worked on a product that helps teachers create spelling-related activities for their elementary school classes and also manage their lessons and keep class records. This software can store lessons, generate learning activities, and store students' grades.

Bargar grew up in Ithaca, New York, and says, "The arts were a constant part of my life." His father



is an artist who was regularly creating and displaying his work while Bargar's mother had a strong interest in craft. "My family also encouraged a free range of experimentation, from geology to drawing to gardening."

"I don't see the arts as separate or walled off, wholly separate from the rest of my education," he says. This view stems from an education in which, in addition to specific arts courses, the arts were also integrated into the curriculum. A typical class at his alternative public high school combined geometry with visual art, literature and writing. Students might draw figures using math as inspiration.

In high school, Bargar took a special interest in class in video production. As he learned the techniques and artistry of video filming, he found that the emerging field of "media arts" allowed him to combine this interest with computers. The pursuit of media arts led him to Hampshire College where,

continued on p. 4

Profiles: Arts Education and the Creative Economy

This profile of Matthew Bargar is the third in a series by MAAE that collects stories about the connections between arts education and Maine's Creative Economy. These profiles articulate the ways in which arts education brings people to communities as well as the connections between arts education and creative businesses and employment. We all use what we learn from the arts every day, often without even realizing it. This year in each issue of this journal, MAAE has profiled a person who contributes to Maine's economy by using creativity or other skills developed through arts education. We have drawn from throughout Maine's diverse economy. While those profiled may not be working purely as artists, arts education has contributed in some way to their professional or personal success. If you would like to suggest someone to be profiled (including yourself), email artseveryday@adelphia.net.

Matthew Bargar

continued from p. 3

thanks to the interdisciplinary approach fostered there, his interest in video grew to encompass film production and theory, as well as interactive multimedia development. This latter interest, which was encouraged by his college advisor, Rich Muller, led to “getting a great job creating fantastic multimedia content” right out of college at a start-up company in Boston.

Bargar has since parlayed his experience and industry connections into a successful freelance career. Because his work is based on his own creativity and ability, Bargar was able to choose where he wanted to live and work. He now works from a high-tech home studio in Portland, near Casco Bay.

Bargar has learned to work with inspiration whenever it strikes. “I can’t over-analyze my work and say, ‘Aha! At this time, I am using a skill I learned in my film theory class! Good thing I took this class or my work would suffer.’” But he says that the arts are so integrated into his life that there is no sense of flipping a switch to turn on the creative juices.

“I learned that it is very important to go your own way and explore and do what seems right. Certainly this is a value that my high school and college helped to instill in me, but I don’t think of it as an art-specific property. Being an individual and thinking for oneself is an attitude that I like to think pervades many more aspects of myself than simply my artistic side.”

The arts education opportunities afforded Bargar throughout his schooling led him on a path to a successful career. He has also flourished in that career thanks to having developed an intuitive understanding of the creative process. This allows him to work between artists and technicians to create a product and to make art whenever the muse strikes.

Noah Keteyian is a Director of Midcoast Magnet, a group that connects and attracts young, talented workers and creative entrepreneurs in Lincoln, Knox and Waldo Counties. He lives in a thriving coastal downtown with his wife and daughter.