

Music Alum Works as Composer for Video Game "Poptropica"

Jeff Heim '11 discusses how he landed this fascinating job.

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JEFF HEIM IN HIS DOVER, NH STUDIO

Jeff Heim '11 is a film and video game composer currently living in Dover, N.H. He earned his bachelor's degree in music theory from the University of New Hampshire and studied music composition under Andrew Boysen Jr., Christopher Kies, Michael Annicchiarico, and Lori Dobbins. He is the composer for the popular educational kids game [Poptropica](#), an online role-playing game owned by Pearson, PLC, the global publishing and education company.

Jeff writes:

"During my sophomore year at UNH in 2008, I invested in some sampled orchestral instruments and a midi sequencer for the purpose of writing faster and getting a better sound quality for my compositions. The new sampled instruments, which are pre-recorded by live musicians and programmed for use on the computer, also enabled me to begin uploading music online, allowing for more exposure. By the beginning of my junior year, I had uploaded about 30 short pieces of music on an entertainment and social media website (popular among indie game developers) called [Newgrounds](#), and for the first time in my life I began working with young developers on low-budget video games. At the start of my senior year I began composing music for independent game developer Bart Henderson on a game currently in development called "Underverse." Bart really pushed me to get a better sound, often rejecting music over and over again until it met his expectations.

"Last year in the fall of 2012, opportunity struck. Turns out that Bart was a programmer working for Pearson, and there was discussion about adding music and sound to Poptropica, which was released back in 2007 without sound because of overall lower computer capabilities. Bart had already put in a good word for me and timing could not have been better. A struggling composer at the time, working several low-paying retail jobs, I was thrilled. During the next few weeks I worked on a few demo tracks, which were very well-received, and I was offered the composing job. Since this past February I have written over 100 short music loops between 30 seconds and two minutes in length, each intended for a specific scene in the game. Of the expanding list of 35 existing islands, two islands have been released with music (including 24 Carrot Island and the more recent Virus Hunter Island), with many more to come."

[Poptropica](#) (screenshot at left) was created by Jeff Kinney, the author of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. The site is geared toward children ages 6 to 15. Players can go to different islands, compete in multiplayer games, and communicate with each other. Players are given several quests, called islands, which they are encouraged to complete. Poptropica was officially launched in September 2007 and it has grown to have over 500 million registered users as of October 19, 2012 (35 million of whom are in the 6-15 age group). Poptropica is free to play.

In his spare time, Jeff enjoys hiking, bicycling, surfing, traveling, playing trombone and piano, spending time with friends and family, and watching movies. He often finds new inspiration from hiking in the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains, spending time by the ocean, and from his experience studying abroad in Italy. You can listen to a few samples of the music for Poptropica on Soundcloud at <https://soundcloud.com/jeff-heim/sets/poptropica>, and you can find more of Jeff's music at <http://www.jeffheim.net/music>.

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