

NEWS RELEASE

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TODDLER CHA-CHAS HIS WAY INTO WILLIAMS COLLEGE

WILLIAMSTOWN, Mass.--Many surfers of the World Wide Web have already seen the strangely endearing spectacle known as the "Dancing Baby," a cha-cha-ing toddler created by 3-D computer animation. Many more have seen Baby Cha reminding characters of their ticking biological clocks on the Golden Globe-winning television show "Ally McBeal." But Williams College junior Matthew Sly of Oakland, Calif., has taken the Dancing Baby to a whole new level--the virtual jukebox.

"Last spring I did an independent study called 'Exploring the Web' and one of our first assignments was to look at the Dancing Baby. I was working on a virtual jukebox program, and so I decided to add the Dancing Baby to the page. The baby's not mine; I just copied it and put it on the page," says Sly.

The baby was created by Kinetix Corporation as a demo for their 3D Studio Max program. Although the baby isn't his, it has brought him unforeseen acclaim. Sly's Web site incorporating the Dancing Baby with musical accompaniment made the *New York Times Online* and the TV show *Public Eye*, and the site is now featured prominently in the Getty Museum's Digital Experience Exhibit.

"My friend Noah Peeters was at the Getty over Christmas break. He called me and told me that I wasn't just mentioned, but the site was projected right up onto the wall. It was a shock," says Sly. "I didn't realize the site would become such a big deal."

Sly adds that since "Ally McBeal" has been using Baby Cha as a symbol for the main character's ticking biological clock, people have been "hitting" his site even harder than they had before. "The week the first episode [of "Ally McBeal"] with the Dancing Baby in it aired, I got about 90,000 hits and 10-20 e-mails every day about it," he says.

Baby Cha, as reincarnated by Sly, wriggles, shakes, and does a mean cha-cha to music of the site visitor's choice. From Peter Gabriel to Bob Marley, the Dancing Baby grooves to any of 14 songs available on the jukebox. According to Sly, however, "The consensus seems to be that he dances best to James Brown's 'Sex Machine'."

While the Dancing Baby has brought Sly and his Web site to newspaper attention, Sly's computer skills have made him well-known and well-respected at Williams College. For his Winter Study Project "Exhibitionisms" with Williams College Museum of Art Director Nancy Mowll Mathews, Sly designed a software program that allowed the students in the course to pick and choose from photographs of artworks and arrange them in a virtual gallery, impossible with real works of art.

"The program works for the space I've created, which is based on the Williams College Museum of Art. I hope to expand the program to be more general, in CD-ROM format as a regular software program," says Sly. He is continuing to develop the software, monitoring it for quirks and bugs, as a model for possible use by other museums, such as New York's Museum of Modern Art.

In addition to his Winter Study work for Mathews, Sly also participated in the "Inventing New Media" class which developed a CD-ROM of tattoo artist Ed Hardy's life and work, is serving as a teaching assistant for the interdisciplinary, multimedia course "Cyberscapes," and has been a summer teacher in the Exploration Summer Program in Southboro for sixth and seventh graders, in which he has helped kids develop interactive fiction video games and Web magazines.

Although the connection between computers and art may not be obvious to some, to Matt Sly the connection is perfectly logical. He comments, "Pushing the envelope of computer art is a perfect intersection for me between my creative and mathematical skills."

Sly continues, "I spent a year at Stanford before transferring to Williams. The division [at Stanford] between 'techies' and 'fuzzies,' between engineering and liberal arts students, was really strict. That really bothered me. I am working, by fusing art with technology, to bridge that division whenever possible."

The Dancing Baby, along with Sly's resume, personal history, and assorted present and past projects in art and technology can be found in cyberspace at <http://wso.williams.edu/~msly>.

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News/Meghan Searles

Williams College is consistently ranked one of the nation's top liberal arts colleges. Founded in 1793, it is the second oldest institution of higher learning in Massachusetts. The college of 2,000 students is located in Williamstown, which has been called the best college town in America. You can visit the college in cyberspace at <http://www.williams.edu>