

## Eric Hofbauer jazzed about Hub's scene

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When Eric Hofbauer moved to Boston in 1996, he had no idea he'd end up smack in the middle of a jazz scene that he feels buzzes with as much creativity as any in the country.

Now he's helping to make it hum.

"Playing with all the different people I do, and in all the projects I'm involved in, keeps me inspired and essentially keeps me in town," the 34-year-old guitarist said.

Hofbauer showcases one of those projects, the Infrared Band, today at a free lunchtime performance at South Station, part of the Jazz in July series. Infrared will cover material from its new CD, "Myth Understanding," a lyrical romp across the wide open plains of free jazz.

The leader sprinkles his originals with a dash of wit - "A Drunk Monk" and "Molecular Mischief" are two of his titles - an attitude that has helped win Hofbauer fans within Boston's outside-the-mainstream jazz community.

"Eric loves every kind of jazz," Infrared Band drummer Miki Matsuki said. "I can be free when I play with him because of that. I came from a country (Japan) that has a good jazz tradition, but Boston has ended up being a really great city for me to play the music I want."

Matsuki calls the Somerville-based Hofbauer's music "kind of underground," but his efforts to boost the local scene have been anything but since he earned a post-graduate degree from New England Conservatory and went on to teach jazz at Emerson College and the University of Rhode Island.

The Rochester, N.Y., native started the Creative Nation Music label for his own music as well as that of others who share his twin beliefs that there's no point in rehashing the past and that the digital future is now.

"I'm interested in the individuality of the artists in their arranging or composing or improvising," he said about the likes of singer Rebecca Shrimpton, Blueprint Project members Jared Sims and Tyson Rogers, and guitarist Garrison Fewell, with whom he recently released a duo CD, "The Lady of Khartoum."

That outside-the box approach is why you'll find Hofbauer and kindred spirits in the growing number of smaller alternative spaces that have sprung up around town, including Outpost 186, the Mobius and GASP galleries, the Cambridge YMCA Theatre and the Lily Pad.

Youth is helping fuel this scene, but Hofbauer is quick to point out that risk-takers of all ages are keeping it hopping, including 71-year-old percussionist Nat Mugavero and 50-something reedman Charlie Kohlase.

"There was a time in my life when I thought I'd make my way to New York," Hofbauer said. "Once I got here, I decided that there are plenty of musicians who are doing great things, just as much if not more than in any city. I've played frequently in New York and Chicago, and it's not like it's any different there. Younger players sometimes have the misconception that they need to go to another city because that's where the scene is. I've found we've got a really exciting one here."

Eric Hofbauer and the Infrared Band, at South Station, today at 12:30 p.m. Free; [jazzinjulyboston.com](http://jazzinjulyboston.com).

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