

Mass High Tech: The Journal of New England Technology - September 25, 2006
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Funding effort by tech entrepreneurs is music to artists' ears

Mass High Tech: The Journal of New England Technology - September 22, 2006 by [Efrain Viscarolasaga](#) Mass High Tech
Christian Howes is not a technology executive. As a well-known jazz violinist, most of his exposure to technology revolves around recording equipment and amplification systems.

But as he plies his art at venues around the country (he was in New York City last week), a select group of New England technology executives are backing him up -- financially.

Howes is the first official "project" of Epistrophy LLC, a Boston-based investment group made up of music industry veterans and technology executives interested in music. The group is using the money its founders made in technology to help artists develop their craft and expand their reach. It includes Vin Bisceglia, chief executive of Boxborough's Broadbus Inc., which was recently acquired by Motorola Inc., and Mark Duffy, chief financial officer of JumpTap Inc., a maker of wireless search applications in Cambridge.

Music producer Keith Garde, representing the music industry, is also an investor in the group, whose members' contacts reach as far as famed Boston rock group Aerosmith.

Epistrophy -- named after the classic song by famed jazz pianist Thelonious Monk -- is less a fund than it is a "bank account," said Duffy. The group has initially set aside an amount in "the thousands," but says it would raise more if opportunities arose.

"When we find an interesting project, we pass the hat," said Duffy.

As the firm's first project, Howes represents a litmus test of sorts for how the group will operate in the future. No upstart, Howes is an accomplished musician, having played with some well-known names in the industry including Les Paul, Greg Osby, Randy Brecker, and Steve Turre's Sextet with Strings. He doesn't need lessons or even help with recording, having already released five albums.

What Epistrophy brings to an artist like Howes is funding for additional projects. The group, for example, has sent a videographer along with Howes to film his concert performances and capture his role as music teacher during lessons. When the footage is compiled, there may be a documentary or concert video available.

Extra financing is always a plus in the music industry, where producing even a low-quality album to give to friends can cost well into the thousands of dollars, while the creation of a radio-ready CD can cost into the hundreds of thousands after adding recording time, quality production staff, labeling and marketing, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

As investors, Epistrophy may take a few points from the sale of products like Howes' documentary, but that really isn't the main point, said Bisceglia, who originally started his college career as a music major before moving to business.

"It's a way for us to give back to the community, though it is also a way for us to live vicariously through (the musicians we deal with)," Bisceglia said.

Bisceglia and Duffy are also part of the Music Clubhouse, a program aimed at giving youths in the Lawrence area a place to learn, practice and even record music after school, at the Lawrence branch of the Merrimack Valley YMCA. The Music Clubhouse is sponsored by the Music and Youth Initiative, which was founded by another technology executive, Gary Eichhorn, and his wife, Joan. Eichhorn sits on the board of directors for Burlington-based Bluesocket Inc. and is the former CEO of Open Market Inc., also in Burlington.

Last spring, Duffy brought friend and associate Tom Hamilton, bass player for Aerosmith, to the Clubhouse to teach some lessons. Recently, the Music Clubhouse opened a new location in Allston.

Both Duffy and Bisceglia said Epistrophy is working with other musicians, but did not want to make those relationships public, nor the specifics of those projects. The idea, said Duffy, is to take each new project as its own entity, without preconceived requirements or expectations.

"Unlike everything else we do in our lives, it's very undisciplined," he said. "That's what makes it fun."

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