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Francois Houle - Alexander Hawkins - Harris Eisenstadt: You Have Options



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The late co-founder of the Vancouver Jazz Festival, Ken Pickering, recommended British pianist [Alexander Hawkins](#) to consummate this trio featuring Canadians: drummer [Harris Eisenstadt](#) (drums) and clarinetist [Francois Houle](#). And, based on the output of this exquisite studio set, it was a sound decision to align with the pianist, who for several years has performed with Eisenstadt in the Convergence Quartet.

Houle's melodious lines occasionally adopt flotation-like aspects, as the trio executes staggered asynchronous grooves with quaint shifts in strategy. But the clarinetist's whispering phraseology on "Clue" evolves into an ever-so-delicate tone poem, followed by a sultry theme, peppered with soft and colorful voicings that seemingly transform into a lullaby followed by a dream.

Various pieces contain bluesy inflections, lightly caressed by Hawkins' slow-rolling clusters and gradually rising plots. At times, the band gets a little rowdy and mix it up with intense dialogues with the disposition of individuals seeking answers to difficult questions. Yet "Le Concombre De Chicoutimi" is paced by Eisenstadt's oscillating percussion treatments and temperate support, along with Hawkins' middle-register ostinato and Houle's semi-classical modulations.

Piano great [Andrew Hill's](#) "Dusk" opens with Hawkins' eloquent and tantalizing passages, textured with Houle's tuneful notes, translucent soundscapes, and the drummer's mellow tom patterns combined with dainty cymbal hits. Eisenstadt helps drive home the probing motif, developed with a poignant delivery.

Other than the musicians' respective original compositions, they cover works by soprano sax luminary [Steve Lacy](#) and pioneering classical composer [Charles Ives](#). Hence, the pristine ambience and magnetism these musicians project are things of beauty. It's almost as if they were performing for an exalted entity in a heavenly music parlor.

Track Listing: Clue; Art; Run Riot; The Pitts; Prayer; Advice; Largo; You Have Options, I Have a Lawyer; Le Concombre de Chicoutimi; Dusk.

Personnel: Francois Houle: clarinet; Alexander Hawkins: piano; Harris Eistenstadt: drums.

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