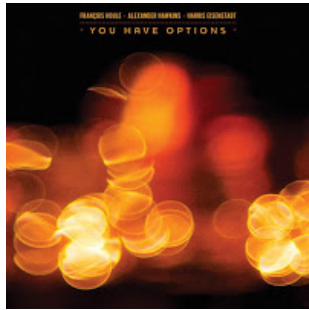


François Houle / Alexander Hawkins / Harris Eisenstadt - You Have Options (Songlines, 2018) ****

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By [Eyal Hareuveni](#)

Canadian, Vancouver-based clarinetist François Houle, fellow-Canadian, Brooklyn-based drummer Harris Eisenstadt and British, Oxford-based pianist Alexander Hawkins owe their meeting to the late artistic director of Vancouver Jazz Festival, Ken Pickering (1952-2018). Pickering always fostered international collaborations and he encouraged Houle to invite Eisenstadt to his quintet performance at the 2012 edition of the festival.

Later Pickering urged Houle to team with Hawkins. Houle had not heard of Hawkins, but trusted Pickering and invited Hawkins for a trio performance during the 2014 edition of the festival, again with Eisenstadt, who had worked before with Hawkins in the Convergence Quartet. The trio returned to the festival in 2016, and recorded *You Have Options* immediately afterwards. The album is dedicated to the generosity of Pickering's spirit and his singular vision.

Houle, Hawkins and Eisenstadt followed the wise advice of Pickering: trust the process, and employed their unselfish friendship for new, challenging experiences. The trio focuses on eclectic program of original pieces and

tunes of Steve Lacy, Andrew Hill and an improvisational version of Charles Ives piece rather than replicating the free-form format of their performances at the festival. All the pieces stress melodic themes but with no attempt to reach sentimental territories, and all highlight the subtle, lyrical and poetic language of the trio, delivered in a quiet and introspective interplay.

The trio's lyrical approach characterizes its interpretation of Lacy's nostalgic "Art". The trio interplay is truly poetic, as if meditating on Lacy's beautiful, fragmented theme, is totally different than recent interpretations of this piece by double bass master Barry Guy and partner, violinist Maya Homburger or by the Swedish-Norwegian super-group Atomic. Even Houle's "Run Riot", the most intense piece here, emphasizes the trio's intimate and emphatic interplay. Hawkins's bluesy "Advice" is the only piece that corresponds directly with jazz legacy, but from an ironic yet compassionate perspective. The improvisational arrangement of Ives "Largo" - originally written for violin, clarinet and piano and in the trio arrangement features Houle in the role of the violinist, highlights again the poetic sense of poise in this trio interplay. Eisenstadt's clever "You Have Options, I Have a Lawyer" demonstrates a layered pulse, gradually explored by the trio, together and individually. The cover of Hill's "Dusk" is true to the late pianist vision, blurring distinctions between contemporary, chamber music and modern jazz, or between the composed and improvised.

Pickering was right. This trio realizes his vision faithfully.