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BRANCH BRIMS WITH BRASH SPIRIT, WHILE WACRENIER TAPS INTO THE HEALING FORCE AT SONS D'HIVER

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Reportage from the suburbs of Paris



Jaimie Branch with Lester St Louis (photo by Luciano Rossetti © Phocus Agency)

Running for almost a month across January and February each year, the **Sons d'hiver** festival brings an uncompromising programme of challenging music to a handful of provincial theatres and arts centres in the suburbs of Paris – with an emphasis on presenting leftfield jazz and improv (the festival's name is a Francophone pun denoting both 'winter sounds' and 'diverse sounds'). Unless you live in Paris or are in a position to decamp there for a few weeks, it's unlikely you'll be able to see every show – but the quality is so high that even just selecting a couple of nights at random pays dividends.

I rock up on a Thursday night for a double-bill beginning with a solo set from keyboardist **John Medeski** (*sans* Martin and Wood). It doesn't get off to a particularly promising start, with Medeski (pictured below) engaging in a silly pantomime of silently pretending to strike the piano keys (presumably with some kind of comedic intent) before slotting into so-so Cecil Taylor-isms. But a couple of well-judged standards save the set: a tender interpretation of 'You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To' followed by a deep reading of the spiritual 'Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child'. For the second half of the session, he switches to Hammond organ, rinsing the filters to generate endlessly morphing textures and timbres. It's progger than prog – and highly entertaining.