

Sons D'Hiver

Various venues, Paris, France
In French, the festival's name Winter Sounds is a phonetic pun on Diverse Sounds – though, in this case, diversity simply means various forms of music originating in Black America. Across three weeks of concerts Sons D'Hiver presents blues, soul, gospel and a lot of jazz from heavyweights including Wadada Leo Smith and longtime Paris resident Archie Shepp playing Sidney Bechet, another adopted son of the City of Lights. Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the festival is confident enough to take risks. For one thing, most of the gigs take place in the southeastern suburbs where, I'm told, locals come out and see whatever's playing. At the same time, it's not afraid to book young, boundary blurring artists to support more established jazz names.

Friday night at Le Pôle Culturel arts centre in Alfortville is a case in point, with

the opening slot taken by New Zealander (and Paris resident) Aron Ottignon leading a piano trio with a difference. Joined by Brits Rodi Kirk on drums and electronics, and Sam Dubois playing steel drums and percussion, Ottignon sketches mellifluous, gamelan-like melodies that suggest a parrot-bright romanticism, like Gauguin reclining in an eternal Tahitian sunset. Sadly, when Kirk hunkers down into a clunky, foursquare rhythm with a booming bass sample attempting club vibe bacchanalia, it all becomes a little vacuous and fails to command attention. That's not an accusation that can easily be levelled at the main event – a hotly anticipated performance by The Roscoe Mitchell Sextet. While Mitchell, too, has enjoyed a long, sympatico relationship with Paris, stretching back to The Art Ensemble Of Chicago's extended sojourn in the late 1960s, he's also here as senior representative of a

pronounced Chicago connection running through this year's programming, which sees fellow AACM alumni Ernest Dawkins and Amina Claudia Myers also appearing at the festival. Tonight's show is billed as a tribute to John Coltrane, with whom Mitchell briefly worked in 1966, though it's tantalisingly unclear what this entails – and all the organisers can tell me is that it will focus on Trane's earlier work.

Double bassist Junius Paul leads the charge into a driving, up-tempo take on "Countdown" from 1960's *Giant Steps*, with Mitchell's soprano sax jackknifing into strange, acrid shapes that just about sit within the melody, while the string trio of violinist Mazz Swift, cellist Tomeka Reid and double bassist Silvia Bolognesi conjure chordal plucks and swooping arco swipes that occupy the space filled by Tommy Flanagan's piano on the original. The tune ends with the familiar, stately touchdown,

like a feather fluttering gently to earth and, from there on, it becomes much harder to identify source material as Mitchell pushes the ensemble further out into free jazz territory with an astonishing, elongated burst of circular breathing. Temporarily spent, he turns to face drummer Vincent Davis, a naturally quiet and sensitive player, whipping him up to more ferocious activity – and then simply stands, head bowed, back to the audience, as the group energy continues to build towards an endlessly deferred crescendo, and the strings take a collective solo like three panes of thin, sharp-edged glass laid on top of each other.

For some, it seems a little too much, as several seats are hurriedly vacated. For the majority who stay, however, it's a gripping tribute not just to John Coltrane's lasting legacy but to Roscoe Mitchell's uncompromising vision.

Daniel Spicer



Anat Ben-David (far left) and the cast of *Kairos*

Anat Ben-David

Kairos
Stanley Picker Gallery, London, UK

The *Kairos* of the title refers to sacred time, opportune time, the perfect moment. In a performance containing elements of opera, dance, music and multimedia projections, Anat Ben-David's cast of ten address this theme through eleven songs in three sections, in a futuristic, science fiction setting. The first section begins with cybernetic philosopher Sadie Plant and sombre discussions of the digital now. A middle segment swells with heroics in mythic time, before the performance closes with a section arranged around sung duos, and narrative arcs about love, loss and human connection. It's heady and ambitious stuff, but sprinkled with enough playful touches (such as a sad-clown trombonist,

a tender, bearded countertenor and the percussionist who goes to town tapping on a wooden tray) to avoid ponderousness.

Ben-David, as an artist, performer and longstanding member of Chicks On Speed, is well known for her solo multimedia performances. She combines an explosive hail of manifestos and ferocious proclamations, powerful, danceable beats, and clever electric cut-ups and animations in her ferocious cybernetic cabaret. It's no mean feat to extend such intensity to an ensemble, but she pulls it off with panache. Costumes for the five singers and five instrumentalists performing in the live cast are both elegant and theatrical in combat boots, tulle and pleated skirts, or pieces of tuxedos. One performer wears a collar wound on his chest in black makeup or marker. Imagine the cast of acrobats of *The Seventh*

Sea, as outfitted by Comme Des Garçons.

Characters play off one another with tenderness and empathy, whether parading through the space in a solemn procession and chanting together in the first act, or whirling around a piano in one sequence that calls to mind a raucous Klezmer romp around a bonfire, old world and pagan in its energy, in the second.

The staging, too, makes the most of the split level gallery: "Icaros", the first song of the middle segment, sees the cast of singers on a balcony, swinging back and forth as waves and sky are projected onto the balcony's outer wall, facing the audience. The cast lean over the ledge and hang on columns and roofbeams as if they are masts. The effect casts them as the sailors and peasants of Breugel's painting, going about their business as Icarus falls

from the sky, his wings having melted from a flight too close to the sun.

The standout moment of the second third of the performance is given over to Bishi, who sings from the perspective of the ancient "Methusalach", with its chorus "Do you rewind?" in a video that is projected onto a wall while the live cast sit on a pew below, silently, themselves becoming the audience in a tableau of support. (And also, perhaps, suggesting that observers and rememberers are necessary to make sense of any epic – or indeed any work of art.) The cybernetic philosophising and video augmented quests give way to the passionate duets of the third segment, the endless now of computer memory and the mythic now of the epic, seen and sung and felt by lovers and beloved.

Emily Bick