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EXPERIMENTAL Attitudes

Pianists Matthew Shipp, Vijay Iyer and Jason Moran share at least one thing in common: They've each forged a fiercely individual approach to creating jazz.

By Ted Panken

Photos by Jimmy Katz

You couldn't find three more stylistically diverse pianists," Matthew Shipp said during a freewheeling conversation between himself, Vijay Iyer and Jason Moran last December at Manhattan's Jazz Gallery. On the other hand, Shipp elaborated, this triumvirate, among the most visible speculative improvisers to emerge on the 88s over the past decade, "touch on similar modern themes, but deal with them in completely different ways; between us, we offer a good sense of how fertile modern jazz piano can be."

Ensclosed in the back office, the pianists

related their disparate histories. Two common threads emerged. Entering their teens, each heard and felt a deep connection to Thelonious Monk, whose singular tonal personality communicated the possibility of finding a voice on their instrument. Ultimately, such imperatives of self-invention—creating an artistic response to the question, "Who am I?"—compelled them to move to New York.

The quick back-story:

Raised in Wilmington, Del., and once an aspirant church organist, Shipp made the jump to New York in 1984, and joined

