

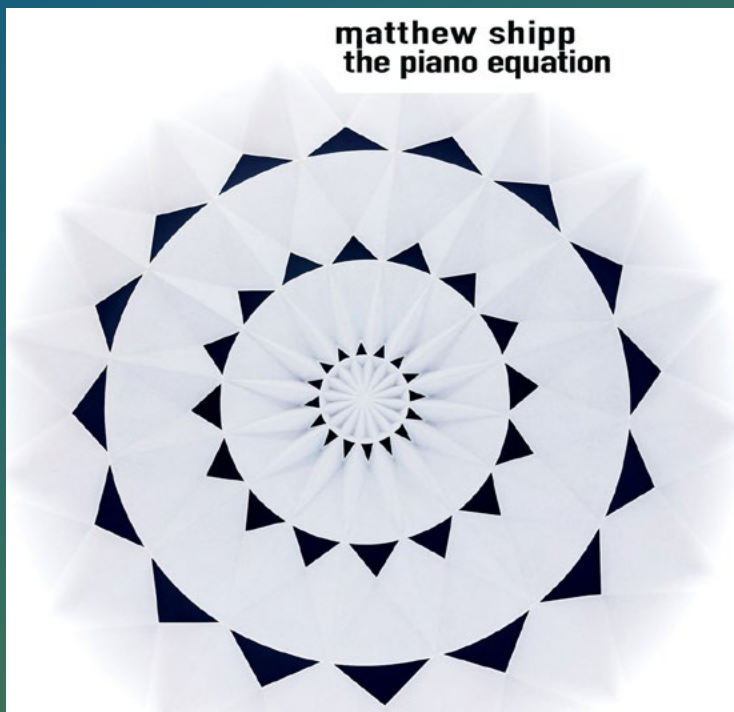
IAS

INSTITUTE FOR  
ADVANCED STUDY  
ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

Edward T. Cone Concert Series  
2020–2021

# Matthew Shipp

## *The Piano Equation*



Saturday, November 21 2020 8:00 p.m. ET  
Virtual Concert, Live from Wolfensohn Hall



Institute for Advanced Study  
2020–2021 Edward T. Cone Concert Series  
Saturday, November 21, 2020 8:00 p.m. ET

# MATTHEW SHIPP

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## PROGRAM

**THE PIANO EQUATION**

Matthew Shipp

*Funding for this concert is provided by **the Edward T. Cone Endowment** and  
a grant from **the PNC Foundation**.*

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

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David Lang writes: Over the summer I asked Matthew Shipp if he would like to play for us the music from his recent recording *The Piano Equation*. This album came out towards the beginning of the pandemic and I found myself listening to it over and over—its unhurried wandering and unpredictable changes of pace and energy made it a welcome, thoughtful accompaniment to the lockdown. My official COVID soundtrack.

Matthew agreed, but he warned me that what he would play might not sound too much like what I had heard on the recording. This music is improvised, which means that it is different every time.

And of course, that is one of the reasons why I am interested in sharing it on our season. We have been grouping concerts under the broad heading of ‘virtuosity’—how music can be designed so that we watch and hear a musical problem being overcome, right before our eyes and ears. Improvisation is a virtuosity all its own, a virtuosity of imagination, of flexibility, of spontaneity.

Most global musical cultures and traditions have always depended on musicians to improvise, but the word ‘improvise’ itself is relatively recent in the history of European classical music, which is an interesting story. Until the early 19th century the relationship between written and spontaneous music was fluid, not set. For centuries before 1800, musicians playing the bass lines of ensemble pieces only received the barest of instructions from composers and were expected to elaborate and fill in the rest, extemporaneously. Musicians playing or singing melodies knew that solo lines in a written piece of music were supposed to be ornamented, to be decorated with filigree added on the spot, and performers were compared to each other based on the individuality of their ornamentations. The idea of harmony itself in Western music began as simple descriptions of the kinds of notes a medieval monk might add, *ad lib*, to Gregorian chant.

Then this all changed. By the late 18th and early 19th century European classical music was well on its way to reducing the opportunities for musicians to add things on their own. A combination of factors led

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to spontaneity for performers going out of style, but one is certainly a change in the stature of the professional composer. As the careers of composers internationalized, the relationship between ‘composers’ and ‘performers’ changed, with composers giving ever more complicated and restrictive instructions to performers, limiting drastically the musical space where the individuality of each performer could be expressed.

It says something about how far European classical music strayed from the spontaneity in its roots that Italians had to invent a new term at the start of the 19th century to describe a practice that musicians had already been engaged in for millennia.

The term that was invented was ‘improvvisare’—to make something whose end is not provided, not foreseen.

The tension between the written and the improvised is present in all our lives. Especially in this time of COVID, we feel the difference between what we can plan and what actually happens, between what we can control and what we can’t. In a way we are all improvising now, moving forward to an end that is not provided, that is not foreseen.

Thanks to Matthew Shipp for showing us the way.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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With his unique and recognizable style, pianist Matthew Shipp worked and recorded vigorously from the late '80s onward, creating music in which free jazz and modern classical intertwined. He first became well known in the early '90s as the pianist in the David S. Ware Quartet, and soon began leading his own dates—most often including Ware bandmate and leading bassist William Parker—and recording a number of duets with a variety of musicians, from the legendary Roscoe Mitchell to violinist Mat Maneri, the latter another musician who began making a name for himself in the '90s.

Through his range of live and recorded performances and unswerving individual development, Shipp has come to be regarded as a prolific and respected voice in creative music into the new millennium.

Born on December 7th, 1960 and raised in Wilmington, Delaware, he grew up around '50s jazz recordings. He began playing piano at the young age of 5, and decided to focus on jazz by the time he was 12. He played on a Fender Rhodes in rock bands while privately devouring recordings by a variety of jazz players. His first mentor was a man in his hometown named Sunyata, who was enthusiastic about a variety of subjects in addition to music. Shipp later studied music theory and improvisation under Clifford Brown's teacher Robert "Boisey" Lawrey, as well as classical piano and bass clarinet for the school band. After one year at the University of Delaware, Shipp left and took lessons with Dennis Sandole for a short time, after which he attended the New England Conservatory of Music for two years.

Shipp moved to New York City in 1984 and soon met bassist William Parker, among others. Both were playing with tenor saxophonist Ware by 1989. Meanwhile, Shipp had debuted as a recording artist in a duo with alto player Rob Brown on *Sonic Explorations*, recorded in November 1987 and February 1988. Shipp married singer Delia Scaife around 1990. He then went on to lead his own trio with Parker

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and drummers Whit Dickey and Susie Ibarra. Shipp has led dates for a number of labels, including FMP, No More, Eremite, Thirsty Ear, and *Silkheart*. In 2000, he began acting as curator for *Thirsty Ear's Blue Series*. This excellent series hosted a number of Shipp's own recordings, as well as the recordings of William Parker, Tim Berne, Roy Campbell, Craig Taborn, Spring Heel Jack and Mat Maneri. The following year saw the release of *Nu Bop*, an exploration into traditional jazz, followed closely by its 2003 counterpart, *Equilibrium*. In 2004, Shipp released *Harmony and Abyss*, a meditation on repetitive melodic and harmonic structures. One arrived in January 2006 and *Piano Vortex* followed a year later.

*4D4D*, featuring Shipp on solo piano, was released by Thirsty Ear early in 2010. It was one of several recordings from the pianist in the initial years of the 21st century, which included a two-disc solo piano recital entitled *Creation Out of Nothing: Live in Moscow* on the *SoLyd Records* imprint and the stellar trio set *Night Logic*, with Joe Morris and former Sun Ra saxophonist Marshall Allen, on the *Rogue Art* label. Shipp kept up the pace in 2011, kicking off the year with the double-CD offering *Art of the Improviser*, which showcased him in two different live settings: one solo and one in a trio with bassist Michael Bisio and drummer Whit Dickey. In the spring he released a duet recording with alto saxophonist Darius Jones entitled *Cosmic Lieder* on the AUM Fidelity label. In 2012, he re-formed the trio with Bisio and Dickey for Elastic Aspects. Shipp entered into a prolific collaboration with saxophonist Ivo Perelman for a slew of projects that year, and 2013 included a duet, trios, and quartets with various personnel, all issued by Leo Records. Titles included *The Gift*, *The Clairvoyant*, *The Foreign Legion*, *A Violent Dose of Anything*, *Enigma*, *The Art of the Duet, Vol. 1*, *The Edge*, and *Serendipity*. In the fall of 2013, Shipp released the solo piano offering *Piano Sutras for Thirsty Ear*, as well as a retrospective for the label entitled *Greatest Hits* and a duet offering with saxophonist John Butcher, *Fataka 2*.

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Shipp maintained a prolific release and touring pace in 2014. First to appear was the trio date *The Roots of Things* in February with Dickey and Bisio, followed by two more sets in various ensembles with Perelman. The first, entitled *The Other Edge*, was issued in March and featured the pianist's quartet backing the saxophonist, while the second, released the same month, was *Book of Sound*, a collaborative recording between Perelman, Shipp, and Parker. *Symbol Systems*, a solo piano outing, appeared in May from Lithuania's No Business label, while *The Darkseid Recital*, a second chapter in Jones' and Shipp's *Cosmic Lieder*, was released in August by AUM Fidelity, followed by the solo piano offering *I've Been to Many Places* on Thirsty Ear in September. That year, the French Rogue Art label issued no less than four Shipp-led dates compiled from several years of performances. They included the solo Piano (2008); a duet album with Evan Parker entitled *Rex, Wrecks & XXX* (2013); *Right Hemisphere* with Brown, Dickey and Morris (2008), and *Declared Enemy: Salute to the 100001 Stars: A Tribute to Jean Genet* with Parker, Gerald Cleaver, Sabir Mateen, and Denis Lavant (2006).

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# INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

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## ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

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