

Jonathan Hepfer

DMA Percussion Recital (N° 1)
Saturday, January 12, 2013, 8pm
University of California – San Diego
CPMC Concert Hall

BREVE STORIA DELLA MANO

Claus-Steffen MAHNKOPF (b. 1962) *Trema I** (1994) [2']

Pierluigi BILLONE (b. 1960) *Mani.Matta* (2008) [20']

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Claus-Steffen MAHNKOPF *Trema II** (1994) [2']

Pierluigi BILLONE *Mani.Mono*** (2007) [22']

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Claus-Steffen MAHNKOPF *Trema III** (1994) [2']

Pierluigi BILLONE *Mani.De Leonardis*** (2004) [18']

* US premiere
** West Coast premiere

Mani.Matta (for Marimba, Log Drums, Woodblock and Opera Gong)



Conical Intersect and *Splitting* – Gordon Matta-Clark

In my first lesson as a student in Germany, my teacher Bernhard Wulff told me that the basic objective of art was the transformation of non-precious materials into precious materials. Thus, alchemy. In *Mani.Matta*, Pierluigi Billone pays homage to the American artist Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978), whose work often blurred the line between vandalism and art. Matta-Clark, the son of two artists, Anne Clark and the famed Chilean Surrealist, Roberto Matta, was a trained architect who used his expertise to produce artistic works he termed “Anarchitecture.” Works such as *Conical Intersect* and *Office Baroque* entailed cutting massive holes into buildings slated for demolition. In *Splitting*, Matta-Clark used a chainsaw to cut a narrow slit down the middle of a typical suburban home in the United States. While the cutting up of buildings is commonly considered to be a destructive activity, Matta-Clark’s work shifts the paradigm: he does not *destroy* or *vandalize*. Rather, in the tradition of alchemists and the practitioners of *détournement*, he *transforms* these buildings and makes *art*.

Similarly, one could describe Pierluigi Billone as a sonic alchemist. When listening to virtually any of his pieces, one discovers sounds hidden within objects that truly seem to be the work of a magician. What at first appears destructive is simply a crucial step in his transformation of a sounding object. *Mani.Matta* is Billone’s attempt to re-examine a well-known percussion instrument: the marimba. In Billone’s conception, the marimba is not a wooden-textured piano (as it is so often employed), but rather simply a sonic object that is to be critically investigated.

The question of the instrumentation (the lowest three octaves of the marimba and bass log drums) had left me curious for a long time until I became familiar with Matta-Clark’s work. The tongues cut into log drums and the tiny spaces between marimba bars recall the narrow slit seen in *Splitting*. The terracing of the log drum and woodblock “staircase” is its own form of architecture. The violent, tumultuous horizontal and vertical glissandi across all of the instruments connote violence and perhaps nihilism. However, destruction is not the objective just as Matta-Clark *revealed* new ways to view old buildings, Billone *reveals* the hidden voices trapped in this wooden behemoth. Paracelsus lives.

Mani.Mono (for Spring Drum and Metal Plate)



Mono Lake, California

Franz Kafka once wrote “in your struggle against the world, bet on the world.” In *Mani.Mono*, Pierluigi Billone makes a wager: in a society in which flow of information increases every day and attention spans decrease, is it possible to write an extended piece for an instrument as humble as a children’s toy? Through my correspondence with Billone, I have observed a deep sense of respect for people and cultures that prefer a slower, spiritually purer way of life than what we experience in urban Western society. Films such as Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* and *Nostalghia*, in which the protagonists reject the cycle of ambition and fame for a mystical world, come to mind when thinking of Billone.

Mani.Mono is named after California’s Mono Lake, a body of water sacred to Native Americans, which is known today for its tufa towers. These once-submerged formations (which look like open-air Limestone stalagmites) became visible after years of diverting water from the lake for the growing needs of Los Angeles starting in 1941.

The piece is dedicated to the Native American mystic war general Tashunka Witko, who is better known in the annals of history as “Crazy Horse.” In the book *Black Elk Speaks*, Black Elk states, “Crazy Horse dreamed and went into the world where there is nothing but the spirits of all things. That is the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world [...]It was this vision that gave him his great power, for when he went into a fight, he had only to think of that world to be in it again, so that he could go through anything and not be hurt.”

Further, Billone writes, “How can I say? He is a kind of meditative warrior, he possesses knowledge and he fights, and he has a deep social consciousness (in the most easy terms: if there is not enough to eat in the camp, he simply renounces to eat, to let other people survive). Both things cannot be separated.

Mono Lake is a sacred place to the Yosemite-Mono Lake Paiutes people. In fact the title and the dedication are a kind of respectful homage to this culture and its values. It is very simple.

In the film *Stalker* by A. Tarkovsky (a kind of spiritual journey inside a closed place which is at the same time our interiority) comes out again this name, when the “writer,” unable to understand the deep spirituality and the form of faith of the Stalker, calls him “Crazy horse,” to offend him (in this case Crazy Horse = someone who fights and works against a stronger enemy with complete consciousness that he will lose the fight”).

Mani de Leonardis (for Automobile Suspension Coils and Glass)



Senza and *Essere mare I* – Federico de Leonardis

[The following is my excerpted and re-ordered version of Pierluigi Billone's own program notes for Mani. De Leonardis...] – J.h.

It is generally assumed that people have two hands. For me there are and have only ever been a very few who truly have as many hands as Mother Nature gives us. Giacometti was one of them: the right one extended, modeled, and formed; the left scratched, removed and hollowed out. The head sat directly between them.

Musicians? Well, some of them have two right hands and a head, but they are rare, very rare. There are others who have just a head but no hands at all, or only two right hands without head. I prefer the former. [...]

Seeing is my profession – or more precisely, seeing and causing to see. [...] Just like that, with my hands deep in my pockets...

Federico De Leonardis - Breve storia della mano (Brief history of the hand)

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Sound is not an acoustic definition but stands for a living and open presence/connection, and it means contact, revelation, and belonging (that has always been the case).

I know the object I have before me hardly at all (for several years now the hanging spring has been used as a special kind of triangle, struck with a metal bar), and I do not know how else it could be played. While experimenting with it I happened to place the spring on the floor above a hollow space that functioned as a resonance chamber, and then I heard especially rich and deep vibrations. It sounded very much like certain electronic sound transformations (e.g. in *Répons* by Pierre Boulez). The encounter was by chance, though not the attentive listening.

The auto springs facilitate a person-thing-sound relationship that starts at zero: a particular opportunity to form knowledge (something New Music has, of course, often sought...). The spring can only produce a sound if I am in a position to hear it, that is, if my ability and sensitivity, the mobility of my attention, my ability to recognize something or produce connections, my freedom to welcome that which is unfamiliar to me – if all these things work in me inseparably and do not inhibit one other.

Over the years I have learned that everything reveals itself only gradually and according to its own rules, and this almost never happens as an answer to a direct question; hence every stage of this approach has its own necessity, and nothing is trivial. I cleaned all the auto springs of rust and encrustations, as one would an archeological find, in order to achieve the familiarity that results from hand contact with the form, with the "rhythm" of the form, the distances and differences between the rings, the possible irregularities, perhaps only to discover whether this metal has an inner life.

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Hand means a complete and undivided working together of all faculties in contact with things.

With each fortissimo beat that is muted with the hand, the expenditure of energy in the action of muting that counteracts the energy and absorbs it, is itself extremely strong, as is demonstrated by the blisters on the left hand, by the muscle cramps. This ancient activity and gesture truly belongs to the working of iron. The hand that holds the auto spring extends the impulse in the body that initiated it. When I muffle and let go, there is a moment in which the energy of the vibration is present both in the spring and in my arm, and this energy, which comes from the right hand, runs through the spring, continues in the left hand, and becomes a flow that leads to the next beat. It is a closed circuit of energy, so to speak. After several beats I vibrate with the spring and have become part of the instrument. I am playing, but it is not all: I am also sounding, and in fact I am playing on my own body.

From every spring, undefined sound constellations, fragments of movement, rough sketches of progress gradually come to light that are caused by the work of a single hand or of two together, using one or more springs; from the first points of contact evolve actual sound-manipulation spaces (this even, created thus and only occurring thus); they are unique and completely open. This kind of slow work of the *listening hand* establishes and reveals the initial meaning of the differences, of the distances, of the connections, of the strangeness, and so on.

While doing its work the *listening hand* also encounters, discovers, and passes through the traces of possible routes and lines of connection, like the streets, bridges, and squares of a city that do not yet exist. It follows them like a *foot* would (undivided working together of all faculties). As it becomes familiar with the measures and distances of the place, it patiently seeks and finds a way. It will be the task of the *writing hand* to continue this beginning, intensifying and disseminating it without losing its freshness. It should turn every step into a discovery that occurs at each moment, and it should itself also persisting in discovering.

There is a rapid and extremely mobile "intelligence of the hand" that facilitates and leads to every further connection to the things. This intelligence is, however, spoiled if one begins to intervene because one thinks the hands are merely neutral mechanical processes like pliers that are simply available to brain activity. Sometimes the intelligence of the hand is overshadowed because one no longer trusts one's own hand (or never did).

It is precisely this division into hands and head (practice and thinking) and the whole rigid ideology that goes with it that justifies our culture's conception of listening.

The title's reference to Federico De Leonardis, an Italian visual artist who has made voluntary

limitations on the role of his hands one pillar of his reflections and work, thereby becomes a friendly (and mutual) provocation, and not just an homage.

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The question remains open (one that is for some perhaps just a disturbing "background noise"): Does all this touch upon my existence? And how deeply?

Of course, and how! though one also has to believe in it for it is always my own hand, when I strike the spring, when I write, when I turn out the light, when I set off the mechanism of a "smart" bomb that always kills in the wrong place, or that of a "cowardly" bomb on a bus or train, when I stroke a face, or squeeze a hand, when I page through this booklet. ♦

THANK YOU: Josef Kucera. Jessica Flores. Neal "Hephaestus" Bociek*. Christian Dierstein. Adam Weisman. Tom de Cock. Big Alex Lipowski. Håkon Stene. Pierluigi Billone. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf. Il Maestro, Federico De Leonardis. Justin Urcis. Jan Williams. Michael Rosen. Bernhard Wulff. Steven Schick (un musicista rarissimo). Will & Cindy. and Alice, whose head has always, like that of Giacometti, sat directly between her two hands.

* Who fashioned the beautiful log drums for *Mani.Matta*, and worked other metallic miracles.

Jonathan Hepfer (b. 1983) is a percussionist specializing in contemporary chamber and solo repertoire. He began playing classical music at age 17 after discovering the music and philosophy of John Cage. Subsequently, Jonathan attended Oberlin Conservatory, UC - San Diego and the Musikhochschule Freiburg (with the support of a two-year DAAD fellowship), where he studied with Michael Rosen, Steven Schick and Bernhard Wulff respectively. He is currently a doctoral student at UC - San Diego.

Jonathan is a member of the percussion ensemble Red Fish Blue Fish and has collaborated with ensembles such as Ensemble SurPlus, Asamisimasa, Signal, ICE and the Slee Sinfonietta. Since 2006, with Alice Teyssier, he has co-directed Echoi, a chamber ensemble devoted primarily to performing the works of scarcely-known and emerging composers.

As a soloist and chamber musician, Jonathan performs regularly on the Monday Evening Concert series in Los Angeles, where he has collaborated with soloists like Alexei Lubimov, Natalia Pschenitschnikova, Mario Caroli and Nicholas Isherwood. On this series, he has taken part in the US premieres of major works by S. Sciarrino, G. Kurtág, R. Riehm, A. Clementi, K. Lang, A. Rabinovitch-Barakovsky and S. Steen-Andersen.

Some noteworthy recent adventures have included tours of Vietnam, Indonesia, Mongolia and the Ukraine with the Freiburger Schlagzeugensemble, performances of P. Boulez' *Le Marteau sans Maître* in Switzerland, Germany, Japan, Israel and New York, the US Premiere of J. Dillon's epic cycle *Nine Rivers* at Columbia University's Miller Theater, a single-day performance of M. Feldman's three trios for flute, piano and percussion (organized by Jan Williams) and an interview project collecting the oral histories of the first generation of eminent European percussion soloists (e.g. C. Caskel, S. Gualda, J.P. Drouet, G. Sylvestre, M. Ben-Omar). The near future contains performances at the University of Huddersfield in England, the Stone in New York and a Rolf Riehm portrait concert in Los Angeles.