**Pierluigi Billone** (1960—)

Aaron Cassidy

Photo: <http://www.pierluigibillone.com/images/pierluigi_billone-th.jpg>

Pierluigi Billone is an Italian composer. Following early studies in guitar and composition in Sienna and Milan, he later studied with Salvatore Sciarrino before moving to Germany, where he was awarded a number of grants and residencies (Schloss Solitude Stuttgart, Heinrich-Strobel Foundation, Akademie der Künst Berlin, etc.) and studied with Helmut Lachenmann at the Musikhochschule Stuttgart before moving to Vienna.

Billone’s work is principally characterised by a raw, earthy, primeval soundworld and by a ritualistic, pre-linguistic approach to musical material and form. His compositions tend toward limited, focused, elemental sounds, and despite a certain sense of physicality and violence are often quite spare and sparse in texture. Unlike many of his colleagues of his generation, Billone’s work has focused almost exclusively on acoustic instruments (with the exception of a handful of works which include electric guitar and some early works requiring amplification) and is comprised predominately of solo and chamber music. Despite working with what are reasonably traditional instrumental resources, Billone creates an otherworldly music full of gritty, scraping, noisy and twisted sounds. He has developed numerous innovative performance techniques in close collaboration with performers – particularly for bassoon (*Legno.Edre* (2004), *Legno.Stele* (2004)), viola (*ITI KE MI* (1995)), percussion (*Mani.Mono* (2007) for spring drum, *Mani.De Leonardis* (2004) for four automobile springs and glass), and voice (*ME.A.AN* (1994), *Kosmoi.Fragmente* (2008), *Quatro Alberi* (2011), etc.) – including dense multiphonics, various fractured and splintered timbres, and high, piercing squeals.

The voice has played a central role in much of Billone’s music. There are a number of works for voice (or voices) and ensemble, frequently focusing on the low register and comprised principally of textless vocalizations which evoke ritualistic incantations, with rasping, guttural, grinding groans and wailing, whistling and shrieking. Additionally, many of his works for ensemble include a range of vocalizations by instrumentalists. *Mani.Giacometti* (2000) for string trio, for example, includes singing from the players – almost always a quiet murmuring, and again almost always as low in register as possible, as seen in the example below (the symbol for vocalizations is the small drawing of a face )– and short text fragments derived from Sumerian cuneiform.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Billone talks frequently of ‘revelation’ in his writing and his lectures.[[2]](#footnote-2) The communication that appears in his works is extraordinarily *primary* – the listener is in a constant state of confrontation with a raw expressivity that creates a shockingly exposed, vulnerable musical surface. And the vocal writing is textless, in a similar sense, because text and language is ‘other’. It is secondary. It refers to something outside of itself. Billone’s materials, however, are resonance, friction, tension, and the raw musculature of the body itself, and it is only through this approach that, Billone says, ‘the usual cultural limits of a body making sound … could and should be overcome’.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**References and further reading**

<http://www.pierluigibillone.com/en/biography/>

<http://www.evs-musikstiftung.ch/en/composers-prizes/composers-prize-winners-2010/pierluigi-billone/>

[www.pierluigibillone.com/en/texts/harvard\_cambridge\_lecture\_2010.html](http://www.pierluigibillone.com/en/texts/harvard_cambridge_lecture_2010.html)

<http://www.pierluigibillone.com/en/videos/>

**List of works**

<http://www.pierluigibillone.com/en/compositions/?order=asc>

**Discography**

**1+1=1** (2006)   
for 2 bass clarinets  
Petra Stump, Heinz-Peter Linshalm  
Kairos 0012602 KAI

**ITI KE MI** (1995)   
**ME A AN** (1994)  
Frank Wörner, voice  
Barbara Maurer, violaEnsemble Recherche / Peter Hirsch  
Stradivarius 33716

**ME A AN** (1994)  
Frank Wörner, voice  
Ensemble Phoenix / Jürg Henneberger  
United Phoenix Records

**Bocca Kosmoi** (2007)  
Alda Caiello, voice  
Andreas Eberle, trombone  
RSO-Wien / Stefan Asbury  
Col legno 20282

**Mani. Giacometti** (2000)   
Ensemble Recherche  
Donaueschingen 2000 documentation-CD  
Col legno WWE 2020

**Mani.Long** (2001)   
Klangforum Wien / Johannes Kalitzke  
Durian 019-2

**TA** (2005)  
Klangforum Wien / Johannes Kalitzke  
Witten 2005 documentation-CD  
WD 2005

**Legno.Edre II. EDRE** (2003)  
Johannes Schwarz, bassoon  
EMSACD-002

**Mani. De Leonardis** (2004)  
Christian Dierstein, percussion  
Donaueschingen 2004 documentation-CD  
Col legno WWE 20245

1. Friedemann Kawohl, liner notes to *Pierluigi Billone: Me A An – Iti Ke Mi*. Stradivarius, STR 33716 (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.pierluigibillone.com/en/texts/harvard_cambridge_lecture_2010.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)