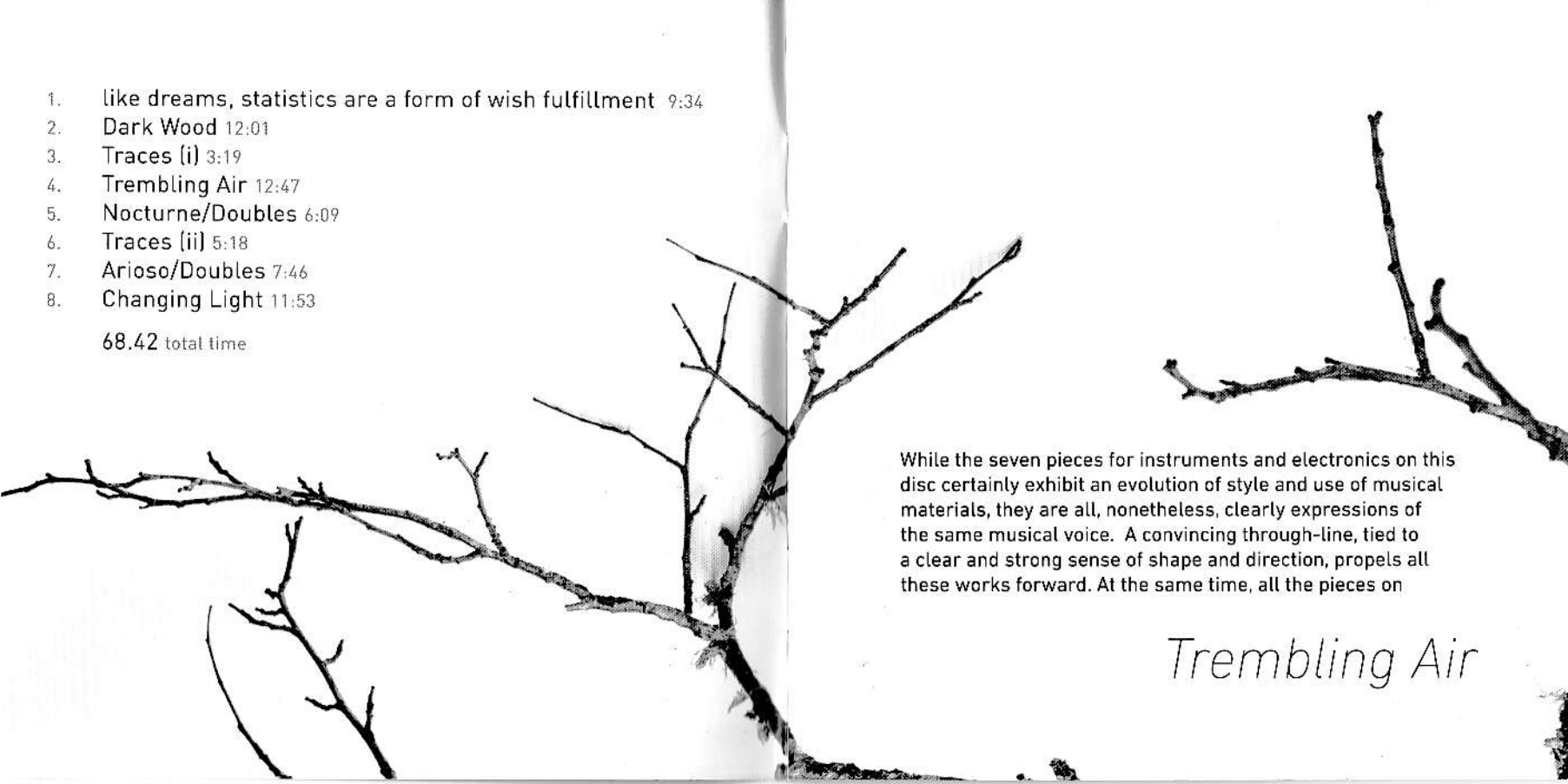
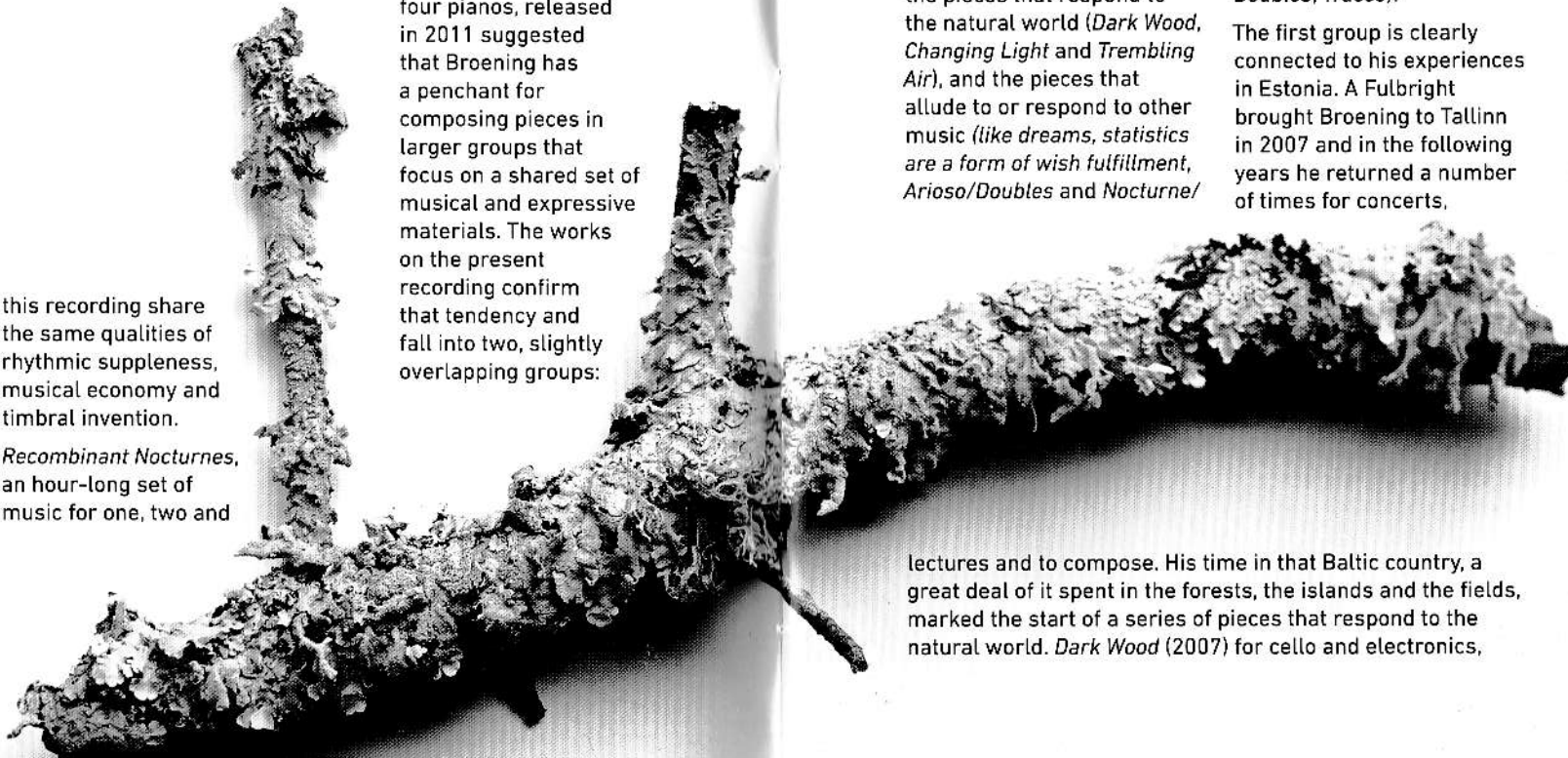


- 
1. like dreams, statistics are a form of wish fulfillment 9:34
 2. Dark Wood 12:01
 3. Traces (i) 3:19
 4. Trembling Air 12:47
 5. Nocturne/Doubles 6:09
 6. Traces (ii) 5:18
 7. Arioso/Doubles 7:46
 8. Changing Light 11:53
- 68.42 total time

While the seven pieces for instruments and electronics on this disc certainly exhibit an evolution of style and use of musical materials, they are all, nonetheless, clearly expressions of the same musical voice. A convincing through-line, tied to a clear and strong sense of shape and direction, propels all these works forward. At the same time, all the pieces on

Trembling Air



this recording share the same qualities of rhythmic suppleness, musical economy and timbral invention.

Recombinant Nocturnes, an hour-long set of music for one, two and

four pianos, released in 2011 suggested that Broening has a penchant for composing pieces in larger groups that focus on a shared set of musical and expressive materials. The works on the present recording confirm that tendency and fall into two, slightly overlapping groups:

the pieces that respond to the natural world (*Dark Wood*, *Changing Light* and *Trembling Air*), and the pieces that allude to or respond to other music (*like dreams, statistics are a form of wish fulfillment, Arioso/Doubles* and *Nocturne/*

Doubles, Traces).

The first group is clearly connected to his experiences in Estonia. A Fulbright brought Broening to Tallinn in 2007 and in the following years he returned a number of times for concerts,

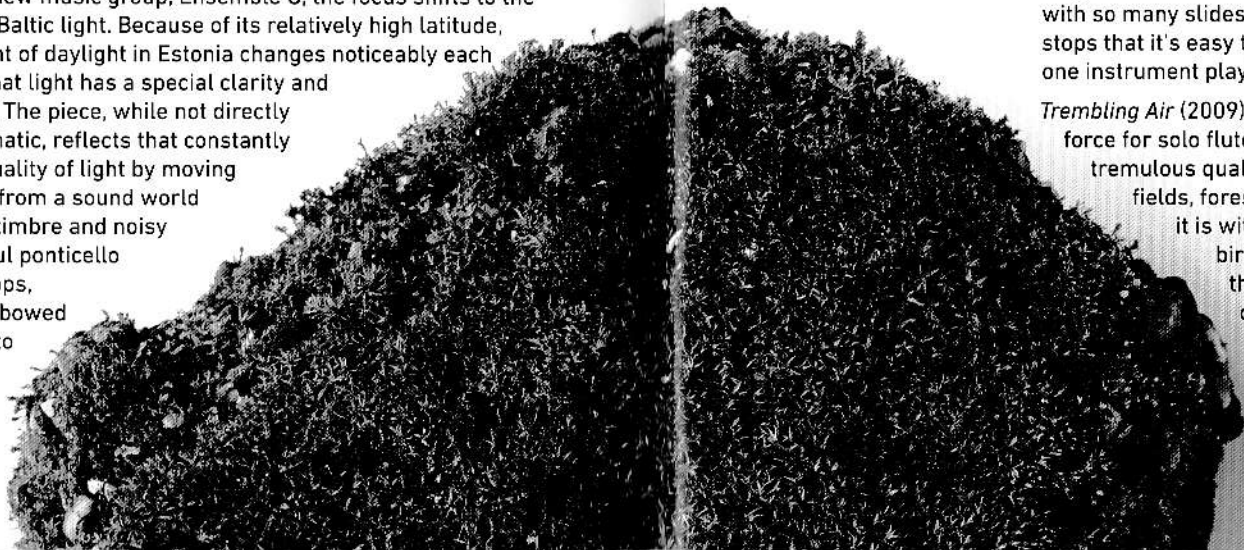
lectures and to compose. His time in that Baltic country, a great deal of it spent in the forests, the islands and the fields, marked the start of a series of pieces that respond to the natural world. *Dark Wood* (2007) for cello and electronics,

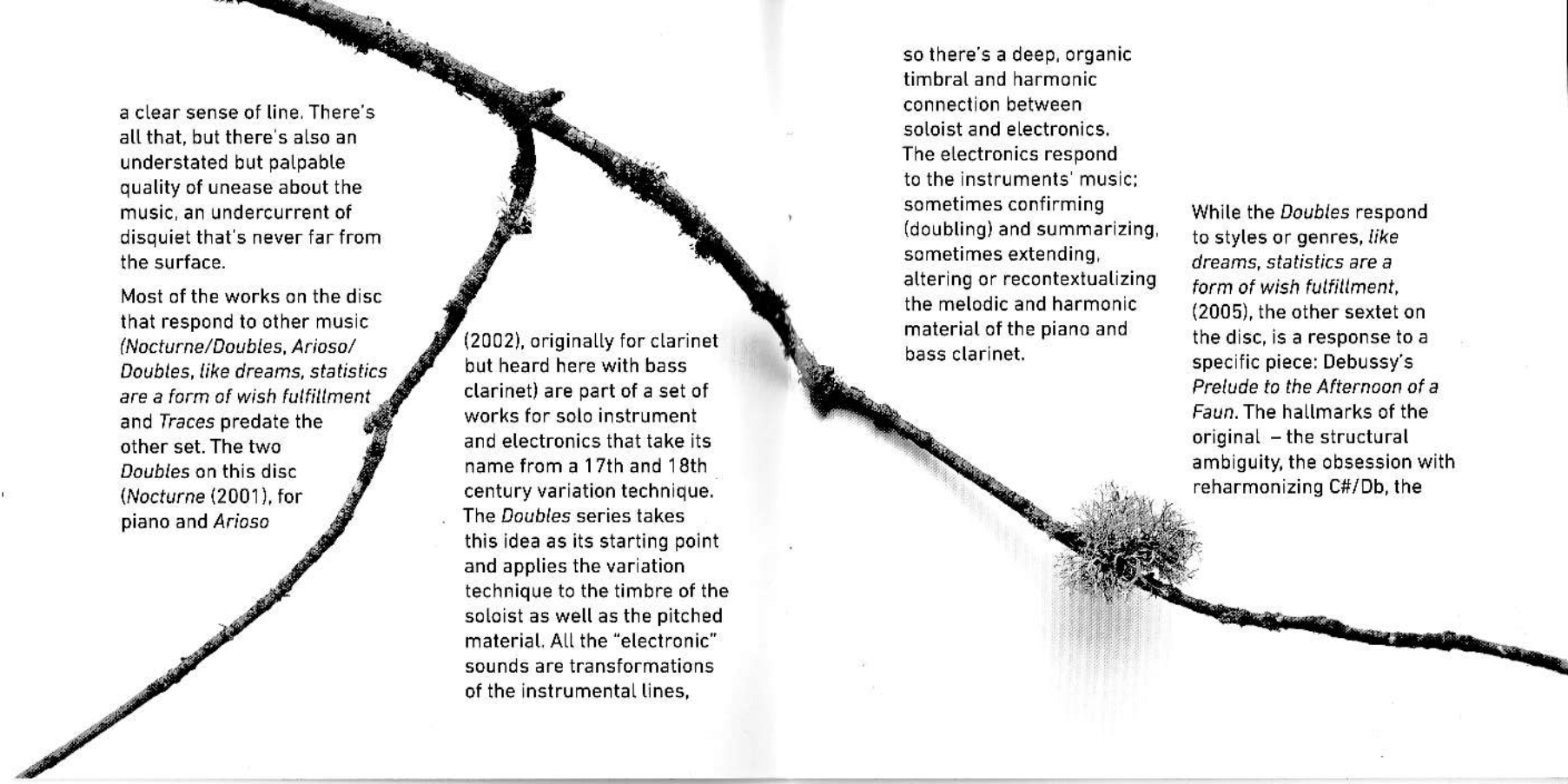
evokes the susurrus of the branches and the groaning of the trunks bent by the breeze in the Estonian woods. The title of the piece calls to mind the opening of Dante's *Inferno* and suggests that the forests, while beautiful, are not untroubling: "In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark forest for the straight road was lost."

In *Changing Light*, composed the next summer in Tartu for the Estonian new music group, Ensemble U, the focus shifts to the quality of Baltic light. Because of its relatively high latitude, the amount of daylight in Estonia changes noticeably each day and that light has a special clarity and character. The piece, while not directly programmatic, reflects that constantly shifting quality of light by moving gradually from a sound world based on timbre and noisy sounds (*sul ponticello* double stops, glissandi, bowed cymbals) to a sound

world focused on melodic line. Two remarkable solos emerge in the second half - an arching but understated penumbral bass clarinet line supported by the ensemble and then an extraordinary extended violin solo that lasts almost a quarter of the piece's duration. Here, a fragile but clear melodic line is embellished with so many slides, harmonics and double stops that it's easy to forget there is only one instrument playing.

Trembling Air (2009), a virtuosic tour-de-force for solo flute, brings to mind the tremulous quality of the air of the fields, forests and shore, filled as it is with the sounds of the bird, of the trees and of the water. As with the other pieces on this disc there is a strong feeling of directed motion, a rich palette of sound and color, a vibrant sound world, and





a clear sense of line. There's all that, but there's also an understated but palpable quality of unease about the music, an undercurrent of disquiet that's never far from the surface.

Most of the works on the disc that respond to other music (*Nocturne/Doubles*, *Arioso/Doubles*, *like dreams, statistics* are a form of wish fulfillment and *Traces* predate the other set. The two *Doubles* on this disc (*Nocturne* (2001), for piano and *Arioso*

(2002), originally for clarinet but heard here with bass clarinet) are part of a set of works for solo instrument and electronics that take its name from a 17th and 18th century variation technique. The *Doubles* series takes this idea as its starting point and applies the variation technique to the timbre of the soloist as well as the pitched material. All the "electronic" sounds are transformations of the instrumental lines,

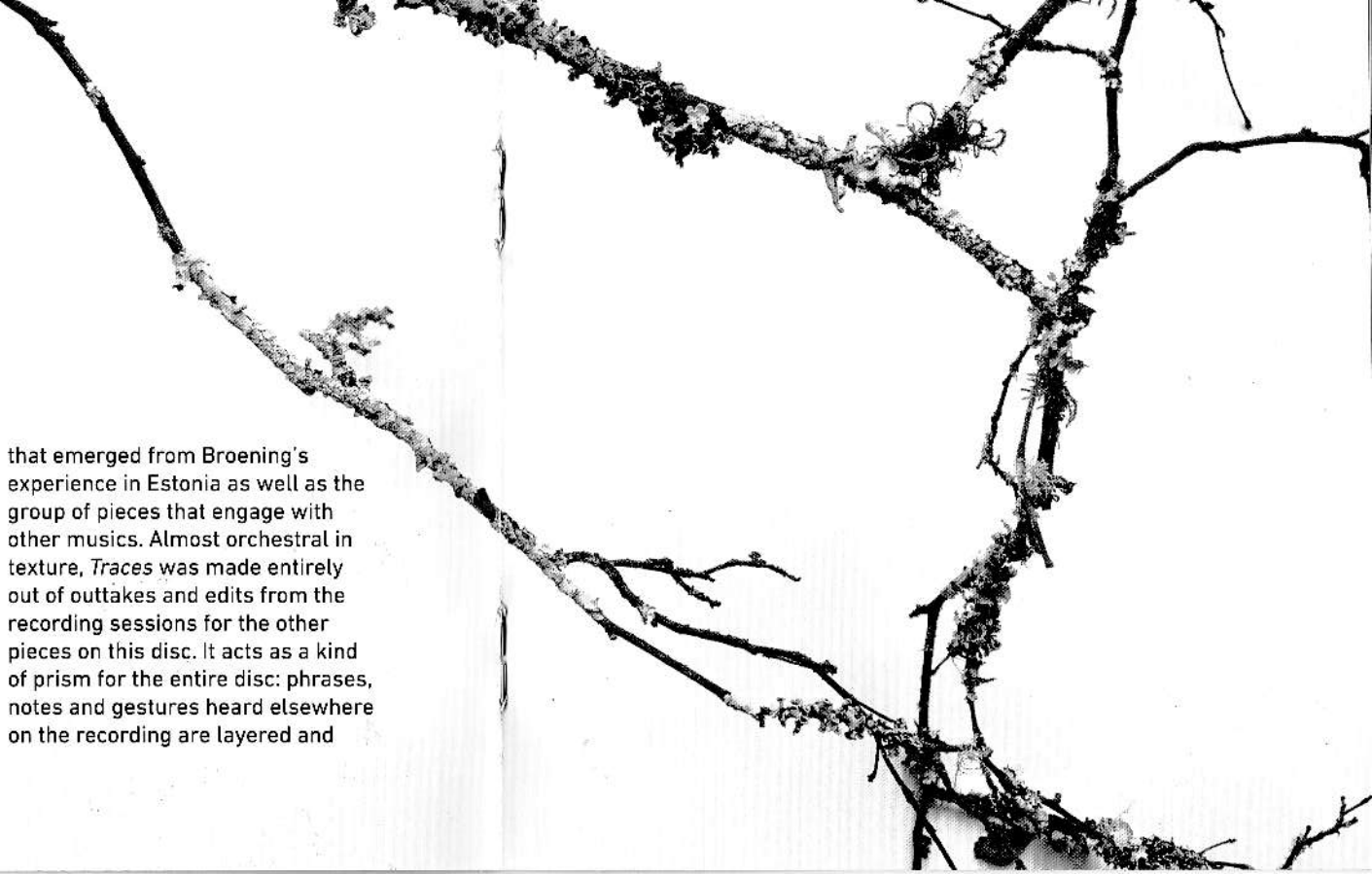
so there's a deep, organic timbral and harmonic connection between soloist and electronics. The electronics respond to the instruments' music: sometimes confirming (doubling) and summarizing, sometimes extending, altering or recontextualizing the melodic and harmonic material of the piano and bass clarinet.

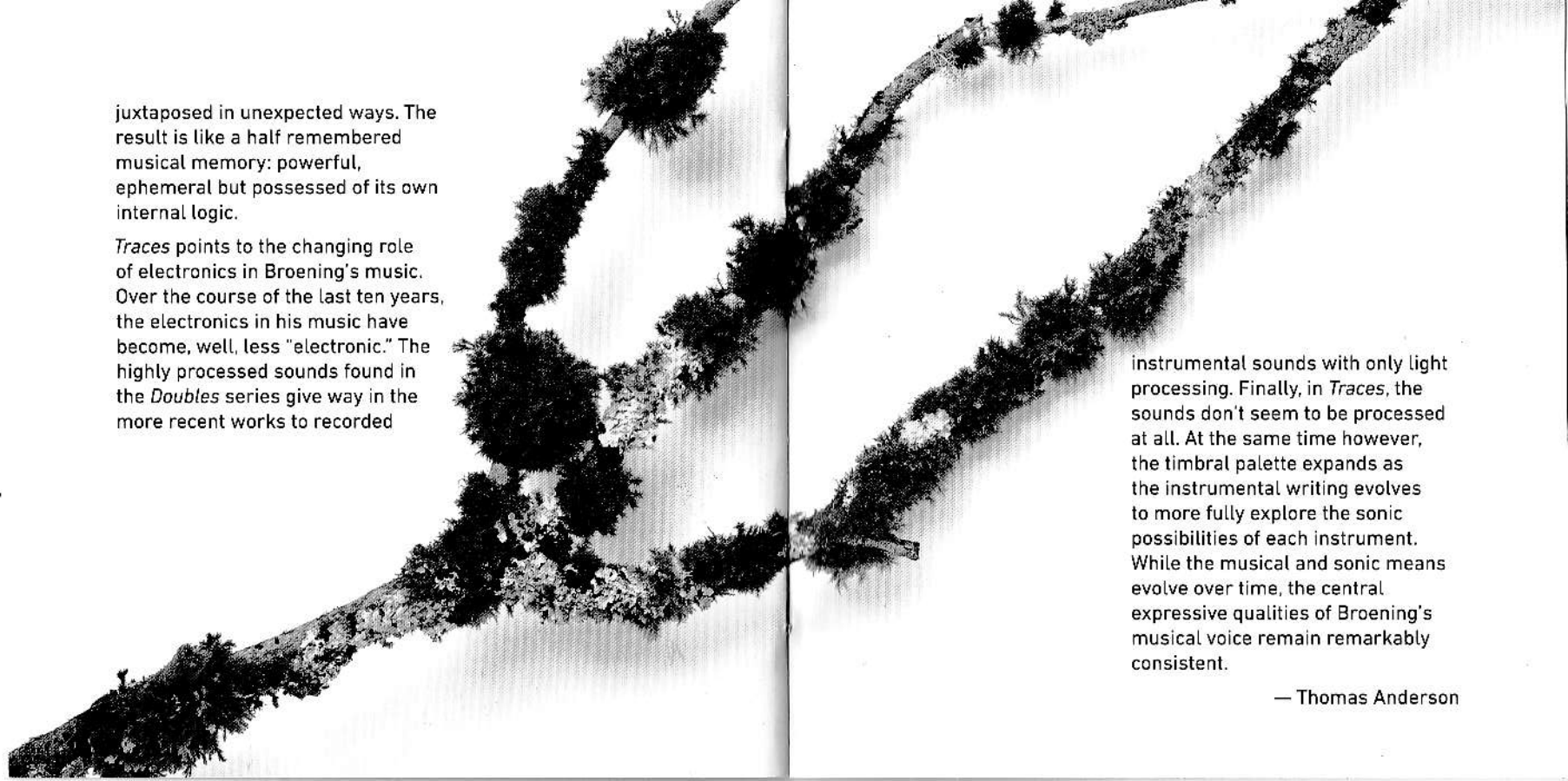
While the *Doubles* respond to styles or genres, *like dreams, statistics* are a form of wish fulfillment, (2005), the other sextet on the disc, is a response to a specific piece: Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. The hallmarks of the original – the structural ambiguity, the obsession with reharmonizing C#/Db, the

long scale motion from C# to E as important notes, the rarefied ending – all these find place in *like dreams*, *statistics are a form of wish fulfillment* as it moves seamlessly and continuously between the dream-like, desired-fueled and strict, rational worlds suggested by its title and by its patrimony. And it does so, notably, without sounding like or quoting Debussy and without sounding like pastiche.

Traces (2010) belongs simultaneously to both sets of pieces – the group of pieces

that emerged from Broening's experience in Estonia as well as the group of pieces that engage with other musics. Almost orchestral in texture, *Traces* was made entirely out of outtakes and edits from the recording sessions for the other pieces on this disc. It acts as a kind of prism for the entire disc: phrases, notes and gestures heard elsewhere on the recording are layered and



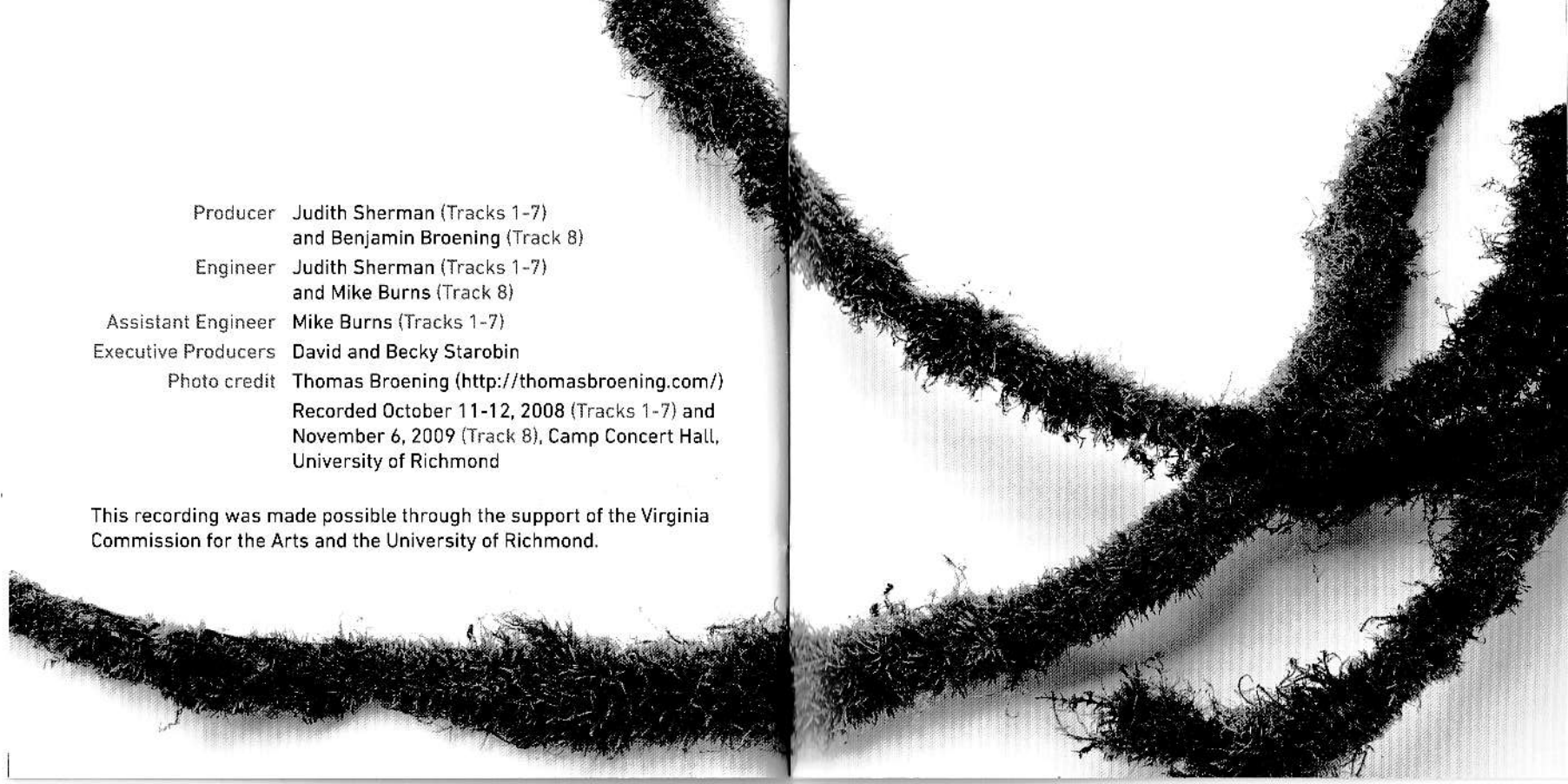


juxtaposed in unexpected ways. The result is like a half remembered musical memory: powerful, ephemeral but possessed of its own internal logic.

Traces points to the changing role of electronics in Broening's music. Over the course of the last ten years, the electronics in his music have become, well, less "electronic." The highly processed sounds found in the *Doubles* series give way in the more recent works to recorded

instrumental sounds with only light processing. Finally, in *Traces*, the sounds don't seem to be processed at all. At the same time however, the timbral palette expands as the instrumental writing evolves to more fully explore the sonic possibilities of each instrument. While the musical and sonic means evolve over time, the central expressive qualities of Broening's musical voice remain remarkably consistent.

— Thomas Anderson



Producer Judith Sherman (Tracks 1-7)
and Benjamin Broening (Track 8)

Engineer Judith Sherman (Tracks 1-7)
and Mike Burns (Track 8)

Assistant Engineer Mike Burns (Tracks 1-7)

Executive Producers David and Becky Starobin

Photo credit Thomas Broening (<http://thomasbroening.com/>)

Recorded October 11-12, 2008 (Tracks 1-7) and
November 6, 2009 (Track 8), Camp Concert Hall,
University of Richmond

This recording was made possible through the support of the Virginia
Commission for the Arts and the University of Richmond.

Benjamin Broening's music couples his interest in the expressive power of sound with a sense of line derived from his background as a singer. Active as a composer of acoustic and electroacoustic music, Broening has written pieces for ensembles such as *Zeitgeist*, *eighth blackbird*, Charlotte Symphony, the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, the Band and Orchestral Division of Yamaha Corporation of America,

the Arts Now Series at North Carolina State University, Ensemble U, duo *runedako*, and the Connecticut Choral Society, and numerous soloists. A recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship, Broening has also received recognition and awards from the Jerome Composers Commissioning Program, American Composers Forum, Virginia Commission for the Arts, Andrew Mellon Foundation and the Presser Music Foundation.

Benjamin Broening

Recombinant Nocturnes, Broening's recent disc of piano music performed by duo *runedako* has been called a "gorgeous disc of music" and "thoughtful, eloquent, and disarmingly direct" by *New Music Box*, "deep, troubling" by François Couture and "lovely, delicate, calming" by Los Angeles' KFJC. Other recordings have been released by Ensemble U in Estonia and on the Innova Centaur, Everglade, Equilibrium, MIT Press and

SEAMUS record labels. Broening is founder and artistic director of Third Practice, an annual festival of electroacoustic music at the University of Richmond, where he is Associate Professor of Music. He holds degrees from the University of Michigan, Cambridge University, Yale University and Wesleyan University.

Chicago-based, two-time Grammy Award-winning sextet eighth blackbird combines the finesse of a string quartet with the energy of a rock band and the audacity of a storefront theater company. The ensemble performs more than 50 concerts each season at major venues across the United States, and has toured to the UK, Holland, Germany, Australia, Mexico and Canada. Recent commissions

include Steve Reich's Pulitzer Prize-winning Double Sextet, Jennifer Higdon's *On a Wire* and Steve Mackey's *Slide*, and future collaborators include Amy Beth Kirsten, Brett Dean, Aaron Jay Kernis, Bryce Dessner, Lee Hyla and Mayke Nas.

eighth blackbird holds ongoing Ensemble-in-Residence positions at the University of Richmond and the University of Chicago. It begins a three-year, Mellon

Foundation-funded term as Ensemble in Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music in Fall 2012. The ensemble has won two Grammy Awards, for *strange imaginary animals* (Best Chamber Music Performance, 2008) and *Lonely Motel: Music from Slide* (Best Small Ensemble Performance, 2012).

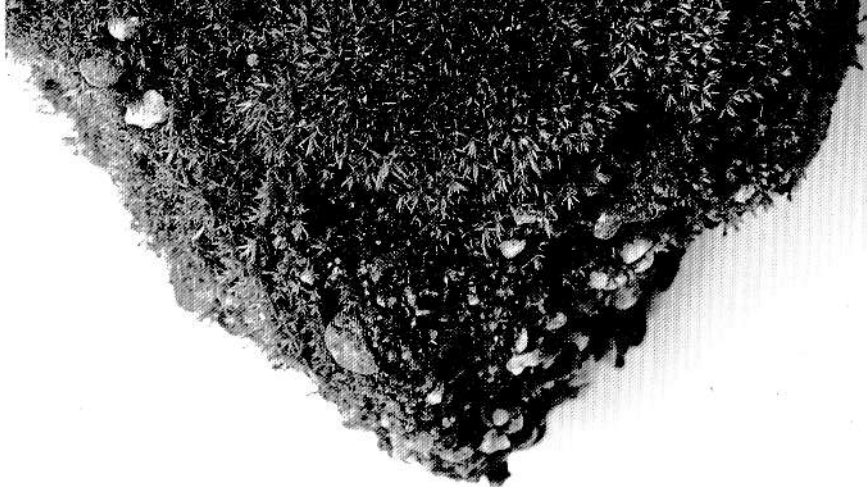
eighth blackbird's members hail from America's Great Lakes, Keystone, Golden and Bay states, and Australia's Sunshine State.

Tim Munro flutes
Michael J. Maccaferri clarinets
Matt Albert violin
Nicholas Photinos cello
Matthew Duvall percussion+
Lisa Kaplan piano

eighth blackbird

There are four foodies, three beer snobs and one exercise junkie. The name "eighth blackbird" derives from the eighth stanza of Wallace Stevens's evocative, aphoristic poem, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* (1917).

+ *Matthew Duvall endorses Pearl/Adams musical instruments, and Vic Firth sticks and mallets.*



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