Interestingly, when it comes to pieces composed for instrumental combinations never before undertaken, the number I’ve taken up on my own is matched by the number I’ve received commissions to do. It seems that in some quarters I’m regarded as a composer who is brimming with combinatory curiosity. To give a few examples, I’ve been commissioned to compose pieces that combine: a recorder with a Sho, a free reed instrument; a clarinet with a ranat, a traditional Thai marimba; a violin with an African thumb piano; and several traditional Japanese, Chinese, and Korean instruments with Western instruments. On every occasion I’ve been given the chance to discover the intense, captivating character of each instrument used. I’m never hesitant to work with instruments that haven’t been combined before, but I can’t say that it’s ever easy. Among the various combinations, that of the trombone and accordion is on a par with the recorder and sho in terms of sheer difficulty.

The first obstacle that one comes up against is the difference in the volumes of the respective instrument. I assumed that the volume of the trombone would end up absolutely dominant. Several times I had met Mike Svoboda, the trombonist who commissioned the piece, and I borrowed an instrument from him for half a year in order to explore its possibilities. A basic principle in my creative process is to compose a type of music that nobody has ever heard before, but in this case the instrumental combination itself was one without precedent. Being familiar with Svoboda’s pliable performance technique, one firmly grounded in a wealth of experience, I felt that my first task was to clear away all of my preconceptions about the instrument.

The more I came to know about the performance and compositions of Svoboda himself, the more freely I was able to conceive of this piece. I realized that not only the volumes of the two instruments but also their sounding bodies are quite different; yet since they both produce sound by blowing air, it seemed to me that I could somehow join them and bring them to life together. As the sounds produced by Svoboda and Stefan Hussong, the accordionist, floated to my mind, the overall structure of the piece came to me in a flash of inspiration. The two-instrument domain I conceived was to be realized through many kinds of breath control, and filled with a supple wealth of sonorities and intonations. That was the vision, but sketching it and fleshing it out was a long, hard slog. I wanted a piece in which the breath and sounds of the performers might at times nestle up to each other as close as possible, and at other times withdraw to extremes of estrangement, all of this requiring a keen capacity to listen and move. At the time, Svoboda had in mind a new work for alto trombone, which is why *midstream*+ was composed for such a high register (though on the CD it is entirely performed on the tenor trombone). Operating at diverse levels, especially in their wide array of musical gestures, the performers are linked through contrasts that let them experience a vast variations in their inner conditions during the performance.

A motif that appeared at the end of No. 12 of the NACH BACH series, which was written for piano the very same year, has been used in the final section of *midstream*+ (composed in homage to Hussong, No. 12 can be heard on the Wergo CD *F. Fragments*). I came up with this name because this work is related to *midstream* (1997), the first duet in which I attempted to join musical gestures and a unique temporal construction.

*midstream*+ was commissioned by and dedicated to Hussong and Svoboda in 2004, and they performed its world premier at Schwerin, Germany in September that year. Since then, it has been performed in Japan, Georgia, Spain, Sweden, and elsewhere. It was recorded live and broadcast at HARADA REMIX, the portrait concert of Keiko Harada sponsored by Saarland Broadcasting.