

Trombones and Figs

by Daniel Harris

He sat at his drawing board copying trombone parts for his latest orchestral piece. The premiere was in three months. He was behind schedule.

He remembered an apocryphal story about Beethoven. A friend encountered the maestro in a café in Vienna at a back table. Beethoven had a score in front of him. The master was copying parts.

The friend wrote in the conversation book of the deaf master, "What are you doing, Maestro?"

"Trombones," roared Beethoven, shaking ink from his quill pen onto the floor.

He looked out the wire glass window of his Brooklyn studio. On the fire escape was a fig tree planted in a large pot. Raindrops fell on the leaf buds. To him it was a special plant. Its grandparent had been an immigrant from Italy. An Italian peasant brought it with her on the boat from Calabria in the 1900's. He planted a cutting from this immigrant tree before it was torn from the earth by urban progress. All his friends thought this story apocryphal, but they ate his figs, which retained the sweet bitterness of Calabrian sunshine. In his head, trombones played in the rain.

