

Trombones and Figs

Vito Mariella sat at his drawing board copying trombone parts for his latest composition. With the premiere in three weeks, he was behind schedule.

He recalled an oft-told, perhaps apocryphal, story about Beethoven:

A musician friend encountered the Maestro at a back table in a Viennese café. The master was copying parts from a score.

The friend wrote in the conversation book of the deaf master, *What are you doing, Maestro?* “Trombones,” roared Beethoven, spattering ink from his quill pen onto the floor.

Vito 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. For Vito, it was a historic tree. Its roots had been an immigrant from Italy. His great-grandmother brought it with her on the boat from Calabria in the 1900s. Vito salvaged a cutting from this immigrant tree after it was torn from the earth by urban progress.

All his friends thought this story mythical, but they ate his figs, which retained the sweet bitterness of Calabrian sunshine.

In Vito’s head, trombones played in the rain.