

## **SYNOPSIS OF THE CANTOR'S TALE**

(A full-length one act in eleven scenes)

**TIME:** 1993

**PLACE:** a college township in New England. A sparsely furnished set representing a church, an office, three parlors, a courtyard, a painter's studio, and an art gallery.

**CHARACTERS:** (three men and three women)

FATHER PRUE DIMMS, a Catholic priest; mid-fifties to mid-thirties

DUPLE DIMMS, the embodiment of Prue's suppressed passions

MILDRED DIMMS MURKLE, Prue's sister; mid-fifties to mid-thirties

FRANCES MURKLE, Prue's niece, Mildred's daughter; early thirties to mid-teens

FATHER FIRMIN SAINT CLOUD, the novice master; mid-sixties

DUNCAN ALBRIGHT, the smitten seminarian; early twenties

FIONA ALBRIGHT, Duncan's mother; late forties

KATHERINE COYNE, Duncan's beloved; mid-twenties

suggested doubling: SAINT CLOUD / MILDRED MURKLE / FIONA ALBRIGHT

**PLOT SYNOPSIS:** Prue Dimms, a Catholic priest, cantor, and self-professed antiquarian, is the spiritual advisor to Duncan Albright, a talented young tenor who has fallen in love and is leaving the seminary to marry. Prue is outraged at losing the leading soloist of his choir to a woman, and conspires in every conceivable way to destroy Duncan's engagement: he spreads malicious rumors, sends anonymous letters, keeps Duncan distracted with duties, and finally evokes the powers of Satan. In the process of scheming, Prue uncovers clues to his own repressed passion which has taken the form of a shadow-self, an omnipotent troll who trails him everywhere and propels the action of the play in a bombastic voice. Prue's misogynistic attitude towards women is also explored, especially his evolving friendship with his niece, Frances, who unmasks his troll-self, forcing Prue to finally acknowledge his love for Duncan. Frances encourages Prue to accept and rejoice in his homosexual longings, to free himself of the rage that resulted when his feelings were thwarted and denied. Prue gains courage from his new insights, and confronts Duncan only to discover that his machinations have succeeded in turning the young man against the woman he once loved. The irony is compounded when Prue realizes that both he and the abandoned woman have projected their fervently felt ardor on a man incapable of returning their passion. Nevertheless, Prue becomes reconciled to the troll-self within, and begins searching for a compromise that might offer some measure of inner peace.