

SYNOPSIS OF *The Cantor's Tale*

(A full-length one act in eleven scenes; running time 90 minutes)

TIME: 1975

PLACE: a college township in New England. A college township in New England.
A single unit set will suffice to suggest 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 middle-aged priest who also plays himself at age 36

DUPLE DIMMS, the middle-aged embodiment of Prue's suppressed passions

FATHER FIRMIN SAINT CLOUD, the middle-aged novice master

MILDRED MURKLE, Prue's middle-aged sister who also plays herself at age 35

FRANCES MURKLE, Prue's niece, Mildred's daughter; age thirty and also at age 16

DUNCAN ALBRIGHT, the smitten seminarian; age early twenties

KATHERINE COYNE, Duncan's beloved; mid-twenties

FIONA ALBRIGHT, Duncan's middle-aged Irish born mother

NOTE: Mildred Murkle, Fiona Albright, and Father Saint Cloud can be played by the same actor.

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.

