

THE HOUSE OF NUNZIO

**Named a semi-finalist for the
2003 Mill Mountain Theatre New Play Competition**

**Named a semi-finalist for the
Twenty-Sixth Annual Mildred and Albert Panowski Playwriting Award**

**Chosen by Manhattan Theatre Source to be a part of their developmental
workshop series**

THE HOUSE OF NUNZIO

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The Characters

Nunzio Monacelli, a cantankerous, old Italian immigrant. He is 83.

Helen Monacelli, his daughter-in-law, an Italian/American spitfire in her late 50's.

Anthony Monacelli, Helen's oldest son, an openly gay man. He is 35.

Tommy Monacelli, Helen's youngest son, 24, intelligent, laid back, realist

Voice of Young Anthony at 4 (pre-recorded – see page 37 only)

The Setting

Act I

Scenes i, ii, iii, and iv take place in the Dining Room

Act II

Scenes i, ii, and iv take place in Nunzio's bedroom.

Scenes iii and v take place in the Dining Room

The play takes place in a very old but well-kept rural home in Western New York.

The year is 1985.

First reading took place on September 12, 2003 at Manhattan Theatre Club Studios in New York City. The cast for the reading was as follows:

NUNZIO: *Ward Asquith
ANTHONY: *Christopher Wisner
MRS. MONACELLI: *Kate Konigisor
TOMMY: Paschal Frisina, III

Developmental Workshop took place at Manhattan Theatre Source in New York City, November 23rd, 24th and 25th, 2003.

The cast for the developmental workshop was as follows:

NUNZIO: *Lawrence Cioppa
ANTHONY: *Christopher Wisner
MRS. MONACELLI: *Letty Serra
TOMMY: Donal Thoms-Cappello

Thanks to Lee Gundersheimer, Kate Konigisor, Mike and Maria Cirilli, Kevin Reifel, Patricia Decker, David Sajadi, Randall Kennedy, John Bellia and especially, Mona Smith for her wisdom and guidance. Special thanks to Giovanna Bellia La Marca for the stories and translations. Special thanks to Michael Menger for helping to craft this play with me. Finally, thanks to David Tonkin, for putting up with me through the entire process.

***members of Actors' Equity Association**

ACT I-sc i

Note: while it is not always mentioned, food is being eaten throughout the play — carrot sticks, salami, cookies, etc. This is an Italian household where food is as much a member of the family as the human inhabitants.

Language note: There is some Italian spoken (particularly by Nunzio) throughout the play. While this is not a bi-lingual play per say, using the language is important. Nunzio should also speak with an authentic Italian accent (not to be confused with Brooklyn). The English translations follow the Italian in [brackets] but should not be spoken as lines.

(In darkness we hear the sounds of Luciano Pavarotti on the stereo. He is singing the end of Come to Sorrento. As lights come up on Nunzio, they catch him asleep in his favorite chair oddly placed in the dining room, far enough away from the table, but not quite. Nunzio is 83, failing in health, but not in mind or wit. He walks with a cane. He is of a former generation of Italians. Everything comes down to respect and hierarchy. Nunzio is snoring, loudly as O Sole Mio is playing and the loud refrain wakes Nunzio up with a start, singing...)

NUNZIO

(singing loudly)

Ma n'atu sole

Cchiu' bello, oje

'O sole mio

Sta 'nfronte a te!

'O sole, 'o sole mio

Sta 'nfronte a te!

Sta 'nfronte a te!

(As the music continues, Mrs. Monacelli enters from the kitchen with dough, a rolling pin and board-Mrs. Monacelli is in her late 50's but she looks younger. Her life has been hard, but she is a woman of deep faith and has a strong love of family. She is ahead of her time. She is wearing an apron with pockets, which she always wears. It stores her rosary and scraps of papers. Nunzio continues singing loudly)

Ma n'atu sole

MRS. MONACELLI

(shouting over him) Papa, Papa, Papa! You are supposed to be napping!

NUNZIO

(looking at what she has brought into the dining room) And what is this?

MRS. MONACELLI

I have spread myself too thin in the kitchen and I need more room to work the dough.

NUNZIO

Adesso mi sporchi anche la tavola? [Now you are even dirtying my table?]

MRS. MONACELLI

Your table Papa? I thought it was ours.

NUNZIO

Ahh! Troppa confusione! [Too much confusion!]

MRS. MONACELLI

No confusion Papa, but listen to me, you have to speak in English when the boys get here. Anthony doesn't understand at all.

NUNZIO

Maybe I do not wish him to understand. Did you think of that ever?

MRS. MONACELLI

I do not like that Papa. *(she exits to the kitchen)*

NUNZIO

(shouting to her) Do they bring friends this time? Like a flock of geese they came in here last time. E' meglio vestirli loro che sfamarli. [It is better to dress them than to feed them]

MRS. MONACELLI

No guests. I think you scared them off. *(she enters with a relish tray and Nunzio takes some salami)* But there will be plenty of food just in case.

NUNZIO

Good!

MRS. MONACELLI

Good to what?

NUNZIO

Both.

MRS. MONACELLI

You should be getting to your nap, don't you think?

NUNZIO

That is what I was doing before you woke me up!

MRS. MONACELLI

You were singing, not napping. You need to rest in quiet. And take your pills.

NUNZIO

Sei un rompi scatole! [Pain in the ass] (*sarcastically as if he is saying what she is thinking*) Vattene, Vattene!

MRS. MONACELLI

(As he leaves she throws him a gesture unseen. Mrs. Monacelli moves to the small table where there is a large statue of St. Anthony and a picture of the Sacred Heart on the wall. She makes the sign of the cross)

Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus, hear my plea. Just this once hear my prayer. I ask that you bless this house, and those who will be under this roof. Please give my boys the strength to deal with their grandpa. And Saint Anthony, my most blessed patron saint, you have always helped me find anything that I lose. Today I ask you to help me find my patience. (*she makes the sign of the cross*) Amen.

(We here Nunzio humming Frank Sinatra somewhere in the house and we hear a knock)

MRS. MONACELLI

Papa! Stop with the knocking.

NUNZIO

(shouting from off-stage) The knocks are not from me. The oven you should check.

MRS. MONACELLI

(to herself) Oh my God! It must be the door. *(shouting)* Who is it? Who could this be?

NUNZIO

(yelling from upstairs) You ask me this question? Che cosa? Ancora! [What? Still!]

(Mrs. Monacelli throws a disgusted look at the ceiling, as there is more knocking)

MRS. MONACELLI

(shouting) Go to sleep Papa. *(heading toward the kitchen)* I'm coming.

ANTHONY

(shouting from offstage) Ma! It's me. I made it.

MRS. MONACELLI

Tony? Oh my God, you're early!

(Anthony enters. He is in his 30's. He is a short man, but taller than his mom. He comes in wearing head phones around his neck and bearing gifts — a plant, a box of chocolates and a few other gifts for the family)

ANTHONY

Ma, I'm late!

MRS. MONACELLI

No matter. What time is it?

ANTHONY

Almost six.

MRS. MONACELLI

Oh Dear Jesus! We need more clocks in this house. (*looking at her watch and slapping at it as it has stopped*) Accurate clocks! No wonder papa is getting crazy with me. Well, put those things on the table for now. I'll move my stuff back to the kitchen. (*she exits but keeps talking*) What is all that?

ANTHONY

Nothing.

MRS. MONACELLI

That is not nothing!

ANTHONY

You taught me too well Ma. It's a Monacelli curse.

MRS. MONACELLI/ANTHONY

(*she re-enters as they say together*) Never go anywhere empty handed! (*they laugh*)

MRS. MONACELLI

You! (*realizing her son had not greeted her*) So what? No hug for your ol' Mom?

(*They embrace – laughing and rocking back and forth*)

ANTHONY

(*very uneasy*) So? Where is he?

MRS. MONACELLI

Say a prayer that he's napping. You know how he is without his nap.

ANTHONY

I know how he is with his nap.

MRS. MONACELLI

Please try and get along. For your old mother? Please?

ANTHONY

I don't know. That's a pretty tall order coming from such a short lady.

MRS. MONACELLI

Now...

ANTHONY

I always try, don't I?

MRS. MONACELLI

Think of it as penance.

ANTHONY

Penance for what?

MRS. MONACELLI

Oh, I don't know. For being too much like him?

ANTHONY

Oh, ho, ho! Point to Mrs. M.! Mrs. M. one. Tony ten.

MRS. MONACELLI

Hey now! How do you get ten?

ANTHONY

Just for showing up.

(as this part of the scene continues, they begin to set the table and nibble at the relish tray)

MRS. MONACELLI

You! (*changing the subject*) Ok. Listen. Before I forget and have you mad at me, I want to tell you I'm sorry that your friend didn't come with you. He seemed so nice and I'd've loved for him to come. But I understand.

ANTHONY

Ma! Don't apologise. Why are you apologizing for Nunzio? He should be the one saying he's sorry. That old squeaky gate!

MRS. MONACELLI

(*deliberate, pointed and a bit annoyed*) I asked you. Please don't make me beg. Be NICE to him.

ANTHONY

Oh lord, we're starting to sound like On Golden Pond and it hasn't even been ten minutes. (*In his best Hepburn and Fonda*) (H) I met the nicest couple in the woods. (F) A couple of people? (H) No a couple of antelope, of course a couple of people. (H) Nunzio Monacelli where the hell are you?

MRS. MONACELLI

I really am in the nut house.

ANTHONY

I'm sorry. I'll behave. (*grabbing some salami*) At least till baby brother gets here. When's he due?

MRS. MONACELLI

In a-half-hour or so, oh no...the time...well, who knows when. (*singing*) "But who knows where or when?"

ANTHONY

My mother. She's got a song for everything.

MRS. MONACELLI

Oh, thank God for my music! Some days I think it's all I've got left. And at least it gives Papa and me something in common. (*she takes a deep breath and sighs and sits at the table*) It's getting more difficult ya know? He's getting worse.

ANTHONY

Ma, I'm worried about you. Really. (*he grabs some of the salami and cheese*)
And music is not all you have left.

MRS. MONACELLI

You actually listen to me once in a while. I'm impressed.

ANTHONY

I always listen to you. Now what were you saying? (*she gives him a look*)
Kidding! But really Ma, I'm serious. It's getting to be too much isn't it?

MRS. MONACELLI

If you boys were here more...

ANTHONY

Ma, please!

MRS. MONACELLI

I know. You have your own lives. And besides, there are not enough points to
award you to make this right, am I right? (*Anthony nods in agreement*) He can't
understand why you are who you are.

ANTHONY

He doesn't want to.

MRS. MONACELLI

Maybe not. But he's old. You can't teach an old Abruzzese...

ANTHONY

Anything!!!

MRS. MONACELLI

Anthony!

ANTHONY

Well? (*thinking and scheming*) Maybe, I could come home for Christmas...

MRS. MONACELLI

Oh that would be so nice for a change.

ANTHONY

(*continuing but lisping*) ...as one of Santa's little helpers. (*singing*) "Santa Baby, leave a sable under the tree for me."

MRS. MONACELLI

Not so nice! Oh Tony! Don't lisp and fool around like that. He won't stand for it. I want this time to be nice. Please?

ANTHONY

I'm kidding Ma. Can't we still kid? What happened to that great sense of humor? We were always laughing in this house.

MRS. MONACELLI

That's true. (*she thinks for a moment*) Your father was the funniest man I ever knew. He could make me laugh even when I was upset. I think that's why I fell in love with him. He was a good man, a kind man. I speak to him every day. (*she gets up and Tony starts to pick at the food more as she continues on*) Some days, when I hear a certain song, or smell a certain scent, or wear a certain article of clothing, I can almost see him. And your Grandpa is asleep and I'm alone down here, sometimes I dance. Just a little waltz – slow. And I hum. I whisper, "Al? I miss you. Thanks for the dance." And then...I snap out of it.

ANTHONY

I miss him too.

MRS. MONACELLI

I know you do. But...life goes on.

ANTHONY

Ok. No sadness! Humor. I said humor, damn it!

MRS. MONACELLI

Sometimes we have to be low to appreciate high.

ANTHONY

Said the wise old woman.

MRS. MONACELLI

That would be me. Ok, now. Back to work.

ANTHONY

You work too hard. When's the last time you took a vacation?

MRS. MONACELLI

It's not something I would enjoy.

ANTHONY

You always do that!

MRS. MONACELLI

What? No time. Listen, I've got to finish this feast! I didn't expect you to be early. You tricked me.

ANTHONY

I'm not early!

MRS. MONACELLI

Well I'm glad. We don't get to talk much, just you and me any more. When you were little, you'd make me come sit in your room so you could tell me all about your day in private...before you told everyone else at dinner.

ANTHONY

You were my dress rehearsal.