The Cranbrook Townsman

CCT opens 2026-27 theatre season with Blood Relations

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Michael Prestwich and Nikki Van Boeyen in Blood Relations (Gillian Francis/CranbrookTownsman)



134 years ago a murder rocked the small community of Fall River, Massachusetts.

Andrew and Abigail Borden, a couple, were found dead in their home after being struck to death by a hatchet in broad daylight.

Police quickly singled out Andrew's 32-year-old daughter Lizzie Borden as a possible suspect. Lizzie was tried, but ultimately acquitted by a jury, and the person responsible for the murder was never identified. This case became one of the most famous murders in American criminal history, and it

continues to captivate the public more than a century later.

Cranbrook Community Theatre (CCT) opens the theatre season with *Blood Relations*, a play that not only revisits this historic event, but also examines the social dynamics happening within the Borden family home at the time and draws its own conclusions about what may have happened that frightful day.

The play runs from Oct. 16-17, Oct. 22-24, and Oct. 29-31 at 7:30 p.m., and Oct. 18 and 25 at 2 p.m. at Studio Stage Door.

Blood Relations was written by Sharon Pollock, one of Canada's most influential playwrights who wrote for the Atlantic Ballet Company and served as the Artistic Director of Theatre Calgary. *Blood Relations* premiered in Edmonton in 1980, and remains one of Pollock's most celebrated plays.

CCT's Director Amy Dettling was actually mentored by Pollock when she was starting out as a theatre artist in Calgary, and the production serves as a homage to the woman who encouraged her to embrace her voice and challenge conventions. Dettling's partner Rory Bruce took on the role of Producer.

"Sharon's writing challenges us to question what we think we know and reminds us that truth is rarely as simple as it appears," Dettling noted.

"My hope is that you leave the theatre with questions, conversations, and perhaps a different perspective on a story you thought you knew," she added.

The play features a small seven-person cast. Nikki Van Boeyen stars as Lizzie, and her father and step-mother are played by Michael Prestwich and Marnée Bellavance. Megan Stewart is Lizzie's sister Emma.

Other cast-members include Rory Bruce as Lizzie's uncle Harry, Tinna Gunn as the family's maid Bridget, and John Malcolm as the local doctor.

Van Boeyen and Gunn both play double roles as the play bounces between past and present narratives. The play takes the audience inside Lizzie's world to show a young woman who feels trapped by gender expectations and social convention, and examines the broader limitations placed upon women who were limited by defined gender roles at the time.

Lizzie is a spinster who feels pressure from her family to abandon her own dreams and goals and toe the line. Although she makes some questionable decisions, she garners sympathy from the audience as she quarrels with her hot-headed and violent father over inheritance. Lizzy's position as a woman in the family means she and her sister will never inherit the family land, despite being the closest blood relatives to their father.

The overall cultural climate of a community with a strict divisional hierarchy for ethnicity, gender and class, also played into the community's perception of Lizzie and contributed to her acquittal. Lizzie was born to a wealthy family and her father was a well-respected real-estate and banking mogul. The social culture at the time made it difficult for the law to see women as aggressors capable of committing a brutal crime.

The play provides an interesting look at the social and cultural barriers women faced in the late 19th century, examined through the context of a murder.
To purchase tickets, visit cranbrookcommunitytheatre.com.