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# Nightingale's Blood Relations is a diamond in the rough.

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Nightingale Theatre are renowned for doing the unexpected. Best known for their avant-garde productions, Nightingale go in a completely unexpected direction with their current production, a revival of Michael Wright's 1983 play *Blood Relations*. With Wright's play being essentially a kitchen sink drama revolving around a family with their hurts and secrets, this marriage of a conventional text with an avant-garde troupe has some memorable moments, but it's not always a comfortable marriage.

*Blood Relations* by T.U. professor Michael Wright (not to be confused with Sharon Pollock's play of the same name) explores the relationship between Ray, an ambitious father and Sonny, his slacker son who live together in Baltimore in 1981. Sonny's reluctance to get a job and Ray's obsession to start his own business strain their relationship, which is further complicated by Ray's developing relationship with Amy, which Sonny resents. Into the mix comes Warren, Ray's long lost son who he abandoned many years before. But this prodigal son hasn't returned looking for forgiveness, nor is he in any mood to grant it, seeking instead to dish out his own brand of punishment and to find answers to the questions that have haunted him all his life.

With its themes of family dysfunction, patriarchal dominance and youthful revolt *Blood Relations* is at its best when it goes straight to the heart of its characters dilemmas. In the opening scene where Sonny's resentment of Amy is set against Ray's love for her, and the couple's secretiveness about showing their feelings around Sonny, layers of tension begin to pile up. Similarly in the explosive final scene where Warren's true self comes to the surface. But in between the script often loses its way, becoming side-tracked by a less satisfying exploration of communication, and of the failure to communicate, exemplified by its overly clever use of word play.

This poses problems which director John Cruncleton strives to overcome, but pace, which seems at some points to drag and at others to rush, never quite achieves a rhythm. Mark Miller as Ray and Robert Clinton McLellan as the somewhat dim witted Sonny who, under Warren's influence, struggles to break away from his father, make their characters credible. Derek Ball as the somewhat menacing Warren struggles to rise above Warren's endlessly clever word play, where words become a disguise. However Sara Cruncleton as Amy brings both vibrancy and energy and sets the stage alight with a truly mesmerising performance.

In *Blood Relations* Michael Wright has an unpolished gem that feels like it has further treasures to yield. This view would seem to be supported by its winning a National Endowment for the Arts upon its original release in 1983. While Nightingale are to be commended for exploring alternative horizons, ultimately this feels like a script that needed a little more time and a production that needed a few more rehearsals to release those elemental forces that form the undercurrent of these characters and their lives. But Nightingale are deserving of huge praise for attempting this and for consistently producing new, challenging and original productions like *Blood Relations*.

*Blood Relations* runs at The [Nightingale Theater](#), 1416 East 4th Street, May 20th and 21st.

Admission is \$10.00.

*Be advised: The Nightingale Theater is a cash only venue and does not have facilities for credit or debit cards at the door.*



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