

Three decades later, Lesser God returns

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OK, so this is not exactly a homecoming, since the play in question was first produced before the nationally renowned [Deaf West Theatre](#) was even in existence.

Still, there's a certain cosmic synchronicity about Deaf West Theatre producing a 30th anniversary revival of Mark Medoff's "[Children of a Lesser God](#)" some 10-15 miles down the freeway from the Mark Taper Forum where Gordon Davidson's [Center Theatre Group](#) first put Medoff - and to some extent theater of and for the deaf - on the map.

CTG's production of "Children" told the story of a love affair between a hearing speech teacher James Leeds and his deaf student Sarah Norman. Performed in English and American sign language, the Taper production directed by Davidson, transferred to [Broadway](#) in 1982 and ran for two years, winning the 1980 Tony Award for Best Play. Stars John Rubinstein and Phyllis Frelich each won acting Tony awards as well. The 1986 [movie](#) won Marlee Matlin an Oscar.

Deaf West was founded in 1991 and has produced more than 30 plays and adaptations - for its deaf and hearing audiences. Of late, the company has made a name for itself with sign language adaptations of musicals such as "Big River," "Pippin," "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" and "Oliver."

Frelich has performed regularly at Deaf West including stints in the world premier of Medoff's "Road to a Revolution" in 2001 and in "Big River." Rubinstein used to perform regularly in North Hollywood as well when his Interact Theatre Co. was based in NoHo, barely a block away from Deaf West's home on Lankershim Boulevard. More recently, Rubinstein played an extended run as the Wizard in the sit down company of "Wicked" at the Pantages Theatre.

The current revival of "Lesser God," which plays Sept. 13 to Oct. 11, is directed by Jonathan Barlow Lee who was the stage manager for Davidson's original production. [Shoshannah Stern](#) and [Matthew Jaeger](#) will play Sarah Norman and James Leeds respectively.

How cool would it be if they could get Rubinstein, Frelich and Davidson all to be in the audience opening night.

Deaf West is located at 5112 Lankershim Blvd.

For more info: (866) 811-4111, www.deafwest.org.

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Shoshannah Stern (Photo: CBS)