

# BWW Interview: Simon Levy on Directing the Los Angeles Premiere of **THE CHILDREN** by Lucy Kirkwood

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by Shari Barrett

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**THE CHILDREN** written by Lucy Kirkwood premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 2016, then transferred to the Manhattan Theatre Club on Broadway the following year. In 2019, *The Guardian* placed the play on its list of "greatest theatrical works since 2000." London's *The Independent* called millennial playwright Kirkwood "the most rewarding dramatist of her generation."

Kirkwood's funny and astonishing Tony-nominated play is a taut and disquieting thriller about responsibility, reparation and what one generation owes the next. With the outside world in chaos following a devastating environmental disaster, two retired nuclear engineers live a quiet life in a remote cottage on the lonely British coast - until a surprise visit from a former colleague upends the couple's equilibrium and trust.



And now with so many issues facing us, not the least of which is humanity surviving climate change as well as a global pandemic, so many are questioning what is our responsibility to the future and what legacy do we want to leave? So no doubt this is the perfect time for the Los Angeles premiere of **THE CHILDREN**, directed by Simon Levy, to take place indoors (with all health and safety guidelines strictly adhered to) at the Fountain Theatre from Saturday, November 6 through January 23. Featured in the cast are Ron Bottitta, Elizabeth Elias Huffman, and Lily Knight, all three well known around the L.A. theatre scene.

I decided to ask director Simon Levy a few questions about the play and how it reflects what is going on in our modern world, as well as returning indoors at the Fountain Theatre. (Photo by Ed Krieger)

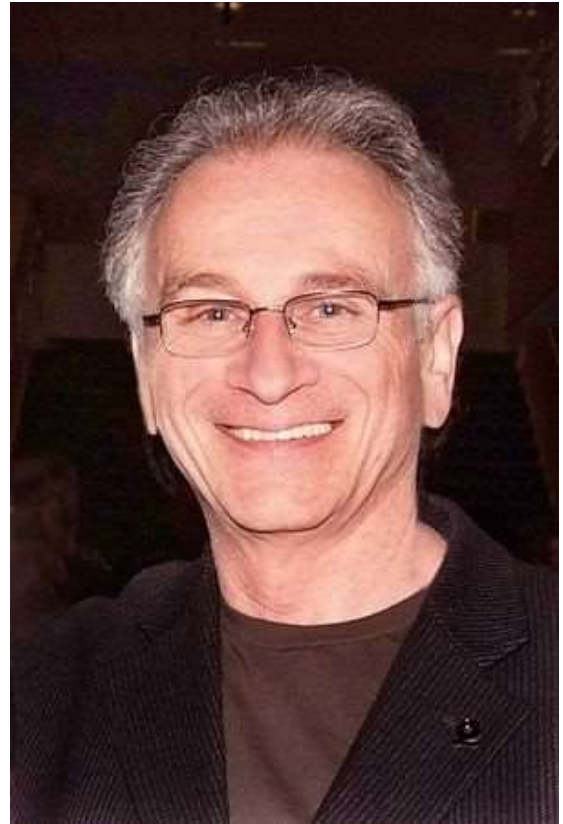
**(Shari):** Hi Simon. You must be thrilled to be back inside presenting live theatre at the Fountain!

**(Simon Levy):** Beyond thrilled! After nearly two years of not being "in the room" with theatre artists, it's wonderful to have that visceral experience again. I've missed being in the playground, creating live.

**(Shari):** What inspired you to select and/or direct **THE CHILDREN**?

**(Simon):** What I love about the play is that it tackles these enormously important contemporary issues about our responsibility to the planet, to each other, to future generations, and grounds them in funny, complex, identifiable characters grappling with a moral dilemma that, quite frankly, all of us are confronting, right now, in real time.

**(Shari):** With such a small ensemble needed to present such an absorbing survival drama, did you cast actors with whom you have worked before or admired on other stages? (Pictured from left: Elizabeth Elias Huffman, Ron Bottitta, Lily Knight. Photo by Jenny Graham)



**(Simon):** I have not worked with these actors, although I've seen some of their work and know them by reputation. It seems we often get the "perfect cast" at the Fountain, and this is no exception. They really are extraordinary.

**(Shari):** Have you been rehearsing in person and/or on Zoom?

**(Simon):** We had a few rehearsals on Zoom at the beginning, but that was because one of our actors was in London, another was in Pittsburgh, and the other was here. That's the wonder of Zoom, isn't it? There really is an upside to the technology. So, we got to read thru the script and spend a couple of sessions doing our script analysis work, asking questions, getting to know each other, delving into the world of the play. Now we're together, blocking, figuring out the life of the play. And I'm glad we can do that live.

**(Shari):** Absolutely! Zoom has opened the L.A. theatre world to audiences and actors around the world. But there is nothing like being in an audience for live theatre, especially when social issues are being examined. (Pictured: Ron Bottitta and Elizabeth Elias Huffman. Photo by Jenny Graham)

Kirkwood's chilling play about the meltdown of a nuclear power plant, which creates not just an environmental crisis but an existential one, explores issues of accountability, guilt, and morality. Since the three characters are all former colleagues from the nuclear power industry, do they feel a real sense of responsibility for what happened? And is that what draws them together to such an isolated place?

**(Simon):** Two of the characters, Hazel and Robin, are married and living just outside the exclusion zone in a cottage on the east coast of England. The third character, Rose, a colleague from 38-years ago, comes to visit. All three are nuclear engineers who helped build the nuclear power plant. Secrets are unveiled and the purpose of Rose's visit becomes known midway through the play, which sets up the major dramatic questions and the moral dilemma of the play.

**(Shari):** Do any of the three have children, and if so, what impact does that have on the story?(Pictured: Ron Bottitta and Lily Knight. Photo by Jenny Graham)

**(Simon):** I think Lucy Kirkwood titled the play, **THE CHILDREN**, because she wants to raise the question of who *are* the children? The literal children and grandchildren of Hazel and Robin? The "children," young people, still working at the power plant? Adults who behave like "children." Or the children of the future? Perhaps it's all of the above.

**(Shari):** What do you hope audiences walk away with to inspire them to take action now to work on a better future for our planet?



**(Simon):** Like so many of the shows we do at the Fountain, we hope the primary issues in this play will awaken or re-awaken people to action. What does our future look like? What is our responsibility to that future, to each other? What kind of planet, climate, are we bestowing on future generations? And, most importantly, what sacrifices are we willing to make NOW?

**(Shari):** Will performances continue at the newly constructed outdoor stage at the Fountain Theatre after indoor performances begin? (Pictured: Elizabeth Elias Huffman and Ron Bottitta. Photo by Jenny Graham)

**(Simon):** We will continue to use the Outdoor Stage for special events, some rentals, etc. But we won't officially start programming it again until next summer.

**(Shari):** Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the play or the Fountain Theatre itself?

**(Simon):** As we learn to live with this virus, the Fountain will continue to pivot and be at the forefront of Safety First - for our staff, our artists, and our audiences. We will continue to follow all protocols so that people feel comfortable again being inside, watching live theatre!

**(Shari):** Thanks so much for speaking with me, Simon. Break legs!





Performances of **THE CHILDREN** take place November 6 through January 23 (except dark Dec. 20 through Jan. 7), on Fridays, Saturdays, and Mondays at 8pm, with Sunday matinees at 2pm. Three preview performances will take place on Wednesday, Nov. 3; Thursday, Nov. 4; and Friday, Nov. 5, all at 8pm. Tickets range from \$25-\$45, with Pay-What-You-Want seating available every Monday night in addition to regular seating (subject to availability). For reservations and information, call (323) 663-1525 or go to [www.FountainTheatre.com](http://www.FountainTheatre.com).

**THE CHILDREN** promo reel: <https://www.lucypr.com/Projects/Web/The-Children-trailer-2.mp4>

The Fountain Theatre is located at 5060 Fountain Avenue (at Normandie) in Los Angeles. Secure, on-site parking is available for \$5. The Fountain Theatre is air-conditioned and wheelchair accessible. Patrons are invited to relax before and after the show at the Fountain's indoor/outdoor café.

**Please note:** Proof of vaccination and mask-wearing will be required of all patrons. Admittance limited to ages 12+. All current CDC and local guidelines regarding seating and masks will be followed at each performance.