



### Rabbi Darby Jared Leigh, '08

The *New York Times* called him "a virtuoso of an exuberant actor." Alternative-rock musician Perry Farrell invited him to perform on stage with the punk rock band Jane's Addiction.

And, by the way, Darby Jared Leigh is profoundly deaf. In fact, he is one of only a handful of deaf men and women ever ordained as rabbis by any of the major rabbinical seminaries in the US.

Leigh's route to the rabbinate may have been circuitous, but he is grateful to RRC for helping him accomplish his ambition. "After I began to study Jewish ethics, I knew I wanted to become a rabbi. I wanted to sing and dance and pray, to engage people in this search for truth. But I pushed the thought away. A deaf rabbi? The RRC faculty was incredible in their willingness to experiment. As a result of my experience, we actually improved the study tools available for all students."

Leigh graduated and became assistant rabbi at [Bnai Keshet](#), a Reconstructionist synagogue in Montclair, NJ, working with another RRC alum, Rabbi Elliott Tepperman, '02. He also is one of 22 rabbis across the country selected as the first fellows in Rabbis Without Borders, an initiative designed to help rabbis make Jewish wisdom accessible to the wider American public.

Originally a native New Yorker and fire-juggling Generation Xer, Leigh toured as a leading actor with the Tony award-winning National Theater of the Deaf. Both *The New York Times* and *Variety* reviewed favorably his 1997 performance as the lead in Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.

In 2001, he provided consulting services for the Oscar-nominated documentary *Sound and Fury* and for Hands ON, an organization that provides sign-language interpreting for Broadway and off-Broadway productions.

Leigh has taught issues related to deafness for organizations such as the New York City Fire Department, the American Musical and Dramatic Academy and the New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities.

Before entering RRC, Leigh received his B.A. in religion, *summa cum laude*, from the University of Rochester and an M.A. in religion from Columbia University.