The Obligation

POTRERO STAGE | SAN FRANCISCO | OCTOBER 12-NOVEMBER 5, 2017
AUTHOR’S NOTE: SCHMUEL’S STORY

In the beginning of The Obligation, a character by the name of Schmuel Berkowicz, a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor, is speaking to a room full of students.

Like Schmuel and many others, my mom, a survivor of Auschwitz (now deceased), regularly spoke to young people.

Both my mom and dad were German Jews. My dad, unlike my mother, never experienced a camp. He fled Germany in 1933 and made his way to the Philippines which, at the time, was one of a handful of places in the world that admitted Jewish refugees. He remained in the Philippines until shortly after the war.

I grew up in San Francisco in the 1960s and 70s. While my world view was greatly influenced by the hope and idealism of the 60s, what was happening on the streets of Selma, Birmingham, Montgomery, Detroit, Watts, Harlem and Newark affected me deeply.

By the mid 1970s, after graduating college and drama school, I moved to New York City and began working as an actor. By the late 1970s, however, my life had taken a turn and although I was still acting, I had become a full-time community activist. An organizer. Over the next 27 years I helped to build several organizations to empower the poor — mostly people of color and primarily urban youth.

About ten years ago, after restarting my acting career, I visited my aunt (my mother’s sister) in Los Angeles and spent several days interviewing her, learning about her life and wartime experience. Aunt Annie, who turned 103 in April, is a survivor of Bergen-Belsen. At one point during my interview, she gave me a book: Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military by Bryan Mark Rigg. Although I considered myself fairly well-read on the period, I had no inkling about this aspect of the German-Jewish experience. Even before I was finished reading Rigg’s book, I started to write and a character began to emerge — a German half-Jew who was a First Lieutenant in Hitler’s army. I named him Christoph and you will meet him today.

When I returned to New York, I asked Annie McGreevey, a talented actress and director, to work with me and be my director. Together we developed a short one-person play called The Mitzvah. I paired the play with a lecture and, for the last three years, have been presenting “The Mitzvah Project” around the world.

Over the last two years, I re-conceptualized and expanded the short play into the full-length stage work that I will be performing today.

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I was born in February, 1951, less than six years after the end of the most murderous decade in the history of the world. The Obligation represents a promise — to my mom and my aunt — to keep in focus the history that humanity must never forget.

— Roger Grunwald, October, 2017, San Francisco
THE MITZVAH PROJECT
IN ASSOCIATION WITH PLAYGROUND
PRESENTS

THE OBLIGATION

WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY
ROGER GRUNWALD*

DIRECTED BY
NANCY CARLIN

LIGHTING DESIGNER         ALLEN WILLNER
SOUND & VIDEO DESIGNER     THEODORE J.H. HULSKER
COSTUME DESIGNER           BROOKE JENNINGS
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR         JOY CARLIN
STAGE MANAGER              JULIA FORMANEK
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR         DAVE LYNCH
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER         JIM KLEINMANN
PRESS AGENT                DAVID HYRY & ASSOCIATES
GRAPHIC DESIGN             BRYAN MCCLURE

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers.

The Director is a member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, Inc., an independent national labor union.

Presented in partnership with Jewish Family & Children’s Services Holocaust Center.

*The Obligation* includes the text and original characters from the short play, *The Mitzvah*, co-authored and developed by Roger Grunwald and Annie McGreevey. The original production of *The Mitzvah* was directed by Ms. McGreevey. The Mitzvah Project is a fiscally-sponsored project of the New York Foundation for the Arts. *The Obligation* is a fiscally-sponsored project of PlayGround.

PlayGround is a member of Theatre Bay Area and Theatre Communications Group, and an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).

SPECIAL THANKS!
The Posen Foundation; Bonny Gildin; Peter Linenthal and Philip Anasovitch; Jamie and Philip Bowles; Judith Bloom; Annie McGreevey; Philip Sneed; Felix, Jane and Danny Posen; Shotgun Players; Omar Ali; Blanche Gildin; Anne Bodenheimer; Lotte Grunwald; Cecille Grunwald-Gunst; Peter C. Gould; Nancy Green; Judy Jorrisch; Jeffrey Aron; Talvin Wilks; Moshe Yassur; Beate Hein; Sol Rosenkranz; Shamay Kizelstein; Michal Kizelstein; Fred Newman; Heiner Müller; Wynn Handman; Elaine Del Valle; Al Eskenazy; John Viscardi; William S. Cohen; Janet Langhart Cohen; The Emerging Artists Theatre; Bryan Mark Rigg; Amos Elon; Rebecca Street; Adena Potok; Bea Matz; Kathleen Conry; Dan Friedman; Michael Salzbank; Cindy Rosenthal; Warner and Susan Posen; Harriet Hoffman; Mary Fridley; Aileen Jacobson; Janice Stern; New York Foundation for the Arts; Michael Royce; Courtney Harge; Sarah Corpron; Madeleine Cutrona.

KUDOS
Crowdfunding Videography - Todd Dayton
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Crowdfunding Graphic Design - Bryan McClure
Crowdfunding Consultant - Leah Cevoli
Dialect coaching: Moshe Yassur, Arje Shaw and Ken Blady
THE OBLIGATION SUPPORTERS

Thanks to the people and institutions who, through their support, helped make The Obligation possible:

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Heyliker/Saint ($50 - $99)

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Associate Executive Producer ($5,000 and above)
The Posen Foundation
**WHO'S WHO**

**ROGER GRUNWALD**
(Actor/Playwright) is a veteran theatre, film, TV and voice actor. He has appeared in over 75 stage productions in the United States and Europe and is a co-founder of New York's Castillo Theatre (www.castillo.org). Over the last three years, Roger has been touring The Mitzvah Project, a short holocaust-themed play and lecture (www.themitzvah.org) he co-created with Annie McGreevey. *The Mitzvah*, the short play, is now a central element in *The Obligation*. Roger co-starred in the premiere episode of the HBO primetime series, *Vinyl*, under the direction of Martin Scorsese. More recently, Roger portrayed Otto Frank in a series of special performances of the play *Anne & Emmett*, first at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC and, subsequently, at the National Black Theater Festival in North Carolina. *Anne & Emmett* depicts an imaginary meeting between Anne Frank and Emmett Till. Roger, a native San Franciscan, received his undergraduate degree from UC Berkeley and trained as an actor at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and, later, with Wynn Handman in New York. In the early 1980s Roger and his partner, Bonny Gildin, were two of the early builders of the All Stars Project (www.allstars.org) youth program in New York City. The All Stars is now in six cities around the country. He and Ms. Gildin, the Executive Director of the All Stars Project Bay Area, reside in San Francisco.

**NANCY CARLIN** (Director) In addition to Roger Grunwald's *The Obligation*, Nancy is director of solo performers Dylan Brody (*Dylan Brody's Driving Hollywood*), Mick Berry (*Keith Moon the Real Me*), Trevor Allen (*Working for the Mouse*), and Arje Shaw (*Magic Hands Freddy*). Carlin is a director, actor, writer, producer, dialect coach, and acting teacher. A former company member of the American Conservatory Theater and longtime associate artist with California Shakespeare Theater, Nancy is a member of PlayGround. She has performed and directed extensively in regional theaters, including A.C.T., Berkeley Rep, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Aurora Theatre Company, Shotgun Players, Center Rep, Marin Theatre Company, African-American Shakespeare, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival. She co-authored the musical *Max Understood*, and co-produced the feature film *Haiku Tunnel*. Carlin holds a BA in comparative literature from Brown University and an MFA in acting from A.C.T. Ms. Carlin is a member of SDC, AEA, SAG-AFTRA, and the Dramatists Guild. She recently directed *The Watson Intelligence* for Shotgun Players, and played Kate Keller in *All My Sons* at The Jewel Theater in Santa Cruz.

**THEODORE J.H. HULSKER** (Sound & Video Projection Designer) is a Bay Area based theater artist, composer, theater sound/video designer, and curator. His recent theater design credits include *Baltimore Waltz* at the Magic Theater, *August Osage County* at Marin Theater Company, *Seared* with San Francisco Playhouse, and *Leni* at Aurora Theater Company. Theodore curates a monthly event, Klanghaus, showcasing the work of local performing and visual artists in an immersive environment, for which he received a Theater Bay Area CA$H grant in 2016. He has also developed, produced and performed in several original Klanghaus productions including *A Play About Leaving* and *The Office of Certain Things*. On certain moonlit nights he can be found performing in DIY spaces, bars, cafes and homes as his alter ego, The SHOWMAN. He graduated as department honoree from San Francisco State University in 2012. For more information, videos and sounds visit: http://theodore-hulsker.squarespace.com

**BROOKE JENNINGS** (Costume Designer) returns to PlayGround, having designed for *Best of PlayGround 21* and, most recently, David Steele’s *Vignettes on Love*. A graduate of UC Santa Cruz's Theater Arts Masters Program, Brooke is an award-winning Costume Designer working in the Bay Area and New York, including San Francisco Playhouse, Cutting Ball Theater, We Players, Magic Theater, Custom Made Theater Company, Virago Theatre, and Santa Cruz Shakespeare. Brooke is the 2015 Recipient for Best Costume Design by Theatre Bay Area for her work on *We Players’ Ondine at Sutro*. 
**AlleN WillNer** (Lighting Designer) is an award winning lighting designer for theater, dance and music. Awards and nominations include: Isadora Duncan Dance Awards for the lighting design of inkBoat’s *Line Between*, *Heaven’s Radio* and Deborah Slater’s *Private Life*. Nominations for Isadora Duncan Dance Awards for the Visual Designs of Erika Chong Shuch’s *51802* and inkBoat’s *Cockroach*. TBA Award Lighting Design Nominations for Shotgun Players’ *Eurydice*, Theater of Yugen’s *This Lingering Life* and We Player’s *Beowulf*. Bay Area Critics Circle Lighting Design Nominations for Shotgun Players’ *Eurydice and God’s Ear*, Broadway World Lighting and Set Design Nomination for Symmetry Theater’s *Patience Worth*. Lighting Artists in Dance Awards for inkBoat’s *Line Between*, Erika Chong Shuch’s *Sitting in a Circle*, Laura Arrington and Jesse Hewitt’s *Adult*, and Scott Wells, Amy Seiwert and Shinichi Iova-Koga’s *Take this Dance and Shove it!*

**JuliA FormANek** (Stage Manager) is delighted to be working at Potrero Stage. She graduated in May from Beloit College and has recently worked on *Measure for Measure* at the Santa Cruz Shakespeare Festival, as well as *As You Like It* at the California Shakespeare Theater.

**DAVE LYNCH** (Technical Director) is a third generation stagehand from Cleveland, OH who has been living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area for four years. He is currently studying lighting design at Ohlone College.

**JIM KLEINMANN** (Executive Producer, *The Obligation*; Artistic Director, PlayGround) co-founded PlayGround in 1994 and has served as Artistic Director since 1996. For PlayGround, he has provided artistic and administrative leadership for the past twenty-one seasons, developing PlayGround’s unique array of new playwright and new play incubator programs, including Monday Night PlayGround, the *Best of PlayGround* Festival, the full-length play Commissioning Initiative, the New Play Production Fund, and most recently the PlayGround Film Festival. During his tenure, he has directed more than 100 short plays by some of the Bay Area’s best new playwrights, including Lauren Yee, Geetha Reddy, Aaron Loeb, Trevor Allen, and Garret Jon Groenveld, among others, and has commissioned and developed over 60 full-length plays by these writers. He originally directed and dramaturged Ruben Grijalva’s *Value Over Replacement* for the 2014 PlayGround Festival. Kleinmann is a veteran arts administrator with more than twenty years of experience, including stints leading Traveling Jewish Theatre, Smuin Ballet and Berkeley Symphony. He is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama.

**DAVID HYRY & ASSOCIATES** (Press Agent) has for the past many years represented hundreds of performing artists in thousands of performances at theaters ranging from the intimate Marsh and Magic theaters to the American Conservatory Theater and Palace of Fine Arts. David Hyry has specialized in the launching and positioning of performing artists, choreographers, composers, organizations and festivals with full service Public Relations, Media Planning, Marketing, Advertising as well as providing booking support. DH & A has launched and/or positioned an array of artists and organizations ranging from Bill Irwin, Spaulding Gray, Rinde Eckert, Whoopi Goldberg, Diamanda Galas, Anne Bogart, Karole Armitage, La La La and Paul Dresher to George Coates Performance Works, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Black Choreographers Moving Festival, Goethe Institut, Italian Cultural Institute, Alliance Française, Irish Arts Foundation and Teatro Di Roma.

**THE JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILDREN’S SERVICES HOLOCAUST CENTER** (Producing Partner) is dedicated to the education, documentation, research, and remembrance of the Holocaust. As Northern California’s primary resource for education about the Holocaust and patterns of genocide, our programs increase awareness about the causes and consequences of hatred, anti-Semitism, and indifference — during the Holocaust, as well as during contemporary times. www.jfcsholocaustcenter.org

**PLAYGROUND** (Co-Producer), the Bay Area’s leading playwright incubator, provides unique development opportunities for the Bay Area’s best new playwrights, including the monthly Monday Night PlayGround staged reading series, annual PlayGround Festival of New Works, full-length play commissions and support for the production of new plays by local playwrights through the New Play Production Fund. To date,
PlayGround has supported over 200 local playwrights in the development and staging of more than 850 original short plays and 75 new full-length plays, with 8 more commissions currently in development. This past year, PlayGround completed major renovations on its San Francisco home theatre and reopened the black box performance space as Potrero Stage: PlayGround Center for New Plays in February with *The Potrero Nuevo Project*. The theatre serves as home for some of the Bay Area's leading new play developers and producers, including PlayGround, Crowded Fire, Golden Thread, Virago Theatre Company, and Playwrights Foundation, among others. For more information, visit http://playground-sf.org.

**POTRERO STAGE** is a 99-seat state-of-the-art performance space located in the heart of San Francisco's Potrero Hill neighborhood, operated by PlayGround, and serving as home to some of the Bay Area's leading new play developers and producers, including PlayGround, Crowded Fire, Golden Thread, and Playwrights Foundation, among others. For more information or to inquire about rentals, email info@potrerostage.org or call (415) 992-6677.

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**PlayGround**

1695 18th St #C101
San Francisco, CA 94107
(415) 992-6677 (office)
(415) 704-3177 (fax)
info@playground-sf.org
www.playground-sf.org

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