

THE OBLIGATION

The Mitzvah Project & PlayGround 2017

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Note: Following Release

On Background: Interview: Roger Grunwald

W/Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

Evolution of "The Mitzvah" Project, THE OBLIGATION

The Mitzvah Project and PlayGround present

The World Premiere of

THE OBLIGATION

A Full-length, One-person Play

Written & Performed by Roger Grunwald*

Directed by Nancy Carlin

October 12-November 5, 2017

Press Night Saturday October 14, 8 pm (Previews October 12 & 13)

POTRERO STAGE

1695 18th Street, San Francisco, CA

In Roger Grunwald's **THE OBLIGATION** a Jewish-American comedian, a survivor, a half-Jewish German soldier and an SS General explore the dark history of their and *our* world. Through drama and humor, Grunwald explores little-known aspects of The Holocaust and the post-war survivor experience and asks: Who decides what culture, race and ethnicity mean? What is identity? Why do we demonize "the other"? **THE OBLIGATION** is a dramatic reminder of the importance of heeding the lessons of The Holocaust and of the dangers facing society when we acquiesce in the face of prejudice and hatred. **The World Premiere of THE OBLIGATION, written & performed by Roger Grunwald is presented by The Mitzvah Project and PlayGround running October 12-November 5, 2017(Press Night Saturday October 14) at the POTRERO STAGE 1695 18th Street in San Francisco.**

Directed by Nancy Carlin, **THE OBLIGATION** is a provocative and immersive theatrical experience, conceived and designed to challenge the audience. "One of the characters I'll be portraying," says Grunwald, "is a high ranking SS officer directly responsible for more than a million Jewish deaths but largely forgotten to history." This unrepentant Nazi reminds us how quickly and alarmingly our world is erasing and, in some cases, sanctioning the dark history that produced him.

The play's central story revolves around the life of Schmucl Berkowicz, a Polish Jew from Bialystok. It's a story of innocence and boyhood crushes — survival and liberation. In addition to Schmucl and the SS officer, the play's two other main characters are Christoph Rosenberg, a German half-Jew who was a First Lieutenant in Hitler's army and The Chorus, a Groucho Marx-esque American-Jewish comedian-cum-social critic who leavens the drama by probing the boundary between the absurd and the horrific.

"I wrote the play to make a connection between the prejudice and hatred that the Schmuel character experiences and what is happening now in our politically fractured world. For me, there are few issues of greater concern." THE OBLIGATION includes the text and characters from the short play, "The Mitzvah," co-authored by Roger Grunwald and Annie McGreevey. The original production of "The Mitzvah" was directed by Ms. McGreevey.

Performances are Thu-Sat at 8pm and Sun at 2pm, and tickets are \$26-\$51. Press Night is Saturday, October 14. For more information or to purchase tickets online, visit <http://potrerostage.org/theobligation>.

* Member of Actors' Equity Association

Roger Grunwald (Actor/Playwright), the performer/creator of THE OBLIGATION, 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). In collaboration with Annie McGreevey, Roger co-authored and has toured internationally "The Mitzvah," (www.themitzvah.org) a short, Holocaust-themed one-person play. "The Mitzvah" is now the nucleus of THE OBLIGATION. He co-starred in the premiere episode of the HBO primetime series, VINYL, under the direction of Martin Scorsese and was one of two leads in the short film, "One Good Pitch" that premiered at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival. More recently, Roger portrayed Otto Frank in a special series of performances of the play "Anne & Emmett" at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

Roger, the son of two German Jews — an Auschwitz survivor and a refugee — was born and raised in San Francisco. He attended Town School for Boys (grammar-middle school), Lick Wilmerding High School and received his B.A. from Cal Berkeley. He trained as an actor at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and then resided in New York. In the early 1980s Roger and his partner, Bonny Gildin were two of the early builders of the the All Stars Project (www.allstars.org) youth program in New York. It's now in six cities around the country. He and Ms. Gildin, who is the Executive Director of the All Stars Project Bay Area, currently reside in San Francisco.

Nancy Carlin (Director) is a director, actor, writer, dialect coach, and acting teacher. A former company member of the American Conservatory Theater and 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 Repertory Theater, Aurora Theater Company, Shotgun Players, African-American Shakespeare Company, A Traveling Jewish Theater, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Carlin is the co-author of a new musical, Max Understood. A theater arts lecturer with UC Santa Cruz and San Jose State, she 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.

PlayGround, 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 71 new full-length plays, with 8 more commissions currently in development. PlayGround recently completed major renovations on its new San Francisco home theatre and reopened the black box performance space as Potrero Stage: The 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, 3Girls Theatre, and Virago Theatre Company, among others. For more information, visit <http://playground-sf.org>.

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CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

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World Premiere Of

THE OBLIGATION

Written & Performed by Roger Grunwald*

Directed by Nancy Carlin

October 12-November 5, 2017

Press Night Saturday October 14, 8 pm (Previews October 12 & 13)

At: Potrero Stage (formerly Thick House), 1695 18th Street, San Francisco, CA

Performances; Thu-Sat at 8pm and Sun at 2pm

Ticket prices: tickets are \$26-\$56 For more information call 415-992-7990

or visit <http://potrero-stage.org/Theobligation>

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ON BACKGROUND:

Interview Roger Grunwald

Evolution of The Mitzvah Project, THE OBLIGATION

THE OBLIGATION includes the text and characters from the short play, “The Mitzvah”, co-authored by Roger Grunwald and Annie McGreevey. The original production of “The Mitzvah” was directed by Ms. McGreevey.

Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at U Min

The Mitzvah Project: Interview with Roger Grunwald

Camille Grey on March 6, 2017

Roger Grunwald, the child of a German Holocaust survivor is a performer from San Francisco and the author of The Mitzvah Project. On February 14th, 2017 he presented his solo show at the University of Minnesota. In The Mitzvah Project Grunwald reveals the surprising history of the German men known as “mischlinge” – the derogatory term the Nazis used to characterize those descended from one or two Jewish grandparents – who served in Hitler’s army.

How did you get started integrating theater and community service?

In New York in the late 70s, I became a community activist and helped to build an organization called the New York City Unemployed and Welfare Council. This was at a time when New York City was in receivership. The city was broke and the major banks had taken over. The first programs to be cut were the ones in the poorest communities. One of the things that we learned from these men and women touched by the council’s work was that their kids loved culture but there was no real outlet for them to express this. A number of us who were involved in this community organizing activity came up with the idea of putting on a talent show. For the young people we produced a talent show in a church basement in the Bronx in the early 80s and that was the beginning of the All Stars Project. It is now in six cities around the United States.

What are the origins of The Mitzvah Project?

Around 2010 I was in a scene study class with Wynn Handman, the founder of the American Place Theater and the former right hand man of Sandy Meisner (one of the founders of the Group Theater). Handman, who has been teaching for 50 years, has been a great developer of actors as solo artists. The likes of which include John Leguizamo and Eric Bogosian. An actress in my class was working on a solo show and it got me thinking. I had been wanting to do something drawing on my family's history for some time, but I didn't know exactly what or how. I had the idea to start building a solo show. I started bringing some materials into class and my colleague, Annie McGreevey, became my director and co-writer of The Mitzvah, the short play that is part of The Mitzvah Project.

You mentioned your aunt, a living Holocaust survivor, in your performance as an inspiration of The Mitzvah Project. Can you elaborate on her role?

I realized I needed more material to work with so I went to visit my aunt, my mother's sister, Annie Bodenheimer. She will be 103 in April. I visited her to learn more and, possibly, develop material, as my mom was deceased at this time. During my interview with her she gave me a book called Hitler's Jewish Soldiers by Bryan Mark Rigg. I couldn't put it down. I considered myself fairly well read on the period of the Holocaust but I was unaware of this aspect of the German-Jewish experience. When I finished reading it I realized that it was an important story to be told and, thinking as a theater person, it also had dramatic potential.

What are your goals in performing and sharing The Mitzvah Project?

As the son of a survivor the question I put to myself is, with my mom's generation dying out, who's going to continue the teaching of the Holocaust and how? I look at it as a privilege and obligation as her son to leverage my skills as a performing artist to teach this history. I think the theater is a way you can touch people emotionally – something you can't do in the same way with a talk. That's one of the skills I have; one of the things we've learned about the power of performance.

How do you want The Mitzvah Project to affect its audience?

My hope and my intent is that the play can reach people on two levels: intellectually and emotionally. I'm not just conveying facts and it's not just drama for the sake of drama. It's hopefully a connection between the two. Hopefully it is a way of getting a little deeper into people and helping them feel something. If we're going to change the world, if we're going to, as a species, transform the world so that the "us and them," the "we and the other," isn't the dominant paradigm. We have to create a new "collective human performance," if you will. I have no illusions that everyone that comes to the theater is going to be transformed; that the theater as a thing in itself is going to change the world. People are going to change the world.

What have you been working on lately? What's next for you?

In the last year I've been writing what has now become a full-length one-person show called THE OBLIGATION. It deals with a lot of moral dilemmas that survivors faced both during and after the war. For more information on Roger Grunwald, The Mitzvah Project, and his upcoming full length play THE OBLIGATION visit his [website](#).