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Arts and Entertainment

By Leah Garchik

Jamie and **Philip Bowles** invited friends to their home on Wednesday to hear a portion of “The Obligation,” a one-man play to open on Oct. 12 at the Potrero Stage.

Actor **Roger Grunwald**, who stars and wrote the work, performed. The story is expanded from one he tells in “The Mitzvah Project,” a presentation he’s been doing around the country for years.

Grunwald, who was raised in San Francisco, is of German Jewish descent, and his late mother, an Auschwitz survivor, visited classrooms talking with young people about her story. Before she died, said Grunwald, she told him she wanted him to continue this work.

“The Obligation” tells a Holocaust story from three points of view, including a fictional Eastern European Jew, and a young Nazi soldier who is half-Jewish. Grunwald switches characters by the buttoning of a jacket, the change of an accent. Having studied German at Lick-Wilmerding High School and then at UC Berkeley, and having spent a year in Munich, the actor not only speaks fluent German, but also has served as a voice coach teaching other actors German accents.

Ironically, in prelude to this project, which has profound meaning for him, his German skills landed him a lot of work over the years portraying war criminals. In Court TV’s “The Nuremberg Trial,” his was the voice of **Hermann Goering**, **Rudolf Hess** and Admiral **Karl Dönitz**. He played a variety of German officers in the Discovery channel’s “Normandy: The Great Crusade.” He was **Adolf Hitler**, **Joseph Goebbels** and Goering in HBO’s “Hitler’s Master Race: The Mad Dream of the SS” and his was the voice of **Erwin Rommel** in HBO’s “Rommel: The Strange Death of the Desert Fox.”