

## **THE OBLIGATION is a reminder to never forget at the Potrero Stage**

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by Robert Sokol

If you are a reasonably sentient being, it should be easy to understand why it is important to tell hard, painful, even horrible stories again and again. We must recognize and remember what happened. We must bear witness and honor those affected by what happened. We must ensure, to the best of our ability, that something like it never happens again.

practiced of genocide and ethnic cleansing. We also live in a world where the witnesses to what is unquestionably man's greatest atrocity are aging and dying.

It has been more than seven decades since the war ended, the camps liberated, and the survivors, many never known, dispersed to all corners of the globe. We will never know when the last Holocaust survi-

of Schmucl Berkowicz, a young Polish Jew, and those around him during the darkest hours of the last century.

**Grunwald is a skilled character actor and he convincingly fills the stage with a fully-drawn ensemble of characters** from a shy boy asking a girl for a walk, to a Marxist Groucho of a cigar-toting Borschtian comic, to a jaded SS officer describing his atrocities in service to the Reich like a to-do list of mundane chores.

Using a few props and some skillfully interchangeable costume piece - inspired design by Brooke Jennings - **Grunwald shifts with the subtle craft of a chameleon from character to character. A barely perceptible shift of posture, an unexaggerated change in vocal tone, a refocusing of his vision, all create a seemingly alchemic change in the energy he radiates.** It's almost as if he and Carlin have found a way for him to become truly possessed by each person - all long dead - in some subtly perceptible but indefinable and utterly believable way. **Watching him move from role to role, marking points along the narrative path, is a thoroughly compelling, thrilling experience, wonderfully abetted by a series of evocative projections and aural supplements courtesy of Theodore J.H. Hulsker.**

In promoting the production, Grunwald has spoken repeatedly about how this piece of history - a true family history for him - is fading from public consciousness due to educational system failings and time's implacable forward motion. A recent study revealed a startling lack of comprehension among millennials of the meaning of terms like Holocaust and Auschwitz. This is what motivates him and short of true witness testimony - something in ever-decreasing supply - the power of theatre, of another living, breathing person speaking those stories to you can create an impact that eludes all other presentations.

Never forget. Never again. That is his obligation, and ours.



Roger Grunwald in *The Obligation*

The Holocaust has inspired an extensive canon of literature, film, television programs, music, documentaries, plays, and even musicals operas, and dance recitals. Has there been enough? No, and for several reasons.

We live in a time when fascism and the demonization of others increasingly influences not only our own "great experiment" of democracy here in the United States, but governments on every continent. We live in a world that still today has not ended the

vor has died but we already know the vile practice of denial has taken root and grows despite all evidence to the contrary. We must bear witness for those who can no longer speak.

So, it is never enough, and it is timely and welcome that Roger Grunwald has brought *The Obligation* back to Potrero Stage. A solo performance directed by acclaimed Bay Area theatremaker Nancy Carlin, *The Obligation* stitches the present to the past with the thread of one life, that