



A *CurtainUp* Los Angeles Review

By [Evan Henerson](#)

I could never presume to be an angel.—Mary



Meredith Bishop and Rob Nagle.
(Photo credit: Chris Gross.)

The horses are absent, and in making his ground zero act the detonation of a bus bomb in London, playwright Richard Martin Hirsch is clearly writing in a post Sept. 11 era not the 1970s. Those differences notwithstanding, *London's Scars* might have swapped its rather vague title for the moniker *Son of Equus*, or perhaps *Daughter of Equus*, since both the play's scarred protagonist and with the treating psychiatrist herself in need of healing.

Structural similarities aside, the play's premiere, a guest production at the Odyssey Theatre directed by Darin Anthony, crawls consistently under your skin and stays there. This is in no short measure due to the performance of Meredith Bishop, an actress whose best known credit had been one of the title character's relations in Nickelodeon's *The Secret World of Alex Mack*. Guess what? The lady's all grown up, and my word but she can act!

The character of Mary — aka Scarlett — played by Bishop actually feels three or four people mixed up inside a single damaged entity, all stuffed into a tight dress and draped by a formless hospital-like gown. Mary had been a prostitute, a quick witted tart with a thirst for words and books (*Alice in Wonderland* being a favorite) and a girl with a shrouded family history. She becomes a person of interest. This is not simply because she ends up withdrawn and largely incoherent, in a London psychiatric hospital, but because she was the last person to have contact with a Pakistani suicide bomber named Habib (Ammar Ramzi) before he blew up the aforementioned bus and its 13 passengers along with it.

Habib's ghost haunts Mary, and we see the two characters interact in flashback. Not surprisingly, Bishop's Mary takes on a couple of different incarnations with her terrorist john as well.

Mary's doctor is an art therapist named Bronwyn (Imelda Corcoran) who encourages drawing, mask making and anything else that might lead to a communication breakthrough. The hourglass is running out on said breakthrough — despite Bronwyn's protests — because a counter-terrorist agent named Wiggins (Rob Nagle) wants a few words with Mary. Wiggins puts the screws to

the clinic's director Margaret (Ann Noble) who, in addition to being Bronwyn's boss, is also her former lover.

The scar of the title comes from a jagged half "z" taking up the better part of Mary's left cheek. We don't learn its origin (at least not until play's end), but we know it defines Mary enough to give her considerable pain and an alias.

Bronwyn's got some internal scars of her own: she has lost a child, an incident which makes Margaret's brusque decision to hand her ex *this patient* seem professionally questionable at best. Unlike in *Equus*, *London's Scars* does not build toward a shattering climax. There are revelations both for doctor and patient, but these are no more earth-shaking than the event that threw Bronwyn and Mary into the same orbit.

Even the agent, played with a nice sense of blue collar humanity by Nagle, seems to sense that a case of this sensitivity calls for something other than strong arm tactics. Noble's too officious Margaret excepted, these characters feel distinctly human. The playwright seems more concerned with questions of responsibility than with blame. And, yes, in the world of *London's Scars*, there is a big difference.

I enjoyed watching Bishop stack Mary's layers one on top of the other, seeing how a character this lonely could end up both in the wrong place with the wrong man and, ultimately, in the right place with the right woman. I didn't mind so much that Hirsch is giving us no indication that Mary is headed out of her darkness, although Bronwyn clearly is. *London's Scars* is a play of great insight, serious humanity and, above all, one quite marvelous performance.

London's Scars

By Richard Martin Hirsch

Directed by Darin Anthony

Stage Manager: Laura Perez

Cast: Imelda Corcoran (Bronwyn), Ann Noble (Margaret), Meredith Bishop (Mary), Ammar Ramzi (Habib), Rob Nagle (Wiggins/Man)

Set Design: Stephen Gifford

Costume Design: Sherry Linnell

Lighting Design: Christine Wright

Sound Design: Bill Froggatt

Running Time: 2 and 10 minutes hours with one intermission

Odyssey Theatre. 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., L.A. (310) 477-2055

https://www.plays411.net/newsite/show/play_info.asp.

From May 13 to June 27

Thu-Sat. @ 8pm, Sun @ 2 pm.

Reviewed by Evan Henerson, based on May 15 performance.