

The Telegraph

A Round-Heeled Woman, Riverside Studios, London

A Round-Heeled Woman at Riverside studios is an unlikely date for a fun night out, but it scores and scores highly.

4 ★★★★★



Magnificent: 'A Round-Heeled Woman' at Riverside Studios, London Photo: Donald Cooper / Rex Features



By [Dominic Cavendish](#)

5:22PM BST 27 Oct 2011

What a surprise. This had all the hallmarks of something desperate. Little-known American play. Fondly remembered but not especially major-league American star: Sharon Gless (Cagney in

Cagney and Lacey). Subject-matter: a 66-year-old divorcee goes on the hunt for men and carnal excitement after decades of celibacy given over to teaching and an insatiable passion for English literature.

I'm sensing cringeworthy, I'm sensing contrived. I'm asking, do I have to go and see this? Is it for the likes of me?

Yes, actually. Even if you're outside the obvious demographic and have no foot in Gless's fan-base, *A Round-Heeled Woman* is fit to put a spring in your step. It's funny, smart and self-aware. It catches the pathos of its heroine's predicament without getting schmaltzy (at least not until the closing stages). It's rooted in truth: in real life as on stage, Jane Juska put an ad in the *New York Review of Books* that ran: "Before I turn 67 – next March – I would like to have a lot of sex with a man I like. If you want to talk first, Trollope works for me."

Not so much tempting fate there as tempting weirdos. Playwright Jane Prowse – who also directs – finds rich matter for mirth in the 63 responses this retirement-age answer to *Bridget Jones* received. Among the more suitable types that Juska plucked up the courage to meet, there still dwelt a plentiful supply of sex-obsessed creeps and loners, but the odd nice guy rode to the rescue, too. After the agonies of a crude, inarticulate cabbie, say, or randy octogenarian comes ecstasy in the shape of a debonair New York writer and even – and this is the dramatic clincher – an erudite thirtysomething young enough to be her estranged son.

The show wisely doesn't only get its kicks by laughing at male shortcomings. Looking magnificent with her silvery scraped-back hair, Gless gives us a wry, well-rounded portrait of a woman aching for physical contact she fears may never come her way again, suffering multiple instances of humiliation, wrestling with having been a bad mom and wondering what she needs to make her feel a whole woman – a strand of feminist inquiry augmented by having a Trollope heroine, old-maid Miss Mackenzie, flit playfully in and out of the action. With a cast of six gamely populating Juska's high-risk, devil-may-care manhunt, this unlikely date for a fun night out scores and scores highly.

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