

VARIETY

A Round-Heeled Woman

(Riverside Studios Studio B, London; 400 seats; £25 \$39 top)

By [Karen Fricker](#)



Sharon Gless in "A Round-Heeled Woman"

A Brian Eastman presentation of a play in one act written and directed by Jane Prowse, based on the true story of Jane Juska.

Jane - Sharon Gless

At the age of 66, retired Bay Area schoolteacher Jane Juska placed an personals ad in the "New York Review of Books" declaring she wanted to have "a lot of sex with a man I like" before her next birthday. She chronicled her resulting experiences in a memoir that has now been adapted into a star vehicle for Sharon Gless, which premiered last year in Miami. Though the venture clearly aspires to entertain and enlighten about the emotional and physical realities of golden-age sex, pedestrian text and adapter Jane Prowse's old-fashioned production add up to a predictable 100-minute narrative of self-discovery and redemption.

There's an attempt at a mildly shocking opener as we are greeted by the sight of Jane (Gless), resplendent in a flowing red nightie, lying on her bed and getting to the good part of a round of phone sex. But production establishes its true tone as, after a laugh line, Jane "realizes" the audience is there and starts to address us directly. Show is in essence an extended monologue, broken up with enacted scenes between Jane and her various suitors (played by the multi-role actors Barry McCarthy, Neil McCaul and Michael Thomson), girlfriends (Jane Bertish and Beth Cordingly), and, as the therapeutic course of the narrative moves on, dead mother (Bertish) and estranged adult son (Thomson).

And guess what? The dating scene after 65 isn't that far off the more mediatized experiences of younger people: Jane meets a few cads, some nice-guys-with-a-catch (addiction, disease), has some mediocre sex and then increasingly better sex, but eventually figures out her real problem is self-acceptance and emotional skeletons in the closet.

The emotional terrain and narrative level here is redolent of a 1980s-era Movie of the Week, an impression furthered by the handsome but stolid home-interior set (by Ian Fisher) and several interspersed scenes of attempted comedy in a salsa dancing class with the game Thomson kitted out like an extra from "Flashdance."

Gless looks splendid and is never less than a likeable and empathetic presence, but at times one feels her straining to make her charisma reach the back of the 400-seat auditorium. She's being made to work too hard to keep the whole evening afloat.

A London run was presumably conceived because Prowse is based here, and because the material features a running reference to the work of novelist Anthony Trollope (the title is a Trollope-era euphemism for a promiscuous lady). But show clangs as way too touchy-feely-American to make much cultural sense in Blighty, though a touring or sit-down future in seniors-oriented communities Stateside might be saleable.

Sets, Ian Fisher; costumes, David Blight; lighting, Nick Richings; sound and music, Matt Corey; production manager, Digby Robinson. Opened, reviewed Oct. 19, 2011. Running time: 1 HOUR, 40 MIN.

With: Jane Bertish, Beth Cordingly, Barry McCarthy, Neil McCaul, Michael Thomson

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