# [***AJC INTERVIEW / CATHERINE ZETA-JONES: Jazzed about 'Chicago'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:47NB-DFY0-0026-G17N-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

THE MOVIE

"Chicago"

Starring Catherine Zeta-Jones, Renee Zellweger and Richard Gere. Directed by Rob Marshall. Rated PG-13 for sexual content and dialogue, violence and thematic elements. At metro theaters. 1 hour, 53 minutes.

\* On ajc.com: Read AJC film critic Eleanor Ringel Gillespie's review of "Chicago." Grade: A-

AJC

New York --- Not every woman does leg splits between having babies. But that's Catherine Zeta-Jones' MO.

Birth a baby. Film "Chicago," with its hot-jazz, leg-splitting opening number, "All That Jazz." Birth a baby.

Baby No. 2 with husband Michael Douglas is due in April, she says while placing her right hand atop her tummy. She's wearing perfectly chic black stretch pants, exposed under a perfectly chic black top.

"This movie was really physically demanding, and it was my idea to do it after I'd had a baby," Zeta-Jones says. " 'Oh, my God,' I thought. 'Whose bright idea was this?' "

As the musical's smart, calculating, headline-grabbing vaudeville diva Velma Kelly, Zeta-Jones opens the film with the blistering "All That Jazz." As she belts out the words and dances, a line of male hoofers hoists her into the air, extending her legs into a flawless split.

The 33-year-old, Welsh-born actress got her start on the English stage in musicals. So she does splits all the time. Right?

"Never," Zeta-Jones says. "Never did a split from the moment I [previously] put my dance shoes up. Of course, I couldn't do it when I started doing this movie. I was terrified about being lifted up by these guys. I thought, I'm sure I'm too heavy. They're going to collapse under me, and I'm going to break my neck."

Obviously, nothing got broken. Her co-stars talk about her ferocity in preparing and performing for "Chicago." The film is full of show-stopping numbers not only from Zeta-Jones but also from co-stars Renee Zellweger (as Roxie Hart), Richard Gere, John C. Reilly and Queen Latifah.

Reilly has noted the tenacity in the film's two leading ladies, Zeta-Jones and Zellweger.

"I would not want to battle them for a taxi," he says.

Critics are heaping praise on the movie. "Chicago," as much about the unquenchable thirst for celebrity as it is about song-and-dance numbers, landed a leading eight nominations for this month's Golden Globes, including best motion picture musical or comedy, director and nods for each of its five main stars.

Though she has a musical background, many American filmgoers are more familiar with Zeta-Jones as a dramatic actress. She made "The Mask of Zorro" (1998); "Entrapment," with Sean Connery (1999); "The Haunting" (1999); "High Fidelity" (2000); and Steven Soderbergh's "Traffic." There was also the comedy "America's Sweethearts" (2001), with Julia Roberts.

A pregnant Zeta-Jones recently sat down (gingerly) in her New York hotel suite to talk about "Chicago," the difference between making musicals and dramas and her recent ***cellphone*** ad campaign.

She also spoke about a little item she treasures on almost all her film sets: a karaoke machine.

AJC: How did you go about finding Velma?

ZETA-JONES: I always knew the music but didn't really know the story. But what I learned from Bill Condon's script and [director] Rob Marshall's vision was that I didn't have a lot of deep scene work that would explain Velma's character. So I had to nail her from the moment she finishes that first number. What I wanted to do was find nuances that weren't explained but were so characteristic of her. She's desperate to be on top. She's ruthless. Everything about her is on show. And she wants everyone to love her. It's greed and love of celebrity.

AJC: And what about the regimen of singing and dancing again?

ZETA-JONES: It was like being in a boot camp. Yes, I've danced before, but it was a long time ago. I had to get back the style and the edginess and the stamina and the flexibility. It was tough. And just tuning up the voice. I've never rehearsed so intensely for a movie in my life, and I probably won't ever again.

AJC: It was while you were making "America's Sweethearts" that I first heard about you and your traveling karaoke machine.

ZETA-JONES: It's a bizarre thing. I always like to have a karaoke machine in my trailer. I like to sing sometimes.

AJC: What do you sing?

ZETA-JONES: Oh, the standards, from the Carpenters to Simon and Garfunkel. Good old tunes. I release a lot of tension by belting out songs. People would laugh. My brother was with me one time, and he's a bit of a karaoke freak, too. So I'd go back to my trailer and I'd hear "Bridge Over Troubled Water" blaring. It's fun. It passes the time. I didn't have a karaoke machine on "Chicago" for obvious reasons. I had enough singing and dancing and enough music around. But on my other films, I have had one. Even on "Traffic."

AJC: There was a commentary piece in the Chicago Tribune that criticized your ***cellphone*** ads. It basically said, "Why would someone of the stature of Catherine Zeta-Jones do this?"

ZETA-JONES: They gave me an offer I couldn't refuse. It's a business venture I wanted to partake in. The industry is not just about showing up and knowing your lines anymore. The movie studios are conglomerates. AOL Time Warner. Viacom. The Internet business. Technology. It's all mixed up in the same bag. And [it's] like I have an Elizabeth Arden contract. Same as Halle Berry. I'm a complete gadget freak.

AJC: "Traffic" and "Chicago" are really your best works to date. They are two different genres. Is it easier to get into playing one more than the other?

ZETA-JONES: Having that rehearsal period for "Chicago" was something I cherished, because I can flesh out so much. Try certain things and fall flat on your face and then come back up again. It gives you the time to do that. With "Traffic," it's scarier. The way Steven [Soderbergh] shoots, it's very different. He has the camera on his shoulder. He's sitting in the car with you while you're doing the scene, filming it. It's spontaneous to the point of "Don't say that line, say something like this" or "Improvise something there." They are two completely different styles. And I like them both the same. I find them both challenging.

AJC: And you've done a Coen brothers movie with George Clooney, the upcoming "Intolerable Cruelty." That must be different again.

ZETA-JONES: Yes. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. We'd be doing scenes with me and George, and they'd be snickering behind the camera --- to the point they had to stop shooting. It would just crack them up. And the amazing thing is we were always done for the day at 2 in the afternoon because they were so prepared. Everything they have on the schedule is done. And I'm like, "Don't you want to do another take?" "No," one of them would say. "I think we've got it."

**Graphic**

Photo: Catherine Zeta-Jones, who got her start on the English stage, plays vaudeville diva Velma Kelly in "Chicago." / David James; Photo: Catherine Zeta-Jones in a scene from "Chicago." (Teaser)

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