

POP CULTURE NEWS

First Tango In Paris

Suddenly single Nicole Kidman shows her gams -- and takes a big gamble -- with the sexy MOULIN ROUGE

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By [Jeff Jensen](#)

You were expecting a woman destroyed. Some tears, a hitch in the throat, maybe a crumpled tissue or two. Possibly even a slap to the face when you dared to use "Tom Cruise" and "miscarriage" in the same sentence. But you get none of this from Nicole Kidman as she sits in an airy hotel suite on a drab May day in Los Angeles. Instead, you get laughter and snappy banter. You get a black sleeveless top with a plunging neckline and an alarmingly mini miniskirt, risking peril with each cross of her long legs. In fact, the only question that gives Kidman pause is a request to explain that outfit. "What do you mean?" she blushes, wrapping her fine china arms around her legs. "It's my ode to being a little French coquette."

Appropriate attire, given that she's here, technically, to talk about Moulin Rouge, a risky, \$50-million reinvention of the movie musical, set in 1899 at the titular Parisian nightclub/dancehall/bordello. The movie, costarring Ewan McGregor, is the third feature from Australian director Baz Luhrmann, whose last film, William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, melded MTV aesthetics and iambic pentameter. Originally slated for last Christmas, Moulin Rouge was pushed to May 18 in order to give Luhrmann more time to fine-tune his densely textured soundscape (see sidebar on page 39). Fortuitously, the delay allowed Moulin Rouge to open -- and compete in -- the 2001 Cannes film festival, where it received standing ovations (and love/hate reviews). But it also lands in the middle of the media frenzy ignited by the Kidman/Cruise marital meltdown, and the subsequent disclosure of the actress' miscarriage. And now, as she begins to stump for Moulin Rouge, she's painfully aware of what her interviewers really want to talk about. "The best and worst times of my life have met at the same time," says Kidman, 33, who looks tired and a tad thin. "Would I prefer to be with my family in Australia, taking care of my kids? Absolutely. But this film means so much to me."

"I shouldn't jump in," says Luhrmann, a lean, silver-haired live wire who sits close to his star, "but I think something great has happened: There's a lot of talk about the work. People are really interested in your work, Nicole. They really are."

"Yeah," she says flatly, not sounding convinced. She pauses. "It's just a really weird time."

Upon completion of a major project, Baz Luhrmann goes on a backpacking trip around the world to recharge his creative batteries. After Romeo + Juliet, he trekked to Marrakech, Cairo, Alexandria, and Paris, and came back with the inspiration for Moulin Rouge: the myth of Orpheus, the Greek lyre player who went into the underworld to save his lady love but failed. "The myth is about the moment you realize there are things you cannot control," Luhrmann says later in his cramped office on the Twentieth Century Fox lot. His twin trademarks are on full display: his art-school formal uniform -- black pants, black jacket, and a blue dress shirt -- and almost manic energy. "You will be scarred by the experience, but hopefully, you will grow from it, not be destroyed. That's the story of the film -- and also true of the making of the film."

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