

(MOVIES)

Winning Streak

Veteran actress
MARY STEENBURGEN tries
her hand in *Last Vegas*.

ON A TUESDAY AFTERNOON, MARY Steenburgen calls from her home on Martha's Vineyard and, prompted by a question about her baby granddaughter, waxes poetic about life and living. "One of the nice things about growing older," she says, "is that there's more of a sense of drinking in life's moments, rather than letting them whiz by."

Appropriately, that sentiment is prevalent in her new film, *Last Vegas*, in which she stars among a legendary lineup that includes Michael Douglas, Robert De Niro, Morgan Freeman and Kevin Kline. Though it's been touted as the baby boomer's *The Hangover*, Steenburgen, 60, insists that it explores, in sweet, funny and tender ways, enduring friendships and "the great human experience that we all deal with: getting older."

For her role as lawyer-turned-lounge-singer Diana, Steenburgen admits, "I'm not a brilliant singer, but I am a hard worker, so I knew I'd come through OK." That work ethic was instilled in her as a child growing up in North Little Rock, Ark., where her mother and father worked as a school-board secretary and a freight-train conductor, respectively.



After leaving college early to move to New York to study acting at the respected Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre, Steenburgen got her big break in 1977 when Jack Nicholson discovered her in Paramount Studios' reception area and cast her in his Western, *Goin' South*. Just two years later, she nabbed a Supporting Actress Oscar for her third movie, *Melvin and Howard*, and has maintained a flourishing career for the past three decades.

More recently, Steenburgen has guest-starred on such TV shows as *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Bored to Death*, both of which allowed her to share the screen with husband Ted Danson. Though the pair married in 1995, Steenburgen wasn't charmed by the leading man of *Cheers* when they'd first met years earlier. "I was a huge fan of his, but I didn't think of him romantically," she remembers. "When [the relationship turned romantic], honestly, you could have knocked me over with a feather!"

The two now split their time between California and Massachusetts, and Steenburgen stays busy outside Hollywood as a songwriter and a home-décor-business owner. Although not much of a gambler, Steenburgen is putting her chips on a new restaurant in Little Rock, Ark., called South on Main, which opened earlier this year in partnership with Danson, *Oxford American* magazine, chef Matt Bell and his wife, Amy Kelley Bell. Perhaps she was inspired by her time shooting *Last Vegas*, when she indulged in games of craps and roulette with her cast mates. "This is going to sound so lame," she laughs, "but I won \$80 and was thrilled to death!" —JULIE JACOBS