

Title: Inside Awards Season with Gregory Ellwood -
Q&A: Anna Kendrick talks 'New Moon,' 'Scott Pilgrim'
and her breakthrough in 'Up in the Air'

Author: Gregory Ellwood

Link: <http://www.hitfix.com/blogs/2008-12-11-awards-campaign-2009/posts/q-a-anna-kendrick-talks-new-moon-scott-pilgrim-and-her-breakthrough-in-up-in-the-air/print>

Posted: Sunday, Sep 13, 2009

A year ago I spoke with Dev Patel right after "Slumdog Millionaire" had debuted at the Toronto International Film Festival. The Brit's first feature film, like many, Patel still couldn't grasp the amazing road the eventual Best Picture-winning movie was going to take or the part he would play in it. At the time, having seen the journey of recent word-of-mouth contenders such as "Little Miss Sunshine" and "Juno," I told him to savor as much of it as he could and enjoy the wild ride. The same scenario is about to engulf up and coming actress Anna Kendrick.

The breakout star of Jason Reitman's new dramedy "Up in the Air," Kendrick will have moviegoers buzzing over her role as Natalie a smart young woman brought in to modernize a company that fires employees for other companies so they don't have to do it themselves. George Clooney plays a longtime manager for the company who is weary of Natalie's new plan to do all the firings via internet video conference call. Eventually his boss (Jason Bateman), puts the unlikely duo on the road together so Natalie can learn the ropes. It's a fantastic performance that could (and should) lead to a best supporting actress nomination for the former Tony Award nominee (youngest ever at the age of 12).

Kendrick isn't a stranger to the big screen or the spotlight, however. She plays the supporting, human role of Bella's schoolmate Jessica in "The Twilight Saga" and will return with the franchise in both "New Moon" this fall and "Eclipse" next June. She also landed a role in the hype-worthy Edgar Wright flick "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" coming out next year.

Having enjoyed "Air" at the public premiere last night, I sat down for a one on one with Kendrick at a Toronto hotel today to discuss her work in "Air" and her very busy 2009.

Q: Are you enjoying all your press commitments to day?

Part of me feels like I'm under hypnosis, but I'm trying to stay focus and respond. And for all I know, I'm answering in French and I don't even know it.

Q: You're still speaking in English to me so that's a good sign. When did you first see the completed 'Air'?

Last night was the first night I saw it with an audience and it was really beautiful. I didn't want it to end. It was everything I wanted it to be.

Q: From the critics I've talked to the response to your performance has been pretty euphoric. What has that reception been like?

I went out the night before the premiere and I was really shocked by how many people who approached me had seen the press screening and that was really exciting and that got me pretty jazzed to see it with an audience. I'm glad that that happened, because I think I would have been a little too overwhelmed by the audience response. I got a wee bit emotional.

Q: Many actors would have seen the names Jason Reitman and George Clooney on a project and accepted it without even reading the script. What was your reaction to actually reading the party itself?

When I read the script it was so damn beautiful I just thought, 'OK, this is one of those things where the cover letter says that George Clooney is attached, but there is no way that's going to happen. He's attached but he's really not going to do it. This role is so beautiful, the script was so beautiful and whoever ends up in this role will be brilliant.' And then when I got it and realized George was really doing it that was like gravy.

I was so grateful to Jason Reitman for writing this role for a young woman. It has nothing to do with romance and sex. She's just smart and interesting and I kept waiting for her to disappear in the script because I knew she never got romantically involved in the little blurb and I kept waiting for the moment where she sort of disappeared and she had her side scenes and that's it. There tends to be an attitude of what purpose is this young woman serving if she's not taking her clothes off. I just can't say how lucky I feel.

Q: It's funny, I recognize a lot of my friends in Natalie. Is there anyone you particularly based her on for your performance?

Jason has based Natalie on some women in his life that he knows and he loves very much. I met one of them halfway through filming, but that was definitely interesting. I can see why he loves these women and why he loves Natalie. He describes Natalie and all these women that their biggest problem is constantly being the smartest person in the room. And that at some point in that person's life they have a realization that all the other elements of their life are not just going to fall into place. It's based on some real incredible women so I'm sure that's why it feels so real.

Q: Did you relate to her at all personally?

I think in a lot of ways I can relate to Natalie, but we want very different things. The speech about thinking she'd be married with a kid and have a Grand Cherokee by the time she was 23 has never registered with me. My parents had me late, they got married late, they had kids late. My mom for the majority of my upbringing was the breadwinner, so I just have very different ideas of what my life was supposed to turn out to be. I'm sure There will be plenty of surprises along the way and I have unrealistic ideas about things I assume will just work out, but I guess I'm going to just have to cross that bridge when I get to it.

Q: You've been on Broadway and experienced the 'Twilight' phenomenon, but how nervous were you were you not to act with George Clooney?

I've never been more terrified in my life to do this movie. It was months of knowing and being terrified, but within five minutes of talking to him you realize how easy it's going to be and how easy he's going to make it for you. To not just meeting him and realizing he's another human being like the rest of us, I completely appreciate he goes out of his way to make you feel comfortable and to make you feel like you can do your job around him. I think that's a skill he's had to develop because he's been 'George Clooney' for a long time and he probably is aware of how people get around him. And he's a generous enough person and a generous enough actor to go out of his way to make you feel like whatever you have to do on the screen, he's going to make sure that happens.

Q: There is a very powerful scene in 'Air' when one of the women your character is firing sort of snaps back at Natalie and she ends up having a breakdown. You're particularly strong in that moment. Can you talk about shooting that?

The one with Tamila Jones, for some reason I had pictured that character and that delivery so different and the way when she came to the table read and it's this small scene I remember that I felt like she cut through me, so that part I definitely have to give her a ton of credit for that scene. I felt she could see right through me.

Q: OK, the 'Twilight' questions you knew were coming. Did you shoot 'Air' after 'New Moon'?

[Actually] I went to shoot 'New Moon' while I was still shooting 'Up in the Air.' I had to run back and forth.

Q: Was that hard?

It's funny because the characters are so different and I was wrapped up in Natalie world, but Jessica, the character that I play in the series, is such a silly girl it was almost like a little escape to go and just play and just monologue about nothing. Basically, I would go up to Vancouver and shoot a scene where something was [already] written, but [director] Chris Weitz would tell me to keep talking because we had to do all of it in one take as a 'walk and talk' and have it feel the space. So, he'd just tell me to say random stuff and it was like stretching in the middle of doing a marathon.

Q: Have you finished shooting 'Eclipse'?

I filmed a majority of what I do and I have like two more days left. My parts, the human characters get shrunk down [in "Eclipse"].

Q: Do you know if you'll be back for 'Breaking Dawn' if and when those movies happen?

It does feel like to us -- when I say 'us' I assume people know I'm referring to the human characters -- it feels like it's probably coming to a close. We appear in a dream sequence or one sequence in the book of 'Breaking Dawn' so I don't know if we'll be back for it and we're only signed up for three, because the three books were only out when we made the first film. So, I

don't know that we will be involved in 'Breaking Dawn,' but it's a really fun thing to go back to. Particularly when I go back for this short period of time it feels like I'm going back to summer camp and I'm seeing my friends from summer camp.

Q: You've dealt with three different directors this year. Has that been refreshing? Have you enjoyed it?

I am trying to pit them all against each other. I'm trying to get Jason and Chris Weitz in a fight, (Laughs.) No, it's so fun it's so interesting. I'm probably the luckiest girl on earth, let's be honest. It is really fun to work with everybody.

Q: Can you compare them?

Jason, the thing I have to say about him is he's so brilliant and intuitive it's annoying (Laughs.), because I like to think I'm not an easy read and I don't like somebody being able to tell my every mood, but he does it with everybody so I feel a little bit better about it. Chris Weitz, never saw him sweat, always made everybody feel as though they were free to be happy and just chill out on set even though I'm sure it was a really stressful set because there was a lot to do. Edgar Wright more energetic than anybody on set even though he probably gets two hours of sleep a night which is incredibly valuable on a set like that where you are shooting essentially an action film but you're shooting it in these tiny little pieces and energy is hard to come by.

Q: I read the 'Scott Pilgrim' books, have they expanded your character of Stacy at all?

Basically my part is yelling at Michael Cera on the phone (Laughs.), but I got to meet the real quote on quote Stacy Pilgrim, Bryan Lee O'Malley's sister Stacy and she said, y'know, she used to call him up whenever she thought he was doing something wrong and yell at him about his life. So, that was just a blast. And, yes, it is a little disappointing to be involved in 'Twilight' and not be vampire or a werewolf and be in 'Scott Pilgrim' and not be in one of the bands or get to fight, but I'm happy to come in and be the snarky sister in a project like that with so many amazing young actors.

Q: So do you have anything else up coming or are you just going to spend the fall enjoying the 'Up in the Air' ride?

I'm gonna try to. Who knows what will happen, but as of now this is it and I just want go on the ride with this film. Happy and willing.

"Up in the Air" is currently schedule for release this December.

"The Twilight Saga: New Moon" opens nationwide on Nov. 20.