

Anna Kendrick goes from 'Twilight' to 'Up in the Air'

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Most child actors either burn out or fade away. At 12, Anna Kendrick earned a Tony Award nomination for Broadway's "High Society" in 1998, becoming the third-youngest nominee after 11-year-old Daisy Eagan (1991, "The Secret Garden") and 10-year-old Frankie Michaels (1966, "Mame"), both of whom won. Yet while those two worthies went on to amass, respectively, few and no other credits, Kendrick has continued a steady rise that now finds her "Up in the Air."

That's the title of the new serio-comic film, opening in limited release Friday and wide on Christmas Day, in which [George Clooney](#) and she spar as reluctant mentor and protege in a corporate-downsizing consulting firm. The [Portland, Maine](#), native matches the established star blow for blow, showing the same fierce talent she's demonstrated in such disparate roles as a manipulative, high-school debater barracuda in "Rocket Science" (2007) and boy-crazy best friend Jessica in the "Twilight" films.

Now 24, Kendrick spoke at the Waldorf Towers in [Manhattan](#) with frequent contributor Frank Lovece.

You're known to cult audiences for your knockout performance in the underseen but critically acclaimed "Rocket Science," and for a YouTube clip of your knockout song "The Ladies Who Lunch" in the movie "Camp" (2003) . . .

Oh, no!

Oh, no? What, oh, no?

[Laughs] No, it's just funny that for whatever reason only that one number has really resurfaced on YouTube, and it makes me regret that people don't see the whole movie . I mean, I understand it, and I'm happy people are watching any piece of it, but people really should see the whole movie!

That's a very modest way of looking at it. So you have fans who know your work and you've got this indie career and a role in the "Twilight" movies. How did that background lead to co-starring with [George Clooney](#) in a big studio picture?

People assume, and rightly so, that it was this grueling audition process and I must have screen-tested with George and probably went in five times. And what actually happened is I went in once, thought I blew it, and then two or three weeks later I got a call saying they were going to offer me the job. And I was completely thrown. Jason told me that he had written it with me in mind.

He knew your work from . . .

From "Rocket Science." And I basically had to come in and prove I had the goods, because from a studio standpoint why wouldn't you hire [Natalie Portman](#) or somebody like that? Nobody's heard of me - like, why would you put me in a movie with George Clooney? That's ridiculous!

What went through your head when you heard who your co-star was?

I had heard that George was attached to it, but I just assumed it was one of those things they just say on a movie when there's a slim possibility it will work, just to generate interest, and there was no way it was going to work out, because why would I be given the opportunity to so much as audition for a George Clooney film? And then when I was cast, I had lunch with Jason and he was telling me about "me and George" and how excited he was to do the film, and I was eating my taco trying to act like it was the most normal thing in the world, for me to be doing a movie with George Clooney.

What's next? "Twilight" surely raised your profile.

It's funny - I was cast before "Twilight," actually. "Twilight" is this huge phenomenon, but I've yet to get a job from it! [laughs] I was cast in "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" [her next film] for ages before "Twilight" came out. And Jason saw "Rocket Science" and didn't even know what "Twilight" was. He actually texted me after seeing it and said, "Oh, I loved 'Twilight,' great job, but I prefer when you play a genius." As strange compliments go, that's pretty good!