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http://www.philly.com/philly/entertainment/20091204_Ana_Kendrick_s_future_not_up_in_the_air.html

Article title: Anna Kendrick's future not up in the air

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The screenshot shows the Philadelphia Daily News website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Inquirer', 'Daily News', 'My Community', 'phrequency', and 'Student Union 34'. A Comcast advertisement for a 'FREE 4G Mobile Broadband device' is visible. The main navigation bar includes categories like 'HOME', 'NEWS', 'SPORTS', 'BUSINESS', 'WHAT'S HAPPENING', 'RESTAURANTS & FOOD', 'ENTERTAINMENT', 'LIVING', 'MARKETPLACE', 'JOBS', 'CARS', and 'HOMES'. The article title 'Anna Kendrick's future not up in the air' is prominently displayed, along with the author 'HOWARD GENSLER' and a photo of Anna Kendrick. A sidebar on the right features a movie advertisement for 'Up in the Air' starring George Clooney, with the text 'UP IN THE AIR' and 'NOW PLAYING'.

If her career had taken a different turn along the way, Anna Kendrick might be on television now, starring in "Glee." She's a musical-theater geek, nominated for a Tony when she was 12 for her role as Daisy in Broadway's "High Society."

Kendrick flexed those musical-theater muscles on screen with a great supporting performance in Todd Graff's underrated "Camp," but then started work as Jessica Stanley in the "Twilight" films and went indie with a role as a high-school debate star in "Rocket Science." There she caught the eye of Jason Reitman ("Thank You for Smoking," "Juno"), the director who turned Ellen Page into a star and may do the same for Kendrick, who as fish-out-of-water efficiency expert Natalie steals scene after scene from George Clooney's Ryan Bingham in "Up in the Air."

In September at the Toronto International Film Festival, Reitman spoke about casting Kendrick:

"Natalie's a character based on many women that I've fallen in love with in my life - extraordinary, young, brilliant women who are just too smart for the room and they're always frustrated. My wife is one of those women. It's very much based on my wife.

"I was just knocked out by her," Reitman said of Kendrick's role in "Rocket Science."

"I thought, 'What an original voice.' She is this character, and I basically wrote it for her. My big question was whether or not she could do it, whether ["Rocket Science"] was some sort of an anomaly, that she could do it once but could not do it again.

"But she came in and read against every great actress of her generation," Reitman added, "and she just crushed it."

At the time of her audition, Reitman didn't tell Kendrick that he'd written the role for her, but she sure was excited to learn it later.

"Uh, yeah," she said. "Trying not to scream at the top of my lungs was the main objective. I tried to play it really cool, well, of course I did, but inside I was having a little personal celebration."

An actress for a dozen years (she's now 24), Kendrick's Maine upbringing and her mother's friends keep her grounded.

"We live in this insane bubble where everyone knows everything that's going on with our films," she said, "but if I said to 50 of my mom's friends that I was making a film with Michael Cera they would have no idea who he was even after I described him in detail and listed everything he'd done."

Unsurprisingly, mom's friends had heard of Clooney. But they couldn't help Kendrick understand the screenplay's corporate culture.

Kendrick, however, was able to draw on her acting instincts (she has no formal training) to find a way into Natalie's character.

"When I was reading the novel of 'Up in the Air,' I realized that there's this whole other world, this business world, where they use all the jargon and the lingo and the side references and it's the same as our world," she said.

"But I didn't want to keep re-reading the novel because the novel is sort of Ryan Bingham world and Natalie doesn't really understand that world and she's really thrown by it. So I instead thought about books that Natalie would read - with the kind of corporate lingo that Natalie would pride herself in knowing - and that sort of got me thinking about being one of the boys and trying to think like one of the boys and being a shark, being a killer."

And working with Clooney, a notorious practical joker?

"I was terrified," she said. "I'm so bad with practical jokes because I'm such a control freak, and I was just waiting and waiting for that day to come when I'd be the butt of a joke and I'd never recover."

"And it never came. And then I began to think that there was something wrong with me that I didn't get the George Clooney prank and I got really upset about it."

Next for the busy actress is a small role in Edgar Wright's "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World," of which Kendrick said, "Nobody's ready for how unbelievable that film is going to be."

After that, who knows?

"I have absolutely no talent for trying to figure out what my next move will be," she said. "Jason is probably better at predicting my life than I am at predicting my own life."

Kendrick couldn't even predict that she'd get the role of Natalie. At her audition, she thought she was horrible.

Reitman said that that was his fault.

"I was so nervous to tell her that I wrote the role for her - because I didn't want to affect her audition - that I wouldn't even act warm to her," he said. "I'm a bad liar, so if I want to pretend that I don't care about your audition, I'm going to be as cold as humanly possible. I was probably pretty mean to her."

"But she got the job - I think everything worked out in the end."