

## Oscar-Worthy ‘Up in the Air’ Gels With Shrewd Script, Fresh Faces, Unpredicted Realism

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Director Jason Reitman is becoming like a fine wine. He’s maturing with age, tasting newer with each sip and leaving an aftertaste that makes you think you’ll savor what’s next.

And in his new romantic dramedy “Up in the Air,” he has managed to pour a likely Oscar contender on the unusual subject matter of flyover country and layoffs all while continuing to display his directorial range. He again uses some of his usual casting suspects (i.e. J.K. Simmons returns for a trifecta with Reitman after both “Juno” and “Thank You for Smoking” and Jason Bateman’s now on a double after “Juno”).



George Clooney stars as Ryan Bingham in the dramatic comedy “Up in the Air”.

*Image credit: Dale Robinette*

Reitman describes “Up in the Air” as a personal journey in [our recent interview with him](#) [19] on this film. In addition, he admits that the quest was daunting after coming off the Oscar-winning achievement with the surprise hit film [“Juno” from writer Diablo Cody](#) [20] and stars Ellen Page and Michael Cera.

While George Clooney confidently delivers the lead as a nomad whose home is on the road (with a hilarious fetish for travel rewards), what's most unexpected about this smart script is its infusion of Clooney's perfectly cast love interest along with his pleasantly refreshing protégé.

“Up in the Air,” which is written by Jason Reitman and Sheldon Turner based on the novel of the same name by Walter Kirn, stars George Clooney along with two sorely underrated actresses: Vera Farmiga (as Clooney's on-the-road whirlwind romance) and Anna Kendrick.



George Clooney (left) and Vera Farmiga in “Up in the Air”.

*Image credit: Dale Robinette*

Kendrick, who might not be remembered from “Twilight,” “The Twilight Saga: New Moon” and 2010’s “The Twilight Saga: Eclipse,” definitely should be as the fast-talking master debater in 2007’s relatively unknown “Rocket Science” (despite its box-office flop and having only grossed \$755,774 on a production budget of \$6 million).

Farmiga is memorable in this year’s “Orphan” as well as in the 2006 Oscar winner “The Departed”. The “Up in the Air” cast is rounded out like a perfectly supportive brassiere by Zach Galifianakis, Danny McBride, Sam Elliott, Amy Morton and Melanie Lynskey.

But leave it to a moment of acting magic between George Clooney and J.K. Simmons to epitomize this film’s important story, why its prescient to today’s times and what it looks like when it actually hits home. While Reitman’s presentation could at times be criticized as a bait and switch and for making light of an emotionally charged and life-changing topic, Clooney’s interaction with Simmons in an office scene reminds you that this director understands the magnitude of his subject matter.





George Clooney (left) and Anna Kendrick in “Up in the Air”.

*Image credit: Dale Robinette*

Kendrick’s Natalie Keener character is still learning the ropes and is working to prove herself to her boss (Jason Bateman as Craig Gregory) as an innovator. But she’s working in an environment where it’s lofty to do so because of her age and gender, which has been an unfortunate business barrier that society thankfully is crumbling.

She proves to be an apt pupil while the more experienced George Clooney as Ryan Bingham (who is only home when he’s on the road and resists Keener’s high-tech attempt to keep him grounded) illustrates to Bob (played by the always poignant J.K. Simmons) why being a victim of corporate downsizing can actually be his blessing in disguise.

Even if it’s just Clooney’s salesmanship speaking, the scene not only delivers the news with genuine empathy but also digs deeper. Clooney’s character researches into Bob’s personal life to opportunistically reveal a new path for him that perhaps could be the best one he’s ever taken.





Vera Farmiga (left) and George Clooney in “Up in the Air”.

*Image credit: Dale Robinette*

The script takes a very modern turn with the injection of Keener’s outside-the-box thinking. While the United States emerges from its current recession, the business of professionals who handle the delicate job of layoffs can be thriving.

But even this unusual business isn’t without its own challenges. Instead of compensating Clooney’s character to fly from city to city and visit each company for professional and face-to-face axings, Kendrick’s character attempts to convince the business to move into today’s increasingly virtual world. She wants to inform employees that they’re being laid off via Webcam.

All the while, this multi-layered story tackles another plot of great consequence: love, unusual romance and the ability for a zebra that’s well set in its stripes to change its non-committal ways.





Anna Kendrick (left) and George Clooney in “Up in the Air”.  
Image credit: Dale Robinette

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You buy into the brewing romance between Clooney and Farmiga because of a chance meeting in an airport bar. Both travel veterans bond, flirt and compete with a device not typically used in movies as the foundation for a connection: the shared awe of travel loyalty rewards.

But it is ultimately Reitman’s finely tuned loyalty to representing today’s times with fresh humor and perfectly placed talent that makes this melting pot of a story and cast brew into one of 2009’s most delicious treats.

*“Up in the Air” from writer and director Jason Reitman stars George Clooney, Vera Farmiga, Anna Kendrick, Jason Bateman, J.K. Simmons, Amy Morton, Melanie Lynskey, Danny McBride, Sam Elliott, Zach Galifianakis, Chris Lowell, Steve Eastin, Adrienne Lamping and Dustin Miles. The film, which has a running time of 109 minutes, is rated “R” for language and some sexual content. “Up in the Air” opened on Dec. 4, 2009 in Chicago and limited theaters, will expand on Dec. 11, 2009 and Dec. 18, 2009 and will play nationwide beginning on Dec. 25, 2009.*



[21]

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