

Class ACT

George Clooney would seem to be a lot like his character in his new film, *Up In The Air*. He defines movie-star good looks, is exceedingly charming and has a fabulous life. But he's also described as 'selfless' and 'perfect' and is extremely well grounded.

"We're not swans," George Clooney tells a crowd of disciples in the Oscar front-runner *Up In The Air*, "we're sharks."

The message: Keep moving, never settle down, never stagnate. To underscore the point, Clooney's white-collar bagman and motivational speaker, Ryan Bingham, hoists a backpack to illustrate all the relationships and possessions people accumulate in a lifetime.

Empty the backpack, Bingham says.

Clooney's performance, a combination of scalpel and smooth-cat, is one of his best — sure to earn him another Academy Award nomination, at minimum — and it is one that fits the persona of the 48-year-old actor and filmmaker like a Shakira body stocking.

The debonair playboy. The effortless bachelor. The no-strings celebrity multimillionaire with the devil-may-care-grin who has said he will never have children or marry again. The guy whose life is so much better than yours.

Even Clooney acknowledges the parallels between actor and alter-ego.

Problem is, says Vera Farmiga, who plays a sexy, like-minded frequent flyer in the film, that's not who



KEVIN WILLIAMSON
Movies

the real Clooney is at all.

"I chuckle at it because that's not who I know George to be. He's selfless. He's not obsessed with himself. He's not rigid in the way Ryan is. His family means everything to him. His friends are so dear to him. His house in Italy, his home base, is everything. That time there is so sacred to him. He has a beautiful Italian girlfriend. None of this is anything like his character. Not the George I know and not the George I befriended."

But it is — considering the difficulty of attracting audiences to films that don't feature superheroes or boy wizards — a clever marketing hook.

"Of course it is," she says, smiling.

And so you should expect much more of it in the months ahead as *Up In The Air* readies for a December release after a smashing tour of the fall festival circuit: Telluride, Venice and Toronto. Certainly at the just-wrapped Toronto International Film Festival, there was no movie star who generated a greater stir

— sorry, but Oprah doesn't count — with Clooney holding court for two films: *Up In The Air* and the war satire *The Men Who Stare at Goats*.

For both, Clooney eschewed interviews, instead preferring the circus of large, crowded news conferences where his laser wit can deflect personal questions and genuine reflection. No surprise there. After all, this is the same guy who says, "I would rather have a prostate exam on live television by a guy with very cold hands than have a Facebook page."

No one asked what he'd rather have than a Twitter account.

Instead, Clooney reserves his candour for his career, offering the occasional post-mortem of his own

professional missteps.

"I buried the Bat franchise once, I don't really have many other ways to go," he says of the likelihood he would ever star in another big-budget summer extravaganza.

And when it's pointed out he's been making a lot of comedies in recent years, he responds, "Well, *Leatherheads* ended up being a drama."

Surely all of this quicksilver charm must be overcompensating for some deep, terrible flaw, right?

"There is no hidden secret," insists Jason Reitman, director of *Up In The Air*.

"Oddly what makes him such a classical character is that he has values and we live in a world where no one has values anymore. He really is everything he is said to be. He is truly a good human being. Pranks aside, he has a tremendous heart and he believes in what is right. And he acts upon what he believes and no one does that anymore. I think he's one of the last great men as far as actors go. This guy's a man. And there are very few actors who could play (Bingham) and he has the charm to pull it off."

"These are very tricky ideas to deliver. I knew he could do it. And I knew there was this interesting connection between his own

persona and the character"

Pressed on what that connection is Reitman says, "You already know it."

Indeed, we all do — so much so he wrote the role with Clooney in mind.

The result flirts with multiple genres — from office satire to romantic comedy — but commits to none of them. While *The Men Who Stare at Goats* is a straight-arrow satire, *Up In The Air* navigates much more resonant emotional and social topography. If business is booming for Ryan the hatchet-man it's because we're in the grip of the most painful recession in decades. That's heady enough, but Reitman goes one further, incorporating testimonials from real people laid off in such depressed centres as Detroit and St. Louis, where the movie was filmed.

"It became clear that it was less and less a comedy and much more about real people," Clooney says. "It felt like the exact right moment to be making the film."

Of course, it is entirely serendipitous. Reitman toiled away for years, adapting Walter Kirn's 2002 novel, and only confirmed Clooney's involvement after the Montreal-born Reitman and his wife flew to the actor's Italian villa on Lake Como. When Clooney signed on,

remembers Reitman, "I, who never never drink, was forced to go toe to toe with George. Because you have to man up. So we drank like four bottles of wine; I got s---faced. It was ugly."

But worth it, hangover and all. On set, Clooney didn't disappoint.

"He's an actor who thinks like a director," Reitman says. "Not only is he in the moment and in the character and doing everything right, but he understands how everything he does affects everyone around him and the filmmaking process. If there's a car honking its horn, he will try to deliver his dialogue between the car honks. Most actors are so in character they're not even aware they're on a film set. And that's good for them to be in character in the moment."

"He is somehow able to be in the moment and articulate and also aware of everything that's around him. If there's a cloud coming, he's going to be quicker so we don't lose the light. He never leaves set, doesn't wear make-up."

Reitman seems ready to laugh at himself, aware he's coming precariously close to gushing. "He's perfect."

Right. Now that's the Clooney we know.

kevin.williamson@sunmedia.ca



Movies

jam.canoe.ca/Movies

Two sides of superstardom

George Clooney is a giga-star. An Academy Award victor. The man women desire and men desire to be. But for sheer, ear-piercing squeals, he's no Robert Pattinson.

Anna Kendrick should know. The 24-year-old actress has been in the rare — and, for many females, enviable — position of having worked alongside both actors.

Even as she swung through the Toronto International Film Festival to promote Clooney's *Up In The Air*, she was preparing to wrap work in Vancouver on the second *Twilight* sequel, *Eclipse*, in which she reprises the role she originated in 2008's phenom. The first sequel, *New Moon*, opens in November, weeks ahead of *Up In The Air*.

"I've never seen anything like it in my life," she says of the hysteria surrounding Pattinson, who stars as the *Twilight*'s brooding blood-slurper Edward. "People were asking me 'Can you believe how crazy this premiere (for *Up In The Air*) is?' And I was like, 'You ain't seen nothing.' Most people have never seen anything like the Rob Pattinson phenomenon."

How do the two leading men, albeit of different generations, compare?

"They get different sides of it. Rob gets a

lot of screaming and a lot of prying and a lot of intensity, which doesn't necessarily feel good when it comes from a hysterical place. And then I see people talk to George, because he's so established, people try to trick him into saying something and it's interesting watching him sidestep that stuff so gracefully and never lose his cool; I don't know how he does it."

In the dramatic comedy, Clooney and Kendrick are professional adversaries who embark on a cross-country odyssey of self-awakening. Alone on the road with Clooney? Somehow her character doesn't develop a crush on him. But did Kendrick during filming?

"I think we have a more father-daughter relationship in the film. I think we almost cultivated that relationship in real life too. George at one point set an age limit for boys I was allowed to date, so it was not a crush on George Clooney kind of situation."

What was the age limit?

"It was something really random, I can't remember. You know what?" she says, beaming.

"Age doesn't matter to me — and he's not really my dad, so he can't tell me what to do."

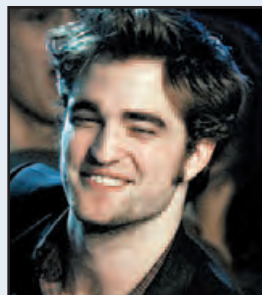
— Kevin Williamson



MARIO ANZUONI/REUTERS



ANNA KENDRICK



ROBERT PATTINSON

".. What makes him such a classical character is that he has values and we live in a world where no one has values anymore. He really is everything he is said to be. He is truly a good human being. Pranks aside, he has a tremendous heart and he believes in what is right. And he acts upon what he believes and no one does that anymore. I think he's one of the last great men as far as actors go. This guy's a man."

Director Jason Reitman