

# Ledger-Transcript

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## Script goes from Wilton to Hollywood

Musical written 13 years ago for Andy's modified into film starring Hilary Duff

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Monadnock Ledger-Transcript

After several false starts and more than a decade after it debuted in Wilton as an Andy's Summer Playhouse musical, "What Goes Up" is finally getting off the ground.

Only this time, it's on the big screen.

Co-written by Peterborough resident Bob Lawson, the soon-to-be-released film is based on a group of New Hampshire high school students just before the Challenger explosion. It stars Steve Coogan and Hilary Duff.

Serving as artistic director at Andy's for 12 years, Lawson wrote several plays for the children's theater program, but 1996's "Safety Glass," which would turn into "What Goes Up" 13 years later, was among his first.

"All I knew was that the play was going to be something about the Challenger and some-

thing about high school kids in relation to that," Lawson says.

Choosing a group of misfit students at Concord High School as his focus, Lawson and his writing partner, Lawson's former student Jonathan Glatzer, wrote about the events leading up to the Challenger disaster. The 1986 space shuttle explosion took the life of Concord High's Christa McAuliffe, who was to be the first teacher in space, along with the six other crewmembers on board.

For Lawson, who is 54, seeing the John F. Kennedy assassination in the third grade was his pivotal, memorable news event. But for 39-year-old Glatzer, it was seeing the Challenger explode.

Glatzer, who directed the original at Andy's, took the director's chair in the film version as well.

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COURTESY PHOTO

Bob Lawson, left, and Jonathan Glatzer, center, co-wrote a musical for Andy's, and readapted it for film, eventually getting actress/singer Hilary Duff, right, to play the lead.



INSIGHT FILM STUDIOS

Movie stills from 'What Goes Up,' which opens May 29 in New York, Los Angeles and Boston.

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Lawson and Glatzer's characters, a group of misfits and complicated personalities, are already dealing with the death of a different teacher when the story begins weeks beforehand. This teacher was their mentor, and greatly touched their lives.

"They were dealing with losing a hero, and on the verge of the moment when the rest of the nation, especially school kids, would lose a hero on a mythic scale," Lawson says.

### Lawson's locals

While it was filmed in Vancouver and stars a Brit and a Texan, locals listening carefully will be able to pick out some Peterborough connections.

The sound for the movie's marching band was recorded by ConVal's own school band, led by music teacher David Aines.

"I've heard them before and they are really great," Lawson says of the band. "I was like, 'this is a real find.'"

Using a digital recorder in the band room and outside, Lawson recorded the group playing the Star Spangled Banner and some other high school band favorites. Franklin Pierce University music students provide vocals for the national anthem.

Lawson's own song, called "Any Other Day," is the feature song on the soundtrack and Hilary Duff performs it in the movie. ConVal graduate and "Andy's kid" Katie Rolph helped Lawson by recording the first demo. Rolph and her sister, Melody, who is currently a student at ConVal, both had their voices

recorded for use in the musical within the film.

"I've written a lot of songs, but never anything remotely in the pop world," Lawson said.

Having Glatzer do some alterations and singing the final demo himself, Lawson sent the recording off to Duff's people to work on it. It came back later in a changed form with Duff's name as one of the writers.

"It's very obviously the same song, but it's very techno, very electronic and has all kinds of driving beats," Lawson says of the final version. "They said that's very common for the pop star to take some of the writing credit. We were sort of at their whim having her do the song. It was great for the movie."

Throughout the filmmaking process, Lawson found himself agreeing to all kinds of changes and alterations. A veteran of the theater world, "What Goes Up" is his first film.

"It's a nightmare," Lawson says of the film world. "I'm absolutely convinced anyone going into it really doesn't know what they are getting into."

### The nightmare

Lawson's foray into the world of film began innocently enough. Glatzer, who had been working a few years in Los Angeles, thought the Andy's play would make a good film project, and the two worked on changing the script to accommodate the big screen.

They added a new main character, a journalist from New York City who is dealing with his own loss. He meets up with the group of students

after being assigned a puff piece on hometown pride in Concord for McAuliffe, and becomes much more interested in them than in the McAuliffe piece.

Less than two years after the new script was completed, a production company picked up the film. It was on its way until the production company pulled their feature film division and eventually went defunct.

"And then, over the course of the next 10 years, it went through the mill," Lawson says. "It was sold and dropped over and over."

Among Lawson and Glatzer's plans was getting their own camera and shooting the film themselves. They also spent a lot of time looking for funding in New Hampshire, but nothing panned out.

Nothing until the script wound up with British actor and producer Steve Coogan.

"As near as my memory can put it together, what happened was in 2006, it had just been dropped again and we were done with it; it was never going to happen," Lawson says. "Late that year, somehow the script got into Steve Coogan's hands, and he was interested in doing it."

The project moved along slowly because there was no funding for it. At the time, Lawson was working on a television show for Touchstone and Fox, which would have been his first, but the project was dropped during the writers' strike in 2007.

Nearly at the same time, funding came through for the film.

Before Lawson knew it, he was flying to Vancouver for pre-production with Hilary Duff and the rest of the cast,

but the difficulties were not over yet.

"In the middle of pre-production, we lost Hilary Duff for 48 hours," Lawson says. "She dropped out of the project. She had another project going on and we were scrambling. She was very much the reason the money had come through."

It was a perilous couple of days for the project, but Duff returned, and principal photography began two weeks later.

### Now showing

On Friday, the film premiered at the Buffalo Niagara Film Festival. It went well, according to Lawson, screening in two theaters rather than one, and with both selling out.

The film opens May 29 in New York, Los Angeles, Boston and many other cities. Lawson has been in touch with owners of the Peterborough Theater and the Town Hall Theater in Wilton, hoping there will be a local showing.

"Things went through so many ringers to get it done, but now that it is actually coming out in theaters, we have very short memories," Lawson says. "Now that it is over, I'd do it again."

Having served as Andy's artistic director for 12 years, Lawson left two years ago. He is also an assistant professor of theater at Franklin Pierce University. He is working on another film project with Glatzer about a seaside town in the 1930s and a theatrical adaptation for a consortium of former FPU students in Philadelphia.

For more information, visit [www.whatgoesup-themovie.com](http://www.whatgoesup-themovie.com).