

All 'Rise'

Film honors U.S. skaters killed in 1961 accident

By **AMY-TUCKER**

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On Valentine's Day 1961, 34 members of the U.S. World Figure Skating team boarded Sabena Airlines Flight 548 for the World Figure Skating Championships in Prague, Czechoslovakia. The next day, the plane crashed near Brussels, Belgium, killing all 72 passengers and nearly decimating the sport of figure skating in America.

"Rise" depicts a cinematic chronicle of the lives of the 19 athletes — who perished along with their coaches and families, judges and skating officials — and the realization of their unfulfilled dreams through the rebuilding of the U.S. Figure Skating team.

The world premiere of "Rise" commemorates the 50th anniversary of the tragedy with a one-night show at 7:30 Thursday in theaters nationwide, includ-

ing Regal Cinemas at Crossgates Mall in Guilderland. Preceding the screening, a red-carpet event hosted by Matt Lauer of "Today" will be broadcast live from New York City's Best Buy Theater.

The post-show broadcast includes interviews with "Rise" storytellers Peggy Fleming, Brian Boitano, Dorothy Hamill, Michelle Kwan and Scott Hamilton, appearances from skating luminaries and an exclusive performance by 2010 Olympic gold medalist Evan Lysacek.

Commissioned by the U.S. Figure Skating Association, "Rise" was produced and directed by 16-time Emmy Award winners Lookalike Productions, owned by twin sisters and filmmakers

Lisa Lax and Nancy Stern Winters. Lax worked her way up at NBC producing five Olympic Games while Stern Winters spent a decade producing for ABC and Wide World of Sports and was introduced to figure skating during the 1988 Calgary Olympics.

"It's a film about real life and the relationships between mothers and daughters, their parents and coaches," Lax said, "not just a historical, factual piece about skating."

"Rise" opens with vignettes from the storytellers about their entry into skating followed by a superimposed silhouette of Lysacek doing a triple jump in super slow motion on a mountain lake. Then the story lines begin to weave, revealing the impact that the 1961 U.S. World team had on future generations of American figure skating.

"These athletes, coaches and parents that never got to experience that dream come true were a springboard for everyone that came after them," Hamilton said.

Rising star Laurence Owen, 16, was the reigning U.S. women's national champion at the time of the crash. She adorned the cover of Sports Illustrated just before heading to Prague with her sister Maribel Owen, 1961 U.S. pairs champion with Dudley Richards, and her mother and coach Maribel Vinson Owen.



THE 1961 U.S. Figure Skating Team and coaches depart for the World Figure Skating Championships in Prague, Czechoslovakia (now the capital city of the Czech Republic), a day before the plane crashed and killed all 72 aboard.

UNITED STATES FIGURE SKATING ASSOCIATION

spoken about the accident before."

Lax and Stern Winters spent more than two years conducting interviews and gathering photos and footage to tell the story. Lysacek was world and national champion at the time, but the filmmakers committed to him as the skating representative for the most recent decade upon his Olympic win in Vancouver in 2010.

"That brought the story full-circle," explained Lax, "with a first Olympic gold for Coach Carroll and the first U.S. men's Olympic champion crowned since Boitano won in Calgary."

All proceeds from "Rise" benefits the U.S. Figure Skating's Memorial Fund, established Feb. 23, 1961. The fund awards approximately \$300,000 annually in grants and scholarships to skaters in need and provided support to all of the "Rise" storytellers with the exception of Hamill.

The 1961 U.S. World Team was posthumously inducted into the U.S. Figure Skating Hall of Fame Jan. 28 at the 2011 National Championships in Greensboro, N.C.

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Vinson Owen, nine-time U.S. champion and 1932 Olympic-bronze-medalist in Lake Placid, coached Frank Carroll, who won the silver medal at the 1960 U.S. Juniors Figure Skating Championships behind Douglas Ramsay.

Ramsay and the Owens family were killed in the crash. Carroll went on to coach both Kwan and Lysacek to national and world titles.

Kwan shares not only the connection to Carroll, but the distinction of being a nine-time U.S. ladies champion like Vinson Owen.

The filmmakers also unearthed more indirect relationships between the skaters of the 1961 team and later champions.

"These interviews were extremely difficult for the survivors," Stern Winters said. "They lost siblings, spouses, coaches and skating partners, and many had never