



Falling Through Time

Beginners a moving elegy for love and loss

BEGINNERS: Written and directed by Mike Mills. Cinematography, Kasper Tuxen. Editor, Olivier Bugge Coutté. Music, Roger Neill, Dave Palmer and Brian Reitzell. Starring Ewan McGregor, Christopher Plummer and Mélanie Laurent. Focus Features, 2011. R. 105 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

No quick, glib summary does Mike Mills' *Beginners* justice. A slippery, shifty, gentle film about perception, memory, family and love, it calls for a flip-book of images, or a series of Polaroids tinged with that retro-fade that can now be called up with the touch of a tiny button in numerous iPhone apps.

But *Beginners* takes place before the App Store, before Obama, before blogging was a thing more than a handful of people took seriously. The film hovers around 2003, darts back a few years earlier, then jumps back and forth to these times and the '50s, locating the audience via a series of photos and descriptions: This is what the president looked like. This is what happy looked like. This is what pretty looked like.

What things look like is of great interest to Oliver (an excellent Ewan McGregor), whose life is a series of things that are not necessarily what they appear. In the present, he's a closed-off, grieving illustrator whose work veers into personal territory when all he's supposed to be drawing are portraits of band members. Oliver is a version of Mills; the writer-director is also a graphic designer and artist who's done plenty of work for bands. And like Oliver's father, Hal (Christopher Plummer), Mills' father came out late in life, after his wife died.

Part of the beauty of *Beginners* is the way Mills locates the effects of Hal's announcement in the ordinary details of life. Free to explore the man he never had the chance to be, Hal joins clubs, writes political letters, gets a much younger boyfriend — the fragile-seeming Andy (Goran Visnjic) — and goes out on the town, calling his son in the middle of the night to ask about a club's music. He smiles, he laughs, he kisses Andy, he hosts parties. In

Oliver's memories, Hal is constantly on the way out the door or already gone; now he's entirely present. The things that kept him in the closet, and in his marriage, turn up in Oliver's lists of how things were: the places men could secretly have sex, the things they might lose if they were discovered.

Quiet, muted Oliver watches all this, then watches more closely when his father is diagnosed with cancer. Hal is unstoppable; Oliver, unmoored. Two months after his father's death, when Oliver has mostly been keeping company with Hal's ridiculously charming dog, he meets a lovely, quirky-but-not-too-quirky actress, Anna. Anna veers toward manic pixie dream girl territory, but Mélanie Laurent grounds her in a poignant, directionless ache that Oliver neatly describes — for her, for himself, for part of a generation — in voiceover: "Our good fortune allowed us to feel a sadness our parents never had time for."

Beginners has an elegiac quality, but veers away from fetishizing sadness and loneliness. These things, like memories, grow or shrink with the improbable, unpredictable pacing of life. The film's loose, jumpy structure reflects Oliver's disconnection, the way his memories are thrown into disarray by his father's coming out and coming into himself. *Beginners* is no more about having a gay parent than it is about losing a parent. It's also about the way truth and change and secrets — and history — shape the way we see ourselves and transform the meanings of things.

Memory can be tricky and complicated, offering too many versions of an event, or of a lifetime. By slipping pieces of history into the story of one man and his father, Mills transfers his deeply personal work to a broader canvas. Intimate, thoughtful, funny and gentle, *Beginners* transcends the simply autobiographical; like the images Oliver draws, it's a compact history of love and sadness.

EW

Beginners opens Friday, Aug. 12, at the Bijou; www.bijou-cinemas.com

THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THU
BEGINNERS							
BEATS RHYMES & LIFE ENDS TONIGHT! 5:00 5:45 8:00	2:30 5:00 7:20 9:40	2:30 5:00 7:20 9:40	2:30 5:00 7:20	5:00 7:20	5:00 7:20	5:00 7:20	5:00 7:20
MIDNIGHT IN PARIS							
8:45	8:00	8:00	8:00	8:00	8:00	8:00	8:00
POETRY							
BUCK							
4:45 6:45	6:00	4:00 6:00	4:00 6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00
TRIGUN: BADLANDS RUMBLE							
LATE NITE PUNCH PASSES ACCEPTED! 10:05			10:05		10:05		
SOON: THE BIG UNEASY				THE GUARD		EVERYTHING MUST GO	
PAGE ONE: INSIDE THE NEW YORK TIMES				THE ROOM		INCENDIES	

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IMAX: HARRY POTTER 7 PART 2 3D (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sun. 11:00 AM 1:50 PM 4:45 PM
FINAL DESTINATION 5 IN REALD 3D - EVENT PRICING (R) - ID REQ'D ★
Fri. - Sun. (11:35 AM 2:00 PM) 4:15 PM
30 MINUTES OR LESS (R) - ID REQ'D
Fri. - Sun. (12:40 3:00) 5:30 8:00 10:20
THE HELP (PG-13)
Fri. - Sun. (11:45 12:15 2:50 3:50) 6:30 7:00 9:40 10:10
OC & DA: RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES (PG-13) ★
Fri. (11:40 AM) 7:20 PM
Sat. (2:10 PM) 9:50 PM
Sun. (11:40 AM) 9:50 PM
RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sun. (12:10 2:40) 5:10 7:50 10:25
RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES (PG-13) ★
Fri. (2:10 PM) 4:35 PM 9:50 PM
Sat. (11:40 AM) 4:35 PM 7:20 PM
Sun. (2:10 PM) 4:35 PM 7:20 PM
THE CHANGE-UP (R) - ID REQ'D
Fri. - Sun. (12:30) 4:20 7:25 10:05
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CRAZY, STUPID, LOVE (PG-13)
Fri. - Sun. (11:10 1:45) 4:25 7:05 9:45
CAPTAIN AMERICA IN REALD 3D - EVENT PRICING (PG-13) ★
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CAPTAIN AMERICA (PG-13)
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Fri. - Sun. (11:30 2:30) 6:40 9:35
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Fri. - Sun. (1:20) 4:20 7:40 10:20
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Fri. - Sun. (1:00) 4:10 7:20 10:10
THE SMURFS (PG)
Fri. - Sun. (3:50 PM) 9:30 PM
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THE CHANGE-UP (DIGITAL) R
11:15, 2:00, 4:45, 7:30, 10:15
COWBOYS & ALIENS (DIGITAL) PG-13
10:20, 11:20, 1:20, 2:20, 4:20, 5:20, 7:20, 8:20, 10:20
CRAZY, STUPID, LOVE (DIGITAL) PG-13
10:35, 1:25, 4:15, 7:05, 9:55
FINAL DESTINATION 5 (DIGITAL) R
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10:00, 10:00
HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS, PART 2 (DIGITAL) PG-13
10:45, 1:45, 4:45, 7:45, 10:45
THE HELP (DIGITAL) PG-13
11:00, 2:20, 5:35, 8:50
RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES (DIGITAL) PG-13
10:10, 11:05, 12:00, 12:55, 1:50, 2:45, 3:40, 4:35, 5:30, 6:25, 7:20, 8:15, 9:10, 10:20
THE SMURFS (DIGITAL) PG
10:15, 12:45, 3:15, 5:45, 8:15
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11:20, 1:55, 4:30, 7:40, 10:05
KUNG FU PANDA 2 PG
12:30, 2:50, 5:10, 7:20, 9:30
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11:15, 1:50, 4:10
LARRY CROWNE PG-13
11:25, 2:10, 4:40, 7:25, 9:50

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11:10, 1:40, 4:20, 7:10, 9:40
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11:30, 2:05, 4:35, 7:35, 9:55
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