



BEGINNERS



A SEPARATION



HUGO



THE DESCENDANTS



TAKE SHELTER



PINA



ATTACK THE BLOCK

I saw that.) Some of these families were traditional, like the parents and child of Asghar Farhadi's *A Separation*, an Oscar nominee for Best Foreign Language film that finds a compelling, painful story in the small, terrible dramas of the everyday. Parents argue. Their 11-year-old daughter gets stuck in the middle, both parents asking her to make an adult's decisions. Arguments escalate, leading to oddly personal trials. Everyone is right in this Iranian film, and everyone is wrong, and the stakes are both high and completely average. The film's verité style, the natural, assertive performances, the pacing — everything about *A Separation* seems ordinary, though the result is anything but.

The brother and sister in *Cold Weather*; the father and daughters in Alexander Payne's surprisingly sympathetic *The Descendants*; the family ties that streak through Steven Soderberg's anxious (and semi-apocalyptic) *Contagion*; the family bubble and the beginning of the universe (I think?) in *The Tree of Life* — these are the things that balance the coming darkness, at least in last year's films. My favorite family was easily that conjured up by Ewan McGregor and Christopher Plummer in Mike Mills' assured, lovely *Beginners*. Full of art and life and

loneliness, and lasting pain, *Beginners* concerns itself with the people we are and the people we might have been, an inescapable tangle of memory and truth.

History and memory inform Martin Scorsese's wonderful, buoyant *Hugo*, which loves movies as much as its director, and which offers a sweet but never cloying reminder that a family is not always made up of the people you're related to.

Plenty of film lovers clearly love to find trends and commonalities in a year's offerings — just think of how delighted people have been to point out that two Best Picture nominees, *Hugo* and the overrated *The Artist*, look back to the history of movies — but not everything will fit neatly into thematic boxes. *Pina*, Wim Wenders' Oscar-nominated documentary about choreographer Pina Bausch, is a beautiful, nebulous film in which Bausch's story is seen as much as heard. Members of Bausch's company speak about her influence and her art in voiceovers that play as the speakers, faces still, look directly into the camera. These scenes are intercut with pieces from Bausch's work, staged in a theater (where the camera sometimes sits like a member of the audience), in a park, on a street median. I know

## MOLLY'S TOP TEN MOVIES OF 2011:

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) <i>Melancholia</i>      | 6) <i>Certified Copy</i>    |
| 2) <i>Beginners</i>        | 7) <i>Meek's Cutoff</i>     |
| 3) <i>A Separation</i>     | 8) <i>Bellflower</i>        |
| 4) <i>Attack the Block</i> | 9) <i>Pina</i>              |
| 5) <i>Hugo</i>             | 10) <i>The Tree of Life</i> |

## RUNNERS-UP

(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER):

- |                        |                             |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Bridesmaids</i>     | <i>Drive</i>                |
| <i>Contagion</i>       | <i>How to Die in Oregon</i> |
| <i>Cold Weather</i>    | <i>Take Shelter</i>         |
| <i>The Descendants</i> | <i>Young Adult</i>          |