

It's never too late to show off your 'Talent'

By LOU LUMENICK

IN the often riveting docu-comedy "The Talent Given Us," Judy and Allen Wagner, an Upper West Side couple in their 70s making their screen debuts, perform with a verisimilitude that puts Brad and Angelina to shame.

Their daughters Emily and Maggie, who are professional actors, also appear in their brother Andrew's micro-budgeted labor of love (and hate), but they don't stand a chance against the parents, whose non-

stop, no-punches-pulled bickering represents some of the most naturalistic performance since the heyday of John Cassavetes.

Or is it acting? Andrew, who directed and very briefly appears, claims he wrote a script and persuaded his reluctant parents to play versions of themselves in it, but allowed them to improvise.

It's hard to see how Andrew could argue with his mother. Judy is an overbearing and impulsive control freak who brow-beats her retired stockbroker husband, Allen, into a

MOVIE REVIEW

THE TALENT GIVEN US



A couple to remember.

Running time: 97 minutes. Not rated (sexual references). At the Angelika, Houston and Mercer streets.

spur-of-the-moment road trip to visit Andrew in California, where he's working as a teacher.

The Wagners' daughters, who

fret about their weight and careers, are less than thrilled about being hijacked for this detour, but the focus never wavers from the elder Wagners, who are locked in mortal combat over old slights.

Judy worries incessantly about Allen's failing health: He's had a stroke and suffers from a speech impediment, incontinence and an involuntary tongue thrusting he tries to control by constantly chewing on a coffee stirrer.

But even his ailments — and her constant kvetching about

road food — can't keep Judy from berating him for a long-ago affair and separation.

It also can't keep her from loudly announcing to her daughters — and anyone else who's around — that she's planning her own separation because of the couple's nonexistent sex life.

"The Talent Given Us," limps to a fairly lame conclusion, but until then its remarkable candor is like spending a memorably hilarious, harrowing and unforgettable weekend with your wacky in-laws.