

THE TALENT GIVEN US

Unrated, 97 mins.

By using the unique device of casting the movie with his own family (who play themselves, no less), and allowing himself to be portrayed as redemptive Godot-like figure, filmmaker Andrew Wagner certainly runs the risk of appearing, at the very least, self-indulgent. Not so with "The Talent Given Us," however, as Mr. Wagner's honest script and direction propel us along what could have been just a flat 100-minute gimmick, but is instead something authentic and entertaining.

Andrew's mother is given most of the attention here. It is she who prompts her speech-impaired husband Allen and two adult daughters to take a ten day road trip from New York to California, so that they can reconnect with their elusive son and brother Andrew.

The performances here are surprisingly convincing. As is often the case with road movies, the initial motive of the trip is eased into the background, making way for those involved to reflect on their lives and relationships. Sharp-tongued, sexually frank dialogue between the cast members gives the film a slight aura of discomfort, but is also refreshing. "The Talent Given Us" is an insightful and original road movie, and an impressive debut.

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