

## NOW PLAYING

\*\*\* 1/2 **MY SUMMER OF LOVE** (R). Its title may promise sweet, gauzy wistfulness. But there's a gritty astringency to director Pawel Pawlikowski's shape-shifting story of romance between two teenage girls in northern England. Mona (Natalie Press) is a working-class romantic whose natural intelligence and budding artistic talent are choked by a drab, desperate life with her older brother (Paddy Considine), a born-again ex-con. Into her grim life drops Tamsin (Emily Blunt), who's worldly, well-bred and oozing glamorous misanthropy. Mutual fascination soon morphs into physical attraction and their bond takes on some strange, quasi-mystical baggage, much of it involving their respective family situations. Together and apart, Press and Blunt are magnetic and Pawlikowski is smart enough to let their relationship evolve — or is it mutate? — against a sultry, yet volatile atmosphere. 1:28 (*sexual situations, vulgarities, nudity, violence*). At select theaters.

— GENE SEYMOUR

\*\*\* 1/2 **EDVARD MUNCH** (Unrated) There has never been an artist bio flick quite like "Edvard Munch," Peter Watkins' woozy and kaleidoscopic portrait of the 19th century Norwegian painter who was in the news last summer when armed robbers made off with his signature work, "The Scream." In 1973, Watkins gathered a cast of more than 200 nonprofessionals (including a quietly magnetic manufacturer's publicity worker named Geir Westby for the lead) to appear in this three-hour film, whose mockumentary-style blend of talking heads and dramatic recreation would be aped by makers of reality-based historical television three decades later. Its virtues and its flaws remain intact in this pristine new print. Watkins' use of flashbacks succeeds marvelous-



Natalie Press, left, and Emily Blunt in "My Summer of Love"

ly in extrapolating the fears of emotional intimacy, as well as the early acquaintance with disease and death, that informed Munch's work. It is also unremittingly dour, and tends to overplay the critical resistance of the conservative art community. Lovers of art and angst will have a field day. 2:54 (*sexual content, adult themes*). In Norwegian, with subtitles. Cinema Village, Manhattan.

— JAN STUART

\*\*\* **THE GREAT WATER** (Unrated). Despite its forbidding landscape and its often-excruciating subject matter, this Macedonian feature nonetheless engages you thoroughly, thanks in large part to the seamless interplay of director Ivo Trajkov and his onetime classmate from Prague, cinematographer Suki Medencevic. Adapted from the novel by Zivko Cingo, the film is a sustained near-death flashback of crucial events in the life of Macedonian politician Lem Nikodinoski. Orphaned by World War II, young Lem (Saso Kekenovski) is literally plucked from the countryside at age 12 and taken to a stone fortress where, with other war orphans, he's to be "reprogrammed" as a young soldier for Stalin. He forges a bond with an enigmatic boy named Isak (Maja Stankovska),

whose almost mystical reserve reinforces Lem's resistance to daily humiliation, browbeating and abuse. As with any film depicting physical and emotional torture, you sometimes wish the pain would stop and the portentousness would ease a bit. But, magic maintains an encouraging distance throughout. 1:30 (*violence, torture, sexual situation*). In Macedonian with English subtitles. At select theaters.

— GENE SEYMOUR

\*\*\* **THE TALENT GIVEN US** (Unrated) Some of America's best documentaries have emerged from the impulse to train a camera on a family and record their most intimate dramas for the world to see. Neophyte writer-director Andrew Wagner is up to something uniquely different, and possibly even more daring: He has cast his family in a scripted, distilled portrait of itself. "The Talent Given Us" is a garrulously comic road movie in which Wagner throws his 70-year-old parents into an SUV with his two actress sisters and contrives to have them drive cross-country together. Imagine four hyper-expressive, self-involved Upper West Side Jews invading the superhighway rest stops of America, then pump up the volume. Allen and Judy Wagner are retired and at an impasse in their marriage. Allen is overweight, diabetic and talks through a therapeutic straw that garbles his speech. Judy is a serial malcontent, inflicting knee-jerk

negative responses on virtually everyone, with particular focus on her husband. Mostly, she just wants him to have sex with her again. Corraling their unmarried daughters for a trip to their beach house, the Wagners end up heading on to Los Angeles to track down their reclusive son. Along the way, they pick up various and sundry friends from their past, who help to deflect the family tensions that inevitably crop up. Do you want to be stuck in a car with this high-maintenance crew? For all their narcissism and Sturm und Drang, the Wagners are a bracingly amusing lot. If nothing else, the sheer bravery and self-awareness with which they hang their personal laundry out for inspection is pretty breathtaking. "The Talent Given Us" takes a few too many side trips for its own good, but what a cathartic ride it is. 1:39 (*language, sexual discussions, mature themes*). Angelika Film Center, Manhattan

— JAN STUART

\*\*\* 1/2 **ETHAN MAO** (Unrated). You're gay, 18 years old, Chinese-American and your stiff-backed widowed father remarries a gold-digging witch who discovers your cache of porn and compels dad to throw you into a life of aimless street hustling. You'll show them! How? Well, if you're the title character (Jun Hee Lee), you break into your old house on Thanksgiving with your drug-dealing roommate (Jerry Hernandez) and ruin the family's holiday by holding them all at gunpoint. Somehow, director Quentin Lee makes this strange hybrid of ethnic family clash, hostage drama and gay romance flow a little better than it sounds, thanks in part to red-herring dream sequences inserted at crucial narrative points. But the soap gets so thick, it chokes whatever ingenuity the filmmaking can summon. Julia Nickson, getting her jollies as the aforementioned wicked stepmother, provides needed breaks from the unyielding earnestness. 1:28 (*violence, vulgarities, drug use, sexual situations, nudity*). At the ImaginAsian Theater, 239 E. 59th St., Manhattan.

— GENE SEYMOUR



Saso Kekenovski plays an orphan in "The Great Water."