

'Life Is Sweet' provides unforgettable slice of life

Andy has a penchant for beginning projects that he never finishes. Wendy, his wife, possesses a perpetually sunny disposition. One of their daughters looks like a boy and works as a plumber. The other leaves the house only when her cigarettes run out.

Like Wendy's infectious laugh, the quirky characters in "Life Is Sweet" have a way of being both annoying and irresistible at the same time. Mike Leigh's new film, which opens at the Detroit Film Theatre (this weekend, looks with humor and insight into their everyday lives.

The film opens colorfully with Wendy (Alison Steadman) teaching a roomful of preschoolers simple dance steps. The normal children contrast sharply with her own twin daughters (played by Claire Skinner and Jane Horrocks), nightmare versions of characters on the old "Patty Duke Show."

Meanwhile, Andy (Jim Broadbent) leaves the house for 20 minutes and returns with a ramshackle food-vending trailer which he parks right in front of the house. You just know

tickets please
John Monaghan

it's going to sit there rusting until the end of eternity — or the police make him haul it away.

What makes "Life Is Sweet" so successful is the way director Leigh and his talented cast keep the char-

acters so real and intimate. Part of this has to do with the physical boundaries of the film: Even the scenes outdoors are claustrophobic, keeping its audience perpetually on edge.

YOU BEGIN by laughing at the incredibly chaotic daughter Nicola, until you realize the emotional problems she suffers from. She refuses to share a meal with the family, instead inhaling candy bars late at night until she's forced to throw up.

Leigh, in classic British style, goes off the comic deep end once or twice with family friend Aubrey. He's played by jowly character actor Timothy Spall of "Gothic" and "The Sheltering Sky."

When the opening of Aubrey's new restaurant Regret Rien is jeopard-

ized by the lack of a wall staff, good-natured Wendy volunteers to help. She conscientiously memorizes the menu, which includes such house specialties as chilled brains, pork cysal and liver in lager.

Although Aubrey serves as a bizarre diversion, "Life Is Sweet" works best when focusing on the main family unit.

As Wendy, Alison Steadman paints an unforgettable portrait of a woman, once an aspiring dancer, who carries on despite considerable hardships. She is irritated by her husband's follies, but also recognizes him as someone who still carries on dreams — no matter how misguided — and doesn't give up.

"Life Is Sweet" ultimately delivers a life-affirming message, especially in its appropriately open-ended conclusion. Obviously not your usual comedy, it offers the most insightful slice of life you'll see on-screen this year.

SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY, Detroit Public Library, 5201 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-4048 for information. (\$4 individual, \$25 series membership)

• "Kitty Foyle" (USA — 1940) and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (USA — 1953), starting at 7 p.m. Feb. 14-15. Kicking off with "Kitty," with Ginger Rogers in an Oscar-winning performance as a working girl trying to make it in the big city. Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell have no trouble making it aboard ship in this classic Howard Hawks' comedy. Highlighted by some Technicolor musical numbers, including "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend."

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (\$5)

• "Life Is Sweet" (Britain — 1991), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 14-15 and 4 and 7 p.m. Feb. 16. Mike Leigh's winning comedy centers on a middle-class British family who keep their sense of humor during a trying couple of months.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2037 for information. (Free)

• "Brief Encounter" (Britain — 1945), 7 p.m. Feb. 10. David Lean directed this classic romantic story about a married doctor and a married woman whose casual meetings intensify with each encounter. Based on a Noel Coward play and starring Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$3; \$2 students and senior citizens)

• "Manhattan" (USA — 1979), 8 p.m. Feb. 10-11. Woody Allen's love letter to New York and modern courtship looks better every year thanks in part to its George Gershwin score and stunning black-and-white cityscapes. With Diane Keaton, Mariel Hemingway and Meryl Streep as the various girlfriends and wives.

• "Strangelove" (Britain — 1964), 8 p.m. Feb. 12. Peter Sellers appears in multiple roles in this most famous of all Cold War comedies. He plays the President of the United States, a British captain and the crazed German scientist Dr. Strangelove. Continuing a tribute to director Stanley Kubrick.

• "Stop Making Sense" (USA — 1984), 9 and 11:30 p.m. Feb. 14-15. Rock group Talking Heads captured live in an inspired black-and-white concert film by Jonathan Demme ("Silence of the Lambs").

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. Call 855-9090 for show times. (\$6, \$2.50 twilight)

IN CONCERT
Continued from Page 4

• **The Hannibals**
Rut's Cafe, 811 Church, Ann Arbor. 9:00, 7:30

• **WCIN-FM**
Suebing Zak, Terry Science and Big Dave Ultrasonics will perform in a benefit WCIN-FM at Filled Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 9:00-11:00

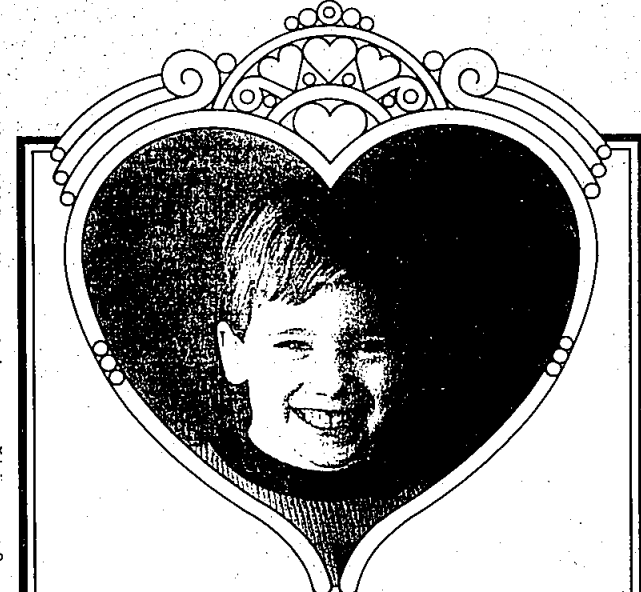
• **Mythic Manifest**
The Miami, 3930 Cass, Detroit. 8:15-10:30

• **Flyin' Saucers**
With Cow Slinging at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. 8:55-10:55

• **Love Ball VI North Cass Community Winter Fair**
With See Dick Run, Hope Orchestra and The Orque performing at North Cass Community Winter Fair at Alvin's, 5755 Cass Ave., across from Wayne State University, Detroit. 8:30-2:35

• **John Gorka**
The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$10.75. 7:00-10:00

On the Town
DINING & ENTERTAINMENT



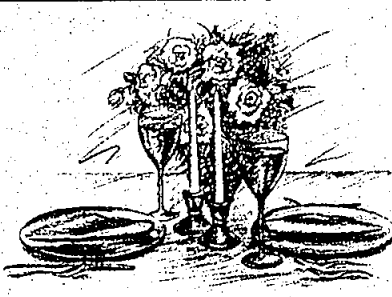
Mushy stuff.

Dad took me to Oakland Mall today to get a present for Heather. She rides on my bus. There was a piano playing this mushy music, but I found a neat locket, and dad let me put money in the "Quarters for Kids" heart for Children's Hospital of Michigan. I gave her the locket with a picture of me inside. I hope she doesn't think it's gross, or anything...

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