

# True faith is examined in 'Saints'

By JOHN MONAGHAN  
Special Writer

She sits quietly on the side of her bed, asking for a miracle. "If I sit perfectly still for five minutes," she prays aloud to God, "then please make the message from the Virgin Mary one of peace."

This child-like belief never leaves. There's one of the heroines in Nancy Savoca's new film "Household Saints." This uncompromising comedy about family and faith, set in New York's Little Italy, plays in a limited run at the AMC Abbey in Madison Heights.

The movie, which spans a 20-year period from roughly 1950 to 1970, begins when bachelor butcher Joseph Santangelo (Vincent D'Onofrio) wins his wife in a card game. The prospect isn't at all that horrible for 17-year-old Catherine (Tracey Ullman), who has spent most of her life caring for a father and brother.

She moves into the Santangelo home with Joseph and his mother (Judith Malina). According to the old lady, Catherine isn't pretty

## MOVIES

enough, doesn't cook well, and perpetuates a family curse. When Catherine becomes pregnant, Catherine's head swims with Old Country superstitions.

A first child is still-born while a second, Theresa, grows up amid the standard trappings of Catholic school and church. The difference is that while most of the girls are grabbing smokes in the bathroom and talking about boys, Theresa thinks up new ways to serve God.

True inspiration comes when Theresa learns about her St. Theresa, "The Little Flower," whose ordinary life was filled with acts of faith. She will follow in the saint's footsteps and, once graduated from high school, will join the Carmelite Sisters.

Tracey Ullman, whose Fox comedy show remains among the past decade's cloudest, still has to make the leap to movie well. She's too clownish in her

early scenes as a 17-year-old but grows into motherhood well, sporting a classic Carol Brady haircut from the early 1970s.

Lilli Taylor, who plays teenage Theresa, captures the bizarre, angelic quality that makes her character so fascinating. She's the kind of girl who never has a moon thought enter her head. Instead of turning away in disgust from her alcoholic uncle, she prays for him to seek the guidance he needs to become a better person.

Some of the subplots, especially the one about the uncle's obsession with Asian women, are too hokey not to have come from real life. You get the feeling that writer and co-director Savoca wasn't only listening carefully to the stories around her family dinner table, but taking elaborate notes.

It would have made good Hollywood sense for Savoca, who received positive reviews for her previous "True Love" and "Dogfight," to deliver a popular movie. This would give her the clout to make subsequent projects her way.

What does she do instead? She makes a movie about religion, traditionally box office poison. Despite the financial and emotional backing of Academy Award-winner Jonathan Demme and solid word of mouth, the movie was abandoned by the Main Theatre in Royal Oak, where it might have brought out more of the casually curious.

It's precisely this uncompromising quality that makes Savoca a fascinating filmmaker and her "Household Saints" such a heartfelt and moving work.

If you have a comment for John Monaghan, call him at 953-2047, mailbox 1866, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write to him care of Street Scene, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

## 'Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas'

— Vudu Hippies

## REVIEW

Unlike most Christmas CDs, this one is short and to the point. It includes only two versions of the classic holiday song — an extended version and one that's shortened for radio airplay.

Singer Rene Paquette, accompanied solely by pianist Randall Sly, smoothened out her trademark vibrato voice for the song recorded at The Tempermill studio in Ferndale. Her dynamic version of the song proves that the Vudu Hippies deserve more attention than they get.

As bassist Chris "Tree"

Newberg says, the song will "make you feel warm and fuzzy, yet cold and prickly."

The CD, which features cover art by photographer Tony Spina, is available exclusively at Harmony House. Proceeds from the sale of the CD benefits the Eleanor Glynn Thom Foundation which benefits cancer research, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, and college scholarships.

—Christina Fuoco

## Comedy from page 4C

Perhaps the Beavis and Butt-head generation may enjoy some of this, but how many references to self-gratification of a sexual nature can listener stand? Bodily function and anatomical humor can be funny in small doses, but unfortunately, Sandler's writing doesn't leave the gutter for most of the album.

Among the album's highlights are a few songs, which feature Sandler alongside G.E. Smith and the SNL rhythm section. "The Thanksgiving Song" is the song made famous on SNL last year. "Food Innuendo Guy" should be a morning radio classic, and "Lunchlady Land" features Sandler's impression of Axl Rose.

Talkin' S...t — Martin Lawrence (EastWest Records America)

From the title alone, you have an idea of what to expect from this album, the debut release from the star of the Fox television series "Martin" and the host of HBO's "Def Comedy Jam." Considering Lawrence's influences in comedy, most notably Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy (with whom he appeared in the movie "Boomerang"), the man's humor is not for the faint of heart.

This album probably had the most laughs of the three, although you won't find Lawrence original in anyway. He touches on all the major themes black comics frequently touch on — poking fun at Michael Jackson, Mike Tyson, Oprah Winfrey and Luther Vandross, among others. He contrasts how blacks and whites differ when it comes to parenting, getting high, boxing and having sex.

And, of course, he ends with a discussion of bodily functions.

The Day the Laughter Died Part II — Andrew Dice Clay (American)

There's nothing the former Andrew Clay Silverstein can do anymore to shock us, right? With his latest album, Clay makes a radical departure from his past material and takes his arrogant raunchy persona to new belligerent heights. This man admits that he harbors intense hatred for everything and everyone and is politically incorrect by design.

Be forewarned, this is not a comedy album by any means. Listening to this 72-minute performance, recorded at Dangerfield's in New York City, reminded me of the latter days of the late Letny Bruce.

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