MOVIES 'Michael' a far-from-heavenly comedy



much sugar as you can and (2) there is no such thing as a bad

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ANK Theatres

Wonderful Life's" Frank Capra. And when she's good, like in "Sleopleas in Scattle," ahe can bring a smile to even the most crumudgeony critic. But even Capra had his bad days, and his worst films, dubbed 'Capra Corn," set the standard for Hollywood at its most cloying and silly, such is the case with "Michael," a well-meaning little to hang on to but its charismatic star. It starts with a letter from fowa, addressed to the star

"Enquirer"-style supermarket tabloid. I have had an angel staying at my motel for the last several months, it says, and think you would be interested in writing about him. His name is Michael.

Michael. So the reporter heads for the heartland, accompanied by his partner (Robert Pastorelli) and a new writer (Andie MacDowell) who claims to be an angel expert but isn't. Also on the trip: Sparky, a terrier like the one on TV's "Frasier", and a bonafide "Mirror" celebrity. Arriving at the motel, they soon realize that Michael is no It starts with a letter from Iowa, addressed to the star reporter (William Hurt) at the "National Mirror," an

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GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

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white-robed, halo-wearing angel. A substantial beer gut hange over his boxers as he shuffles to the refrigerator for breakfast, which includes a can of beer and a bowl of Frosted Flakes literally buried in sugar. When it comes to winge, how-ever, ho's the real McCoy. To women, he smble like caramel, like fresh-baked cookies, like childhood.

ilko fresh-baked cookies, like childhood. When they make the long trek back to Chicago in a beach up sta-tion and the state of the state of the sanctuary for screenwriters who have no other place to go. That's why we get compless shots of the ear driving by confided from every nonctivable angle, backed by a Randy Newman scree that golly evokets the Heartland. At one of the predictable staps, Michael gets in a fight in a red-neck bar. Seems the local bays don't like strangers dancing with their women, especially all at one.

don't like strangere danking with their women, especially all at once. The real miracle in "Michael" is that Travolta manages to carry some of this sillicess off. In the two or threey years since his comeback in "Pulp Fieldses off. In the two or threey years since his tackfold a half dozen celectic roles, from villan in "Broken Arrow" to scientific oddity in "Phenomenon," which, like thia, mines the star's real-life spiritu-al side. The other actors are ill-suide for their roles. Andie MacDowel has concentrated her talents on fluffy romantic come them. Hurt, as Michael's reacher tor coming down (like the Tin Woodman, he needs a heart), is as stiff as you'd expect him to be in aromantic lead. Pastorelli, late of TV's a romantic lead. Pastorelli, late of TV's



Angel: John Travolta stars in the Turner Pictures' comedy, "Michael."

"Murphy Brown" and cast in increasingly substantial roles, wouldn't be bad if Ephron had any sense of pacing. Even a movie this light needs some speed to get it off the ground, but it drags when Travolta's off the screen.

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John Monaghan wclcomes your calls and comments. You can lis-ten to him on Dave Discon's Radio Shou AM 1270, 8 p.m. to mid-night Saturdays. To leave John a voice mail message, dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1866.

ZADE

Under. ■ "The Crucible" (USA -1996). Arthur Miller adapted his own play for the serven, the story of the Salen Witch Trials in which as piteful girl (Winona Ryder) holds the faite of the man-she had an affair with. Daniel-Day.Lewis and Winona Ryder star. Magic Bag Theatre22920 Woodward, Forndale. Call (610) 544-3030 for information. ■ "Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation." 8, 10 p.m. Jan. 2. Last year it played like a "great-est his" package. This year the fourth annual showcass of ani-mated bad tasts features 20 pre-mieres. Among the titles: "Condom Complaint," "The Happy Moses" and new episodes of the perennial favorite "No Neck Joe." (65) ■ Mario Bava ... "Liss and the Devil" (Italy/Spain/West Germany - 1972) and "Danger Diabolik" (Italy/Spain/West Germany - 1974) (Italy/Spain/West Germany - 1974) (Italy/Spain/West Barries about secret agents based on a European comic book and featuring a score by Ennio Morie Art Theetrells N Min Street at 11 Mile, Royal Oak, Films play through at least Thursia, unless noted other-wise. Call (610) 542-0160 for informatice Leconton, tarring Charles Berling

(\$6; \$2.95 twilight) "Shino" (Australia - 1996).

See Birmingham Theatre listing nbove.



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General Cinemas

JOHN NOTICITATION MONAGHAN MONAGHAN TO Nora Ephron apparently lives by that same creed, She has set herself up as queen of the feel good movies, the '90s answer to "It's a

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