

OUR TOWN

Now She's A Saint Master Actress Judith Malina

By MARK HALLAMITIN

She doesn't cook in real life, only in reel life. Judith Malina doesn't even eat meat, let alone make what are supposed to be the best sausages in Little Italy, as she does as Carmela Santangelo in the new Nancy Savoca hit *Household Saints*. The film, for which Malina has been receiving Oscar-level accolades, is about three generations of New York Italian women and their fanatical religious convictions.

Malina, who co-founded The Living Theatre with the late Julian Beck, is experiencing a renaissance as an actress these days. In the last three years she has starred or co-starred in several major films and in a production at Joseph Papp's Delacorte Theatre in Central Park.

Since the late 1940's, The Living Theatre has made it's home in New York, where giants like James Earle Jones, Martin Sheen and Al Pacino got their starts.

"We first cast Martin Sheen in our production of *The Connection* and we cast Al later on," recalls Malina, 68. The company, which has toured the world with dozens of avant garde and revolutionary plays, just lost it's space on East 3rd Street after city fire marshalls informed them their space was not up to code. But the company, based in Malina's West Side apartment, lives on and is planning two projects for the winter: a series of street events against capital punishment and a new play, *Anarchia*, scheduled for a three week run beginning December 16 at the Theatre for the New City on First Avenue.

As an actress, Malina started out in the 1950's appearing on television in *The Goldbergs*. She trained with the likes of Marlon Brando, Elaine Strich and Tennessee Williams in the late 1940's at the noted Dramatic Workshop with German director Erwin Piscator. More recently she played Granny in the original *Addams Family* film. Malina also played Al Pacino's mother in Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon*.

Last year she worked with Penny Marshall, Robin Williams and Robert De Niro on the film *Awakenings*, in which she played a encephalitic patient foolishly smitten with her

doctor, played by Williams. "It's very different making a comedy rather than a tragedy," notes Malina. "In life Williams and I found that we had in common a kind of theological morality," she says, adding that De Niro, who was "wrestling with his character," kept mostly to himself. "We spent 14 weeks filming in a psychiatric hospital in Brooklyn and I can not tell you how depressing that was."

Williams gave Malina a copy of the film script inscribed: "The soul of Mother Theresa, the heart of Gandhi and the mind of Groucho." To which Malina sighs, "Ah, if it were true, I



Judith Malina, who stars as Carmela Santangelo in Nancy Savoca's *'Household Saints,'* with co-star Tracey Ullman.

could be as funny as Groucho."

Before *Awakenings*, she played a concentration camp survivor in *Enemies, a Love Story* and in preparing for it, drew from her own life experience as a refuge. Malina's father, a Rabbi, escaped with his family from Nazi Germany before the Holocaust and established a synagogue for emigré Jews in New York.

"My father helped bring out many people, some of whom came to our house when I was a little child," says Malina. "As I listened to their stories, I didn't have to go very far to know what my character of Shifra felt."

Not one to sit around waiting for the phone to ring with offers, Judith has been keeping detailed diaries of her life since she was a teenager; the 1947 to 1957 diaries were published by Grove Press in 1984. These volumes fill up a large portion of her home as does the beehive of activity of the Living Theatre members. She frequently tours with the company, having been in Brazil this summer, and is preparing for a tour of New Mexico. Then its back to the city to rehearse the new plays.