

Book Review: *The Case of the Orphaned Bassoonists*

(A Cassandra Reilly Mystery by Barbara Wilson)

By Betty Asher
Scotts Valley, California

After reading a review of *The Case of the Orphaned Bassoonists* in a local paper I hotfooted it to my local independent bookstore and purchased their total supply: three copies. At last!-a murder mystery about bassoonists. I dashed home to begin reading what I anticipated to be an exciting mystery and with the hope that I could eventually share this excitement and good news with my double reed friends. Alas, this good news was not to be.

The Case of the Orphaned Bassoonists takes place in Venice, and, yes, it is the story of a stolen baroque bassoon, one reputed to have belonged to Antonio Vivaldi's orchestra in the "Pieta", the orphanage where he had taught, composed and conducted. The characters in today's story are an international group of students in Venice for a seminar on Baroque double reed practices, of which one student is accused of stealing an antique bassoon and another is dutifully drowned in a canal, creating the "mystery" of the plot. There are a few additional twists, but not enough to keep the storyline moving. There are so many minor characters that it is difficult to understand their purpose in the story other than to partake in numerous sexual intertwinings. These intertwinings of different varieties, diffidently described, were undoubtedly included to enliven the story, but

they didn't, nor did they even serve the usual purpose of adding depth to a characterization.

Occasional discussions of bassoon characteristics and Vivaldi at first led me to believe the author was at least somewhat knowledgeable about bassoons. It seemed so when she wrote "Of all the instruments in the orchestra, it is the most emotionally distinctive.... Yet what other instrument can alternate between bitter-sweet lyricism and outright jocularly with such engaging finesse?" When I came to the following passage, my hopes were dashed. (One would think that Ms. Wilson would have at least had a bassoonist proof read her book before publishing.) After the stolen bassoon had been found, an incriminating magazine article was found in a "tube" of the bassoon. The explanation for how it got there reads "I cleaned the mouthpiece with it. Must have slipped inside when I put it back together." C'mon, now....

Barbara Wilson writes graphically of Venice and well enough to take you there in your mind's eye during this read. But one doesn't buy a murder mystery to read a travelogue or a catalogue of feminist dalliances. Buy this book – it's in paperback and not expensive – only if you want to learn a bit more about the orphanages of Venice in the 18th century, or if you want the title to be seen on your bookshelf.