



The Alto Wore Tweed

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Hayden Konig is the police chief in the small Appalachian town of St. Germaine, North Carolina. His part-time job, however, is serving as the choir director and organist at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, but he's also determined to write the next great hard-boiled mystery novel a la Raymond Chandler — a liturgical mystery novel with no real plot, but enough bad prose to make the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest look like the Oxford University Press spring catalog.

Chief Konig is also lucky enough to be independently wealthy, which is why he decides that his lack of talent in the writing department can easily be remedied, or at least greatly enhanced, by the purchase of Raymond Chandler's 1939 Underwood typewriter. He is sadly mistaken, but the results are uproarious! Even as Hayden works on his opus, he must deal with other, more pressing, problems — a new priest at St. Barnabas, a Christmas feud between the Rotarians and the Kiwanians and, more importantly, a dead body in the choir loft. It's a good thing that Hayden keeps a loaded Glock under the organ bench!

As Christmas approaches, the tension (and hilarity) rises to a fever pitch. St. Barnabas is introduced to "The Penguin of Bethlehem" and the town's Nativity feud turns ugly when the Kiwanian's bagpiper spooks the Rotarian's camel. A 12 year old wine snob, hedgehogs, Benny (the world-champion thurifer), church antics, and an episode that is just too good to give away, fill out this mystery that will leave you laughing with every page turn.

The Alto Wore Tweed Details

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From Reader Review *The Alto Wore Tweed* for online ebook

Tyrannosaurus regina says

I really wanted to enjoy this, because it sounded fun and it combined a lot of things I enjoy (particularly noir and choral music) that I never expected to see paired.

Unfortunately, the protagonist—whom I believe we were supposed to find roguish and charming—was sexist, classist and racist, and not only that but the narrative supported his point of view. It was deeply anti-woman at several points. And the book-within-a-book just came off as pointless filler. There *were* funny parts, and a couple of sympathetic characters, but they were vastly outweighed.

Karen Syed says

I found this book in an ad in the sidebar of Facebook. I was amused by the image of the author and the brief description of *Liturgical Mysteries* intrigued me. So, I clicked on the link which took me to Kindle and I bought the eBook.

As a publisher, I was surprised by the number of errors in this book. They range from misspelled words to grammar and punctuation. I was also surprised that I enjoyed the story so much I didn't care about them.

As a reader, I could hardly put my Kindle down. It was fast-paced, interesting, and clever. The cast of characters are wildly imaginative and a lot of fun to get to know. The fact that *Liturgical Mysteries* have their foundation in religion is no detractor from the wicked sense of humor that shines like a beacon.

Mark Schweizer has a gift for weaving a tale and for sucking the reader in. The novel inside a novel is ridiculously funny and the unique qualities of the story itself will enchant even the most serious reader.

Don't let my mention of the editorial errors put you off from this book. It is a delightful read and well worth the time and effort of ignoring the mistakes.

Rosemarie says

This is a flat-out, fall-down funny mystery!

When Willie Boyd, sexton at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, is found dead in the choir loft, having spewed all over the keyboards of the organ in the process; Chief Detective and Choir Director Hayden Konig suspects poison. It was poison, but the bottle of sacramental wine Willie had filched and drunk, the only thing he is known to have consumed, is not the source.

Many people disliked Willie, including the new priest, Mother Lorraine Ryan, whom many Church members find almost as disagreeable as Willie. While suspects are plentiful, clues are sparse, and the motive remains a mystery.

The story is interspersed with chapters from Hayden's unfortunate efforts to write a Chanderlesque mystery novel. These passages got a little annoying after awhile; but were italicized, so I just skimmed them. The story doesn't need them!

Allover, I enjoyed the book so much that I immediately ordered two more in the series; although I can't imagine how the author can possibly match *The Incident of the Escaped Helium-filled Sex Dolls* (with recurring dire consequences) and the two competing Live Christmas Nativity Displays (one with amorous camel.) These mental images will amuse me for years.

Rachel says

I was predisposed to like *The Alto Wore Tweed*, the first in a series by Mark Schweizer. It's lighthearted crime novel, it's set against a musical background and it channels Raymond Chandler - what's not to like?

Well - here's a book which is bursting with great ideas and that's its problem for me. It's just trying too hard. Pastiche Chandler is fine except Chandler himself did it better. And the central figure being a choirmaster as well as a cop works, except he's also an author writing Chandler-esque crime fiction. See what I mean? Too much already. I can't help feel it would have been better to have a main character with less personii and more detailed plotlines to replace the Chandler thing. Or even make it all Chandler pastiche.

This, I believe, is a highly successful series of books on the same theme, but I'm afraid that I'm stopping here.

Patricia Rockwell says

This is absolutely the type of mystery I enjoy most. The main character spends his time attempting to solve a mystery--not trying to elude some bad guy. There are a lot of unique-even quirky--suspects from which to choose. The plot is complicated and there are a host of fascinating clues. And finally, there is humor! Lots of it!

In *THE ALTO WORE TWEED* (the first of many of Schweizer's liturgical mysteries, we meet Hayden Konig--police chief of the small North Carolina town of St. Germaine. He's also the choir director for St. Barnabas Episcopal Church. The title derives from Hayden's attempts to write the perfect Phillip Marlowe-type detective story, with uncertain success. I'm assuming he will continue to master the style in the following novels. Luckily for the reader, Hayden also keeps us informed of the crime happenings in St. Germaine and his attempts as police chief to solve them.

In this book, the church janitor is found dead, apparently poisoned, and Hayden and his small team of Dave and Nancy must attempt to determine the who, how, why, where, and when. In their efforts they encounter numerous suspects--mostly comprised of church members and staff--as it seems many people found the janitor more than a little unpleasant. Along the way, Hayden uncovers other unusual crimes--and I do mean unusual. For example, one victim succumbs when she climbs out of the roof of a moving vehicle and leaps to her death when she sees a man on the side of the road releasing human-shaped helium balloons--and believes him to be Jesus.

I laughed out loud many times each page of this book. It is witty and full of sly observations about small town life, the Church, art, history, relationships, and--well, just about everything. I will say that my very favorite part of the book is Archimedes, but I won't tell you who or what that is. I just fervently hope that Archimedes appears in future volumes. I highly recommend that you read the book yourself and find out what I'm talking about.

Karen says

This is one of the funniest books I have read in a long time. It isn't great literature, and not the best detective novel I've ever read, because I think he is making fun of detective novels. I see there are quite few books in this series, I will definitely be reading them.

January 3, 2018. I just realized that there are many more books in this series, so I decided to re-read the first 3 books. To be honest, this first book is just as good on the second read. I even upped the rating.

Helen says

There aren't many cosy mysteries written by men but this series shows great promise. This and a Christmas one were loaned to me by a friend after I told her about the Bach centred one I'd just finished. The titles for all the books in the series have a singer type noun followed by "wore" and what they wore. The story that goes with the title is the Raymond Chandler style mystery the narrator (police detective/choir master and organist) Hayden Konig is currently working on while a real mystery is unfolding in the small North Carolina town where the stories are located. In this first one the church janitor is found dead in the choir loft, killed by poison. This is a town so small that 911 calls go to the neighbouring town, the police force consists of three people and there is only one police car, so there isn't much in the way of forensic assistance available and autopsies may have to sit. This is not a book to read if you don't like puns, are not somewhat familiar with Episcopalian churches, and have no liking for classical church music, although you'd probably like it as long as you don't suffer from the first characteristic. An example from the fictional story: "I pulled my fedora low over my eyes and a sneer played across my lips as I opened the hymnal looking for an old favorite containing sound theological doctrine." In the "real" story the new (female)priest wanted to use Kum Baya as a post communion hymn and our narrator, who "didn't much care for the campfire music of the sixties" and was using a French anthem that Sunday suggested the priest start the song and the organist would pick up his banjo and the choir and (he) would join in on the chorus. He had no intention of doing anything of the sort, but the priest, who wanted to be called "Mother Ryan" carried right on in utter silence through the whole thing. It is difficult to give the actual flavour of thing, but think of a primary child in a penguin costume in a manger scene singing about "them floes, them icy floes". I must look for others in this series even if the writing and editing are more than slightly uneven.

Eric_W says

Our hero, Hayden, is a chief of detectives (the only detective in town) by day and the rest of the time choir director at the local Episcopal church with a master's in music composition and a degree in law

enforcement.. He drives a '62 Chevy that has rolled over the odometer four times, according to the notches he keeps on the steering wheel, and it's fully equipped with blue lights, siren, and really expensive Marantz stereo speakers. He keeps his ticket pad in the office.

He had a standard way of eliminating dates that seemed incompatible or were going nowhere: the Knock n' Bach strategy. First stop is knockwurst and sauerkraut followed by the Credo from the B minor Mass (one of my all time favorite pieces of music by-the-way.) Before he met Megan who actually loved the stuff, he had a well-earned reputation as a boring date.

The new female minister (Herself) at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church is less traditional than he would like, and requests they sing Kum-Baya. He demurs and doesn't hand out the music so during the service the minister winds up doing a solo. "She had sounded vaguely like Ted Kennedy doing an impression of Willie Nelson on a bad day. Altogether, it might not have been the effect she was hoping for. The congregation, for some strange reason, didn't join in, but sat there, mute, as if suddenly struck dumb by the Holy Spirit. "Sorry," I had said after the service, "I thought you were just kidding about Kum-Baya. But you did a great job."

Hayden is also a wannabe writer and the title of each book in the series is the title of the book he happens to be working on. His girl-friend Meg, keeps pointing out how awful is his writing and suggesting he enter the Buler-Lytton contest for bad sentences. He prints out a chapter each week and distributes it in the choir folders so the choir has something to read during the sermon. Filled with ridiculous similes and metaphors, the reader is treated to the book within a book. For example: *Pulling up a chair, she sat down gracefully, crossing her tweed-covered legs with an elegance belying the sound of tweed-on-tweed, a sound not unlike forty Amish farmers shucking corn. . . She was really ranting now. I could always tell when they were mad. This one was beet-red and her hands were clenching and unclenching the loaded shotgun that I had left sitting on the table. I suddenly realized I had made a tactical error. Still, I had her hooked like a tweed tuna and I had to reel her in. "These ain't metaphors. Only an idiot would try to use an unlicensed metaphor in a detective story. These what I'm usin' is similes pure and simple." I lit a cigar*

Some wonderful scenes. I think my favorite is accident scene Hayden is called to where Carleton's wife leaped through the sunroof of his car, splatting on the pavement. When queried as to why she might have done that, Carleton replies she thought it was the Rapture. *She started screaming 'He's back, He's back.' Then she climbed right out of the sunroof and jumped out of the car.* "Excuse me?" Nancy stopped writing, raised an eyebrow and looked Carlton in the face. "She thought it was the Rapture," Carlton continued, shaking his head. "You know, like in those Left Behind books. She thought Jesus was going to lift her up into the sky. Look, I was trying to slow down, but she wouldn't wait till I stopped." "Why would she think it was the Rapture?" I asked. "We passed a half-dozen naked people floating into the air and then she saw Jesus." "She saw Jesus?" Nancy asked, pen poised over the paper but seemingly unable to take any notes. "Well," said Carlton, gesturing toward the pickup truck, "anyway, she saw Arlen." Arlen Pearl was dressed in a white sheet leaning against his old pickup. He was in his mid-thirties I'd guess, but I didn't know for sure. He had shoulder length blond hair and a beard but, in my opinion, he didn't bear much resemblance to Jesus. The tarp came off Arlen's truck and the eight sex dolls floated off into the sky. "I stopped the truck by the side of the road and I was shouting at the dolls 'Come back here.' I guess my arms were up in the air like this," he said, lifting his hands toward the heavens. "I just wanted them to come back. Sheesh. They cost almost thirty dollars apiece. I was going to sell them to the guys after the party. Then Carlton comes racin' by and Darlene jumps out of the sunroof." She was convinced He was coming for her and climbed through the sunroof to get a head start. Priceless.

The naked dolls reappear at inopportune (depending on your point of view) moments throughout. Another

classic is when Herself is having a wymmin's conference and as they chant outside the church, *The drums and cymbals began anew with restored vigor to the refrain "Sophia, Sophia, Sophia, shower us with your love."* As they chanted together, their collective voices straining to a frenzied pitch, suddenly one of the womyn screamed and pointed to the sky. They all glanced heavenward and there, framed by the full moon which was still low in the sky, was the goddess Sophia herself. She hung there for a just moment, transfixed in naked beauty, before drifting into a power pole and landing against a transformer. The resulting explosion and shower of fire that rained down on the wimmyn priests was enough to convert most of them back to orthodox Christianity. Four of them checked into the hospital with "severe emotional distress." Six got into their cars and went home immediately. The goddess Sophia met her untimely end amid the fragrance of electrical conflagration and burning latex. The girls and I just stood and watched with disbelief. "The Lord works in mysterious ways," said Georgia thoughtfully, "but Arlen won't be very happy." Not to mention the Bishop's memo that all new compositions had to have at least 50% non-white notes.

I intend to read all of this series. Had me LOL.

Cheryl says

If I could have given this book 2.5 stars, I would have.

I didn't hate this book at all -- in fact, it was a cute little read. However, I am not sure I would recommend it.

While it's clear the author knows his stuff regarding classical music, I tired of the constant references to them. It almost felt like a "look at me! This is what all of you peons should be listening to!" And I'm a vocal music major. Yikes.

Likewise the humor - - while clever at times, there were instances when it was a little heavy-handed.

I finally just gave up on reading the Chandler-esque "story within a story" that the main character is supposedly writing. It was just too boring and again, the humor was way over the top for me. I'm sure this was intentional, but again - - it just didn't work for me.

On the other hand, I think this was an ok beginning for the author. I notice that some of his more recent books have received better ratings - - I think the basic story was good enough that I would be willing to give Mr. Schweizer a second chance.

Cphe says

There is a lot to like about this this light hearted cozy mystery. I very much enjoyed the homage to the wonderful noir detective stories of past years.

The mystery component was well presented but the main character Detective Hayden Konig was a mite too smug for my reading enjoyment and took a bit of gloss off this cozy mystery. I wasn't enamoured with his

"detecting" at times or with his ability to let some suspects off the hook.

But overall I did enjoy this light hearted cozy, often quirky mystery.

Pauleta says

I love a cheesy mystery. And this is pretty cheesy. I'm also a church choir nerd. And this is...

about a small town church choir, a murder, a choir director and organist who doubles as the town sherriff and also happens to be independently wealthy with a computer degree and a not-so-useful music degree all while writing run-on sentences in his film noir books... oh, he also keeps a gun in the organ bench. (That's actually no big deal since at least one of the choir members keeps a flask in her choir folder.) See? It's cheesy and lots of fun. If you sing in a church choir, this series is for you! (You'll also love his music!)

Jon says

I almost gave up on this one after 25 pages--the quality of writing seriously put me off. Then I noticed that most GoodReads reviewers gave it four stars, so I gave it some more time. I'm glad I did. Eventually I got on the author's wavelength and realized that he had the same off-beat sense of humor as Carl Hiaasen or Christopher Moore (*The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove*). The writing improved as it went along, and apparently it gets quite good, since a later book in the series (*The Soprano Wore Falsettos*) won several awards. This one was a so-so mystery, but laugh-out-loud funny for its puns, its similes, its outrageous church humor, and its occasional silly plot devices. At one point eight inflatable sex dolls are filled with helium, put in the back of a pickup, and covered with a tarp. The tarp comes loose, the sex dolls slowly float away, and for the rest of the book, one by one, just when you've forgotten about them, they sink to earth at highly inappropriate moments. Many church-music jokes, like the politically correct directive from the bishop that whole and half notes will from now on be referred to as "pigmentally impoverished," that 50% of all compositions will be made up of "notes of color," and no reference will be made to the stereotype that notes of color move faster and generally jump higher. I was also introduced to what I think will become my favorite Biblical quote: "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without good sense." (Proverbs 11.22) I'll be reading more of this series.

Rebecca says

This mystery was a fun read. The small town police detective moonlighting as the music director at the Episcopal church solves a murder. In the mountains of North Carolina. And a Bernese Mountain dog makes an appearance. Gosh, why does that sound so familiar? But this one is humorous, which is a nice change. I notice that most of its humor pokes fun at women in the church and choir (especially altos - is he afraid of us?), and with gosh-darn little of it directed at men, which seems a little one-sided. But it's still funny. The protagonist listens to a whole slew of great music, and I appreciated his naming so many works. Now I know what to look for. I look forward to reading about the follies of basses, baritones, tenors, and sopranos, in that order. Except I don't think he distinguishes between basses and baritones.

Beverly says

This is the first I've read of this series and the first of the series--I may read another to see if the plotting improves. The main character is a police chief/church organist in a small NC town. He wants to be a noir mystery writer. Strangely, there are two stories here: the one he is writing and the one he is living. For my money, he could have left out the one he was writing. Although I came to skim most of that, I found no connection between the two. If you've read it and have other ideas, please let me know. I enjoyed the setting and background.

girl writing says

Since I'm an Episcopalian and grew up going to a church called St. Barnabas, I was drawn to the first book in this series in which laughs and murder take place at an Episcopal church called St. Barnabas. I liked the first installment enough to try the second but definitely had some issues with the story. The female rector is portrayed as an off-the-chart stereotyped female minister and is completely unlikeable not to mention eventually immoral and unprofessional. Maybe the series redeems itself later with regard to female clergy. The protagonist comes off as an arrogant know it all who doesn't follow rules. The mystery was ok with several red herrings. The locale, local characters and church humor are what will take me to the next story. The story within the story of the protagonist writing an old fashioned detective novel was clever and also provided some humor.
