

Two regional authors explore new genres

THIS WEEK WE take a look at new genres by two favorite authors who have appeared in this column before.

Josi Kilpack fans will enjoy her “culinary mystery” every bit as much as her romance novels, and if you haven’t discovered Kilpack by now, this novel will be a good place to start.

As usual, G.G. Vandagriff demonstrates her skill and versatility with her first historical fiction outing. Like most of Vandagriff’s books, the story of how the book came about is nearly as interesting as the book itself.

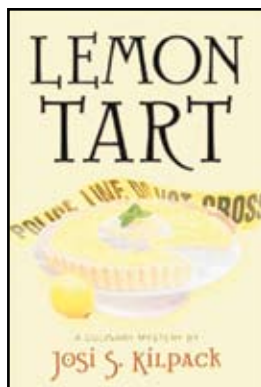
“Lemon Tart” by Josi Kilpack (Deseret Book, 2009, \$16.95)

First of all a note to my non-LDS readers: Do not be turned off by the publisher. This book is as mainstream as any book could get. And for my LDS readers, it’s as squeaky clean as one would expect from this author and publisher.

Sadie Hoffmiller is the busybody of the neighborhood. She conveniently lives at the curve of the cul-de-sac where she can see the comings and goings of her neighbors and their visitors from her kitchen window. She even has the key to all the houses, entrusted to her over the years for emergencies by her neighbors. A single mother of several years, she also has a long-standing fiancé and thinks no tragedy or misunderstanding exists that can’t be repaired by one of her baked offerings.

As the book opens, she is canning homemade applesauce when there is an unexpected knock on her door. To her surprise, two police officers have arrived with the unsettling news that her young friend and neighbor, Anne Lemmon, has been murdered and her 2-year-old son, Trevor, is missing.

Later, two detectives return, Cunningham and Madsen. For Sadie and detective Madsen, it is distrust at first sight, as



the detective identifies her as a prime suspect almost immediately. He is especially suspicious when he learns Sadie is a key to Anne’s house and is well-acquainted with her comings and goings. Miffed at his obvious suspicion and dislike, Sadie makes it her business to start gathering clues on her own. Thus is born Sadie Hoffmiller: amateur sleuth.

Although she is repeatedly warned by the officers conducting the investigation, she feels duty-bound to solve the case and clear herself. She is especially worried about what has happened to the child and thinks the police are spending way too much time trying to implicate her for murder and not nearly enough time trying to find Trevor. Unfortunately for Sadie, she manages to jump to conclusions at every turn and soon thinks everybody she knows, including her brother and fiancé, are likely suspects.

As she bumbles through one misadventure after another, detective Madsen’s suspicions of her only seem to grow stronger. Feeling very self-satisfied with information she has gathered from the local librarian about Anne, Sadie is jolted from her reverie by a familiar male voice: “‘I’ll take that, Mrs. Hoffmiller.’ Sadie startled and looked up into the eyes of detective Madsen. She pulled the card to her chest and took a step backward. ‘What — what are you doing?’ ... ‘Conducting

Regional Reads

By Charlene Hirschi

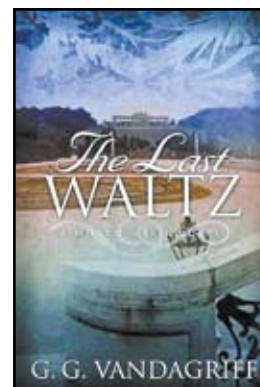


a police investigation,’ he said through tight lips. ‘Something you just can’t seem to stay out of — which only makes it more and more obvious to me that you have far too much unwarranted interest in this case.’”

For romance fans, there is a little bit of that brewing under the surface as well. A nice, light read, “Lemon Tart” is perfect for a lazy afternoon and the bonus of several good recipes that will no doubt become favorites. Not surprisingly, this is “the first of the Sadie Hoffmiller mystery series.” Enjoy!

“The Last Waltz” by G.G. Vandagriff (Shadow Mountain, 2009, \$19.95)

This is a big book — 591 pages — and a terrific value if only measured by length and weight. But add to that the delightful storytelling of G.G. Vandagriff, the splendor of 1913 Vienna, the historic revealing of an era and events leading up to World War I and culminating in the Nazi takeover of Austria before World War II, well-drawn characters who consume your thoughts every minute you are away from them — and word for word this is perhaps the greatest literary bargain you will find



this summer.

This novel was originally written more than 20 years ago, when the author was 27 years old. The entire manuscript was lost at one time, only to be returned by a “lovely Polynesian woman who found the manuscript (and the diaper bag that contained it) in the Los Angeles airport and cared enough to go to great lengths to see that it was returned. This was way before computers, so the loss ... would have been staggering.”

At 19 years old, Amalia Faulhaber has been raised in the glittering but shallow social life of pre-war Vienna. Reared in a middle-class family, which meant a great deal more wealth than that would imply in today’s world, her social-climbing mother is determined her two daughters will marry well. Attractive, spoiled, naïve and independent, Amalia has her own ideas of how her life should be lived and ends up with three suitors. Because of her perverse pride, she marries a Prussian officer who makes her a baroness, instead of the man she truly loves.

Experiencing the horrors of war from the German perspective, Amalia is sickened by the carnage she witnesses as she volunteers in a Catholic hospital in Berlin, and she is nearly destroyed when her husband is killed in battle. Returning to Vienna after the death of her mother-in-law, she finds her

father deep in dementia and her mother refusing to accept they have lost everything. Amalia comes to the family’s rescue with the fortune her husband has left her, but that too is finally gone as Europe plunges deeper and deeper into poverty.

By this time, Amalia again has to choose between a marriage of wealth and convenience with Baron von Schoenburg or her Polish lover, Herr Doctor Andrzej. Through a series of twists and turns, fate brings her to an unexpected choice and the book follows her second marriage and the intervention of the lost suitor who finally saves both her and her children.

“Last Waltz” is divided into six sections covering Amalia’s life from Vienna to Berlin, 1913-16, and back to Vienna, 1916-38. The layout is especially effective as the reader gets the sense of finishing one chapter of her life and moving on to the next. In many ways, this is at least four books in one, each one of them captivating.

This book has all the trappings of a bestseller and one can only hope it gets the attention it deserves. The book ends where another could easily start — heaven knows this reader wants to know what happens to Amalia and her children during and after World War II. Will fate finally deal her the hand the reader feels she so richly deserves? Only Vandagriff can tell us that, and in the meantime, we will have to be satisfied with constructing our own version of the post-1938 heroine.

Book critic Charlene Hirschi holds her master’s in English from Utah State University. She is among a number of freelance writers whose columns appear in The Herald Journal as part of an effort to expose readers to a variety of community voices. Authors, readers and editors are invited to visit www.charlenehirschi.com.