

From the far north – Sweden’s most endearing export

Children’s books featuring Festus and Mercury (also known as “Pettersson und Findus”) have long enjoyed cult status in Switzerland too. They are the brainchild of Sven Nordqvist, the Swedish illustrator, who first worked as an architect before fulfilling his dream of being an author and illustrator of children’s books and making his professional breakthrough.



A tomcat with green eyes that twinkle with mischief, green-striped trousers and a tiny green cap, a fat hen and a little, troll-like figure are drilling holes in a piece of wood that’s carefully labelled in three languages. Are they perhaps faking Emmental cheese? And who are the inquisitive onlookers in the box? The scene is one big question mark ...

A comical team

However, for those who are familiar with Nordqvist’s tales about Festus, the somewhat eccentric handyman, and Mercury, his talking cat, the scene will come as no surprise because they know that anything is possible. Mercury has a quixotic mind and comes up with loads of different schemes. He is just bursting with energy and eager for action, and turns his

master’s life topsy-turvy. So Festus often has to get his tomcat out of trouble, though without his talking pet, he would probably feel very lonely. The remote farm in the heart of the Swedish countryside is also home to ten talking – but rather dim – hens as well as to the colourful Mucklas, the tiny trolls that live under Festus’s kitchen floor and delight in spiriting away all kinds of items. If Festus or Mercury has a mishap, the Mucklas are immediately on the spot, laughing up their sleeves. This, combined with the curious, gossiping neighbours, offers plenty of material for slapstick episodes and funny incidents. →



First-day cover motif

Special stamp Festus and Mercury

Sales

Philately:
From 24.2.2011
until 31.3.2012,
while stocks last
Post offices:
From 3.3.2011,
while stocks last

Validity

Unlimited from 3.3.2011

Printing

Offset, 4-colour;
Joh. Enschedé,
Haarlem, Netherlands

Sizes

Stamp: 33×28 mm
Stamp booklet:
254×62 mm (open)
(2 rows of 5 stamps)

Paper

White stamp paper,
self-adhesive on backing
paper, 220 gm²

Perforation

Serpentine cut (4 sides)

Designer

Sven Nordqvist, Sweden

First-day cancellation





Sven Nordqvist. The man behind Festus and Mercury. Photo: zvg

Nordqvist’s love of detail

Clovingly drawn story illustrations with lots of detail are Nordqvist’s hallmark. Mercury often features four or five times in a single picture, and the busy images contain hundreds of details just waiting to be discovered – for instance, in the hopeless shambles of the workshop, in the garden, the henhouse or the loveable chaos of Festus’s home.

The popularity of Nordqvist’s stories in Switzerland is probably partly due to the fact that they deal with everyday topics: Mercury celebrates his birthday (three times a year), Mercury wants to spend the night in a tent (but chickens out in the end), Mercury wants to hunt the fox (that is after the dim hens), Festus is surprised by visitors (his neighbours), Festus plants vegetables (and Mercury plants meatballs), or they celebrate Christmas together (along with a strange postman). The other ingredient in the Swede’s success is the communication and dialogue between children and adults encouraged by the constant discovery of new details. So the books are regarded as extremely suitable for children

and therefore of educational value. And the stories always have a thought-provoking happy ending.

Who is Sven Nordqvist?

Sven Nordqvist, the creator of Festus and Mercury, was born in 1946 in Helsingborg, Sweden. From early on, he wanted to be an illustrator and graphic artist, but after being rejected by several art colleges, he first studied architecture at the Lund Institute of Technology. Nevertheless, his passion for drawing continued unabated, and he did illustrations for advertising material, postcards and greeting cards, posters, textbooks, picture books and novels while still working as an architect.

His persistence was rewarded in 1983 when he won first prize in a children’s book competition, and since then he has focused solely on writing and illustrating children’s books. Nordqvist is a member of the Swedish Children’s Book Academy and his stories have already won several awards, including the Astrid Lindgren Prize in 2003 for his oeuvre. So far, the adventures of Festus and Mercury have been published in 40 languages, and the couple are so successful that they have featured in a television series, four films and radio plays. And there are also Festus and Mercury games, jigsaws, advent and annual calendars, songbooks, colouring books, puzzle books, cookery books, activity and text books. And a closer look may reveal what the tiny troll is having for breakfast, or why Festus and Mercury need tinned tomatoes ...

Claudia Lambrich, wortvoll



Off in search of adventure! Who's for a bike ride?

Festus and Mercury have taken to their bikes. Festus looks to be pedalling so fast you can almost feel the wind in your hair. Even the cattle are looking on in amazement, and a butterfly is looping the loop. Mercury is being his usual cheeky self, standing on the handlebars and leaning into the wind, while the other oddball passengers have made themselves comfortable on the luggage carrier and in the panniers.



**Picture postcard
Festus and Mercury**

Sales
Philately:
From 24.2.2011
until 31.3.2012,
while stocks last
Post offices:
Not available

Validity
Unlimited from 3.3.2011

Printing
Offset

Sizes
Card: 148×105 mm
Imprinted stamp:
33×28 mm

Paper
White offset board,
260 gm²

First-day cancellation



Designed exclusively for Swiss Post

Festus and Mercury have lots of adventures. And now, you can send them on their travels too. The credit-card sized stamp booklet with ten self-adhesive non-priority stamps lets you post letters and cards anywhere. Both the stamp and the booklet are exclusive Sven Nordqvist creations for

Swiss Post. He has illustrated the scenes from the life of Festus and Mercury with careful attention to detail, and a closer look reveals an abundance of comical figures and accessories. So this amusing team is sure to raise a smile from your message recipients. The stamp booklet costing CHF 8.50 is available via the

Internet (www.swisspost.ch/philashop), from all philatelic salespoints and from larger post offices.

