

Sweden: 1000 Years of Church Art



On May 8 Sweden issued a set of stamps highlighting Sweden's churches as a cultural heritage that needs to be recognized for their Church Art.

"I believe the stamps can play a role here in terms of promoting rediscovery of the country's thousands of church interiors, which together constitute a large and vibrant museum," said Ingrid Sjöström who is an associate professor of art history and who has headed an inventory project on Swedish churches for the Swedish National Heritage Board for many years.

Ingrid Sjöström is one of the editors of a book called *Kyrkornas hemligheter* (*The Secrets of Churches*) that has the same aim as the stamps, which is to arouse the general public's interest in churches and in the cultural heritage found there. She also took part in a popular TV series on the same theme.

Music is a natural part of the cultural heritage in churches. Organs are traditionally associated with church interiors. They were found in a few Swedish churches as early as the Middle Ages, but they were not common until the 17th century. The 18th century organ from Askeryd Church in the Diocese of Linköping is depicted on one of the stamps.

In modern times, the range of music in churches is much broader, and church interiors around the country often serve as concert halls for both classical and modern music.

"Lighting a candle is the most common activity for the vast majority of people when visiting a church. The candle holder was regarded with skepticism by some people in the beginning, and lighting candles in the church was considered strange. We enjoy lighting candles in Sweden, however, and nine out of ten churches today have candle holders," explained Ingrid Sjöström. Candle holders made their first appearance in Sweden in Uppsala Cathedral in 1968 in conjunction with a large ecumenical meeting—which has also been recognized with a stamp. The candle holder in the shape of a ship from 2001 in Torsåkers Church in the Diocese in Härnösand is the motif for another stamp.

The stamps of Sweden, as well as the issues of 20 other postal administrations sold at face value may be accessed at the World Online Philatelic Agency, <http://www.wopa-stamps.com/>.