

25 Years of the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy for the most popular music stamps

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Music stamps are a common theme in stamp issuances worldwide, featuring musicians, musicals, musical instruments, theater, and many other aspects. This article introduces the 25-year history of the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy for the most popular music stamps, which ran from 2001 to 2025. However, it's worth mentioning its predecessor, the Robert Stolz Cup Music Stamp Award, which ran from 1980 to 1997.

Robert-Stolz-Trophy for music philately

Robert Stolz (1880-1975) was an Austrian composer, pianist, and conductor who wrote over 60 operettas, over 100 film scores, and approximately 1,500 songs. He was also a passionate philatelist, believing that "philately is one of the most beautiful passions," and he composed "The Philatelist's Waltz," showcasing the connection between music and philately.

In 1972, Irene Lawford (1935-2007) of the British Philatelic Music Circle (PMC) read about Stolz's composition of "The Philatelist's Waltz" in an American magazine and wrote to invite him to join the PMC. He readily accepted, and the two became close friends through correspondence.



In 1975, Stolz died just a few weeks before his 95th birthday. In 1979, Stolz's widow, Einzi Stolz, wrote to Irene Lawford proposing the establishment of an annual "Robert-Stolz-Trophy" to be given to PMC members. Irene Lawford suggested that it be awarded to the designer of the best music stamp issued in the previous year. Einzi Stolz welcomed the proposal, and the "Robert-Stolz-Trophy for music philately" was born.

In 1980, the 100th anniversary of Stolz's birth was celebrated, and several countries issued commemorative stamps in his honor. **Figure 1** shows a commemorative stamp issued by Austria on August 25, 1980, his 100th birthday. The "Robert-Stolz-Trophy for music philately" also began in 1980, honoring music stamps issued worldwide in 1979. Voters must be PMC members, and the winner is the stamp designer.

From 1980 to 1984, the winning music stamps were issued by Saint Vincent, France, Monaco, Austria, and Sweden. **Figure 2** shows a music stamp sheet issued by Sweden on October 1, 1983. Engraved by the renowned engraver Slania, the five stamps depict classical music, jazz, the painting "The Fiddler," opera, and the pop band ABBA. From 1985 to 1989, winners were East



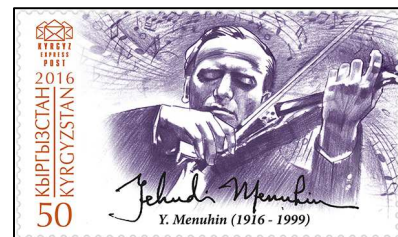
Germany, Monaco, New Zealand, Monaco, and Switzerland. From 1990 to 1994, winners were Austria, Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Norway. **Figure 3** shows a "Culture and Music" stamp with Beethoven's portrait, issued by Belgium on October 6, 1990. The "Robert-Stolz-Trophy for music philately" was vacant in 1995. Israel and New Zealand won the prize in 1996 and 1997. These winning stamps reflect the achievements of music stamps in the 1980s and 1990s.



Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy for the most popular music stamp

Founded in 1969, the PMC was the largest of the world's five music stamp collecting societies at the time. Headquartered in the UK, it boasted approximately 500 members, with the remaining four located in France, Italy, Japan, and Germany. Irene Lawford served as the PMC's second president from 1987 to 2005. Upon her retirement in 2005 at the age of 70, the PMC disbanded, and the French group ceased to exist. The German Motivgruppe Musik, founded in 1959, became a gathering place for music stamp enthusiasts. The PMC and Motivgruppe Musik merged in 2006, with Motivgruppe taking over the annual music stamp awards.

Before Motivgruppe Musik took over, the music stamp awards had been renamed as "Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy for the most popular music stamp" in 2001 and continued to be hosted by the PMC for five years. Yehudi Menuhin was a renowned American violinist and conductor (1916-1999). He stunned the music world at the age of seven with his stunning performance of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E Minor. He gave his first solo recital at the age of nine and conducted his first concert in Germany at the age of 16. He is hailed as a "rare child prodigy" in 20th-century music history. He traveled extensively around the world and visited China three times for performances and lectures, leaving an unforgettable impression on Chinese musicians.



Yehudi Menuhin collected music stamps and, through



the help of Irene Lawford, became a patron of the PMC in 1969. The year after Menuhin's death, the PMC decided to honor him by naming its annual music stamp award after him, with the unanimous approval of Menuhin's family. **Figure 4** shows the stamp issued by Kyrgyzstan Express Post in 2016 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Menuhin's birth. **Figure 5** shows the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy 2025.

The First Five Years of the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy Election

To help readers understand which music stamps have won the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy over the past 25 years, I have compiled the following table. Each year's awards are based on music stamps issued in the previous year.

Table 1. PMC-sponsored elections from 2001 to 2005

Year	Country	Stamp Subject	Number of Stamps
2001	Belgium	Bach and the Brussels Museum of Musical Instruments	6
2002	Uruguay	125th Anniversary of Richard Wagner's Tetralogy	4
2003	Brazil	Musical Instruments	10
2004	Turkey	Musical Instruments	2
2005	San Marino	Reopening of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan	3



Figure 6 shows the first "Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy for the most popular music stamp" in 2001. It was given to a set of six stamps issued by Belgium on May 5, 2000, commemorating the 250th anniversary of the death of Bach (1685-1750) and the opening of the Brussels

Museum of Musical Instruments. The first recipients of the "Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy" were Belgian stamp designers Thierry Martin (top left, Figure 7) and Myriam Voz (right).

Of the five stamp sets awarded in these five years, three were related to musical instruments. **Figure 7** shows the stamp designers who won awards over the first five years. In addition to the Belgian designers mentioned above in 2001, other award-winning designers include Carlos Freire of Uruguay in 2002, Nelson Inocencio of Brazil in 2003, Emre Becer of Turkey in 2004, and Franco Filanci of San Marino in 2005. This honor serves as an inspiration to music stamp designers worldwide.



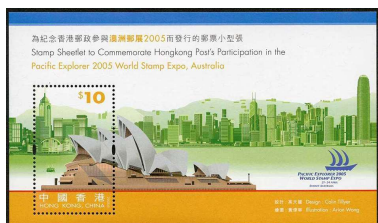
Elections from 2006 to 2016

Table 2. Elections from 2006 to 2025, hosted by Motivgruppe Musik

Year	1st Place	Stamp Subject	2nd Place	3rd Place
2006	Austria	50th Anniversary of the Reconstruction of National Opera	Argentina	Hong Kong
2007	Belgium	Renaissance Polyphonic Musicians	Estonia	UK & Austria
2008	Luxembourg	Grand Organ of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Armenia

2009	Switzerland	Musical Instruments	UK	Argentina
2010	Belgium	Five Master Composers	Vatican City	Germany
2011	Austria	150th Anniversary of the Birth of Gustav Mahler	Switzerland	Finland
2012	Cyprus	18th-Century Composers	Jersey	Czech
2013	Sweden & France	Opera "Un Ballo in Maschera"	Poland	USA & France
2014	Germany	Berlin Konzerthaus	Belgium	Germany
2015	Åland	Pianist Ellie Lindberg	Austria	Switzerland
2016	Norway	250th Anniversary of the Bergen Philharmonic	France	Poland
2017	France	Ballet "Swan Lake"	France	UN
2018	USA	Mississippi Bicentennial	Hungary	France
2019	Austria	100th Anniversary of Leonard Bernstein's Birth	Hungary	USA
2020	Argentina	Tango	Chile	Ukraine
2021	Bosnian Croats	250th Anniversary of Beethoven's Birth	Austria	Hungary
2022	UN	50th Anniversary of Lennon's "Imagine"	Australia	France
2023	Austria	Austrian Music Land	Uruguay	Greece
2024	Italy	Opera "Aida"	Greece	Ukraine
2025	Sweden	50th Anniversary of ABBA	Spain	Norway

Since Motivgruppe Musik took over the annual awards in 2006, two changes have occurred: first, voting is no longer limited to members, but is now open to the public online; second, three sets of winning stamps are selected each year. The elections run from March 1st to July 31st. The top eight winners were announced in 2015 and 2016, and the top ten winners have been announced since 2021.



In the first year's election of Motivgruppe Musik, the Hong Kong-issued miniature sheet "Commemorating Hong Kong Post's Participation in the 2005 World Stamp Exhibition in Australia" ranked third (Figure 8). Its

designs feature the Sydney Opera House and the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, earning designers Colin Tillyer & Arion Wong a spot on the list. The first and third place winners in 2006 both featured opera houses, reflecting the popularity of opera house stamps.

Two Belgian designers who had won the 2001 Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy again won the 2007 election, contributing to Belgium's winning for the second time. Luxembourg won both first and second place in 2008. Switzerland's musical instrument stamps took first place in 2009.





Belgium's "Music Masters - Composers" booklet won first place in the 2010 competition (Figure 9), making Belgium the only country to win the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy three times in its first decade. The musical masters featured on the stamps are Henry Purcell of Britain, Handel of Germany, Haydn of Austria, Felix Mendelssohn of Germany, and Clara Schumann of Germany. The top three winners that year were all musicians, and the third-place German stamp also featured Felix Mendelssohn (Figure 10), as 2009 marked the 200th anniversary of his birth. He died young at the age of 38, but he left behind the "Wedding March" from A Midsummer's Night Dream, a piece that launched many of us on our married life.

Some countries have also chosen musical themes in their joint stamp issuances, which have received positive reviews. The 2013 winner of the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy was a miniature sheet jointly issued by France (Figure 11) and Sweden, commemorating Verdi's three-act Italian opera "Un Ballo in Maschera." A stamp jointly issued by France and the United States, commemorating American jazz musician Miles Davis and French singer Edith Piaf, took third place in 2013. France, which had never previously won the Menuhin Prize, took first and third place in 2013 thanks to two sets of jointly issued stamps.



A similar story continues. Germany, which had never won a Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy, took first and third place in 2014. The top eight winners were announced in 2015 and 2016. Figure 12 shows the top eight music stamps of 2015, selected in 2016. From the first place with 7.19% of the votes, to the second and third place with 4.33 and 4.01%, to the fourth and fifth place with 3.60 and 3.55%, to the sixth to eighth place with 2.87, 2.86 and 2.72%, the vote rates are very close.

Elections from 2017 to 2025



Peter Lang, Chairman of Motivgruppe Musik (Figure 13), told me that each year, countries issue over 300 sets of music stamps. To facilitate voting, the board of directors first selected the candidate stamps, settling on 66 sets because the first round of online voting had 66 participants. Each country is limited to three sets, and voters can choose up to three stamps.

Figure 14 shows the French miniature sheet "Swan Lake" and designer Jean Claverie, which won first place in 2017. Another French stamp, "Hearing," featuring musical instruments, flowers, butterflies, and birds, took second place.





The 2018 election received 3,123 votes from 32 countries. The United States, which issues a large number of music stamps, had been absent from the awards for the previous 17 years until it won the 2018 prize with its "Mississippi Bicentennial"

stamp, and designer Greg Breeding was awarded the 2018 Menuhin Cup (Figure 15). Mississippi is the birthplace of modern traditional blues music in the United States. In the 2019 election, a US stamp commemorating John Lennon took third place.

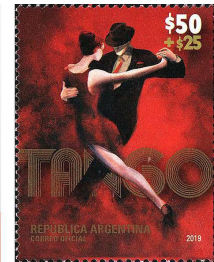
The 2019 shortlist included 66 music stamps from 54 issuers, receiving 2,772 votes. The first and second place winners surprisingly shared the same theme: commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990). The winning Austrian stamp captured his passionate conducting style



(Figure 16). The Motivgruppe Musik bulletin praised Austrian stamps for their long-standing reputation for quality, not only in printing but also in expressiveness. The second-place Hungarian stamp also featured the same theme (Figure 17). Both stamps received 11.54% and 9.52% of the vote, respectively. Previous winning stamps have never received more than 8% of the vote.



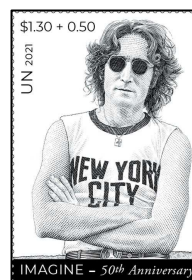
The 2020 shortlist included 66 music stamps from 44 issuers, receiving 3,231 votes from 58 countries or regions. The winner of that year's medal was Argentinian stamp designer Evangelina Cynthia Raffaelli (Figure 18, left), for her passionate and dynamic "Tango" supplementary stamp (Figure 18, right).



The 2021 nominations included 66 music stamps from 51 issuers, receiving 2,907 votes. Eight stamps issued in 2020, commemorating the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, made the shortlist. The first, third, and fourth place winners were all on this theme, issued by Bosnia and Herzegovina (Croatia) (Figure 19), Hungary, and Germany.

The 2022 elections received 2,979 votes from 61 countries and regions, 98% of which selected three stamps. The United Nations Post Office stamp commemorating the 50th anniversary of John Lennon's (1940-1980) song "Imagine" took first place (Figure 20). United Nations

Postal Designer Rory Katz (2nd from Figure 21) accepted the Menuhin Trophy on behalf of Martin Mock and other members of the design team at the Strawberry Fields Memorial in New York's Central Park.

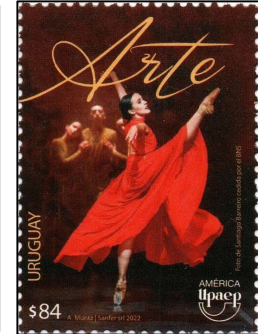
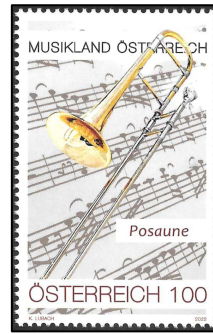




Among the top 10 winners, the Irish stamp depicting the traditional tap dance "Riverdance" ranked ninth (Figure 22).

Sixty-nine stamps from 55 postal services were shortlisted for the 2023 competition. Austria's trombone stamp (Figure 23) won first place.

It is part of a series of musical instrument stamps issued by Austria starting in 2020, and features the Trombone Concerto in E-flat Major by Georg Wagenseil (1715-1777) in the background. German designer Kirsten Lubach received the 2023 "Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy for the most popular music stamp". Uruguay's ballet stamp took second place (Figure 24).



The 2024 competition focused on music stamps issued in 2023. 112 postal services worldwide issued 765 music-related stamps. The members of the board shortlisted 66 candidate stamps from 56 issuers. Over 750 music stamp collectors from 42 countries participated in the online voting. Italy's stamp commemorating the 100th Verona Arena Opera Festival took first place. The Verona Arena, built in 30 AD, is the world's oldest and largest open-air opera venue. The stamp design is inspired by the festival poster, featuring an opera singer performing an aria in Verdi's opera "Aida" before an audience of tens of thousands (Figure 25).

The 2025 election results were announced on August 10. Music stamp enthusiasts from 46 countries and regions selected the Swedish stamp commemorating the 50th anniversary of the pop band ABBA as first place (Figure 26, left), receiving 7.33% of the votes, from a pool of 66 candidates. On April 6, 1974, the Swedish pop band ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest with their song "Waterloo", launching their international musical career and significantly transforming the music market dominated by American and British bands. ABBA already appeared on the 1983 Swedish stamp (Figure 2). Swedish designer Eva Wilsson became the 25th music stamp designer to win the Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy (Figure 26, right).



Spanish stamp commemorating graffiti artist Safar's mural "The Cellist" (Figure 27) and Norway's stamp commemorating Bodø, the 2024 European Capital of Culture (Figure 28) ranked second and third, receiving 6.41% and 6.09% of the vote respectively. Music stamps issued by the British Antarctic Territory, Ireland, Mongolia, Germany, Japan, France, and the United Kingdom ranked fourth to tenth.

Motivgruppe Musik currently has 228 members from 36 countries and regions. They are vibrant and organize annual awards and numerous other music philatelic events. Shanghai philatelist Shi Yiping, once the only member from mainland China, compiled the "Appreciation Guide to World Cultural Celebrities' Stamps - Musicians," but passed away in 2022. A quarter-century after its founding, the "Yehudi-Menuhin-Trophy for the most popular music stamp" remains youthful, having had an indelible and profound impact on promoting the development of music philately.