

2026 Music Stamp Awards

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Music-themed stamps are a popular specialty among many philatelists. Between 2019 and 2023, I wrote four articles covering the annual "Yehudi Menuhin Music Stamp Award" selection process organized by the "Motivgruppe Musik" (Philatelic Music Study Group) (see issues 190322, 201232, 211236, and 230241). This article reports on the selection process for the 2025 Music Stamp Awards held this year; all issuance dates mentioned refer to 2025.

66 Stamps in the Running

According to statistics from "Motivgruppe Musik", 83 countries or regions issued a total of 273 diverse music-themed stamps in 2025. Board members conducted a preliminary selection, choosing 66 music stamps from 66 countries or regions as candidates. The designer of the winning stamp will be awarded the "2026 Yehudi Menuhin Trophy" (Figure 1). The online voting period began on April 26, 2026, and ran for three months, concluding on July 31. The organizers will select lucky winners from among the participating philatelists to receive exquisite philatelic gifts.

Figure 2 displays images of some of the 2025 music stamps featured in the selection event, comprising 31 stamps in total. Figure 3 shows the entries numbered 10 through 21—representing various countries or regions—available for viewing and voting online. These include the "Synchronized Swimming" stamp issued by China for the 15th National Games, as well as music stamps issued by Estonia, Germany, Finland, France, the UK, Greece, India, and others. According to the published selection results, five of the top ten are shown in Figure 3.

Each participant was allowed to cast three votes. A total of 815 music-themed stamp enthusiasts from 36 countries and regions took part in the voting. After excluding invalid votes—such as those from individuals who voted multiple times or cast all three votes for the same stamp—the total score stood at 6,342 points. As in previous years, the majority of votes came from European countries. This year, India contributed 43 votes (up from just two last year), while Kazakhstan and New Zealand each cast a vote for the first time. The official press release announcing the results was issued on August 17.

Austria Wins the "Menuhin" Award Twice in Three Years

A stamp issued by Austria on January 18 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the "Waltz King," Johann Strauss II (1825–1899), was voted the most popular music stamp of 2025 by enthusiasts worldwide, securing 385 points and 6.07% of the vote (Figure 4). The stamp features the gilded bronze full-body statue of Johann Strauss II playing the violin, located in Vienna's Stadtpark;

unveiled on June 21, 1921, the statue's inauguration ceremony saw the Vienna Philharmonic perform his immortal masterpiece, "The Blue Danube".

The stamp was designed by artist Kirsten Lubach, who was awarded this year's Menuhin Trophy for her work. This marks the second time in three years that Austria has won the award—an achievement made even more remarkable by the fact that both winning designs were created by the same artist. Her previous win came in 2023 for a stamp featuring the trombone, issued by Austria in 2022. She has become the only designer to win the Menuhin Award twice within a span of just three years—a highlight of this year's competition. A precedent for this exists in the work of Belgian stamp designers Myriam Voz & Thierry Martin, who won the award twice—in 2001 and 2007.

Lubach was born in 1973 in Troisdorf, Germany. After graduating from high school, she studied engraving at the Hanau Academy of Drawing. She later traveled to Lahti, Finland, for advanced studies on a scholarship and passed the master engraver examination in 1999. After working for several years at a specialist firm in Vienna, she joined the Austrian State Printing Office in 2003. The first Austrian stamp she engraved was the "Lynx" issue from the 2006 "Austrian Wildlife" series. In 2012, she established her own studio for copperplate engraving and printing in Vienna. Over the years, she has designed numerous stamps for various postal authorities.

The Faroe Islands and Germany took 2nd and 3rd place, respectively.

The Faroe Islands' Christmas stamp "Elves' Christmas," issued on October 20, won second place with 291 points and 4.59% of the vote (Figure 5). The stamp was designed by Janus á Húsagarði, a photographer and visual artist from the Faroe Islands who is currently based in Iceland.

Legends of elves have circulated in Nordic countries for centuries. Small in stature—standing only about 20 to 30 centimeters tall—they typically wear green or brown clothing and long, pointed hats. Christmas is the most anticipated holiday of the year for these elves; they bustle about baking treats, enjoying the festivities, and helping Santa Claus distribute gifts. During the holiday season, if you are patient and quiet, you might even catch a glimpse of an elf sitting on a rock, playing Christmas music.

Germany's "Semperoper" (Semper Opera House) stamp, issued on October 2, ranked third with 281 points and 4.43% of the vote (Figure 6), trailing the second-place entry by just 10 points. This stamp belongs to the "Historic Buildings in Germany" series and was designed by Jan-Niklas Kröger, an artist from Deutsche Post's graphic design team, who utilized AI image-generation tools in the creative process. The top three music-themed stamp designs showcase a diverse range of artistic approaches.

The Semperoper serves as the performance venue for the Saxon State Opera in Dresden, the concert hall for the Saxon State Orchestra, and the home base of the Semperoper Ballet. The opera house was originally built by architect Gottfried Semper in 1841. Following a devastating fire in 1869, the reconstruction—also designed in part by Semper—was completed in 1878. It boasts a rich history of premieres, having hosted the first performances of numerous significant works.

4th–6th Place

The entries ranking 4th through 6th received scores of 241, 227, and 224 points, respectively, with vote shares of 3.80%, 3.58%, and 3.53%—figures that were quite close to one another. The set of four "Little Angel" Christmas stamps issued by the Bahamas on November 20—the only set released by the country that year—included one stamp depicting a little angel blowing a conch shell; this stamp ranked 4th (Figure 7). Another stamp in the set, featuring two singing little angels, is the fourth stamp in the third column from the left in Figure 2.

A stamp issued by Monaco on March 21 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) and the centenary of his work "L'Enfant et les sortilèges" (The Child and the Spells) took 5th place in this poll (Figure 8). Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy (1862–1918) stood together as the two most influential figures in the French music scene of their time and were key representatives of Impressionism. Ravel was a leading figure in the musical movement. He was renowned for exploring a wide range of musical genres, with Spanish influences frequently appearing in his works. Many of his compositions—including the symphonic ballet "Daphnis et Chloé" (1909–1912) and "Boléro" (1928)—have become staples of the concert repertoire. Ravel often demonstrated a keen sensitivity to and deep interest in the realms of fantasy and dreams; this is particularly evident in his famous work "L'Enfant et les sortilèges" (The Child and the Spells), based on a text by Colette, which premiered in Monte Carlo in 1925.

A French souvenir sheet issued on March 31—commemorating the 150th anniversary of the premiere of the famous opera "Carmen" (first performed in Paris on March 3, 1875)—ranked sixth in the poll (Figure 9). The opera "Carmen" is by the French composer Georges Bizet (1838–1875) and the most frequently performed opera in the world today. The stamp depicts the Swedish dancer Jenny Hasselquist (1894–1977) in the role of Carmen in 1922; the officer shown in the margin is Don José, while the Giralda Tower in Seville, Spain—visible in the background—indicates the story's setting. Bizet's opera successfully blends folk, comic, and tragic elements, imbuing the melodies and rhythms with vibrant energy. It features famous arias such as "Love Is a Rebellious Bird" and the "Toreador Song," as well as numerous popular dance pieces.

Rankings 7–10

The countries ranking 7th through 10th formed the third tier. Their vote totals were extremely close—with a maximum difference of only 5 points separating the four positions—recording scores of 189, 187, 185, and 184, respectively. Their vote shares ranged from 2.98% to 2.90%. This demonstrates that the votes of just two or three—or even one or two—philatelists could alter the rankings. It also reflects the varying aesthetic tastes of individual voters, each of whom responsibly expressed their own assessment of the 2025 music-themed stamps.

The stamp issued by Greece on July 29 to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Greek composer and lyricist Mikis Theodorakis (1925–2021) was ranked 7th (Figure 10). He created over 1,000 works during his lifetime and was considered Greece's most renowned living composer until his passing. He was elected as a legislator three times—in 1964, 1981, and 1990—and actively promoted the development of culture and education.

Ranked eighth is the "Radio" stamp issue released by Sweden on January 9 (Figure 11); the set of three stamps illustrates the history and evolution of broadcasting technology.

On April 7, India and Portugal jointly issued two stamps to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Indian stamp, which ranked ninth (Figure 12), depicts the Kalbelia dance—one of the most evocative dances of Rajasthan. Known for its fluid movements and vibrant costumes, the dance vividly mimics the movements of a snake.

Ranked tenth is the "Accordion" stamp issued by Moldova on October 1 (Figure 13). It is one of a three-stamp set featuring musical instruments; the other two stamps depict the violin and the trumpet.

The music stamp awards program began in 1980. The "Robert Stolz Music Stamp Award"—renamed the "Yehudi Menuhin Music Stamp Award" in 2001—has been running for 26 years, playing a positive role in the appreciation, design, and development of music stamps, as well as in recognizing outstanding stamp designers.