
MUSIC ON STAMPS

by

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During the past forty years a number of countries have issued postage stamps to commemorate famous composers, musicians, conductors, music festivals, and even national anthems. One of the earliest European issues was in 1922 when a set of Austrian Charity stamps were on sale for a short period in aid of a Musicians Fund. There were seven different values bearing portraits of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner, Strauss and Wolf.

Some countries have issued stamps depicting musical instruments and some interesting examples have appeared showing musicians playing traditional instruments of their particular country. In 1931 the Belgian Congo issued a set of three stamps showing native flute players (40c. green) native musicians—to quote the Stamp Catalogue, (50c. violet) and native drummers (60c. purple).

In 1915 a design for the French Somali Coast shows a native drummer and this may be the first African stamp of its kind though I am not certain on this point. Since then stamps with a musical theme have been issued by a number of African territories including Angola, Portuguese Guinea, South West Africa, Togo, Spanish Guinea, Sahara and Ifni. In 1952 the Gold Coast issued a stamp showing the famous Talking Drums and, shortly after Independence, a Ghana stamp again illustrates the talking drums with the addition of a line drawing of a man blowing an elephant horn. (See cover illustration)*

Israel has issued two interesting sets showing ancient Hebrew musicians and in Asia such countries as China, Burma, Indonesia and Laos have portrayed their native musicians. Quite recently a very fine set of six large stamps was issued by the Kingdom of Laos which includes musicians playing flutes, pipes, xylophones, bells, violin and drum.

Many people must be familiar with the considerable number of stamps issued by countries who would appear to take a pride in their wild flowers, insects, animals and birds, even fishes, besides their ships, railway engines, castles and public buildings, and famous men and women. But music seems to come very low on the list and yet I am sure it would create an interest in the indigenous music of a country both to the peoples concerned and the world in general if stamps of this type were more common. Surely the little mbira would make a most pleasing and typically African design for a stamp, or better still, as one of a set showing typical native musical instruments. Perhaps one day we may see such a set issued by one of the African countries.

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