

Ugly Beethoven

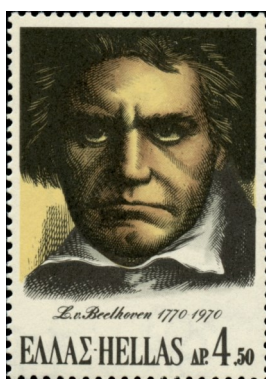
Contemporaries, however, described his “wild and dishevelled looks, eyes full of stormy energy,” and hair “untamed by comb or scissors for years”. The composer was only 5’2” tall, an ugly man, often unkempt, with a pockmarked face”. However, he was “very charismatic, and women found him highly attractive”, according to Michael Ladenburger, director of the Beethoven Haus.

Some stamps have particularly ugly portraits or designs. Enjoy this highly subjective display.

Most of us are used to the idealized image of Beethoven (1770–1827) — a musical titan, battered and buffeted by fate. The iconic portrait by Stieler (1819) shows the brooding force of nature looking into the distance as he awaits inspiration for his *Missa Solemnis*, the score clasped in his left hand.



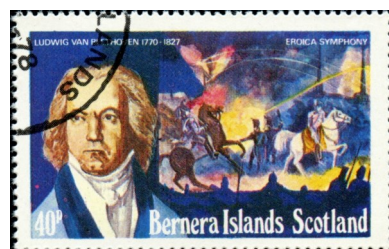
Mongolia used these iconic portraits by August von Klobner (1793–1864) and Joseph Karl Stieler (1781–1858) to mark the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth in 2020.



In 1970, Greece issued a stamp of a dark, gloowering Beethoven which doesn't appear to be based on a portrait. Perhaps a blonde, metrosexual, hipster portrait appeals, as in this 1973 portrait of a Sagittarian.



Three rather ugly stamps from 2020. Bosnia & Herzegovina (Serb Admin) used the Stieler portrait, but with odd gray splotches all over Beethoven's face. Israel issued a rather cartoonish adaptation of the same portrait with oddly piercing eyes. Azerbaijan used an odd design, fashioning an image of Beethoven to form a heart in the corner.



Senegal issued a stamp in 1970 with a portrait seemingly designed for the stamp of a windblown Beethoven—perhaps after riding a motorcycle without a helmet. The stamp from Austria (1970) and the local issue from the Bernera Islands (1978) show an 1823 portrait of the stern, impatient, ill-tempered, aged composer by Ferdinand Georg Waldmuller (1793–1865).

Macau issued an odd pair of stamps in 2020. One shows a c1786 silhouette attributed to Joseph Neesena long with a G clef, an ear and ear horn, referring to Beethoven's eventual deafness, and the back of a piano. The other shows a drawing of Beethoven energetically playing the piano with a series of numbers emanating from the soundboard, and a foot appearing from the bottom

Over 350 stamps have been dedicated to the great composer. These are just a few which caused me to chuckle, shake my head, and wonder about the designers.

