

# ***Yesterday in U.S. Stamp News:*** **The Music of America Mini-Set**

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(From *U.S. Stamp News*, December 2006-January 2007)

This month we continue our in-depth examination of the Americana Series with the mini-set known as the “Music of America” mini-set. This set is sort of a departure from the original concept of the series and has many characteristics that differ from the other Americana stamps. First we will discuss the commonalities that each of the stamps in this mini-series share, then we will examine each stamp’s specifics in detail.

The Music of America mini-set consists entirely of decimalized fractional denominations ranging from 3.1 cents to 8.4 cents. These denominations, with the exception of the 3.1 cent, place the mini-set squarely between the Roots of Democracy set that we discussed previously and the Rights and Freedom mini-set, which consists of the 9-cent through 12-cent denominations, and which we will discuss after this group. These fractional denominations were used to satisfy various classes of presorted or bulk rate mail.

Another commonality among these stamps are that they are all coils. The reason for this is fairly obvious when we consider the customers who would use these stamps: postal patrons who utilize fractional presort and bulk rates are customers who deal in high volumes of mail and normally would use high-speed methods of applying stamps and address labels, such as an automatic coil dispenser would allow.

As with all coil stamps in the Americana series, these stamps were printed on the single-color Cottrell press and include joint lines every 24 subjects. Additionally, all coils in the Americana series were perforated gauge 10 on the Seybold perforating machine, and finally cut into coils using the Goebel coiling machine. The stamps were issued in rolls of 500 or 3,000.

All stamps in this series were issued with taggant applied, a policy that was later changed by the USPS. Currently, all stamps with a denomination or value of 10 cents or less are issued untagged. Precanceled versions of these stamps were issued untagged, carrying on a policy that had been in place since the Liberty Series precancels during the 1960s, when tagging technology began.

The stamps in this mini-set are also all printed on canary yellow paper, with the exception of one philatelic variety on the 7.9-cent denomination, which is printed on a lighter yellow paper. This is in keeping with the overall design of the series to simulate multi-color through the use of single color ink on colored paper. The idea was to print multi-color stamps without having to prepare multiple plates at additional cost.

The Music of America set is peculiar among the Americana mini-sets because there are five designs in the set rather than the usual four. Additionally, this mini-set includes the only postal stationary item in the Americana series: the 3.5-cent Violins stamped envelope, Scott U590.

Another peculiarity about the set is that all the stamps are Bureau precancels, a fact that makes them my favorite part of the series as it combines my two favorite collecting areas, precancels and the Americana Series. Finally, unlike the rest of the mini-sets in the Americana series, the legends do not form a square around the edges of the stamps, first because there are more than four stamps in the set, and second because the designs simply didn't work out that way.

All the stamps in the set are service-inscribed, and generally did not receive cancellation on mail. Today, we would describe such stamps as service-inscribed precancels, though this is not true in the strictest sense for the Americana Series. For true precancels in the Americana Series, most bear the traditional set of parallel lines with city and state inscriptions between them. Additionally, some were issued with just a pair of parallel lines with no city and state printed between. These precancels are referred to as "National" Bureau precancels, and were developed to

replace the traditional city/state Bureau precancels in an effort to streamline production of precancels with a more generic design. With the traditional style of precancel, the city/state precancel overprint was only applied as orders were received. With this new style of precancel, the overprints could be printed and stockpiled in anticipation of forthcoming orders. Throughout this article, I will make mention of Precancel Stamp Society (PSS) precancel style numbers.



The 3.1-cent guitar stamp is the first stamp we will look at in the Music of America mini-set as it is the lowest denomination in the set. As with all the stamps in this mini-set, the 3.1-cent guitar (Scott 1613) is only available as a coil. This stamp was issued on October 25, 1979 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Originally, the stamp was scheduled to be issued in Nashville, Tennessee, but was then changed to Baltimore, Maryland, because the Orioles had made it to the World Series that year.

At the last minute, USPS officials had second thoughts, and switched the first-day city to Shreveport, stating that they did not want to overburden the Baltimore office due to the anticipated high number of requests for first day cancellations because collectors would be looking for both a first day cover and a World Series memento.

The 3.1-cent guitar stamp was issued to satisfy the new third class, bulk rate, non-profit mailing rate, which took effect on July 15, 1979. Since this was a new rate, the stamp did not take the place of any previously issued stamps. This stamp is also the first coil stamp to be issued specifically for use by non-profit organizations.

The stamp was designed by George Mercer of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and is said to have been his first postage stamp design. The vignette depicts a six-string acoustic guitar that is a composite of several standard guitar designs. The legend reads "Listen With Love to the Music of the Land". As with most of the legends

in the Americana series, the origins are unknown for this legend but were probably made up by the designer to fit the theme of the mini-series. On this stamp, the legend begins in the lower left, spans across the bottom of the stamp, and then wraps around to end up at the top right corner of the stamp.

This stamp was printed in brown ink on pregummed (dull gum) canary paper using four plates: 39181, 39182, 39183, and 39184. The stamp bears the service inscription “Auth Non-Profit Org” to indicate its intended use, and is an early example of a service inscribed Bureau precancel. Because of this inscription, this stamp represents an important step in the evolution of Bureau precancels that ultimately resulted in today’s service inscribed, undenominated precancels. Another, more traditional precancel style is also available on this stamp: the “national” lines-only style.



There are several notable varieties for the 3.1-cent guitar issue including color variations, imperfs, and tagging varieties. Color variations include light red, red, and dark red varieties. A further inking variety is described as “hollow numeral”, though I can’t be sure what this means as I have never personally seen this variety. Fully imperforate variations of this stamp exist, both in non-precanceled and precanceled versions. Finally a tagged variety exists of the national Bureau precancel version of the stamp. Other varieties exist for this issue and appear in a listing published by Robert E. Manning, Jr. in the December 1993/January 1994 issue of *EFO Collector*, which is the most complete listing of Americana EFOs published to date.

The 3.5-cent Weaver Violins (Scott 1813) coil stamp is the next issue (by denomination) in the Music of America mini-series. The stamp was issued on June 23, 1980 in Williamsburg, Pennsylvania without a first day ceremo-

ny, and was the second-to-last stamp issued in the series. A stamped envelope, Scott U590, was also issued in Williamsburg on the same day bearing a similar design as the stamp, but with



*June 23, 1980 first day of issue cancel on Scott U590, with additional Music of America Series stamps to meet the first class rate*

a different inscription. The stamp was issued to satisfy the increased third class, non-profit, bulk rate that took effect July 6, 1980. The stamp was intended to replace the 3.1-cent guitar stamp mentioned above. The stamped envelope was issued for the same purpose.

This stamp was also designed by George Mercer of the BEP and depicts a pair of violins like those designed by Herman Weaver in the late 1800s. The legend on the 3.5-cent Americana reads from bottom left to top right “The Music of America is Freedom’s Symphony”. The stamp also bears a small inscription in the lower right that reads “Auth Non-Profit Org” in two lines.

On the stamped envelope of similar design, the stamp inscription is replaced with the wording “Authorized Non-Profit Org” from the bottom left to the upper right. The stamped envelope also differs in design from the stamp, with the design consisting of a pair of solid white violins on a purple background. The violins do not have any detailing like the stamp, so cannot be definitively identified as Weaver violins.



The 3.5-cent Violins stamp was printed in purple ink on pregummed canary paper, carrying on the theme of yellow backgrounds for this mini-series. Six plates were used for this issue: 39360, 39361, 39366, 39367, 39943, and 39955.

As with the 3.1-cent guitar stamp, this stamp bears the inscription “Auth Non-Profit Org” in two lines. Shown here, this stamp is also available in an untagged, lines-only precancel version.



The 3.5-cent stamped envelope was issued in two different sizes: letter size (No. 6 3/4) and legal size (No. 10). Both sizes came in windowed and non-windowed versions, and several different watermark varieties. The envelope was issued untagged, but there is a tagged error variety of the envelope. There are few varieties on the 3.5-cent stamp, consisting mostly of misperforated stamps. A fully imperf variety of the stamp does exist.



The next stamp up for discussion is the 7.7¢ Saxhorns stamp, Scott 1614. This coil was issued in New York City on November 20, 1976, with a ceremony held at the Americana Stamp Dealers Association (ASDA) national stamp show held at Madison Square Garden. The circumstance for issue of this stamp is

unusual in that it was issued to satisfy a reduction in rate, rather than the normal rate increases we are all used to seeing.

This stamp was issued to satisfy the decreased bulk mailing rate for third class, bulk mailing for more than 250,000 pieces that took effect on July 18, 1976, which was just seven months after the previous rate was authorized in December of 1975. This peculiar move really makes one wonder if there was some election-year politicking going on to appease big business interests. Whatever the reason, this remains one of the weirdest rate changes in modern postal history.

The Saxhorns stamp was designed by Susan Robb of Washington, D.C., who is also credited with developing the overall theme for the Roots of Democracy mini-set. The stamp depicts a set of three saxhorns that are on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The

legend on this stamp reads from top left, down the left side and across to the bottom right of the stamp. The legend reads “Marching in step to the music of the union”, and is a paraphrase of part of an 1885 letter written by Massachusetts Senator Rufus Choate to a Whig convention in Worcester, Mass. The stamp bears the service inscription “bulk rate”, indicating that the stamp was intended for use in third class, bulk rate mailings of 250,000 pieces or more.

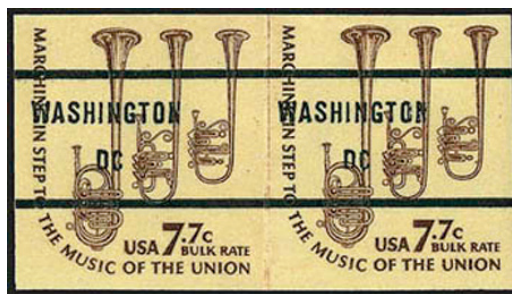
As with the 3.1¢ Guitar, the 7.7¢ Saxhorns stamp was printed in brown ink on canary-colored, pregummed (shiny gum) paper. There were ten plates used in the manufacture of the stamp: 37670-37673, 38351, 38352, 38396, 38397, 38465, and 38466. A total of 16,315,000 stamps were issued without precancels applied, while some 263,602,000 were issued with precancels applied. The stamps were produced in coil rolls of 500 and 3,000 stamps.

While most of the stamps in this mini-set were available with a lines-only “National” Bureau precancel, this stamp is an exception. The only printed Bureau precancels available on this stamp were the traditional city/state type printed between two parallel black lines. The precancels were one of three types, Precancel Stamp Society (PSS) types 71, 81, and 87. There were a total of 160 different city/state Bureau precancels printed on the Saxhorns stamp, and most of them are commonly available. There is one particularly valuable Bureau precancel, however: the Richmond, VA type 87. In the 2007 PSS Bureau Precancel Catalog, the stamp is valued at \$150.00 for a single and \$300.00 for a pair, making this one of the more valuable Americana Bureau precancels. A line pair would be considerably more valuable, though no price is given in the catalog for such a pair. The 2008 Scott Specialized Catalogue of U.S. Stamps and Covers values a Bureau precancel of this stamp (listed as 1614a, left) at 35 cents.



Two major varieties exist for this stamp, both of them

being imperf pairs of precanceled stamps. Both are listed as Scott 1614b and are precanceled from Washington, DC or Marion, OH. A line pair is valued at 300% of the regular pair price. [The line pair shown here sold for \$3,000 + 15% Buyer's Premium in a June 2008 Robert A. Siegel Galleries auction. JFD.] Other varieties for this stamp include misperforations, miscuts, tagged Bureau precancels, and one inking variety that shows a hollow large "7" in the denomination. There are apparently two types of shiny gum available on these stamps, known as shiny wavy and shiny flat. From what I can gather, the jury is still out as to whether the gum varieties are real or not.



The 7.9¢ Drum stamp (Scott 1615) is the next stamp in this mini-set, according to denomination, but as mentioned earlier, this stamp actually preceded the 7.7¢ bulk rate stamp, and was intended to satisfy the third class bulk mailing rate for 250,000 pieces or more that was enacted on December 31, 1975. This rate

was only in effect for just over 7 months.

The 7.9¢ Drum stamp was released on April 23, 1976 at a ceremony in Miami, Fla. The stamp was issued in conjunction with Stamporee '76 USA, an International Philatelic exhibition sponsored jointly by the Florida Federation of Stamp Clubs and the Cuban Philatelic Club of Miami.

The stamp was designed by Bernard Glassman from the Philadelphia design firm responsible for the overall theme of the Americana series: Kramer, Miller, Lomden, and Glassman. The design features a Revolutionary War era drum, and is only representational as the design is made up of a composite of several actual drum designs of the era. The legend on the stamp starts at the bottom left

of the stamp, continues across the bottom and then curves around to stop at the upper right corner of the stamp. The legend reads “Beat the Drum for Liberty and the Spirit of ‘76”. The origin of the legend is unknown.

The stamp bears the service inscription “Bulk Rate” to the right of the denomination. It was intended to replace the 6.3¢ stylized Liberty Bell stamp bearing the same inscription that was issued in October of 1974.

It should be remembered, when considering the Americana series, that the country was deeply involved in a year-long celebration of its 200th anniversary. This does much to explain the patriotic theme of the Americana series. It’s hard to imagine the patriotic fervor of the times these days, but it was very real and present in the 1975-76 time frame.

The 7.9¢ Drum stamp was printed in red ink on canary paper, and was issued in both precancel and non-precancel versions. It should be noted that the non-precancel version of this stamp was issued solely for philatelic purposes and is printed on a lighter yellow paper than the Bureau precancel version. So far, there has been no accepted explanation found for this difference in paper, though there are continuing efforts to find the answer. This version of the stamp exists with both dull and shiny gum and is tagged. The precancel versions are untagged, as are most Bureau precancels.

This stamp was also printed using ten printing plates: 37235, 37236, 37238, 37239, 37304, 37305, 40011, 40012, 40167, and 40168. The total number of stamps printed is currently unknown, but there is research being conducted to try to determine those numbers.

There are six different types of Bureau precancels available on the 7.9¢ Drum coil. The first type is a “National” Bureau precancel which re-designates the use of the stamp. The precancel overprint consists of two parallel black lines with the words “Car-Rt Sort” between them on two lines. This essentially designated



the stamp for use as a carrier rate presort stamp, which was a new level of sorting for third class mail established in January of 1979. This precancel type was issued with dull gum. There are two varieties of this overprint, designated as types 1.3 and 1.4 in the PSS Bureau Catalog. The differences are minute: on type 1.4 the leg of the R in “Car” is curved and the S in “sort” is more open than on the 1.3.

The rest of the Bureau precancel types on the 7.9¢ Drum stamp are city/state type Bureau precancels. The PSS type numbers are 71, 81, 81a, 82, and 87. Type 81a designates an error or variety of the basic type 81. All city/state Bureau precancels were issued with shiny gum. There are a total of 108 different city/state Bureau precancels available on this stamp. There are no scarce cities on this particular stamp, and no Bureau precancels cataloging over 25 cents.

There is one fully imperf variety of this stamp, designated as Scott 1615b. Many misperf varieties exist, as well as one miscut variety showing 25% of a plate number. A tagged Bureau precancel variety is noted in Robert Manning’s *EFO Collector* “Americana Series” article (Dec 1993), but it doesn’t say whether it was a city/state or a ‘National’ Bureau precancel. Any further information on this variety would be greatly appreciated.



The final stamp in the Music of America mini-set is the 8.4¢ Piano stamp, Scott 1615c. The stamp was issued on July 13, 1978 in conjunction with the 50th anniversary celebration of the National Music Camp in Interlocken, Mich. This stamp was also issued in both precancel and non-precancel format.

The 8.4¢ Piano stamp was not issued to replace any stamp, but instead to satisfy the new basic presort rate that went into effect on May 29, 1978. This rate was for bulk rate commercial third class mailings of more than 200 pieces or 50 lbs with sorting to various criteria. A full explanation of basic presort requirements can be found

in the *Domestic Mail Manual* or in *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-1999* by Henry W. Beecher and Dr. Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz.

This stamp was designed by Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) designer V. Jack Ruther and features a rare Steinway grand piano that was presented to the Smithsonian Institution by the Steinway family. The inscription on this stamp starts at the top left, continues down the left side of the stamp and curves around to end at the bottom right of the stamp. The inscription reads “Peace Unites a Nation Like Harmony in Music”, and again, the origin of the inscription is unknown.

As with the other stamps in the mini-set, this stamp was printed on canary paper, this time in blue ink. The non-precancel version is overall tagged, while the precanceled versions are untagged as usual. The non-precancel version of the stamp was printed on pre-gummed (shiny gum) paper, as were the city/state Bureau precancels. The lines-only “National” style Bureau precancel was issued with dull gum.



For this issue, there were 15 plate numbers employed in the printing of these stamps: 38715, 38725, 38726, 38747, 38748, 38751, 38752, 38832, 38893, 38894, 39344, 39419, 39415, 39449, and 39450. This is another issue where the quantity of stamps printed is still unknown, with research ongoing to determine those numbers. The stamps were produced in rolls of 500 and 3000 stamps.

The 8.4¢ Piano was issued with 144 different city/state Bureau precancels, and one lines-only “National” Bureau precancel. The city/state Bureau precancels were issued in five different styles: PSS styles 71, 81, 81a, 86, and 87. There is one particularly scarce 8.4¢ Piano city/state Bureau precancel from Wayne, Pa. The 2007 PSS Catalog values it at \$80, making it a tie with the Philadelphia 1¢ Bureau precancel for the second highest catalog value Bureau precancel of the Americana Series.

There is a veritable plethora of varieties available on this stamp. There are seven full imperforate varieties, as well as six different part imperf varieties. In addition, there are at least nine different misperforation varieties, as well as eight miscut varieties, most of which show at least part of the plate number. Other minor varieties include a weak print variety, and a narrow spacing variety on line pairs. Interestingly enough, there seem to be no tagging varieties for this issue. For a full explanation of all the varieties available on this stamp, I refer you to the above-mentioned article by Robert Manning.

This is the end of our examination of the Music of America mini-set.