

Hungarian Stamps 2010

FAMOUS HUNGARIANS BICENTENARY OF FERENC ERKEL'S BIRTH



Magyar Posta is marking the bicentenary of Ferenc Erkel's birth by issuing a special stamp block.

Ferenc Erkel (Gyula, 7 November 1810 – Budapest, 15 June 1893) was a composer, conductor and pianist. He started his career as a pianist and music teacher in Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania). He visited Pest in 1834 and finally settled there the next year. For two years he worked for the German Theatre of Pest and the Hungarian Theatrical Society of Buda as a conductor. In 1837 he became first conductor at the Hungarian Theatre of Pest, later the National Theatre. In 1840 he wrote his first opera, *Mária Bátor*, for which Béni Egressy wrote the libretto. They collaborated on other operas until the librettist's death in 1851. In 1844 Erkel won the competition to set Ferenc Kölcsey's *Himnusz* to music, which was adopted as the Hungarian national anthem. After the 1848-49 Revolution and War of Independence, he worked energetically to re-

vive concert life in the capital. The Philharmonic Society, which he conducted on countless occasions, was founded in 1853 under his direction. His opera *Bánk bán*, considered the pinnacle of his career, was first performed in 1861. He was involved in the foundation of the Academy of Music in 1875, where he was the director and taught the piano for 10 years before becoming the chief musical director of the Opera House. As a conductor and thanks to his organising skills he made a tremendous contribution to the flourishing of musical life in Budapest. His name is closely associated with the creation of the Hungarian national opera, yet he also composed choral works, songs, incidental music, piano pieces and orchestral works. His rich oeuvre is exemplary.

Erkel was also an excellent chess player and was actively involved in organising chess in Hungary. He was a member of the first Pest Chess Club, founded in 1839, and, after the ban imposed in 1849 was lifted, he became vice-president of the Club on its re-foundation in 1864 and later its president. From the mid-1850s to the early 1860s he was considered to be among the best Hungarian chess players along with József Szén and, after his death, Emil Récsi. As he grew older, he played less frequently and stopped playing chess around 1875, but still regularly attended the Chess Club, discussing games with fellow members, watching matches and solving problems. (Source: www.filharmonia.com * www.wikipedia.org * by Iván Bottlik)

The design of the stamp in the numbered block is a portrayal of the composer Ferenc Erkel. The graphic composition of the surrounding frame shows the Opera House, scores and a chess board. There is a portrait of Ferenc Erkel on the block's first day cover as well as the Opera House and the end of an Erkel-Szén chess game, which Erkel won. The graphic design of the special postmark is a stylised portrait of the composer.

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