

John Philip Sousa

His last name is pronounced Soo'-sah.

A composer of the Romantic era and the twentieth century.

John Philip Sousa attended public schools in the District of Columbia and took music lessons at a private music school. His father was a member of the U.S. Marine Band. As a teenager, John enlisted in the Marines and served as an apprentice musician in the Marine Band until the age of 20. As an apprentice, he studied theory, harmony, and composition. He also took lessons on the violin, his primary instrument.

After leaving the Marine Band, Sousa toured as a conductor of musical theater productions. In 1876 he moved to Philadelphia where he played violin in an orchestra at the American Centennial celebration. Here he began to compose music.

In 1880 (age 26), Sousa was named conductor of the U.S. Marine Band, a position he held for 12 years. He then resigned his military commission and formed his own band which he called Sousa's Band. Every year for the rest of his life, he spent from six to twelve months on tour throughout the United States with Sousa's Band.

As leader of the Sousa Band, John Philip Sousa was one of the most recognized musicians in the world. He was a great showman, always requiring the utmost professionalism from his band members. During World War I, he temporarily disbanded Sousa's Band, re-enlisted in the Navy, and formed a 300 member band of sailors which toured throughout the United States. After the war he took up a touring schedule once again with Sousa's Band.

Sousa is best known for the 136 **marches** he wrote for his band. He also composed 70 songs, several extended **suites** for band, as well as numerous **waltzes** and dance pieces for band. For the concert stage, he composed several **operas** and **operettas**. The operettas, in particular, were well liked by audiences. He also arranged more than a hundred orchestral works for band.

For the first two decades of the twentieth century, John Philip Sousa had a significant impact on the business of music. His band tours generated a steady income, and his marches, which were published in editions for band as well as piano, sold well. And recordings of Sousa's Band were among the first top sellers for the new recording industry. He continued touring and guest conducting bands throughout the United States until his death.

No one was more influential in developing bands in the United States than John Philip Sousa. His band tours exposed millions of Americans to a highly professional musical ensemble, and many of his band members went on to found and conduct bands throughout the country. To this day, his marches are considered the finest examples of the form and are still widely performed by bands around the world.



born

November 6, 1854
Washington, DC

died

March 6, 1932
Reading, Pennsylvania

66

Sousa often told his audiences that his bass drum player was the best paid member of the Sousa band.

99

John Philip Sousa

What I composed

Orchestra

Concerto

Chamber Music

Keyboard

Opera

Theater/Film

Ballet

Band

Choral

Vocal Solos

John Philip Sousa

>

>

>

>

Sousa Factoids:

- For the first two decades of the twentieth century, Sousa was probably the most famous and well-known musician in the world.
- At Sousa band concerts, audience members frequently danced to Sousa's marches.
- Sousa helped to create a new instrument, the Sousaphone, a tuba which wrapped around a player's upper body, thus making it easier to carry and play while marching.
- In addition to composing music and directing a band, Sousa wrote three novels, an autobiography, a music instruction book, and hundreds of magazine articles.

1854: Birth of John Philip Sousa; Franklin Pierce is President of the United States.

1861: Charles Dickens writes *Great Expectations*.

1873: Color photographs are first developed.

1880: New York City streets are first lit by electricity.

1893: Engelbert Humperdinck composes the opera *Hansel and Gretel*.

1901: Following a "century of steam" the "century of electricity" begins.

1912: S.S. *Titanic* sinks on her maiden voyage after striking an iceberg.

1932: Death of John Philip Sousa; Amelia Earhart flies solo across the Atlantic Ocean, the first woman to do so.

What in the world
is happening?

John Philip Sousa (1854-1932) *Stars and Stripes Forever*



John Philip Sousa is known as "The March King," and *Stars and Stripes Forever* is one of his most popular marches. Sousa himself said that it was his finest composition. When performed, this march is nearly always played at the end of a concert. Even Sousa, in his own concerts, scheduled it to be played last, or as an encore.

The Sousa Band played many of Sousa's marches. Sousa often performed his marches differently than they were written. For example, he would have the clarinets play an octave lower than written. Or he might perform a section pianissimo (very soft) where the printed music said to play forte (loud). Sousa (the Big Boss, as some of his band members called him) felt if he played the march as written, all other bands would sound like the Sousa Band. So the changes made his band sound unique.

In his book, *Marching Along: Recollections of Men, Women and Music*, Sousa recalls how *Stars and Stripes Forever* came about. He was on a steam ship bound for America. "I began to sense the rhythmic beat of a band playing within my brain. It kept on ceaselessly, playing, playing, playing. Throughout the whole tense voyage, that imaginary band continued to unfold the same themes, echoing and re-echoing the most distinct melody... When we reached shore, I set down the measures that my brain-band had been playing for me, and not a note of it has ever been changed. The composition is known the world over as *The Stars and Stripes Forever* and is probably my most popular march." The date on his original band score is April 26, 1897, Boston, Massachusetts, although many believe it was written on Christmas Day, December 25, 1896. Its official premiere was May 14, 1897 at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

- Raise your hand when you hear the first melody, after the four measure introduction. Notice how the notes are played short, called pizzicato.
- The second melody begins softly. What instrument is predominantly heard?
- The piccolo plays the highest notes in the band. Raise your hand when you hear their solo. Often just before the piccolo solo begins, the piccolo players either stand or come to the front of the stage during the performance.

66

The first Sousaphones were built with the bell pointing straight up. Several years later, it occurred to the manufacturer that it might be better if the bell pointed forward, so the sound could be heard in front of the performer.

66

The form of this piece is very easy to follow: Introduction, A, A, B, B, C, D, C, D, C. We'll list the number of measures in each section. You may want to count along. There are two beats in each measure. Count "one-two, two-two, three-two, four-two" and so on.

TIMING

- :01 An eight measure introduction, played by the full band.
- :04 The "A" melody (16 measures).
- :20 A repeat of the "A" melody (16 measures).
- :35 The "B" melody is introduced by the low woodwinds (16 measures).
- :49 Brass are added to the "B" melody (16 measures).
- 1:04 The saxophones play the smooth, legato "C" melody (32 measures).
- 1:34 Trombones and low brass introduce the minor-key "D" melody (24 measures).
- 1:58 Return of the "C" melody (32 measures). Listen for the piccolo (a small flute, the highest pitched instrument in the band), playing a counter-melody over the "C" melody.
- 2:28 A return of the trombone/low brass "D" melody (24 measures).
- 2:51 The "C" melody returns (32 measures), again with the piccolo, and with the trombones also playing a counter-melody.

Review!

Forward,
march!



John Philip Sousa

Name _____

Place the letter of the correct answer in the space provided.

For True/False questions, print True or False in the space provided.

1. Sousa and his father were members of what band? _____
A. the U.S. Army Band C. the U.S. Marine Band
B. the U.S. Navy Band D. the Band of the Grenadiers
2. Although Sousa is known as a band composer, his primary instrument was the _____.
A. piano C. viola
B. violin D. string bass
3. Sousa is best known for his _____.
A. oratorios C. marches
B. waltzes D. suites
4. True or False: Sousa was unable to earn a living as a musician and composer.

5. In addition to his music for band, Sousa also wrote _____.
A. operas C. novels
B. operettas D. all of the above
6. The Sousaphone is a type of _____.
A. tuba C. telephone
B. recording device D. trumpet
7. *Pianissimo* means _____. A. very soft
Forte means _____. B. loud
8. Sousa's most famous march is _____.
A. *Marching Along* C. *The Big Boss*
B. *Stars and Stripes Forever* D. *District of Columbia March*
9. True or False: Sousa spent most of his adult life touring with his bands.

10. What instrument plays the highest notes in the band? _____
A. the flute C. the piccolo
B. the violin D. the trombone

Bonus:

During World War I, Sousa created a band for _____.