

John Philip Sousa was born in Washington, D. C. on November 6, 1854. His father, John Antonio Sousa, was born in Spain of Portuguese parents, and his mother, Marie Elizabeth Trinkaus, was born in Bavaria.

Sousa received his early education in Washington public schools, while simultaneously studying music at a private conservatory. At age 13, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Band as a "boy" (apprentice) musician, but he also continued his private music studies. His most important teacher was George Felix Benkert, with whom he studied violin, harmony, and composition. After serving seven years with the marines, he was discharged. Thereafter, he performed as a violinist and conductor in various theater orchestras in Washington and Philadelphia.

By 1880, his fame as a conductor, composer, and arranger had been established. He was appointed leader of the U. S. Marine Band and held this position for 12 years, eventually molding the band into the finest military band in the world.

Sousa resigned from the Marine Corps in 1892 to form his own civilian band. In a matter of months this band assumed a position of equality with the finest symphony orchestras of the day. It was a concert organization, not a marching band. The finest available instrumentalists were engaged, and among the celebrated soloists to perform with the band over the years were Herbert L. Clarke (cornet), Arthur Pryor (trombone), Simone Mantia (euphonium), Estelle Liebling (soprano), and Maud Powell (violin). Numerous other artists of international fame performed with the band at one time or another.

People throughout the world flocked to see "The March King" during his many American and worldwide tours. He employed a principle that endeared him to the public: Everything was played to perfection, whether it was a classical masterpiece or a popular song.

Sousa was a man of considerable self-discipline and extraordinary talent. He excelled in everything he undertook, yet he was unassuming, approachable, tolerant, and in possession of an almost saintly disposition. To all who knew him, he was a man of incredibly high moral standards. From his childhood, he was determined, and industrious, and in command of such an unbounded optimism that nothing seemed impossible to him. Foremost in his mind was how best to please his audiences.

Sousa's musical compositions represent a heritage that belongs not only to Americans, but also to vast numbers of music lovers around the world. His influence on American musical tastes was remarkable, and much of his influence spread abroad. The Sousa band traveled the world in 1910-1911, made four additional tours of Europe, and annual tours of America.

Although Sousa is stereotyped as a march composer, he composed music of many forms, including 15 operettas. Among his many original works for band are suites, humoresques, fantasies, descriptive pieces, and dances. In addition to the over 200 songs of his operettas, he composed 70 other vocal works, and many of these vocal works were transcribed for use with the Sousa Band.

The musical philosophy, which stimulated his composing, ("I would rather be the composer of an inspired march than of a manufactured symphony.") is reflected in all of his works. Basically a humble,

deeply religious man, he composed only upon genuine inspiration and repeatedly stated that his melodies came from a "Higher Power."

Sousa was an indefatigable worker, proclaiming that, "When you hear of Sousa retiring, you will hear of Sousa dead." This prediction came true; he died suddenly following a rehearsal of the Ringgold Band in Reading Pennsylvania on March 6, 1932. He is buried with other family members at Congressional Cemetery in Washington. Among hundreds of honors he received during his lifetime and posthumously, was election to the Hall of Fame for Great Americans. Only 102 persons have been so honored.

