"The Stars and Stripes Forever"

John Philip Sousa
Born: November 6, 1854
Died: March 6, 1932

American bandmaster and composer John Philip Sousa was born in Washington D.C. He was the son of Portuguese and German immigrants. His father played trombone in the United States Marine Band, and the younger Sousa grew up with an interest in bands. When he was 13, he nearly ran off to join a circus band, but his father found out about the plan and put him in the Marine Band instead.

In addition to playing band instruments, Sousa played violin, and that's how he met his wife. She was a singer, and he was playing in the orchestra of the theater where she worked. Sousa was also a theater composer who wrote fifteen operettas.

Eventually, John Philip Sousa went back to bands. He spent 12 years as conductor of the Marine Band, and then left to start a concert band of his own. The Sousa Band toured all over the world, playing to sold-out houses. Even though the bands Sousa conducted were not marching bands, his marches were so popular that he became known as the "March King." He also spent a lot of time helping school bands and orchestras and improving band instruments. The marching tuba that wraps around the musician's body is named for him; it's called the "Sousaphone."

John Philip Sousa literally continued conducting up until his death. He died suddenly after leading a band rehearsal. The final piece he conducted at the rehearsal was "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

John Philip Sousa

Sousa wrote over two hundred works, including symphonic poems, suites, songs and operettas for both orchestra and band.

Here is the story of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." In 1896, Sousa and his wife took a vacation to Europe. While there, Sousa received word that the manager of the Sousa Band had died suddenly. He immediately returned to America. Sousa tells the rest of the story in this excerpt from his autobiography *Marching Along*.

"Here came one of the most vivid incidents of my career. As the vessel (the *Teutonic*) steamed out of the harbor, I was pacing on the deck, absorbed in thoughts of my manager's death and the many duties and decisions which awaited me in New York. Suddenly, I began to sense a rhythmic beat of a band playing within my brain. Throughout the whole tense voyage, that imaginary band continued to unfold the same themes, echoing and re-echoing the most distinct melody. I did not transfer a note of that music to paper while I was on the steamer, but when we reached the shore, I set down the measures that my brain-band had been playing for me, and not a note of it has ever changed."

The march was an immediate success, and Sousa's Band played it at almost every concert until his death over 25 years later. Sousa even wrote words for it. You'll find the words to the march on the next page.

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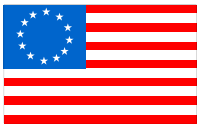
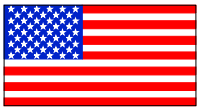
Flags of our History

All of these flags are important to the history of our country. Can you match the name of the flag with it's picture?

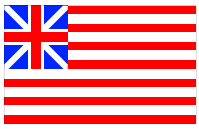


Modern USA Flag

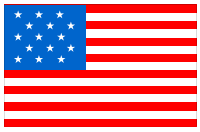


Grand Union Flag

Star Spangled Banner



Betsy Ross Flag



Presidential Flag

Listen to "The Stars and Stripes Forever" and answer the following questions:

1. Does Sousa use dynamics to contrast loud and soft sections?
2. Is the piccolo or the flute used as a solo instrument?
3. Are there any sections which repeat in the music?
4. Does the final section sound like one, two or three themes played together?
5. Does Sousa use the tuba in an important role?

Extra: Try to write your own listening map to go with the music. You can use letters, numbers or pictures to designate the sections of the music.

The Stars and Stripes Forever

Let martial note in triumph float
And liberty extend its mighty hand
A flag appears 'mid thunderous cheers,
The banner of the Western land.
The emblem of the brave and true
Its folds protect no tyrant crew;
The red and white and starry blue
Is freedom's shield and hope.

Other nations may deem their flags the best
And cheer them with fervid elation
But the flag of the North and South and West
Is the flag of flags, the flag of Freedom's nation.

Hurrah for the flag of the free!
May it wave as our standard forever,
The gem of the land and the sea,
The banner of the right.
Let despots remember the day
When our fathers with mighty endeavor
Proclaimed as they marched to the fray
That their might and by their right
It waves forever.

Let eagles shriek from lofty peak
The never-ending watchword of our land;
Let summer breeze waft through the trees
The echo of the chorus grand.
Sing out for liberty and light,
Sing out for freedom and the right.
Sing out for Union and its might,
O patriotic sons.

Other nations may deem their flags the best
And cheer them with fervid elation,
But the flag of the North and South and West
Is the flag of flags, the flag of Freedom's nation.

Hurrah for the flag of the free.
May it wave as our standard forever
The gem of the land and the sea,
The banner of the right.
Let despots remember the day
When our fathers with might endeavor
Proclaimed as they marched to the fray,
That by their might and by their right
It waves forever.