

The Rockville Concert Band Presents “A Tribute to John Philip Sousa”

Conducted by Music Director Dr. Juan Gallastegui

Sunday, April 2, 2023, at 3:00 P.M.

Program Notes by Noreen B. Friedman

About John Philip Sousa (1854-1932)

As a “Tribute to John Philip Sousa”, today’s performance strives to provide a representative offering of the composer’s enormous and diverse opus within the concert time limits. As such, the program presents not only some uber-famous and less played marches of “The March King” (he composed 136 marches), but also a sampling of Sousa’s lesser known music of other genres, including a theatrical overture, tone poem, and Waltzes.

While busy with the responsibilities including conducting the U.S. Marine Band and later the Sousa Band, the composer managed regularly to turn out a wide variety of music, including 15 operettas, the music from which also yielded marches and other arrangements, which have remained in the concert band repertoire. Other works included songs, fantasies, humoresques, and dances.

Born in Washington DC in 1854, John Philip Sousa was one of ten children of Spanish-born John Antonio Sousa and Bavarian born Maria Elisabeth Trinkhaus. The father was a trombonist in the U.S. Marine Band providing Sousa with a strong musical environment and education on many different instruments. At age 13, Sousa enlisted as an apprentice in the U.S. Marine Band. With a particular affinity for the violin, Sousa played the instrument in theater orchestras, fueling his love for theatrical productions that later manifested itself in his composition projects. In 1880, Sousa was appointed the leader of the Marine Band, a position which he held for 12 years, raising the quality of the ensemble to one of the finest military bands in the world. Sousa resigned from the Marine Corp. in 1892 to form his own band. The Sousa Band attracted superior talent and international soloists and received acclaim in the U.S. and elsewhere through extensive touring.

Always extraordinary driven, Sousa strived for excellence in composing, conducting, writing articles and books. He had time for Free Mason and sporting activities including trap shooting and boxing. Sousa had a strong moral compass and was known for being tolerant and approachable. Sousa was married to Jane van Middlesworth Bellis with whom he had three children. He and family members are buried at the Congressional Cemetery in Washington D.C.

While leaving an impressive legacy of compositions including warhorses of band repertoire, Sousa is also remembered via other impressive accolades, including a 1952 20th Century Fox film, *Stars and Stripes Forever*, based on his memoirs; a World War Liberty Ship named in his honor; and his posthumous 1976 induction into the Hall of Fame for Great Americans. In 1955, with the blessings of Sousa’s two daughters, the *Sousa Award* was established to honor the top student in a high school band.

Overture to “Vautour” (1893)

John Philip Sousa

While conducting the Marine Band, Sousa composed not only music in the march realm but also works for the theater--comedic operas and several staged plays. Among the latter is this ***Overture*** for the play ***Vautour*** (“Vulture”) by the prolific French playwright and novelist Adolphe Eugene Philippe Dennerly or d’Ennerly (1811-1899). During his lifetime, the Paris-born d’Ennerly wrote or contributed writing to over 200 melodramas and comedies.

Though seldom today performed, the upbeat ***Overture to “Vautour*** was a favorite of Sousa who frequently included it on Sousa Band programs.

Sheridan’s Ride (1908)

On a Poem by Thomas Buchanon Read (1822-1872)

John Philip Sousa

The programmatic ***Sheridan’s Ride*** is based on the 1864 poem of the same name by artist and poet Thomas Buchanon Read. Celebrating Union General Philip Sheridan’s rallying his troops at the victorious 1864 Battle of Cedar Creek in the Shenandoah Valley, the poem was extensively published in its time promoting the Union effort and President Abraham Lincoln. General Sheridan himself was a big fan of the poem that commemorated the ride of Winchester to Cedar Creek, changing his horse’s name from Rieni to Winchester. As excerpted from the poem: “A steed as black as the steeds of night was seen to pass, as with eagles flight; As if he knew the terrible need, He stretched away with the utmost speed”.

Sousa’s ***Sheridan’s Ride*** is segmented into five scenes—Waiting for the Bugle, The Attack, The Death of Thoburn, The Coming of Sheridan, and The Apotheosis. Reflecting Sousa’s staunch patriotism, the work has a certain vintage film music quality. A trumpet solo, representing the bugle calls, figures prominently at the beginning and end of the work. The percussion section provides ample suitable sound effects, depicting everything from horse trotting to the general cacophony of war.

The Colonial Dames Waltzes (1898)

John Philip Sousa

Sousa was fond of the Waltz form and composed a considerable number of Waltzes and other dances for his operettas and singularly. ***The Colonial Dames Waltzes*** was a revised version of ***Wissahickon Waltz*** (1885). First published as a piano piece in a women’s magazine, ***The Colonial Dames*** appears to have been targeting a parlor music audience with possible dedication to an exclusive women’s society for those of colonial lineage. Following a short introduction, the piece’s main musical theme is catchy and works well for concert band.

March, Manhattan Beach (1893)

John Philip Sousa

The ***March, Manhattan Beach*** memorializes the first summer season for Sousa's Band at what was then a popular and fashionable New York resort. The July/August Manhattan residency became a regular gig for the Band and Sousa thrived in its ambience, composing this and many other works. ***Manhattan Beach*** is performed widely by bands throughout the world. Festive and programmatic, the March depicts the ocean's waves and distinctively evokes the sound of a band playing, the volume first growing louder and then steadily diminishing at the end, as beach strollers move away from the concert.

March, The Bride Elect (1897)

John Philip Sousa

The Bride Elect March presented today was extracted from Sousa's 3-act comedic operetta of the same name for which Sousa ultimately wrote his own libretto in addition to composing the music. Building on the success of his operetta *El Capitan* (1895), Sousa dedicated himself to composing music for other theatrical works, including ***The Bride Elect***.

Premiering at the Hyperion Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, ***The Bride Elect*** was extremely well received by the audience. This initial performance success resulted in the Theatre's offering Sousa \$100,000 for exclusive rights and The New York Journal offering \$10,000 for the right to publish the operetta's March. Sousa declined both these offers, a decision which did not work out well financially. Future performances of the opera received mixed reviews, although the March, with its main theme derived from the opera's song "Unchain the Dogs of War", was highly acclaimed and continues to be programmed.

March, The Charlatan (1898)

John Philip Sousa

As with *The Bride Elect*, Sousa's operetta ***The Charlatan***, also known as ***The Mystical Miss***, emerged from the composer's post-*El Capitan* exuberance. With a book by English-born playwright Charles Klein, who also supplied the libretto for *El Capitan*, ***The Charlatan*** was premiered by the De Wolf Hopper Opera Company at the Academy of Music in Montreal with Hopper in the starring role. Subsequently, the show transferred to the Knickerbocker Theatre on Broadway in New York City. Many reviews praised the music, while criticizing Klein's book and Sousa's song lyrics. ***The Charlatan's*** music lives on via excerpted arrangements of The Overture, Waltzes, and the March.

March, Semper Fidelis (1888)

John Philip Sousa

Named after the motto of the U.S. Marine Corps, ***Semper Fidelis*** (Always Faithful) is one of Sousa's most famous marches. Now considered the official march of the Marine Corps, ***Semper Fidelis*** has a notably interesting history. When Sousa was the leader of the U.S. Marine Band, he had a conversation with then President Chester A. Arthur who expressed his displeasure with the formal use of *Hail to the Chief*,

which Sousa noted was derived from a Scottish boat song. Indeed, its origins are from Sir Walter Scott's poem, "The Lady of the Lake" set to music adapted by English composer James Sanderson from a traditional Gaelic melody. President Arthur suggested that Sousa compose something more appropriate, which led Sousa to compose two works—**Presidential Polonaise** (1886) and two years later, after the death of President Arthur, **Semper Fidelis**.

While *Hail to the Chief* has remained the official musical introduction for U.S. Presidents, **Semper Fidelis** has endured as the march of the Marines and, with its stirring snare drum interlude, a staple of wind band repertoire. Regarded by Sousa as one of his best marches, **Semper Fidelis** in a slow, dirge-like form, was played for the composer's funeral procession.

March, Anchor and Star (1919)

John Philip Sousa

Named after components of the U.S. Navy emblem and dedicated by Sousa to the U.S. Navy, **Anchor and Star** is a parade march with similar structural elements to **Semper Fidelis**. The March was composed when Sousa was commander of the Navy recruit bands at Great Lakes Naval Training Center. While serving in this capacity, Sousa organized an impressive 300-strong cadet marching band.

March, The Washington Post (1889)

John Philip Sousa

Holding the name of the newspaper, **The Washington Post March** has its origins in community public relations and marketing. In 1889, the newspaper organized an "Amateur Authors' Association" and sponsored an essay contest for D.C. school children. The newspaper's owners asked Sousa, then leading the Marine Band, to compose a march for the inaugural award ceremony. On June 15, 1889, 25,000 people, including President Benjamin Harrison and other dignitaries, gathered on the grounds of the Smithsonian for the awarding of 11 gold medals of the essay contest.

When Marine Band conducted by Sousa performed **The Washington Post** at the ceremony, the crowd responded enthusiastically. Subsequently, the March became popular locally, enhanced by its meter which aligned with the then-popular two-step dance. After a dance master's organization adopted it for their yearly convention, the March's popularity exploded nationally and internationally. Unfortunately, the global popularity precipitated a deluge of pirated editions under different titles, often with bogus composer attribution.

While the publisher reaped substantial financial benefit from **The Washington Post**, Sousa received only \$35 for several versions of the March. Despite gross underpayment and the said piracy, Sousa enjoyed the work's immense popularity, an oft played and requested selection for his band programs. The March and newspaper legacy continue today. In the Washington Post's building, there is the John Philip Sousa Community room, which includes a life-size portrait of the composer who is inextricably tied to the paper's global name and presence.

March, The Stars and Stripes Forever (1896)

John Philip Sousa

Sousa's most famous March and by a 1987 Act of Congress, the Official March of the United States of America, ***The Stars and Stripes Forever*** is a spirited tribute to the country and its flag. After its May 14, 1897 debut performance in Philadelphia, the crowds embraced its patriotic fervor. Wrote the *Public Ledger*: "It is stirring enough to rouse the American eagle from his crag and set him to shriek exultantly while he hurls his arrows at the aurora borealis".

Sousa wrote his masterpiece while on an ocean liner returning from a trip to Europe with his wife. He was homesick and melancholy at learning of the passing of David Blakely, manager of the Sousa Band. The March steadily grew in popularity to its position of prominence today, programmed and encored frequently and the culmination of July 4th celebrations throughout the country.

A brief but powerful introduction is followed by a more subdued strain, leading to the famously singable Trio melody for which Sousa's own lyrics are particularly poignant (and parodies and silly lyrics also proliferate). A breaks strain featuring low brass leads to the Grandioso repetition of the Trio theme during which the famous piccolo countermelody is featured. As repeated, more piccolos are added (typically the entire flute section among military and other professional bands) over which the brass section increases volume, leading to an audience-pleasing finale. ***Stars and Stripes Forever!***