

**Sousa's Greatest March**

**Lead: On May 14, 1897 John Philip Sousa stood at the podium of the Philadelphia Academy of Music, lifted his baton and began leading his greatest march. Two encores later the crowd was still on its feet.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: The son of immigrants, Sousa grew up in Washington, DC around military band music. His father played trombone in the Marine Band. The boy's musical study began at the age of six. Work with voice,**

**violin, piano, flute, cornet, trombone and the alto horn demonstrated his prodigious ability and he was soon taking engagements as an orchestral violinist, doing some conducting and turning out primitive compositions.**

**In 1867 he attempted to run away from home to join a circus band and his father signed him up as an apprentice bands man with the Marines. Discharged in 1875, he established a reputation as an excellent violinist and theater conductor in national tours and on Broadway. Returning to the Marines in 1880 he raised the President's own to the highest standards of technical execution and performance. Sousa conducted the Band for Presidents**

**Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland and Harrison.**

**In 1892, promoter David Blakely convinced him to resign the Marines and organize a civilian concert band. The group played to enthusiastic crowds all around the country. While returning from a European vacation in 1896, he was strolling the deck of the liner *Teutonic*, there he received the inspiration for a new March. By the spring of the following year the components were together, he had tried it out with a few audiences. Theirs was the same reaction as in Philadelphia. Critics called it jingoistic and said it pandered to the martial fever gripping the country in the lead**

**up to the Spanish war, but the people loved it.**

**Until his death in 1932, no audience would permit him to leave the stage without playing it. It was the last piece he conducted. "The Stars and Stripes, Forever."**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

### **Resources**

**Bierley, Paul E. *John Philip Sousa: American Phenomenon*. New York: Century-Appelton Crofts, 1973.**

**Anonymous, "Sousa's Greatest," *American Heritage* (May, June 1997): 106.**

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