



March, “The Stars and Stripes Forever”

John Philip Sousa

After spending twelve years as the seventeenth director of “The President’s Own” from 1880 to 1892, John Philip Sousa went on to form his own civilian band at the urging of concert promoter David Blakely. Sousa enjoyed tremendous success with his Sousa Band, traveling extensively throughout the continental United States and abroad. It was during his time with the Marine Band and in the early years of leading his civilian band that Sousa wrote some of his most famous marches, earning him the title “The March King.”

Since its première in Philadelphia on May 14, 1897, “The Stars and Stripes Forever” has easily secured its place as the most popular and widely recognized march of all time. It has for more than a century captured the spirit of American patriotism perhaps better than any other composition. During the heyday of the Sousa Band, “The Stars and Stripes Forever” was performed as an encore at the end of nearly every concert. Audiences expected, and sometimes even demanded to hear the piece and eventually began to stand upon recognizing its opening bars as if it were the national anthem. The “Stars and Stripes Forever” became America’s national march in 1987.

Sousa was a staunch patriot and he often insisted that the impetus for “The Stars and Stripes Forever” was borne of both his love for country and divine inspiration. The following is taken from a Sousa Band program from the early part of the century:

Someone asked, “Who influenced you to compose ‘The Stars and Stripes Forever,’” and before the question was hardly asked, Sousa replied, “God—and I say this in all reverence! I was in Europe and I got a cablegram that my manager was dead. I rushed...to Paris and then to England and sailed for America. On board the steamer as I walked miles up and down the deck, back and forth, a mental band was playing ‘Stars and Stripes Forever.’ Day after day as I walked it persisted in crashing into my very soul. I wrote it on Christmas day, 1896.

Sousa later added that some of the initial melodic material was conceived while he was still in Europe and it was then that the image of the American flag came to the forefront of the homesick composer’s mind. In an interview, Sousa said, “In a kind of dreamy way I used to think over the old days at Washington when I was leader of the Marine Band...when we played at all public official functions, and I could see the Stars and Stripes flying from the flagstaff on the grounds of the White House.... [T]o my imagination it seemed to be the biggest, grandest flag in the world, and I could not get back under it quick enough.”

This version was recorded in the John Philip Sousa Band Hall at the Marine Barracks Annex in Washington, D.C., in 2007 under baton of Colonel Michael J. Colburn, 27th Director of “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band.

Entry March of the Boyares

Johan Halvorsen

transcribed by Clifford P. Barnes

Born in the small industrial town of Drammen, Norway, Johan Halvorsen (1864–1935) began music studies on the violin at age seven. He later added piccolo, French horn, cornet, and percussion to his musical résumé. His first position as a professional musician was as a triangle player in the percussion section of the Oslo Second Brigade Band at age 17. Halvorsen wrote his first composition, a march, during his two-year tenure with the band. He left to continue his violin studies at the Stockholm Conservatory in Sweden. He also studied in Leipzig, Germany, and in Leige, Belgium, and then went on to perform as concertmaster of the Bergen Orchestra in Norway. In 1899, Halvorsen was appointed conductor of Oslo's Christiania National Theatre, a post he held for almost thirty years.

Entry March of the Boyares, Halvorsen's most famous work, was composed in 1895. He had been offered a teaching position in Bucharest, Romania, which he ultimately turned down, but in researching the country's history, Halvorsen became fascinated with the story of the Boyares. Elite members of the region's aristocracy from the 10th through the 17th century, the Boyares were outranked only by the ruling princes. Halvorsen's march depicts the regal Boyares in procession.

Halvorsen's compositional style was greatly influenced by fellow countryman Edvard Grieg, who was the uncle of Halvorsen's wife. It was Grieg's arrangement of Entry March of the Boyares for piano which first called attention to the work and began its surge in popularity as a work for orchestra and band.

The U.S. Marine Band performed Entry March of the Boyares in concert in Hamar, Norway, on July 2, 1989, and the audience response to the march was similar to the enthusiastic response of the performance of a Sousa march in the United States. This recording is from that concert under the baton of Colonel John R. Bourgeois, 25th Director of "The President's Own" United States Marine Band.