SHOWING OFF BEFORE COMPANY
HUMORESQUE

JOHN PHILIP SOUSA
RECONSTRUCTED & EDITED BY KEVIN R. TAM

CONDUCTORS SCORE
CONCERT BAND
John Philip Sousa's renown within the circles of music appreciation is permanently connected to his collective march compositions which spanned the length of his musical career. A style of composition which he perfected and then made his own, his touring band brought appreciation of the concert march to the masses which they never forgot – propelling Sousa to the status of musical legend which endures today – some 86 years hence.

However, this fact eclipses most of his musical efforts. With an output rivaling nearly any other American composer, Sousa produced or arranged nearly 320 operettas, overtures, songs, fantasies, librettos, and humoresques versus some 135 march compositions. It is within these unheard or often overlooked works in which we discover the true measure of the man’s creativeness, for in each, a unique voice is given in a setting unreachable within the structure of a concert march.

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On tour, his concert programming was eclectic in nature, generally featuring approximately nine works, not counting numerous encores which were all generally marches. His own compositions were usually represented on most programs – often a suite, humoresque, or fantasy appeared in one half of the program with a new march introduced in the latter. These would often be bracketed by an introductory overture, a solo piece or small ensemble, a vocal solo work, and several transcriptions and additional instrumental solos. The featured suite or humoresque was generally used throughout a given season and many were so popular that they were put into regular use throughout Sousa’s long career.

Sousa was the consummate showman in everything he did, showmanship was an essential element and he was quoted many times as saying “The man who does not exercise showmanship is dead.” This aspect of his nature came into full effect in his humoresques – a style of composition given by its very nature to showmanship. Often blending contemporary or popular melodies with classics and sometimes sound effects or physical humor, not publicized were original compositions and were kept for exclusive use of Sousa and his band. Indeed, the genre itself is almost exclusively Sousa’s as well – the form developed by Sousa was in no way similar to classical composers – there were and remain few composers willing to inject actual mirth into their compositions.

The first of fourteen Sousa humoresques was composed in 1885 and was called “A Little Peach in an Orchard Grew”, this was followed by a whimsically titled “Stag Party” at roughly the same time. The band came back” was Sousa’s follow-up to his 1892 humoresque “Good-Bye” in which the band takes exception to what they view as unreasonable criticism from their conductor and literally desert him, marching off the stage in sections while playing melodies relating to travel – Paris. At the end of the work, the band realizes that payday is coming and rush back on stage to the tune of “Annie Laurie” This Humoresque is believed to have been Sousa’s answer to Haydn’s “Farewell” Symphony.

It is not clear how he came to develop this interest in his composition but it certainly speaks to the wry sense of humor of which he was possessed, his lachon manner played out perfectly in musical form. Not a man given to outward emotion, often the only hint of his wit to the uninitiated was a twinkle in the eye following an aside comment and they were left wondering whether he was serious or joking. Married to a youthful wife, he often introduced her and his three children as “my four children by my first wife”.

In 1919, Jazz was coming into its own. Sousa was a man who easily recognized the changing trends in music and quickly capitalized on the increased popularity of this new genre. Cautious about endorsing it however, he composed perhaps his most epic humoresque “Showing Off Before Company” featuring band members ‘showing off’ in the jazz style either individually or in groups. Of Jazz he said, what was good was good, what was bad, was bad, and most of it “made you want to bite your grandmother”. Despite his skeptical embrace of jazz, he would go on to write a fantasy for band entitled “Jazz America” which became hugely popular.

By 1920, Sousa had for the last few years been including works and arrangements from a Mr. Herman Bellstedt, a member of his band and during that year Mr. Bellstedt became ill and unable to write, leaving a gap in upcoming programs. But, “Sousa turned to” and composed his humoresque on George Gershwin’s “Swanee” in only two days.

Following “Swanee”, in 1922 Sousa seized on another contemporary popular song upon which to base a new humoresque, Jerome Kern’s “Look for the Silver Lining” - which he titled with the same name but adding the subscript “with some extra Wadding”.

* SHOWING OFF BEFORE COMPANY *

In 1919, Sousa’s debuted what for many represents his most unique and sensational humoresque – “Showing Off Before Company” – a reconstituted form first explored in 1895 with “The Band Came Back” whereas the work would open the second half of the program with all players ‘back of scenes’ and section by section, players would enter alone or in groups playing a solo or selection that highlighted the players talents or the unique features of the instrument until at last the entire band is on stage and performing – uniquely minus the conductor, who finally joins the stage for the finale some 20 minutes later!

The original “arrangement” was partially traditionally scored but the parts were also constituted with inserts and paste-ins which actually changed off and on as Sousa made substitutions in sections over the years – the result was a living arrangement which in 1927, looked very different than the 1919 version.

SHOWING OFF BEFORE COMPANY

HUMORESQUE
Norbert Hunt Quayle recalled in Part II of his article in the March 1955 issue of the Instrumentalist:

"...In 1919 we heard his band open the second part of an evening concert with his original satire entitled SHOWING OFF BEFORE COMPANY. This commenced with a fanfare by the trumpets behind the scenes. Then the various sections of the band came out in front and played variations on a given theme, each section resuming its seats in turn. Frank Simons appeared with a long Post Horn (without valves) on which he blew a series of bugle calls. He finished the act on an extremely high note which he held for a full minute. The writer vividly recalls hearing gasps of amazement here and there throughout the huge audience. The Indian artist, Red Cloud (John Kuhn) played a brilliant cadenza on the big sousaphone. At the close, Kuhn "went down into the basement" as though he would never stop. Just before he played the final amazingly low note, he threw his head back and shouted "Ha, ha!".

When interviewed in 1920 for the Cleveland press, Mr. Sousa was asked why he undertook this musical endeavor:

"Those who heard the afternoon concert will remember this delicious mélange of musical nonsense. It begins with a stage deserted...then...one at a time, or group by group, the various instruments of the band are assembled by their owners, and in a solo, duet, trio, quartet, sextette or octette, the players are given the opportunity to "show off".

The newspaper continues to state that "each one does his little stunt, quite without the aid of a leader. The volume of music swells and swells with each new arrival, and when at last the whole band is crashing into a crescendo, leaderless but in perfect accord, in comes the best-loved band leader in America, with his quick, military step, to meet the round of applause that never fails to greet him.

That merry medley always interests the audiences tremendously and it has always seemed to be the height of tact and courtesy on the part of Sousa, since it gives each (band) member that little taste of individual applause that is such heady wine to the "artist'."

Mr. Sousa continues: it arranged that for two reasons. First of all, it gave all of my band members a chance for an individual appearance and a bit of individual applause, and it then gives them a certain amount of self-confidence too - it takes away that self-consciousness a soloist feels at first.

And then I had another reason. People who do not know a great deal about the technique of music, yet enjoy it greatly, are often very curious as to the tonal qualities of certain instruments, and the manner of playing them. When the band, as a whole, is playing it is impossible to tell the lay listener to distinguish the individual voices of the instruments, and often they cannot see how those in the rear rows are played. After they hear this musical mixture they will always be able to hunt through the medley of sounds that make up the whole and pick out the individual's work."

* SHOWING OFF BEFORE COMPANY - 99 YEARS LATER *

As previously mentioned, the parts for the original iteration of this humoresque were slightly unorthodox in form – partly being scored and partly consisting of inserts and paste-ins. Sadly, this did not lend itself to preservation of the original, especially given later substitutions of songs and sections, resulting in fragmentation of the 1919 parts.

99 years hence, pages from several parts became missing. The various trumpet fanfares, written on the back of parts in pencil became smudged and faded. The entire Alto Clarinet part went missing except for some of the paste-ins. The percussion parts for several sections went missing.

There was no known full score for this humoresque, the conductor's score was comprised of a single line melody and abbreviated as well – indicating "Ja-Da" and "Yankee Doodle" as sections to be played but not containing any music for these selections. The parts all begin where the various instruments enter the stage at their appointed time and so without a full score, there was no context as to how all of the parts aligned together.

Recreating the original form of this humoresque seemed like an impossible task, however thorough research at the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and at the Library of Congress turned up not only a previously unknown partial full score, but the original source materials Sousa originally used in 1919 to construct the arrangement thereby allowing for context of how parts should align but also allowing many of the gaps to be filled in. The original tenor saxophone parts was missing a good portion of a page but using Sousa's separate arrangement of the "Jazz Waltz" which he included in this humoresque, the full part was able to be restored. In this manner, most sections of the missing Alto Clarinet part has been healed.

The 1919 paste-ins – specifically "Ja-Da" and "Yankee Doodle" were identified as separate compositions/holdings at the Sousa Archives and in careful study, many of these individual parts had "Showing Off Before Company" or simply "Showing Off" written on them in Sousa's hand and therefore allowed full restoration of these sections, bringing about a complete and full recreation of the 1919 form of this important and historical work.

It should be noted that many of the repeats, especially earlier in the piece were marked "Omit" in pencil, likely to cut down the extended running time. Research turned up two Bassoon entrance sections – the original variations on "Yankee Doodle" and a subsequent easier version which mirrors the content of the horn quartet. Both are included and can both be performed if desired with optional cuts indicated in the music for either. The finale was originally indicated on the score and parts as simply "Segue to Semper Fidelis". Via various newspaper accounts, Sousa often substituted the "Stars and Stripes Forever" for the finale and this change is not discouraged if desired. Lastly, newspaper accounts at the time indicate that upon entering the stage and performing their indicated entrances, many instruments worked up their own cadenza or solo which were never written down and so creative license in this regard in the performance of "Showing Off Before Company" is encouraged.

Kevin R. Tam
The only page of the Eb Clarinet part except for the opening section paste-in 'back of scenes'. Note the indications for sections written on separate sheets and subsequent cut of this section at some point. Below, the paste-in for the opening section 'back of scenes' with repeat omitted.
The first and final pages of the conductor's score.
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Pic.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Timp.
B Cl.
Hn. 1
Hn. 2
B Cl.
A Cl.
B. Sx.
A. Sx.
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Hd. 1
Hd. 2
Cus. 1
Cus. 2
B Bls.
B Bls.
Tuba 1
Tuba 2
Hyp.