

John would begin his music study around age six (1860) where he studied voice, piano, flute, also horn, cornet and trombone. He would enlist in the Marines at age 13 (1867) as an apprentice after he attempted to join the circus. In 1872, he published his first composition, "Moonlight on the Potomac Waltzes". In 1875 he was discharged from the Marines and began performing on violin where he would tour and eventually conduct theater orchestras.

In 1880 he would return to Washington, D.C. to assume the leadership of the United States Marine Band where he conducted "The President's Own" until 1892. He served under Presidents Haynes, Garfield, Cleveland, Arthur and Harrison. Sousa championed the cause of music education. He received several honorary degrees and fought for the rights of composers, testifying before Congress in 1927 and 1928.

Sousa died at age 77 on March 6th, 1932 after conducting a rehearsal of the Ringgold Band in Reading, Pennsylvania. The last piece he conducted was "The Stars and Stripes Forever".