**Elton John**, in full **Sir Elton Hercules John**, original name **Reginald Kenneth Dwight**, (born March 25, 1947, Pinner, Middlesex, England), British singer, composer, and pianist who was one of the most popular entertainers of the late 20th century. He fused as many strands of popular music and stylistic showmanship as Elvis Presley in a concert and recording career that included the sale of hundreds of millions of records.

A child prodigy on the piano, John was awarded a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music at 11. Gravitating toward pop after discovering rhythm and blues, he joined Bluesology, later John Baldry’s backing band, in the mid-1960s. He met his major songwriting collaborator, Bernie Taupin (b. May 22, 1950, Sleaford, Lincolnshire), after both responded to an advertisement in a trade magazine, and his first British recording success was with “Lady Samantha” in 1968. His first American album, *Elton John,* was released in 1970 and immediately established him as a major international star.

Throughout his career John demonstrated a supreme talent for assimilating and blending diverse pop and rock styles into a propulsive, streamlined sound that was extroverted, energetic, and somewhat impersonal. His recordings were among the first to homogenize electric guitar and acoustic piano with synthesized instrumentation. His vocal style, with its Southern accent and gospel inflections, was strongly American-influenced, as was his pianism, an ornate, gospel-flavoured elaboration of the stylings of Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis. His first American hit, “Your Song,” in 1970, was a love ballad that combined the introspective mood of the era’s singer-songwriters with a more traditional pop craftsmanship. John’s early 1970s recordings paid homage to country rock and folk rock models such as the Band and Crosby, Stills and Nash.

John was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1994, and in 1998 he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. He received a Kennedy Center Honor in 2004.

**Sergei Prokofiev** (1891-1953) was born in the village of Sontsovka in the Donets region of the Ukraine.  He was a child prodigy on the order of Mozart, composing for piano at age five and writing an opera at nine.  His first teacher was his mother, a talented pianist.  He attended the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1904 to 1914, winning the Anton Rubinstein prize for best student pianist when he graduated.  He traveled widely, spending many years in London and Paris, and toured the United States five times.

In 1936, Prokofiev returned to settle permanently in the Soviet Union.  One of his first compositions after his return was *Peter and the Wolf*, written in just two weeks in April of 1936 for a children's theater in Moscow.  Prokofiev invented the story and wrote the narration himself, drawing on memories of his own childhood.  He constructed the music as a child's introduction to the orchestra, with each character in the story represented by a different instrument or group of instruments: Peter by the strings, the bird by the flute, the duck by the oboe, the cat by the clarinet, the wolf by the horn section, and so on.

*Peter and the Wolf*was an immediate success and has been loved by children all over the world.  The music is sophisticated enough to be enjoyed by adults, even through repeated hearings.  And its moral — you can't be a hero if you don't take risks — delights children as it must have cheered the composer.

**Scott Watson**

**Scott Watson** received his B.S., Music Education from West Chester University and his M.M and D.M.A., Composition from Temple University and has taught instrumental and elective music for 30 years in the Parkland School District (Allentown, Pennsylvania). An award-winning and frequently commissioned composer, Dr. Watson’s output includes more than 60 published works at all levels for concert band and orchestra. Watson’s music, which has been performed around the world and in the U.S. at such prestigious venues as Philadelphia’s Academy of Music (Philadelphia), the White House, and at the renowned Midwest Clinic (Chicago), has been described as “outstanding . . . with beautiful melodies and interesting harmonies" (The Instrumentalist) and "written with supreme craft" (Percussive Arts Society Percussive Notes).

His music has received awards and recognition from the American Composers Forum, the American Music Center, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, the Percussive Arts Society, and others. Recent commissions include works for: Composers and Schools in Concert (for a consortium of 12 university and high school bands across the U.S.), Magic Valley Symphony Orchestra (Twin Falls, ID), Albemarle County (VA) Middle School Honors Band, MusicAlliance Honor Band Camp (Cleveland, OH), Lehigh County (PA) Bandmasters Association, and the Massachusetts Instrumental and Choral Conductors Association.

In addition, he is a contributor to the Young Concert Band edition of Alfred Publishing’s Sound Innovations Ensemble Development Series. Watson has presented numerous workshops/clinics for music educators and frequently serves as guest conductor for honor band festivals (including the 2015 All New England Band Festival at Plymouth State University, NH). Additionally, Dr. Watson is an adjunct professor for a number of universities (Cairn University, University of the Arts, and Central Connecticut State University) and is the author of the highly regarded music education text, Using Technology to Unlock Musical Creativity (©2011, Oxford University Press).

***JOHN PHILIP SOUSA***

John Philip Sousa was born in Washington, DC on November 6, 1854. He was the third of ten children of John Antonio Sousa, a Portuguese immigrant, and Maria Elizabeth Trinkhaus, a German immigrant. His father played **trombone** in the U.S. Marine Band, which influenced John to begin studying music when he was six years old. He began studying **violin**, but eventually learned all the wind instruments. John Philip Sousa was very interested in being in a band, so when he was 13 years old, he tried to join a circus band. His attempt was unsuccessful and shortly afterwards, his father enlisted John in the Marine Band in Washington, D.C., where he stayed for 8 years.

In 1875, Sousa began performing as a **violinist**, going on tour and eventually landing positions as a theater orchestra conductor. It was in the theater that he met his wife, Jane Van Middlesworth Bellis who was a singer. They had 3 children who were musicians; John, Jane & Helen.

Sousa returned to conduct the Marine Band for 12 years, serving 5 Presidents. Also known as “The President’s Own,” the Marine Band became a premier military band under Sousa’s tutelage, making him one of America’s most respected conductors and composers. Known as “The March King,” Sousa composed over 100 marches, in addition to concert pieces, operettas, overtures and suites. On Christmas Day 1898, Sousa composed “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” which eventually became the U.S. national march.

He organized and conducted his own band called the "Sousa's New Marine Band." which toured Europe and sold out each venue.

During World War I, at the age of 62, Sousa joined the U.S. Navy Reserve as a lieutenant to train young bandsmen at the Great Lakes Navy Training Center. He was paid $1 per month.

Sousa was a staunch supporter of general music education in our schools, and often advocated for composers' rights. In 1893, Sousa worked in conjunction with J.W. Pepper to create a marching **tuba**. Dubbed a sousaphone, this **tuba** could be played in a standing or sitting position with the bell positioned to project the music over the band. In 1898, Conn created a model that Sousa preferred.

John Philip Sousa died on March 6, 1932, in his hotel room at the age of 77 in Reading, Pennsylvania. He had finished a rehearsal with the Ringgold Band a few hours earlier. The last piece he conducted in that rehearsal was “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” Eight years later, in 1940, the U.S. Postal Service issued a commemorative 2 cent stamp with Sousa’s image. (This bio was contributed by Mrs. Armstrong's 4th & 5th graders at Hammond Elem., Laurel, MD)