

# The March King and Taylor Swift Share Common Concerns

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John Philip Sousa (1864–1932), who was called the March King, and Taylor Swift have something in common: the two copyright owners expressed concern about the means of distributing their music. Swift, the phenomenally popular singer-songwriter, recently denied a music streaming service the right to distribute her new album *1989*, which was released in October. Instead, the album came out the old-fashioned way, that is, on CDs. It promptly sold more than 1.25 million copies. She and other singers and songwriters **claim** that the small fraction of a cent that they receive when someone streams their music does not fairly compensate them for the use of their copyrighted material.

John Philips Sousa in Marine Band uniform

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Sousa too felt that new technology was doing a disservice to his royalties as well as to the music of America. He was outspoken in his distaste for the lack of remuneration for composers and musicians after the introduction of piano rolls. It was not just minuscule royalties, it was no royalties that he decried. Those who used his music but did not pay—the music pirates—were those “**powerful corporations**” that manufactured and distributed “mechanical-recording apparatuses.” The result of this new technology, he said, was a decrease in royalties for composers and performers. He feared that without the incentive of reward for merit and labor, composers would not publish new music but would control their compositions in manuscript form.

A hit at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, Sousa’s New Band, which he formed after leaving his position as conductor of the Marine Band in 1892, inspired thousands to purchase sheet music and take it home to play on their own instruments. According to Sousa, Americans had more instruments than did the residents of any other country, and the multitude of instruments resulted in the employment of many instructors. America was the “**Mecca** toward which journey the artists of all nations,” he said.

But within a few years of the fair, he believed that not only was domestic music endangered, but also that amateur creation of music was in decline due to



A piano that played music from piano rolls.

the proliferation of mechanical devices that played music. Sousa coined the term “canned music” to refer to the sounds emanating from machines playing wax cylinder recordings.

In 1906 when **Congress was considering** whether to give copyright owners a monopoly over machines that could reproduce sound, Sousa **supported** the idea. But Congress adopted a compulsory license so that composers would receive compensation when their works were played.

Swift and Sousa would agree that new technology brings new challenges to composers, songwriters, and musicians. ©