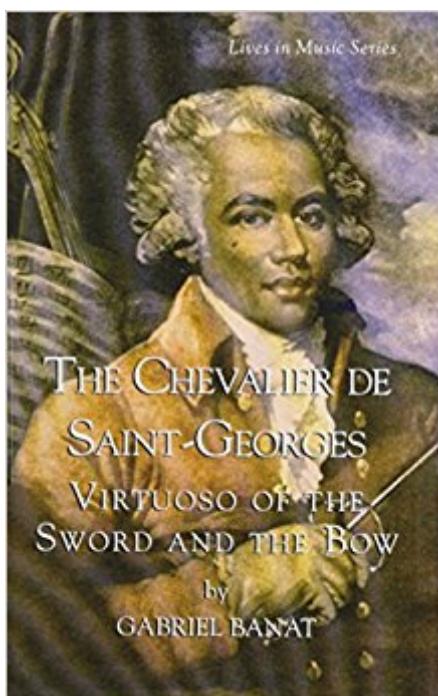


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# The Chevalier De Saint-Georges: Virtuoso Of The Sword And The Bow



## **Synopsis**

The Chevalier de Saint-Georges, born Joseph Boulogne, was the son of an African slave and a French plantation owner on the island of Guadeloupe. The story of his improbable rise in French society, his life as a famous fencer, celebrated violinist-composer and conductor, and later commander of a colored regiment in the French Revolution, should, on the facts alone, gladden the heart of the most passionate romance novelist. Yet, the information disseminated about this illustre inconnu is found in an extravagant nineteenth-century novel, which contains more fiction than fact. Unfortunately, many of the author's flights of fancy have found their way into serious works about Saint-Georges. Gabriel Banat has set about systematically dispelling the confusion, for the real story is easily as fascinating as any flight of fancy. Gabriel Banat has been a professional violinist all his life; recitalist and member of the New York Philharmonic, he has systematically scoured the violin repertory for interesting and even unknown music. He came across the works of St. Georges and was fascinated by the freshness and charm of these 18th-century compositions. Eventually, he edited a critical edition of all the violin music and, inevitably, began a systematic investigation into the life of this intriguing and multifaceted individual, utilizing archives of the French Land Army, official clippings and untapped personal diaries of St. Georges' contemporaries. Banat is the author of an authoritative monograph on St. Georges in the Black Music Research Journal.

## **Book Information**

Hardcover: 568 pages

Publisher: Pendragon Press; First Edition edition (August 17, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1576471098

ISBN-13: 978-1576471098

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 6.2 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #488,090 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #133 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Classical #1208 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Television Performers #1401 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Performing Arts > Music

## **Customer Reviews**

Must Read!!!! --Today's Books, Sept. 1, 2006 The life of Joseph Boulogne, known as the Chevalier

de Saint-George[s], is one of exceptional and fantastic color . . . Banat meticulously documents the composer's life . . . fully illuminating the entire period and offering safe speculations and scene painting that endow the biography with life. --Dominique-RenÃ© de Lerma, Chamber Music, December 2006 particularly welcome [...] Saint-Georges finally has a biographer who tries to give a sense of his place in music history. He has no patience with the romanticized biographies and fictionalized accounts of Saint-Georges's life, particularly those that have been published in France in recent years. --New York Review of Books, August 16, 2007

My reading is usually a mix of work related technical material, continuing education material and books related to Leadership themes. *Le Chevalier du Georges* is the MOST comprehensive and exhaustive 'biography' I have read to date. Rarely do I read a book twice. Once I started reading this book, I couldn't put it down! It was so rich and vast in the depth and description of this man's life...there were times I found myself re-reading a chapter; section or passage over and over again. It's interesting to me a 'new' copy of this book is cheaper than a 'used' copy, an indication the content of this book continues to appreciate. A second printing is seriously needed. The talent, barriers, hardships and accomplishments this man experienced is truly awe inspiring and heart breaking. His contributions to 'classical music' remain unacknowledged, his swordsmanship...no one has passed to date! His personal losses include instances most of us probably wouldn't survive yet he remained dynamic and continued to produce. Truly, this is one of 'those books' when you're done reading it, you never see the world as you saw it before again. Posthumously, the French have named a boulevard after Saint Georges, much like we have named avenues after Martin Luther King Jr. or, Ceasar Chavez. The book is rich in identifying de Georges relationship and history to Haiti which in turn reveals history of Haiti most of us never knew. Since reading this book I've bought it twice for others. All three of us claim it is one of the top five books we'd take to an island or grave. It's just that good of a book. Read it fast or slow you'll learn fantastic information and history in each page.

*The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the Sword and the Bow* is the biography of Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799), the illegitimate son of a French planter and a young African slave. Educated in France, his skill in fencing and amazing talent as a violin virtuoso earned him a distinguished place in French high society and the court of Versailles; yet he was not content to simply bask in court life, choosing to support the abolitionist movement, take part in the Haitian slave revolt, and join the French Revolution in the hope of ending slavery. Considered the first

classical composer of African descent, his music is best understood in the context of his vivid life. Black-and-white photographs, illustrations, and sample scores, and reproductions of primary source documents round out this in-depth study of a singularly remarkable musician, politician, and fighter.

The second half of the 18th century from St. Petersburg to St. Louis was a socio-political mess as men and women of faith and courage strove to overthrow the imperial tyrannies oppressing their lives and stultifying their cultures. Supported by his white planter father and adored by his black slave mother, Joseph Bologne, born on Guadeloupe, captivated the Court and Parisian society by his extraordinary fencing ability and musical genius. Nor did it hurt that he was both handsome and intelligent. His violin playing, his original compositions, and his orchestral conducting assure him a place among the handful of outstanding musicians between Bach and Mozart. His military acumen and his political idealism on behalf of the downtrodden not only in France but also in Haiti made him a distinguished brigade commander in the Revolutionary army and led him, at the pain of a long imprisonment, to help stop The Terror. At the end of his life, the world he had bedazzled was gone and the world he had hoped to establish was falling to Napoleonic power. The sad, powerful tale of this romantic hero's life and genius is all movingly here in Banat's scrupulous research and genuine affection--just waiting for an intrepid director and a first-rate actor to make a brilliant film that would really speak to our time.

One of the problems in researching Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges is separating fact from fiction, due to the popular myths propagated beginning with Roger de Beauvoir, and continuing with Alexandre Dumas (fils). These and other semi-factual accounts of Le Chevalier's life led many to believe that it served as the basis for the character D'Artagnan in The Three Musketeers. In contrast to these myths, surviving well into the twentieth century, Mr. Banat's thoroughly researched study is factual. Banat, a retired violinist from the New York Philharmonic and a specialist on the violin works of Mozart, is ideally positioned to understand the significance of this historical figure. It turns out that Le Chevalier was a major contributor to the symphony concertante genre, until recently thought to be Mozart's creation. As a musician, Le Chevalier was a violinist and composer, mastering the classical style and creating multiple compositions for orchestra and violin that remain underrepresented in the academic and performance Canon today. Not only a prominent musician and athlete of his day, Le Chevalier was one of several African descendants who made important contributions to European elite culture. Born in Guadeloupe to a French plantation owner and his enslaved mother, Le Chevalier was educated in France, with substantial periods in England, where

he was a champion fencer. In the latter part of his life, Le Chevalier became highly involved in the Haitian Revolution. Mr. Banat began his study on Le Chevalier with an original article from the 1980s. Twenty years later, Banat's recent book reflects his dedication and enthusiasm toward his subject matter. The extensive documentation he provides for his assertions makes him the authority on Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges.

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