



# The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the Sword and the Bow

*Gabriel Banat*

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The Chevalier de Saint-Georges, born Joseph Bologne, 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.

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