
**JOSEPH BOULOGNE, THE CHEVALIER DE ST GEORGE:
MUCH FORGOTTEN BLACK COMPOSER OF THE 18TH CENTURY
FRANCE**

*JOSEPH BOULOGNE, THE CHEVALIER DE ST GEORGE:
18. YÜZYIL FRANSA'SININ UNUTULMUŞ SİYAHÎ BESTECİSİ*

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Abstract: Joseph Boulogne, the Chevalier de St George is one of the interesting and fascinating characters of the 18th century France. He was one of the first black musicians of his time. He was a master of fencing, a classical music composer, personal music teacher to Marie Antoinette, an active abolitionist and a colonel to the Legion of Saint Georges, the first black regiment formed in France and Europe. The aim of this research to introduce this mostly forgotten and underestimated violinist and composer to the reader. Among the research done in the course of this work, very little information was found in Turkish about this black composer. To be precise a badly translated version of what is found on Wikipedia. It is hoped that this black composer will be introduced and his works will be of interest to the readers.

Key Words: 18th century French classical music, Joseph Boulogne the Chevalier de St George, Violin virtuoso, black composers

Öz: Joseph Boulogne, the Chevalier de St George 18. yüzyıl Fransa'sının ve batı klasik müzik dünyasının ilk siyahî müzisyenlerinden birisidir. Çok tanınan bir kılıç ustası, klasik müzik bestecisi, Maire Antoinette'in müzik hocası, aktif olarak ırkçılığa karşı savaşmış bir birey ve Fransa'da ve Avrupa'da kurulan ilk siyahî birlik olan Legion de Saint George'un ilk komutanı. Bu araştırmanın amacı bu çok yönlü siyahî besteciyi müzik severlere tanıtmaktır. St.George hakkında Türkçe kaynaklar araştırıldığında, Wikipedia sayfasından son derece kötü bir çeviri ile Türkçe'ye aktarılmış bir yazıdan fazlası bulunamamıştır. Bu çalışmamızla St George'u ve eserlerini klasik müzik dünyasına ve icracılara tanıtmak amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 18. Yüzyıl Fransa'sında Klasik Müzik, Joseph Boulogne the Chevalier de St George, Keman Virtüözleri, Siyahî Besteciler

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2020 Searchlight Pictures announced plans for a film on the life of Joseph Boulogne, the Chevalier de St George-from now on he will be referred to as St George. There have been other documentaries about the life of St George using a much-contested title 'Black Mozart' or 'Mozart Noire'. To many present-day musicologists this moniker is unjustified and should not be used for a very accomplished composer. The discussions on this issue will be taken in the later pages of this research.

Joseph Boulogne, the Chevalier de St George is one of the interesting and fascinating characters of the 18th century. He was a master of fencing, a classical music composer, a master violinist, personal music teacher to Marie Antoinette, an active abolitionist, accomplished equestrian, a great marksman, an elegant dancer, and a colonel to the Legion of Saint Georges, the first black regiment formed in France and Europe in short, a well-known man of his time. How did St George achieve all these? Was it easy? Of course not. He was a mulatto-a child of a black mother and a white father. The following research will try to shed light to his life story and his classical works.

2. LIFE STORY OF CHEVALIER DE ST GEORGE

2.1. Becoming a Gentlemen Through and Through: St George's Life as a Gentlemen of the Court

Monsieur Boëssière, the owner of the one of the most prestigious fencing schools for boys, was shocked when received Monsieur George de Boulogne de St George with his son Joseph de Boulogne. He is disturbed in the sense that this wealthy and well-connected West Indies plantation owner had brought his son who is a mulatto. Even though the situation was unusual, Boëssière, could not deny admittance to this child. George de Boulogne, make clear that he wanted his son to have the best education this institution could offer to his son.

Monsieur Boëssière introduces St George to the group so students who would be working and studying together. Most of these boys knew about the French colonies and understand that there would be people of color. However, they most probably never thought that they would see one among themselves. All stare at him with interest and resent except one, Lamotte. Lamotte, admires this tall and strong looking boy, a mulatto, and introduces himself. From that day the two became inseparable friends of a lifetime.¹

¹ Walter E. Smith, *The Black Mozart: Le Chevalier de Saint Georges*, Author House, Bloomington, Indiana 2004, p. 7.

This anecdote above tells the story of St George's introduction to the French society, or the beginning of his life in France. We know very little of his life until his arrival to France. St George was born on the island of Guadeloupe ruled by the French in the 18th century. He was the son of a white, rich, aristocratic plantation owner George Boulogne and La belle Nanon, a beautiful black slave. The date of his birth is not very clear. Due to the fact that good records had not been kept, there are several dates assumed to be his, 1739, 1745, 1747, 1748. However, some of the leading scholars have found enough evidence that he was actually born in 1745. Although St George's mother was a slave, her son Joseph, was not. His father has acknowledged him as his son and he was not treated like a slave. He was taught music and fencing by his father and led a good life on the island. There are more records of his life in France after he has arrived on the mainland. While he lived on the island, St George probably did not realize that he would have to survive in a world dominated by whites like his father. He would not have anticipated, at that young age that being the son of a black woman could and would follow of all throughout his life.

Sr. George stays at Boëssière Academy until the age of nineteen. During the time he has spent in the Academy, he excels in all his classes. He proves that he is good in literature, mathematics and sciences. The academy insists on training the boys in all physical sports and the arts such as dancing and music. St George has shown a talent for the violin from early age on. It is a wonder that he has mastered such a difficult instrument with great finesse. He continues to advance levels with his violin studies. Furthermore, he is a good runner, a rider and a marksman. However, what he excels in is fencing. At nineteen, he is very athletic and good at every sport. La Boëssière, fencing master, Master of Arms of the Academy of the King, Louis XV has given St George the greatest praise. In his book *Traité de L'Art Des Armes* (The Treatise on the Art of Fencing) he wrote; "Saint-Georges was endowed with extraordinary strengths, with extraordinary vigor. Lively, flexible, slender, he was astonishing by his alertness. No one ever in the art of fencing displayed more grace, more steadiness".²

His acumen as a fencing prodigy was evident from the early days on. He was only seventeen years old when he met the fencing master Alexandre Picard in Ruen. Picard publicly mocked him by calling him "Boëssière's mulatto". This match divided the public into partisans and opponents of slavery. There were huge bets

² Walter E. Smith, *ibid*, p. 15.

made on this competition. When Boulogne beat Picard he became an instant success with the free thinkers in France. His father who was proud of his son gifted him a horse and a carriage.

Shortly after he left the Boiserie's Academy, St George joined the Musketeers. Unfortunately, the prejudices against blacks and racist comments of his fellow musketeers forced him to resign his commission. Some of his biographers refute that he has even been a musketeer. Nevertheless, because he was the son of an aristocrat in 1766 when he graduated from the Royal Polytechnique Academy, he was made a *Gendarme du roi* (officer of the king's bodyguard) and a consequently a chevalier which he used as his name from that day on; "Chevalier de Saint-Georges".³

Around the same time, he was also appointed as an esquire to the Duchess of Orleans, the wife and the brother of King Louis XVI. In this position he has gained an influential friend and protector in the person of Duke of Orleans. Following the death of the Duke, St George continued his friendly relations with his son, the Duke of Chartres. These royal connections were important in advancement of his career as a fencing master and a musician in pre-revolutionary France.

Louise Fusil, an actress and one of St George's lifetime friends praised him not only for his fencing and riding skills but also because he presented a good model for young aristocrats and sportsman. According to Fusil, he was invited to dances and balls and was very popular among the ladies. He was a handsome man with kind and impeccable manners which contributed to his popularity.⁴

St George, with letters of introduction from his influential friends were admitted to the English aristocracy. He was in London giving fencing exhibitions. However, the most notable event of his stay in England was his match with the mysterious Chevalier d'Eon in 1787. Chevalier d'Eon was an enigma to most who knew him or her. Nobody really knew of his/her gender. The well-known fencing master sometimes wore male and sometimes females' clothes.

The two fencing masters met in Carlton house in the presence of his royal highness Prince Regent, later King George IV. This exhibition match, where d'Eon wore petticoats dressed as a woman, was immortalized by the royal painter of the time, Robineau, which still hangs in Buckingham Palace. The match was declared a win for d'Eon. However, she declared that her opponent held back gallantly and let her win. St George knew that D'Eon needed the money from this exhibition match.

³ Walter E. Smith, *ibid*, p. 26.

⁴ Gabriel Banat, *The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the Sword and The Bow*, Pendragon Press, New York, New York 2006, p. 90.

Nevertheless, he denied throwing the fight bowing to the superior strength of his lady opponent.⁵

It was during this visit that St George had his portrait painted by an American painter, Mather Brown. In this portrait he appears with his violin and music in the background. In his hand he has his foil instead of the expected bow. The painting portrays St George in his two best characteristics; a musician and a fencing master. He has given this portrait to his good friend Henry Angelo, who saved it from the Covent Garden when the opera house burned down. Today this painting appears in many works covering St George's life or his music.

The good life St George enjoyed as close friends to the English and French aristocracy lasted until the French revolution. He has had close relations to the French royal house, functioning as a teacher to the Queen Marie Antoinette and enjoying patronage of the house of Orleans.

2.2. St George's Later Life

St George had suffered and was affected by the racism and racist laws which were employed by the monarchy. France had colonies in the Caribbean islands and Africa. There were immigrants who came to France for various reasons. The increasing number of people of color gave rise to government concerns and attempts In 1762 King Louis XV decreed that all blacks and people of color should register with the Admiralty. Pierre Bardin⁶ explains how few people could cross over the barrier of racial prejudice and join the middle classes. The law prohibited interracial marriages. This is probably why St George never married even though he was popular among the ladies.

When his father died in 1765, he has bequeathed Anne Nanon, St George's mother now a free black women three thousand pounds. He also left his son, St George, the Royal Guard to the King and his advisor fifty thousand pounds. The handsome some left by his father and the income from the plantation in Guadeloupe gave St George a comfortable life where he could pursue his military and music career.

⁵ Gabriel Banat, "Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Man of Music and Gentleman-at-Arms: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Prodigy", *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 10 (2), 1990, p. 182. <https://doi.org/10.2307/779385> (22.06.2021).

⁶ Pierre Bardin, *Généalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe [Genealogy and History of the Caribbean]*, 2015. <http://www.ghcaraibe.org/articles/2015-art01.pdf> (22.06.2021).

The racism was not the only social problem in France. The peasant classes were uneasy and in poverty. Furthermore, France since Louis XIV has been involved in many wars. Seventy-five percent of the French budget was spent on military expenses. The French ministers of finance tried to increase the budget by taxing without much success. Additionally, Louis XV and Louis XVI were not very competent rulers. They were inapt in coping with the increasing displeasure and unrest among the crowds. France was fast approaching crisis.

Even though it did not happen overnight, French Revolution started in 1789 when the crowds attacked the Bastille and set prisoner free. This was the beginning of a Revolution which led to periods of chaos and unrest for about ten years. St George who has had suffer the brunt of racism was affected by the revolution. Since he was always referred as mulatto and had to put off with the racist attitudes of pre-revolutionary France, he welcomed the new laws that gave equal rights to all French people. He was a republican at heart.⁷

In 1792 France was at war with Prussia and Austria. St George wanted to offer his services asked the National Assembly to grant him permission to establish a corps comprised of people of color. The National Assembly allowed St George this honor. He, promoted colonel, recruited brave black and free immigrants into this Legion later to be Legion of St George. His lieutenant colonel was Alexander Dumas who was to become a distinguished general in the army of Napoleon and father to one of the well-known writers of French literature, Alexander Dumas père.⁸

St George distinguished himself as a great military leader and was successful in fighting in Belgium. However, without any fault of his own France started losing and St George was criticized for the losses incurred. In 1790 he was accused of being a non-revolutionary and was prisoned for eighteen months. This must have been a great blow to him since he had always supported the revolutionary causes. To be labeled as 'a man to be watched' on hearsay. St George, in a way, was a victim of troublesome post-revolutionary political unrest. When his name was cleared even though he petitioned several times and wanted his command post back, he was never allowed to resume his military career or join his comrades in arms.

His next move was to try to embrace his roots and find out what was happening with his father's plantation. He, with his faithful friend Lamotte, went to his birth place Guadalupe. However, the scene he has met there was even more chaotic. His native people were fighting against the French. The situation was very confusing.

⁷ Gabriel Banat, *ibid*, p. 180-189.

⁸ Gabriel Banat, *ibid*, p. 179.

Blacks, mulattoes and free man changed sides constantly siding with French, English or the Spaniards. St George found out that his father's plantation in ruins. He and his friend Lamotte barely escaped the island with their life and returned to France in 1797. Still trying to pursue music career he died in 1799.

3. ST GEORGE: THE VIRTUOSO, THE COMPOSER AND THE CONDUCTOR

3.1. The Background to the 18th Century Music Scene in France

France learned of the violin as an instrument when Catherine de Medici introduced the instrument to the court of Henri II of France. Parisians appreciated fort his Italian import. As time went on the liking became more of a passion. By the time Louis XIII came the throne, French kings were patrons of violin players and instrumental in forming violin groups. By mid-eighteen century Parisians considered violin the most developed and perfect instrument. Audiences appreciated violin virtuosos and many composers their own work. These performances took place in public or private concert halls. Italian violinist such as Jean-Baptiste Lully and Jean-Baptiste Viotti stood as the pioneers of classic French school of violin playing (La Laurencie and Matens, 1919). In due course France started to have her own violin virtuosos. Among them were Guillemain who came from Paris but there were many others who came from provinces like Mondonville and Vachon. One of the violinists who conquered the French capital came from one of the French colonies, the Antilles. This violinist composer, St George, was a mulatto, meaning of mixed parentage of black and white mixed races. Most of these names in the violin scene were later lost and forgotten except Kreutzer or Gavinies because they produced technical studies that are still used today.⁹

During the reign of Louis XIV, music was under the control of the king. Private patron of music formed their own orchestras, conductors and composer following the king's footsteps. The courts of dukes of Maine, Conti and Orleans were among the most important elaborate musical establishments. The concerts given in their halls were private and only the circle of the hosts could hear the music. However, the bourgeois also wanted to share the pleasure of listening to these private concerts.

⁹ Leonel de La Laurencie, Frederick H. Martens, "The Chevalier de Saint-George: Violinist", *The Musical Quarterly*, 5(1), 1919, p. 75-76.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/737927> (22.06. 2021).

The need to provide musical events during religious holidays when the opera and theaters were closed. The *Concert Spirituel* was the first of series of musical events that were attended by the public. Originally the music used were vocal and concentrated on religious subject. Nevertheless, in time orchestral music began to be played in these concerts. Since the *Concert Spirituel* was the first symphonic institution in Europe, its concerts were covered by the press. The repertoire included Italian and French opera overtures and instrumental concertos. This set up made is possible for violin virtuosos to prove themselves to the critical Parisian audiences. In these concerts composer also had the chance to play their own compositions. Furthermore, Paris became the center for music publishers.¹⁰

It was in in such a musical environment that St George emerged in the French classical music scene.

3.2. St George Emerges in the Parisian Music Scene: The Virtuoso and the Conductor

There is little documentation about St George's musical training or studies during his formative years. As it has been mentioned before his life before he came to Paris is not documented. Musicologist who have written about his life and music (La Laurincie and Martens, 1919; de Lerma, 1976; Banat, 1990, 2006; Smith, 2004; Garnier-Panafieu, 2011; Ledford, 2019; Balter, 2020) agree on the fact that he has had formal training while he was at La Boëssière's school where he received the type of education fit for aristocrats. He studied the violin with Jean Marie Leclair. Leclair knew that his student was exceptional and probably was to become one of the best of his time. There are also claims that Lolli, the Italian violinist could also be one of his violin teachers. It was in 1766 that St George officially began studying composition under Joseph Gossec.¹¹

Joseph Gossec who was the prominent figure in St George's music career was from Belgium. He has been active in Paris since 1751. He had organized concerts given by the wealthy tax collector Le Riche de La Pouplinière. Gossec has been one of the key figures in the development of symphony in France. He has great respect and admiration for St George's talent. This is known from the fact that Gossec dedicated one of his works to St George, Opus IX, six trios for two violins and bass.¹²

¹⁰ Gabriel Banat, *ibid*, p. 186-187.

¹¹ Walter E. Smith, *ibid*, p. 17.

¹² Gabriel Banat, *The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the Sword and The Bow*, p. 120.

Gossec founded the *Concert des Amateurs* in 1769, he invited St George to join the orchestra. Dominique De Larma¹³ warns us that the term “Amateur” in the name of the orchestra means “Love” rather than meaning lower level of professionalism. This very illustrious orchestra housed a string section of forty violins-a number that probably included the violas-, twelve cellos, and eight basses, besides winds.¹⁴

During his years as a member of the *Concert des Amateurs*, St George concentrated on his composition. He has introduced two of his violin concertos to the public as the violin soloist in 1772. Le Mercure, a Parisian periodical, reported that “*These concertos were played last winter at the Concert of Amateurs by the author himself and were received with the greatest applause as much for the merit of execution of playing, as for that of the composition*”.¹⁵ His execution of his own works and the works of other composers was received favorably. A violinist of his time Marie Fauquet has written that St George “*acquired the mastery over his technique and sonority early on to an extent that his velvety talent on the violin sometimes gave him preference over the cleverest artists of his day*”.¹⁶ *Concert des Amateurs* performed at the town house of the Prince de Soubise (today the National Archives) with St George as the concertmaster. His musical talents were encouraged by his participation. Since he was a gentleman and had private means of income, he remained an amateur in the orchestra without expecting payment for his performance.

Gossec conducted and managed the *Concert des Amateurs* for four years. He was to conduct *Concert Spirituel* along with Gaviniés, the violinist, and Le Duc. When Gossec resigned from his post as the conductor of *Concert des Amateurs* he handed his orchestra to his student St George who continued to play the first violin and conducted at the same time. St George conducted with authority and ‘fine nuances’ and was respected by his fellow musicians. The quality of music produced

¹³ Dominique de Larma, “The Chevalier de Saint-Georges”, *The Black Perspective in Music*, 4(1), 1976, p. 6. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1214399> (22.06.2021).

¹⁴ Claude Ribbe, *Le Blog de Claude Ribbe* [Claude Ribbe’s Blog], 2010. <http://www.claude-ribbe.com/dotclear/index.php?2010/10/09/220-le-mystere-de-larue-du-chevalier-de-saint-george> (22.06.2021).

¹⁵ Walter E. Smith, *The Black Mozart: Le Chevalier de Saint Georges*, p. 31.

¹⁶ Michelle Garnier-Panafieu, *Un Contemporain Atypique de Mozart: Le chevalier de Saint-George* [An Atypical Contemporary of Mozart: The Chevalier of Saint George], YP Éditions, Paris 2016, p.43.

under his direction was well received and praised as the “the best orchestra for symphonies there is in Paris, and perhaps, in Europe”.¹⁷

St George combined his duties as a conductor with his compositions. In the years 1773-1775, he produced 8 violin concertos and 2 symphonie concertantes. Symphonie concertante has become very popular as a new form around the time St George became part of the Parisian scene. His name became associated with this new French form of concerto.¹⁸ explains that this new form is a ‘a cross between the baroque concerto grosso and the instrumental solo concerto’. The form pleased the public since it offered not only one but two or more soloist who were competing with each other as they were also competing with the orchestra. This kind of performance, may be compared to a duel, fueled public imagination. The success of this form and St George’s brilliance made the music publisher, Bailleux, to take a six-year option on symphoinc concertances.

In the year 1775 to 1785 different Paris publishes printed nine and may be as many as twelve violin concertos, eight simphonie concertantes and two symphonies. St George also produced six string quartets and three sonatas for keyboard and the violin. Of six solo violin sonatas with a second violin he composed in this period, only three were published, posthumously in 1800, by Pleyel. A sonata for flute and harp and a piece for guitar, published in the *Journal de la Guitarre* in 1791, complete Saint-Georges's known list of instrumental works Banat.¹⁹ (1990, 1888).

3.2.1. A Closer Look into St George’s Instrumental Works

Laurincie and Martens²⁰ in their analysis of St George’s instrumental works divide them into three: The quartets, The concertos and symphonie concertantes and the sonatas.

The six quartets for string instruments that St George composed follow two pattern that eighteenth-century composers used; Allegro and Rondo. As an unusual approach St George used all four instruments in his quartets in a more equal fashion. This is not expected if we consider the dominance of the violin in other string quartets of the period.

¹⁷ Gabriel Banat, “Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Man of Music and Gentleman-at-Arms: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Prodigy”, p. 186.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 178.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 188.

²⁰ Leonel de La Laurencie, Frederick H. Martens, *ibid*, p. 81.

St George's quartets were written in a flowing style very clear with sentimentality that a mulatto might have felt. Laurincie and Martens give as an example, the beginning of the graceful and tender rondo of the second quartet, "delicate and enwrapped in the cajoling and swaying sonorities of the accompanying instruments".²¹



Image 1. Chevalier de St George Rondeau di Menuetto²²

St George follows the usual three-compartment framework for his concertos: A medial Adagio or Largo as most of his concertos finish with a Rondeau. In all his works St George demonstrates grace and a little touch of his Creole ease. He likes to repeat his themes and in the second time in a lower octave.

The first two of his concertos were written two years before Mozart wrote his violin concertos in Salzburg. Banat explains that "they are in three movements, more "galant" than "rococo" in style, full of Parisian appeal. The emphasis here is not on

²¹ Leonel de La Laurencie, Frederick H. Martens, *ibid*, p. 80.

²² *Ibid*, p. 82

*depth of meaning but verve and charm overwhelm the listener.” They reflect bravado of the composer's personality. “The slow movements have an affecting quality, some of them being enhanced by an occasional augmented second in the minor key, evoking an exotic Creole atmosphere. The Rondeaux all have a minore section (as in Mozart's third and fifth concertos), suggesting a similar nostalgic mood, in contrast with the typically galant style of the movement. Except for the above-mentioned portions in minor keys, Saint-Georges's musical invention does not stand out among his colleagues”.*²³

Unfortunately, there is only one symphonie concertant of the composer has survived to our day in G major. As the rule dictated it has two movements: and Allegro and a Randeau. It is necessary to emphasize that St George's symphonies concertants bridges and connects the violin technique of the violinist-composers of the late baroque period to the technique of the nineteenth century romantics. It is the opinion of the musicologists that St George's style of virtuosity leads directly to Beethoven and beyond.²⁴

St George's sonatas have the expected two movements, however, offer the violin an independent role. He deviates from the classical mode and assigns a major role to the violin. The violin is not narrowed down to the role of an accompanying instrument, rather it is a collaborator in the thematic exposition and development of the work. His third sonata contains a violin part where the instrument assumes its highest position in the very effective passage. His break from the traditional baroque in a manner emphasis the argument that he was in a new age in music.²⁵ Around the time that St George was composing for the violin, there has been a racial change in the design of the violin bow.²⁶ This change influenced the style of violin playing in France and subsequently in England. The bow's arch became more concave and enabled the violin player to produce fast strokes to the strings. This resulted in a stronger and more aggressive tone. It is clear that this change is responsible for the finesse in St George's violin technique. He could cross the strings with precision and speed using his bow like he would his rapier.

St George though a great violinist and composer is relatively famous. One encyclopedia Thomspson 1985 gives him three line. The most important German Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart has more than a page for him. More

²³ Gabriel Banat, “Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Man of Music and Gentleman-at-Arms: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Prodigy”, p. 190.

²⁴ Ibid, 190.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 188.

²⁶ Gabriel Banat, *Masters of Violin*, Ed. Johnson Reprint, New York 1981, Vol. 3, p. xiii-xiv.

ironically the French Encyclopedie de la Musique does not mention in the main body of the encyclopedia but just like an afterthought mentions him in the addendum.²⁷

One of the reasons for this neglect stems from the fact that St George abandoned his instrumental compositions and decided to go into opera. He was about thirty years old and in the height of his creativity when he made this decision.

3.2.2. St George and the Opera

St George has established himself as a composer and a brilliant conductor by 1776. He was considered for the post of assistant director at the Opera. The Paris Opera had been in financial difficulties for years. Avoiding the political power plays that took place in the Paris opera it is sufficient to say that there was great prestige and power behind the closed doors. When St George was considered for the post of assistant director for the Opera, some members of the Opera-several singers and a dancer, Miles Guimart, Amould, Rosalie, and other demi-mondaines, with some powerful protectors behind them- addressed a petition to the queen: "their honor and the delicate nature of their conscience, could never allow them to submit to the orders of a mulatto".²⁸

This type of racial attitude must have affected St George. He did not appeal to the Queen whom he was teaching and performing music for. He did not want to show negative reactions. Only he moved on. He knew that he had talent and moved on. Since he was accepted by many in the society being a mulatto did not affect him that much.

Moving on with his life, St George produced his first opera *Ernestine*, in 1777 at the Theatre des Italiens. At the time he was still the director of *Concert des Amateurs*. His first attempt in opera was not successful. Ernestine lasted only one performance. St George was not discouraged with this outcome at all. He produced his next opera *La Chasse* (the Hunt). This one was received better than his first attempt. There were four performances which was normal for that period. His third opera *La Fille Garçon* suffered the same faith as *Ernestine*. Even though his music was praised the libretto was instrumental in these failures. In the next ten years St

²⁷ Gabriel Banat, "Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Man of Music and Gentleman-at-Arms: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Prodigy", p. 203.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 194.

George composed five comic operas. With exception of one, *L'Amant Anonyme* (Anonymous Lover) all have been lost.²⁹

The aristocrats of the time loved to patron the arts. Nobles of the highest rank employed or protected singers, actors and musicians for their performances. The only stipulation was that these performances would take place their own private theatres and homes.

Paris housed such private theatres. One of the most prestigious one as the one owned by Mme de Montesson. She was cousin the King Louis XVI, and was married to Duke of Orleans. She also liked to appear in the production in her own homes. She offered the position of musical director to St George who was a great musician as well as an elegant and sociable gentleman. This position was a lucrative one. St George received a good income from his endeavors with Mme de Montesson. Working with Mme Montesson, St George worked not only as a conductor, composer or a violinist but also as an actor. He conducted concerts and directed play where Mme Montesson and he would occasionally appeared on the stage.³⁰

St George thus was introduced into the artistic and noble circles of the Royal Palace because of his relation with Duke of Orleans as aforementioned. Duke of Orleans was his friend and protector. In 1779, Saint-Georges was appointed as the musician with *Concert Particuliers* of the Queen, Marie Antoinette, as the second violinist.³¹

St George has never been so occupied with so many responsibilities during these years. He still conducted the *Concert des Amateurs*, worked with Mme Montesson, taught the Queen and continued his compositions. He was in a position where he was asked to help introduce composers outside France to the French public. Count Nicholas Eszterhazy, Haydn's employer and through his friend Count Oigny ensured that Haydn's symphonies were performed in France. St George conducted them for the first time. The fourth set of Haydn's symphonies were also attended by Marie Antoinette.³²

When his friend and protector Duke of Orleans died in 1785, St George became friends with his son Philippe, Duke of Chartres who later became Duke of Orleans, later called Philippe Égalite. Their relationship was more of political nature

²⁹ Gabriel Banat, *The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the sword and the bow*, Pendragon Press, p. 177.

³⁰ Walter E. Smith, *The Black Mozart: Le Chevalier de Saint Georges*, Author House, Bloomington, Indiana, 2004, p. 35-36.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 43

³² Gabriel Banat, "Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Man of Music and Gentleman-at-Arms: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Prodigy", p. 199.

than artistic. Since his income has lessened with the death of elder royals, St George organized a second trip to London. His trip was not as successful as the first one and he did not receive favors from the Prince Regent.³³

When he returned the French Revolution was in full swing. Even though the Revolution did not stop musical event, it certainly diminished the extent of the musical performances.

3.2.3. St George and Mozart

In the course of this paper, it is necessary to have a special section on the relationship between St George and Mozart. Duchen³⁴ labels St George as the man who got under Mozart's skin. What is written by Duchen could be pure conjecture and hearsay. The story is still interesting enough to relate in these pages. Especially, if we consider the fact that in today's world St George-justifiably or not- named after Mozart as the Black Mozart.

The reader needs to remember that opera stories need be taken with a grain of salt and disbelief. Even so Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* gives food for thought. Despite the beauty of its music, one of the most disgusting and villainous character in the opera named Monostatos is black. Why would Mozart and his librettist, Emanuel Schikaneder, create a black character at all? The following might offer an explanation.

In 1778 Mozart was in Paris with his mother. He was 22 years old and was trying to establish a career for himself. His father Leopold wrote to him and included the *Concert des Amateurs* in a list of possible commissions for him in Paris. Music in Paris revolved around the Palace where Louis XVI had assumed the throne with his Queen Marie Antoinette. Mozart had met the Queen in Austria when she was a princess and he was 6 years old.³⁵

It was difficult of Mozart to be accepted by the French society which Mozart did not like at all. He found the French "frightfully arrogant", was "appalled by their general immorality" and felt "they understand nothing about music" (Duchen, 2016).

³³ *Ibid*, p. 199.

³⁴ Jessica Duchen, "Chevalier de Saint-Georges: The man who got under Mozart's skin", *The Independent*, 2016.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/features/chevalier-de-saintgeorges-the-man-who-got-under-mozart-s-skin-a6859191.ht> (22. 06. 2021).

³⁵ Julian A.Ledford, "Joseph Boulogne, the Chevalier de Saint-George and the Problem with Black Mozart", *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. (1), 2020, p. 77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934719892239> (22.06, 2021).

One of the prominent members in the Palace was St George eleven years Mozart's senior. Baron von Grimm, writer, diplomat and secretary to the Duke of Orleans was their common contact. When Mozart and his mother arrived in Paris, the Baron was eager to serve as his mentor and manager.

In July of 1778 Mozart's mother Maria Anna died. Mozart was dispirited, depressed, was in mourning and lonely. Even though Baron Grimm was trying to console the young composer it was not enough. To a grieving Mozart, St George popular and well accepted was a source of jealousy. When St George conducted one of the best-known orchestras of Europe *Le Concert des Amateurs*, Mozart had to be satisfied with the much inferior rendering of his works by the *Concert Spirituel*. In a manner of speaking Mozart had all the reason to feel resentment against this successful mulatto colleague, feasible in the racist society of his day. This might explain the creation of a black vindictive and evil sidekick of an evil Queen, Monostatos.³⁶

While discussing the interaction between St George and Mozart, it is necessary to comment on the moniker use for St George: The Black Mozart. De Larne³⁷ argues that it is not fair to refer to St George as a Black Mozart or for that matter as Black Haydn. St George came from a different cultural and musical background. He was a Frenchman as opposed to the Austrian composer. The impropriety of using such a racial term to describe musician also demonstrates the ignorance of both French music and of Haydn and Mozart.

Ledford³⁸ argues that the only good that would come out of naming St George as the Black Mozart would be for commercial reasons. This moniker would be good selling point for St. George's who is being discovered anew in the late 20th century.

4. CONCLUSION

Most of his contemporaries report that St George had a gentle and tender nature sometimes given to quick temper. He was very good with children and often acted as a philanthropist to the aged and the ill. He was considered and eccentric when it came to his clothes and wore a different one each day. He was popular within the society and never vindictive.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 79

³⁷ Dominique de Larne, *ibid*, p. 17.

³⁸ Julian A.Ledford, *ibid*, p. 81.

He was loyal to his friends as his friend were loyal to him. Saint-Georges's friend, Louise Fusil, whose memoirs *Souvenirs d'une Actrice* (1841) speak of him with genuine affection. According to Louise Fusil, Saint-Georges and Lamote -his friend from his earlier days at the Academy- were inseparable companions. Lamote was a horn player by his own right. The fact that St George was the better sportsman and musician of the two they had been good friend throughout their lives. Lamotte went wherever St George went even to the troublesome West Indies in times of civil war.

La Boessiere, his fencing mentor, emphasized that "in spite of his great skill, he never hurt anybody in a fencing contest" (Banat, 1990, 208). He also went to great lengths to prevent fighting duels foisted on him by others, which only his reputation as a superior swordsman allowed him to do without being branded a coward.

In his final years, when he returned from the West Indies with Lamotte, he went back to his real calling in life: music. He was a real eighteenth century man who loved the arts. He conducted the orchestra of the *Cercle de l'Harmonie*. The Cercle was an exclusive club located in the Palais Royal. The club offered entertainments such as chess, dining, and concerts. *Mercure*, the French periodical reported that these concerts under the direction of the "famous Saint-Georges, left nothing to be desired for the choice of pieces and superiority of execution".³⁹

This unusual, extraordinary gifted man died on June 9 or 10, 1799. He suffered from a kidney condition. It is a pity that eighteenth-century medicine misdiagnosed the condition as an ulcer on his leg. St George concealed the seriousness of his wound. Eventually gangrene set in causing his death.

Many of his biographers claim that he died in poverty and alone. Banat reports that this was not the case. He was taken care of by an old friend who served under him until his death. He was not alone as claimed. Zick⁴⁰ reveals the discovery of St George's death certificate. In it, it is mentioned that his friends and supporters asked his body to be exhumed and put in a lead coffin. This discovery helps us to know the place where St George was buried. It is the St. Marguerite Church on Rue de Chanzy where the adjoining cemetery was one of the most important in Paris at the time.

³⁹ Gabriel Banat, "Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Man of Music and Gentleman-at-Arms: The Life and Times of an Eighteenth-Century Prodigy", p. 209.

⁴⁰ William J. Zick, "Biographer Pierre Bardin Discovers Death Report of Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799)", *Afri Classical*, 2009.
<https://africlassical.blogspot.com/2009/01/biographer-pierre-bardin-discovers.html> (22.06.2021).

To end the life story of St George it is better to leave the final words to La Laurencie ⁴¹ who wrote: “*Thus disappeared one of the most curious and engaging figures of the dying eighteenth century. Saint-Georges was a remarkably gifted man, full of generosity and delicacy of feeling. Liberal and beneficent, he often deprived himself of the necessities of life in order to aid the unfortunate. His contemporaries use the expression 'full and soft' to express his violinist gifts, and, in truth, it really seems to qualify his manner, in which the dual trends of his temperament are united, in a mingling of vivacity, brilliancy and dreamy melancholy.*”

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ADDENDUMS

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