Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges

Joseph Bologne, **Chevalier de Saint-Georges** (1745 – 1799), was born on the island of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, the son of an enslaved woman and a French plantation owner. Saint-Georges moved with his parents to France when he was six years old. When he was 13, he began fencing lessons and he rapidly became one of the most famous swordsmen in Europe. His early musical training was in school, but in his early twenties, he studied privately with the well-known French composer Joseph-François Gossec. Saint- Georges soon became the concertmaster of Gossec's orchestra. He made his solo debut at 27 when he played his first two violin concertos with them.

Saint-Georges became an influential composer in his day. Along with his teacher, he was one of the first composers in France to write string quartets, and his symphonies concertantes for two violins and string orchestra inspired Mozart. Saint-Georges also worked as a conductor. He directed the Amateurs, which quickly became one of the most famous orchestras in Europe. He also founded his own orchestra in 1781. Under his direction, this new orchestra premiered Joseph Haydn's six Paris Symphonies. When the French revolution started, Saint-Georges joined the National Guard and became a colonel, leading an entire combat regiment. As he got older, Saint-Georges changed from composing instrumental music to writing operas. At the end of his life, he was still conducting concerts to great acclaim.

Chevalier is Joseph Bologne's title, which means "Knight." It was also common in France to name people according to their home town, and so "**de Saint-Georges**" means "from the town of Saint-Georges." Joseph Bologne became so famous that he is usually referred to as simply the Chevalier de Saint-Georges because so many people knew him by that title. Imagine a violinist from Detroit growing up to become so famous that everyone called them the Violinist of Detroit!

From the Rachel Barton Pine Foundation Coloring Book of Black Composers

MBC LUDWIG Masters PUBLICATIONS

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