

Guédé, Alain. *Le chevalier de Saint-George*. Achères, France: Dagan Jeunesse; and, Toulouse, France: MAT Éditions (Collection Nouveaux Héros), 2008. Pp. 48. 48 color illustrations. Hardbound 8 ¼" X 9 ½". Price: \$24.00. ISBN: 978-2-9542829-0-7 (Dagan Jeunesse: www.daganjeunesse.com) and ISBN: 978-2-9531209-1-2 (MAT Éditions: www.mat-editions.com). Distributed in the United States by Carole D. Fredericks Foundation (www.carolefredericksfoundation.org), a non-profit educational organization, with \$5.50 for shipping and handling for the first book and \$3.00 for each additional book.

Le chevalier de Saint-George, authored by Alain Guédé and exquisitely illustrated by Serge Hochain, recounts the life and times of the highly celebrated violin virtuoso and composer who was a “métis,” born to a white father, a nobleman, the Comte Guillaume-Pierre Tavernier de Boulogne, and to a slave mother, Nanon, in the French Antilles. Using first-person narration to address the reader in the “tu” form, this delightful book traces Saint-George’s life from his youth in the French Antilles, wedged between slaves and the white world of his father, to his life in France, where he was forced to put on three layers of make-up so as to not stick out and his struggles to live up to his father’s expectations that he had to be the best at everything. The book is made up of twenty chapters (all with a title specific to the events and times of Saint-George’s life, the majority consisting of a page of text and a page of illustrations) and four pages of instructional support.

Particularly meaningful in the book are the people whom Saint-George met in France and who influenced his life and who in turn were influenced by him. For example, one of Saint-George’s greatest admirers was John Adams, second president of the United States. At the time that Saint-George and Adams met, Adams was the U.S. ambassador to France. Adams, wanting to see a demonstration of Saint-George’s shooting expertise, was duly impressed when Saint-George expertly blasted a wine cork that a valet had thrown into the air. Never forgetting this event, Adams would go on to become a great defender of people of different races.

As a contemporary of Voltaire, Rousseau, Robespierre, and Marat, Saint-George enjoyed a social life at the court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette that is intriguing, to say the least. After his father lost his fortune trying to please the king, it was his mother who made sure that he had a proper education and could support himself. No doubt as a result of Nanon’s experience as a slave in the French Antilles where she saw first-hand that musicians often escaped harm, she encouraged her son to develop his musical talents. In the book, he says, “Bientôt les critiques sacrèrent mon orchestre comme le meilleur d’Europe. Mes musiciens étaient fiers de jouer sous mes ordres. Pour eux, comme pour tous mes amis, je n’étais plus ‘le nègre,’ comme les envieux m’appelaient. Ils me surnommaient gentiment ‘l’Américain’ car je venais des Antilles. Je devins vite l’une des stars de Paris. Les journaux ne me désignaient plus que comme ‘le fameux Saint-George,’ au grand désespoir des jaloux” (20). Saint-George was in such high demand that Marie-Antoinette insisted that the second performance of his opera “La Chasse” take place at Versailles. However, disappointment set in as Marie-Antoinette created a stir by showing favoritism toward a “nègre” and was soon forced to turn her back on her protégé. As a result, Saint-George found comfort in becoming a member of the Freemasons. He soon found favor in England with the Prince of Wales

and met Louise, a married white woman, who would become his true love. Later, returning to France after the start of the French Revolution, Saint-George became a colonel in the French army (he was the first person of color to achieve this rank in France) but would eventually be accused of trying to restore the royal family to the throne. Later, Saint-George spent time in Haïti with General Toussaint Louverture and witnessed the establishment of the first black republic. He died in Paris with his beloved Louise at his side, most likely of a disease that he had contracted while in Haïti.

The main story ends with a call for the readers to finish Saint-George's important work of living in tolerance and accepting cultural differences. Also included at the end of the book are suggestions by author Alain Guédé for further research on the music and life of Saint-George, a page dedicated to understanding why slavery is a crime against humanity, and information on Senegal, Guadeloupe, and "Le code noir" ["C'est un ensemble de textes de lois qui régissaient dès 1685 la vie des esclaves dans les colonies françaises des Antilles. Il a servi à déshumaniser les esclaves en les déclarant 'biens meubles.' 'Le Code noir' interdisait entre autres les mariages entre Blancs et Noirs" (46)]. If an instructor wishes to combine the lessons taught in the book with Saint-George's music, it is advisable to investigate recordings of his compositions by European orchestras available online.

Truly, *Le chevalier de Saint-George* is a beautiful and gentle yet highly effective tool for introducing intermediate to advanced students of French to the life and times of Saint-George. Rich in detail yet written in understandable prose, it will serve to engage students in an active discussion of slavery, discrimination, and respect for each other's talents. Indeed, this unique book deserves the honor it received by becoming part of the "2008: Année européenne du dialogue interculturel" collection.

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Publisher's Response

During my visit to France and Belgium in 2008 I had the good fortune to meet **Dieudonné Gnamankou**, historian and linguist, founder and director of Dagan Jeunesse /DGP. Dagan Jeunesse /DGP, a publishing house that specializes in books for children and young French-language readers from all continents, was preparing to release Alain Guédé's new biography about *Le Chevalier de Saint-George* written especially for young people. I was thrilled. I had read about Saint-George many years ago and had collected Guédé's biographies about him for adults in both French and English. Until speaking with **Dieudonné** and discovering Dagan Jeunesse /DGP, I had no idea that a novel about '*le fameux Saint-George*' was available for young people. Here was the perfect opportunity to broaden a product line offered at the Carole D. Fredericks Foundation website and the chance to share Saint-George, a highly celebrated violin virtuoso and composer who was a 'métis,' with American teachers and students of French. I am pleased beyond words to write this Publisher's Response

to the review of *Le Chevalier de Saint-George* by Dr. Eileen Angelini in *The NECTFL Review*.

The issue of race in the Francophone world is a reality and a subject that even most veteran teachers understandably will shy away from. One cannot discuss Saint-George without addressing the struggle against slavery and biases during his lifetime. Saint-George was born to a white father, a nobleman, the Comte Guillaume-Pierre Tavernier de Boulogne, and to a slave mother, Nanon, in the French Antilles. He is a real person. In her review of the Guédé's biography about Saint-George, Eileen Angelini focuses on the thoughtful text, exquisite illustrations by Serge Hochain, and positive themes that make this book an effective teaching tool. Angelini points to the teaching opportunities offered by the book such as the use of first-person narration to address the reader in the "tu" form, the book's twenty chapters (all with a title specific to the events and times of Saint-George's life...), and four pages of instructional support at the end. She also highlights the people whom Saint-George met in France and who influenced his life and who in turn were influenced by him. For example, one of Saint-George's greatest admirers was John Adams, second president of the United States. These aspects of Saint-George's life, a biracial man, a contemporary of Voltaire, Rousseau, Robespierre, and Marat, and his social life at the court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, present an intriguing personality to say the least.

Guédé is unflinching in his portrayal of Saint-George's personal life, his challenges, triumphs, loves and adventures in the the *Ancien Régime*. Angelini in turn, uncovers the positive themes and points educators and students towards the teachable aspects of the book such as the call for readers to finish Saint-George's important work of living in tolerance, accepting cultural differences. She highlights the suggestions by author Alain Guédé for further research on the music and life of Saint-George. In closing Dr. Angelini states, "Truly, *Le chevalier de Saint-George* is a beautiful and gentle yet highly effective tool for introducing intermediate to advanced students of French to the life and times of Saint-George. Rich in detail yet written in understandable prose, it will serve to engage students in an active discussion of slavery, discrimination, and respect for each other's talents. Indeed, this unique book deserves the honor it received by becoming part of the '2008: Année européenne du dialogue interculturel' collection."

I could not agree more with this inspired review of *Le Chevalier de Saint-George*. On behalf of the Carole D. Fredericks Foundation I extend our sincere appreciation to Eileen Angelini and *The NECTFL Review* for bringing this resource to French educators.

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