



The Main Feature

Season 45 – Issue 9 – Screening 22nd January 2026

Chevalier

USA 2022
108 min Cert 12A

Director Stephen Williams
Screenplay Stefani Robinson
Cinematography Jess Hall
Composer Kris Bowers
Production Design Karen Murphy

Cast

Kelvin Harrison Jr	Joseph
Samara Weaving	Marie-Josephine
Lucy Boynton	Marie Antoinette
Ronke Adekoluejo	Nanon
Marton Csokas	Marquis de Montalembert
Alex Fitzalan	Philippe
Minnie Driver	La Guimard
Sian Clifford	Madame de Genlis



In 2015, the club showed *Belle*, a film biography inspired by an 18th century portrait of two young women. One is white; the other is Dido Elizabeth Belle, the daughter of a Royal Navy officer, Sir John Lindsey, and his black mistress Maria Belle. As the film notes said 'Lindsay treated Maria well, by the standards of the time, freeing her and giving her property in her own name. He also acknowledged his daughter, and provided for her. Later, Dido was brought to England, and she entered a world of wealth and privilege.'

There are strong parallels with tonight's film *Chevalier*. It too is biographical, set in the 18th century in the run-up to and after the French Revolution. Its principal subject is the illegitimate son of Georges Bologne de Saint-Georges, a wealthy, white plantation owner in the French colony of Guadeloupe. The son, Joseph Bologne, was born on Christmas day 1745: his mother, Nanon, was 17 at the time of his birth, and one of the Creole people Georges kept enslaved. Georges was married, but acknowledged his son and gave him his name.

In 1753, Joseph was sent to France for his education. He seems to have been prodigiously talented: at 13 he was enrolled in the private fencing academy run by Texier de La Boëssière. At 15 he was beating some of the best swordsmen; he was still a student when he defeated Alexandre Picard, a fencing master in Rouen, who had been mocking him in public as "Boëssière's upstart mulatto". That match, bet on heavily by a public divided into partisans and opponents of slavery, was an important episode for Joseph. His father rewarded him with a horse and buggy. After defeating Picard in 1761 or on graduation from the academy in 1766, Bologne was made a Gendarme du roi (officer of the king's bodyguard) in Versailles and a

chevalier. He then adopted the suffix of his father's plantation and was known as the "Chevalier de Saint-Georges".

He was also handy with a violin. Saint-Georges became Conductor of Le Concert des Amateurs in 1773, combining his conducting duties with composing. From 1773 through 1775, he produced eight violin concertos and two symphonies concertantes. In 1775, only two years after Saint-Georges became conductor, L'Almanach Musical (The Musical Almanac) wrote that the ensemble was "the best orchestra for symphonies in Paris and perhaps in Europe."

At this point in his career Saint-Georges had reached his professional peak as a composer. He published two symphony concertantes in 1776 and two more in 1778. In 1777 he wrote three violin concertos and six string quartets. Some people call Saint-Georges the "Black Mozart".

On 17 May 1779 John Adams, one of the Founding Fathers and second President of the United States made an entry in his diary that mistakenly described Saint-George as the son of a governor: "[...] gave Us an Account of St. George at Paris, a Molatto Man, Son of a former Governor of Guadaloupe, by a Negro Woman [...] He is the most accomplished Man in Europe in Riding, Running, Shooting, Fencing, Dancing, Musick. He will hit the Button, any Button on the Coat or Waistcoat of the greatest Masters. He will hit a Crown Piece in the Air with a Pistoll Ball."

Saint-Georges was living in Lille when the French Revolution broke out in July 1789. He joined the National Guard in Lille later that year and achieved the rank of Captain in 1790. Saint-Georges the soldier was still a musician and a fencer, so he organized concerts and fencing demonstrations in Lille while stationed there. He even wrote an opera, Guillaume-Tout-Coeur ou les Amis de Village (William-All-Heart or The Village Friends).

The film traces Joseph's history in France, including his relations with the Court before the French Revolution, where his musical prowess made him as well-known as his ability with the sword.

The director is Stephen Willams, a Canadian best known for his work in television, but who has not made a feature film since 1999. Joseph is played by Kelvin Harrison Jr, who we saw in 2023 as BB King in the biopic Elvis. Personalities for the French court include Marie Antionette (Lucy Boynton), Marie Josephine (Samara Weaving), and La Guimard (Minnie Driver) and even Mozart (Joseph Prown).

The Guardian said of the film: 'Chevalier isn't the only period drama to centre a person of colour, but while the likes of Bridgerton or the Dev Patel-starring David Copperfield enliven otherwise familiar material with audacious casting choices, this represents a more fundamental, story-level shift. Like Amma Asante's Belle from 2013, Chevalier retrieves an extraordinary Black life from historical obscurity and deems it biopic-worthy. That means acknowledging the harsh reality of racism, for sure, but not necessarily forgoing the genre's frothier, escapist pleasures. As Bologne flits from party to party, supping champagne and seducing married women, we enjoy elements of a Dangerous Liaisons-style courtly intrigue, alongside a backstage musical (complete with audition montages), and a historical primer on the French Revolution. And while Kelvin Harrison's performance [as Chevalier] may never fully reveal the nature of the man beneath these sumptuous layers of organza, silk and self-confidence, it's enchanté Chevalier, all the same.'

Michael Hipkins



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Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 28th January
Discs of most of our previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

Chevalier – the historical background

Chevalier takes place against the background of the French revolution. Here are some key dates

25 December 1745	Chevalier born, Guadeloupe
1770	The future Louis XVI marries Marie Antoinette
10 May 1774	Accession of Louis XVI on the death of his grandfather, Louis XV
11 June 1775	Coronation of Louis XVI in Reims cathedral
1788	The Estates-General draw up <i>cahiers</i> (grievance-lists) to guide the deliberations of deputies
27 April 1789	Estates-General (the clergy, the nobility and the 'third estate') summoned to meet in Versailles
17 June 1789	National Assembly proclaimed, replacing the Estates-General and challenging royal authority
14 July 1789	Storming of the Bastille prison
4 August 1789	Abolition of feudalism and privileges
26 August 1789	Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen
2 November 1789	Church property nationalised
March 1790	Deputies vote not to abolish slavery
12 June 1790	Nobility abolished
7-15 May 1790	Debates on colonies and civil status of free coloureds
20 June 1790	Louis XVI attempts to flee towards Luxembourg but is stopped at Varennes and returned
October 1790	Robespierre denounces slavery and calls for political rights to be granted regardless of colour
10 August 1792	Storming of the Tuileries, overthrow of the monarchy
22 September 1792	Republic proclaimed
3 December 1792	Decision to try Louis XVI
7 January 1793	Condemnation of Louis XVI
21 January 1793	Execution of Louis XVI
16 October 1793	Marie Antoinette executed
1793-94	The Terror
4 February 1794	Abolition of slavery
2 November 1795	Directory constituted
2 March 1796	Bonaparte appointed commander in Italy
9 June 1799	Chevalier dies in Paris, aged 53
9 - 10 Nov 1799	Bonaparte overthrows the Directory and appointed as First Consul
20 May 1802	Slavery re-introduced in French colonies
18 May 1804	Empire proclaimed
2 December 1804	Bonaparte crowns himself as Emperor
27 February 1848	Slavery finally abolished in French colonies



Comments and reactions to: **Mr. Burton** (shown 8th January 2026)
 No of reaction slips received = 29 Average score = 8.41

Score 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
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Position	Film	Score	Reactions
1	Mr. Burton	8.41	29
2	Conclave	8.15	34
3	Frantz	7.91	32
4	The Dressmaker	7.73	26
5	Perfect Days	7.34	29
6	Maria	6.16	25
7	Jimi - All is By My Side	4.77	26
8	A Christmas Tale/Conte de Noel	3.72	25

A new leader for the Season - and joint 16th on our all-time list!

No complaints this time! Superb acting!

A tribute to PH Burton

A very fine film, well-acted & directed

Masterful performance by Toby Jones – sacrifice when a teacher brings out the potential of a student and is rewarded. Excellent, enthusiastic teacher. Transformation of Jenkins to actor extraordinaire was believable

Excellent

Excellent. A window into a life I never knew. A life taken away far too soon by a cruel illness

Very well-acted. Very enjoyable film

Very enjoyable. Great acting by Toby Jones and Harry Lawtey

Excellent!

Interesting to find out about his early life and the influence of his teacher. Excellent performances

Excellent cast and acting. PH – a marvellous teacher

Lovely performances by Toby Jones & Lesley Manville. But about 20 minutes too long

A little slow at times, but fascinating to see how the conflict that RB experienced played out throughout his life

Lovely film, well told and enjoyable

Harry Lawtey gave an incredible, convincing performance

I am so pleased I came to see this film! Great acting, script and settings!

Loved it! Marvellous acting. Harry Lawtey particularly good

First half a bit slow. Second half very atmospheric

Better second time around on the big screen

Great performances and a gripping story

Our Next Film - 12th February – Touch (Snerting)



A widower retraces his youth and finds that devastating truths can lurk below even our fondest recollections in this romantic drama from Icelandic director Baltasar Kormákur – The Observer

Touch is the kind of movie you get when a filmmaker thinks...on his feet and with his heart—and in so doing, he makes us believe we can, too – Time Magazine

It's romantically melodramatic, but in a quiet way that is quite touching – Movies for Grown-Ups