

Famous French People

Serge Gainsbourg

by Robert Shepherd

Vocabulary & pronunciation study by Fiona Kinloch©

Retrouvez la traduction de certains mots à droite du texte

La séparation des syllabes est marquée par un point •

Les syllabes accentuées sont en gras et soulignées*



Hello, this is Robert Shepherd and welcome to Famous French. Today, EnglishWaves will **explore** the col•our•ful life of singer/songwriter, Serge Gainsbourg.

He was born Lucien Ginsburg on 2nd April 1928 in Paris, **along with** his twin sister Liliane. They were the children of Jewish Ukrainian im•mi•grants, Joseph and Olga, who **escaped** to Paris after the Russian Rev•o•lu•tion in 1917.

When World War II started in 1939, Lucien was just 11-years-old, so he **remained** in Paris during the German oc•cu•pa•tion. Being Jewish only made things more difficult and in 1942, a law was introduced, which required Jews to wear yellow stars with the word "Juif" written on them. He later admitted the ex•per•i•ence **scarred** him for life. "It was like you were a bull, **branded** with a red-hot iron," he said. First Joseph, then the family, escaped to Limoges using false identification. Southern France was controlled by the French government, so it was **slightly** less dangerous for Jews. After the war ended, Lucien **enrolled** at a music school and began dating Elisabeth Levitsky. They married in 1951.

Joseph soon passed some of his piano gigs to Lucien. In 1954, Lucien joined France's songwriters' society, where he registered his first six songs – but he **hated** his name, so he changed it. He thought Serge sounded more Russian and he chose Gainsbourg because he loved the English painter, Thomas Gainsborough.

Gainsbourg and Elisabeth **divorced** in 1957, but word spread about his talent and a **record** deal with Philips followed. French chanson **fell out of vogue** in the early 60s, because French youth preferred American and British rock 'n' roll and French im•i•ta•tions known as "yé-yé". Later, Gainsbourg began writing material for teen yé-yé star France Gall, **including** the hit "Les Sucettes" and "Poupée de Cire, Poupée de Son", which won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1965.

Gainsbourg married his second wife, Béatrice, in 1964 and they had a daughter called Natacha. However, they divorced two years later, before **re•u•nit•ing** **briefly** in 1967. Their son Paul was born in 1968, but by that time Gainsbourg had fallen in love with the famous actress, Brigitte Bardot.

along with (exp.) de même que

to remain (vb.) rester

to scare (vb.) effrayer

to brand (vb.) marquer

slightly (adv.) légèrement

to enrol (vb.) s'inscrire

to hate (vb.) détester

to fall out of vogue (exp.) se démoder

briefly (adv.) brièvement

Often described as ugly, Gainsbourg **attributed** his **appeal** to women to his sense of vulnerability, as well as his bug eyes, stubble and **perpetual** halo of smoke from packs of Gitanes. Gainsbourg also said "ugliness is superior to beauty because it lasts longer". Bardot and Gainsbourg sang his new songs such as "Bonnie and Clyde" and "Je t'aime ... moi non plus", an erotic duet peppered with groans and sighs. It was **rumoured** that Gainsbourg and Bardot became very amorous while recording it. To protect Bardot's image, the song wasn't **released** until 1986.

Bardot returned to her husband, while Gainsbourg fell for Jane Birkin, a British actress whose looks were the zeitgeist of the swinging London fashion scene. Gainsbourg rerecorded "Je t'aime ... moi non plus" with Birkin and released it as a single. The Vatican called the song **obscene** and the BBC **banned** it, but it still became Gainsbourg's only hit outside France. In 1971, Birkin gave birth to their daughter, Charlotte. The same year, Gainsbourg and Birkin released Histoire de Melody Nelson, an album about a middle-aged man in a relationship with a 15-year-old girl. Two years later, Gainsbourg suffered a heart attack, so he **adopted** a more relaxed persona, with a stubby look that became his **visual trademark**.

In 1979, Gainsbourg worked with reggae stars Sly and Robbie to **create** the album "Aux Armes Etcetera". The title track was Gainsbourg's reggae version of the French national anthem, "La Marseillaise". The track's wording sparked **controversy** in France and French national newspaper Le Figaro said Gainsbourg's French **citizenship** should be **revoked**. Birkin left him in 1980, because of his drinking and **outlandish** behaviour. A year later, Gainsbourg began seeing the younger singer Caroline Von Paulus, better known by her stage name, Bambou. In 1986, she gave birth to their son, Lucien. **Meanwhile**, Gainsbourg became much more **outrageous**. On two separate occasions on live TV, he burned a 500-franc note in protest at high taxes and **lewdly** propositioned American singer Whitney Houston.

It was also during the 80s that Gainsbourg recorded "Lemon Incest" as a duet with his teenage daughter Charlotte. He also wrote songs for the young French singer Vanessa Paradis. Gainsbourg's **unhealthy** lifestyle led to a fatal heart attack on 2nd March, 1991. He was buried in Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris, the final resting place of many great French writers and artists.

appeal (n.) attrait

perpetual (adj.) perpétuel

It was rumoured that (exp.) La rumeur a couru que

obscene (adj.) obscène

to ban (vb.) censurer

visual trademark (exp.) identité visuelle

to revoke (vb.) officiellement retirer

outlandish (adj.) farfelu

meanwhile (adv.) pendant ce temps

lewdly (adv.) de façon obscène

unhealthy (adj.) mauvais pour la santé

*Aide à la prononciation !

L'accentuation des syllabes aide à comprendre les mots. En connaissant l'accentuation d'un mot on peut aisément le reconnaître à l'oreille et le comprendre, puis l'utiliser pour s'exprimer.

Deux exemples avec les mots 'synonymous' et 'synonym'.

Comptons les syllabes : 'syn•on•y•mous' a 4 syllabes

'syn•o•nym' a 3 syllabes

L'accentuation des syllabes correspond à une prononciation plus forte, plus marquée. Exemples: **synonymous** s mais **synonym**