

Chess and Music

Edward Winter

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Anthony Santasiere, *Chess Review*, April 1943, page 111

The following non-exhaustive list of items about chess and music in older chess periodicals intentionally leaves aside the innumerable articles on Philidor.

- ‘Mendelssohn as a Chessplayer’, in the *Chess Player’s Chronicle*, 22 November 1881, page 565. It comprised a brief extract from *Letters and Recollections of Mendelssohn* by Ferdinand Hiller.
- Steinitz related an encounter with Richard Wagner on page 213 of the *International Chess Magazine*, July 1887, page 213.
- An account of a ‘Musical Chess Tournament’ at King’s Lynn on 30-31 January 1893 was printed in the *BCM*, March 1893, pages 135-137.
- ‘*Caïssa Waltz* composed by Walter Pulitzer, author of *Chess Harmonis*’. The musical score was reproduced on pages 276-277 of the *American Chess Magazine*, October 1897:

CAÏSSA WALTZ.

For the "American Chess Magazine." Composed by WALTER FULITZER,
Author of "Chess Harmonics."

INTRODUCTION

Piano. *Moderato. f*

Tutti al Stabile.

leg. p *mf* *p*

- 'Chess and Music'. A feature from the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* was given on pages 463-464 of the October 1907 *BCM*. It discussed the 'many affinities between chess and music', referring to the violinist Adolph Brodsky, who was claimed to believe that 'playing music is not a matter of thinking, but of emotion; so to occupy his brains the musician plays chess, and what better could he do?'
- 'Our Problem Pages Editor as Musical Composer'. The *Chess Amateur*, March 1913, pages 162-163, reported on a performance in Bournemouth of a work by Philip H. Williams for baritone solo and full orchestra, a scena from *The Jackdaw of Rheims*. The *Amateur* gave an example of P.H.W.'s musical skill. 'It was produced one evening when the conversation turned on hymn tunes. Mr Williams, to illustrate his argument, turned to the piano and improvised the following, which is given without alteration or amendment':



- On page 199 of its April 1914 issue *The Chess Amateur* quoted a short text from the *Montreal Gazette* about ‘the mysterious connection between music and chess’.
- Below is a news item on page 305 of the July 1925 *BCM*:

‘Chess and Music. P.P. Sabouroff, who was once president of the Pan-Russian Chess Federation, and also of the Petrograd Chess Club, has composed a Love Symphony for big orchestra, which was played for the first time on 6 May in the “Concert Classique” at Monte Carlo and proved a great success.

The Scherzo (third part) of the symphony is called “Simultaneous Games of Chess”.’



Peter Petrovich Saburov (Sabouroff), *American Chess Bulletin*, November 1911, page 246

- An article by H.E. Barry, 'Again the Musical-Chessist', appeared on page 126 of the July-August 1925 *American Chess Bulletin*. It referred to the 'striking, harmonious bond between music and chess' and focussed on Professor Theodore W. Kerkam.
- *The Gambit* presented in three parts (November 1928, pages 340-342, December 1928, pages 375-377, and January 1929, pages 6-8) an article by Orlando A. Mansfield entitled 'Music and Chess', reprinted from *The Musical Quarterly*, July 1928. It stated that 'one of the earliest musician chessplayers of whose playing we have any definite record was Adam [sic] Kirnberger (1721-83)'. As so often in such articles, the temptation to force connections between chess and music proved irresistible, and Mansfield wrote:

'... chess has much to recommend it to the notice of practical musicians and composers. For instance, the mental alertness, the rapid decision, the almost instantaneous abandonment of a preconceived plan in order to counter-act an unexpected move on the part of an opponent or to profit by any observed peculiarity in the play of the lat[t]er, would be but familiar procedures or conditions to, let us say, organ recitalists accustomed as they are, or should be, to vary registration, tempo and even style to meet the exigencies or defects of a strange building or unfamiliar instrument.'
- A two-part article 'La Musique et le Jeu d'Echecs' by Pierre Maillard was published in *Les Cahiers de l'Echiquier Français* (May-June, 1935, pages 65-69, and July-August 1935, pages 97-100). It adopted a broadly theoretical approach, making the point that '*un morceau de musique est une construction – abstraite en sa totalité immédiate – qui ne prend existence que parce qu'elle s'inscrit dans le temps*', i.e. like chess but unlike the plastic arts, which were labelled '*des manifestations artistiques d'un caractère essentiellement spatial*'.
- An article entitled 'Chess and a Great Musician' on pages 117-118 of the April 1947 *BCM* quoted from pages 215-216 and 320 of Berta Geissmar's book *The Baton and the Jackboot* some chess-related reminiscences about Sir Thomas Beecham.
- Page 162 of the June 1950 *Chess Review* had a brief item under the heading 'A Musical Chess Game':

‘From *The Road to Music* by Nicolas Slonimsky (Dodd, Mead and Company) we find a curious bit of chessiana.

“Also in a humorous vein are such musical pieces as *A Chess Game*, in which chess moves are imitated by melodic intervals. The pawn moves two spaces, and the melody moves two degrees of the scale. The knight jumps obliquely, as knights do in chess, and the melody moves an augmented fourth up. When the bishop dashes off on a diagonal, the music imitates the move by a rapid scale passage. Play this piece for a chess expert, and the chances are he will name the moves without a slip.”

- ‘A Genius of Chess and Music’ by M.D. Broun on pages 57-59 of *Chess World*, April 1953 discussed Mark Taimanov.
- ‘Musicians and Chess’ on page 97 of *Chess World*, May 1958. The article began by commenting, ‘Nearly every one of the world’s leading violinists has been a chessplayer, and indeed, a majority of violinists of any note at all’. It called the preponderance of chessplaying violinists an ‘unsolved question’.
- ‘Chess and Music’ by Louis Persinger on pages 209-210 of *Chess Life*, July 1961. A discussion of the affinity between the two arts (‘I do believe that musicians have had a very special hypnotic fascination for the 32 little figures and have always been very willing slaves to those little characters’ inexhaustible intrigues and pranks.’). Persinger included a long list of chess-loving musicians.

Finally, we mention that two musical scores (‘Schach-Marsch’ by F. Kerkhoff and ‘Schach-Walzer’ by C. Noack) took up 11 pages of the Barmen, 1905 tournament book. They were performed in Barmen on 16 August 1905, i.e. during a presentation of Richard Genée’s *Der Seekadett*. This operetta, which gave its name to the ‘Sea Cadet Mate’, began with a Prologue recited by Frau Adolf Keller attired as Caissa:

Schach - Marsch.

Marcia. Fred. Kerkhoff

Piano.

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Afterword: This article originally appeared as C.N. 3073. See also the references to music in the [Factfinder](#).

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