

**Compiled, edited and translated from Russian sources  
by Jimmy Adams**

**MIKHAIL CHIGORIN**

**The Creative Chess Genius**

New Greatly Enlarged Edition

**New In Chess 2016**

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# Introduction

If a group of average club and tournament players in the West were to be asked what they know about Mikhail Chigorin (1850-1908), the replies are likely to be: 'He was a Russian chess champion. He was an attacking player from the gambit era of a hundred years ago. He invented a couple of opening variations.' And that would be about it!

However, if the same question were asked in Russia, I suspect the responses would be quite different: 'He is a Russian hero. He was a man of the people. He laid the foundations for the development and expansion of chess in our country. He always played to win and represented Russia with honour in many international tournaments. He came within a couple of points of winning the World Championship. He explored new paths in the openings and also made great contributions to the theory of all phases of the game. He was an unselfish, public-spirited man who promoted chess through his editorship of chess magazines and newspaper columns as well as public appearances and exhibitions. For over half a century, we have held annual Chigorin Memorial tournaments in his honour...'

You see, the fact of the matter is that relatively little has been written about Chigorin in the West, whereas in Russia he is revered. And it is precisely for this reason that I decided to turn to Russian chess literature in an endeavour to compile a book on this remarkable man and bring to the attention of the English speaking chess world at large not only his brilliant games but also the story of his turbulent life. After all, who better to write about the first great Russian chess player than Russians themselves, whether they be grandmasters, masters, amateurs or journalists?

My first attempt to produce such a work came in 1987 with the publication by Caissa Editions, Delaware, USA, of *Mikhail Chigorin: The Creative Chess Genius*, which contained 100 annotated games and a summary of Chigorin's chess career.

Now *New in Chess* have published this revised and expanded second edition, with a huge increase in both the number of games and the amount of biographical material. In fact it is two books in one!

Part One: *Mikhail Chigorin: The Creative Chess Genius*, is essentially a translation of the 1972 biographical best games collection of Chigorin by Alexander Narkevich, Alexander Nikitin and Evgeny Vasyukov. This combination of writers – an academic, a chess trainer and a strong grandmaster – works brilliantly in presenting the life and times of Chigorin, as well as offering the reader a modern and instructive appreciation of over sixty of Chigorin's greatest games and their relevance to present day chess.

Part Two: *Mikhail Chigorin: His Friends, Rivals and Enemies* by Vasily Panov, is a second, quite different and indeed complementary biography from that given in Part One. Translated from the original 1963 Russian book, it provides a hard-hitting account of the strengths and weaknesses of Chigorin's character, which ranged from absolute genius for chess and enormous capacity for hard work to a certain naïvety in terms of sporting preparation and even a self-destructive addiction to alcohol. It also charts his lifelong struggles against adversity, which included the damaging effects of a childhood spent in a brutal orphanage, habitual poverty, ill health and even the malicious actions of jealous rivals who sought to undermine his pre-eminent position in Russian chess. Added to this is a selection of a further 159 games, annotated by a variety of masters and grandmasters, including Chigorin himself, and extracted from the Russian books, *Selected Games of Chigorin* (1926) by Efim Bogoljubow, *M.I.Chigorin: The Great Russian Chess Player* (two editions, 1939 and 1949) by Nikolai Grekov and *120 Selected Games of M.I.Chigorin* (1952) also by Nikolai Grekov, *The Creative Legacy of M.I.Chigorin* (1960) by Isaac Romanov, and *Mikhail Chigorin* (1985) by Mikhail Yudovich. These games, like the biography, show both positive and negative sides to Chigorin – brilliancies to be sure, but also blunders, to which he was unfortunately prone. But, whatever the results of these chess battles, always there is that endless searching for new ideas in an endeavour to broaden the horizons of chess...

Actually there is also a third part to this book, an introductory survey of Chigorin's chess career by his turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contemporary Peter Romanovsky, which appeared in the above-mentioned work by Romanov. I suggest that the reader digests this first as it will serve as a very nice appetizer for the second and third courses...

It should be kept in mind that much of the text of the present book was written during the Soviet era, although new analysis has sometimes been added to the original annotations in the form of footnotes, in order to identify and clarify debatable points of play. Overall, readers will find ample evidence here of Chigorin's creative work in all phases of the game.

*The Openings:* Of his generation, Chigorin was the greatest exponent of open games and gambit play, yet paradoxically it is his closed defence in the Spanish Game, still bearing his name today, that is one of the most frequently played openings of all time. The Chigorin Defence to the Queen's Gambit also has quite a reputation, although perhaps not for the significant fact that its original concept of allowing White to construct a big pawn centre, only to undermine it later with blows from the flanks, was some twenty years later claimed as its own by the so-called 'Hypermodern' chess movement!

Then again, Chigorin also experimented with other avant-garde openings such as the King's Indian Defence and similar fianchetto developments, as well as the

Semi-Slav Defence, way back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – yet these openings only really resurfaced fifty years later when they became major weapons in the armoury of the mighty Soviet School of Chess – and indeed are still amongst the most popular openings in competitive chess of today.

*The Middlegame:* Chigorin was a master of the sustained initiative. He paid as much attention to the preparation and build-up of a kingside offensive as he did to the calculation of the eventual breakthrough and delivery of the final winning combination. A study of Chigorin's games is in itself an education in the fine art of carrying out a properly planned attack.

In his career Chigorin also employed a number of methods of play which were later attributed to Nimzowitsch, such as the principles of centralisation, blockade, exploitation of weak squares, dynamic manoeuvring, and the latent power of seemingly cramped positions. Also, like Nimzowitsch, Chigorin displayed exceptional skill when handling the knights, although he denied any suggestion that he considered this piece to be superior to the bishop. He stated that his play was guided solely by the specific demands of each individual position and not by any dogmatic 'general principles' such as were proclaimed by Dr. Tarrasch at this time and against which Chigorin vigorously rebelled, considering that adherence to such fixed rules and regulations squeezed the life-blood out of chess creativity.

*The Endgame:* Chigorin played to win in every game and to achieve this desired result he frequently had to demonstrate both his skill and patience in the endgame. Former World Champion Botvinnik said that whenever he entered a rook endgame he would recall how Chigorin defeated Dr. Tarrasch from a seemingly dead drawn position with just kings, a pair of rooks and a handful of pawns on the board.

So to conclude, we can confidently state that Chigorin was years ahead of his time in his understanding of chess and was only fully appreciated long after his death. Indeed, his unceasing creative approach to all phases of the game, which he displayed to the full in both his play and writings, later served as a great inspiration to a long line of Russian and Soviet players, including World Champions Alekhine, Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal and Spassky, all of whom have spoken of the profound influence of Chigorin on their own play. Even Kasparov, with his love of dynamic play and precise analysis, continued the Chigorin traditions.

I hope the present varied compilation provides a balanced view of Mikhail Chigorin, both the man and his creative chess legacy, and that he will in the future be held in the same high regard throughout the whole world as he is in his native Russia.

Jimmy Adams  
London 2016

## Grandmasters on Chigorin

‘The most worthy challenger in the struggle for the World Championship.’ Steinitz

‘Chigorin’s creative work in the area of the openings can serve as a model for chess masters... In the Soviet Union, the Chigorin traditions are being maintained.’ Lasker

‘A naturally-gifted genius – he was the first Russian to work at the creation of public chess life in Russia.’ Winawer

‘Though ruined by ill-health, he, at the same time, contributed so much that was new to the theory of the openings, like nobody else.’ Rubinstein

‘There was nobody in chess who was more artistic and creative than Chigorin.’ Mieses

‘There was never a master who combined the art of attack and defence to such an extent as Chigorin.’ Pillsbury

‘Combinations, such as Chigorin’s, can be created only by a great master.’ Gunsberg

‘An outstanding master of the endgame.’ Schlechter

‘For Chigorin, in principle, the word “draw” did not exist. What could a half, a one and a zero mean for him when he was looking for a fight, for discovery, for truth?’ Spielmann

‘No master was closer to the great Morphy than Chigorin.’ Maroczy

‘My best teacher.’ Charousek

‘There was no master, against whom a defeat would be less annoying, than a defeat in an encounter with Chigorin.’ Salwe

‘There was nobody who was so little favoured by tournament luck as Chigorin, but also nobody who needed so little luck in a tournament as Chigorin.’ Tarrasch

‘Remembrance of the great Chigorin lives on in my memory as lives and will live his glory in the history of chess art for as long as people play chess.’ Duras

‘Chigorin is the founder of the Russian chess school. No one has done so much for the development and popularisation of chess in Russia as Chigorin. We, Soviet chess players, follow his creative behests, revere his memory, and are profoundly grateful to him for his selfless service to the game.’ Smyslov

‘Chigorin was one of the greatest Russian players, an artist of chess thought, and perhaps the first player in the world to treat the game as it deserves. He did a great deal for the development of chess in Russia and had a very powerful influence on world chess thought. He was many years ahead of his time, and his work will always be an inexhaustible source for the development and perfection of chess ideas.’ Botvinnik

# Mikhail Ivanovich Chigorin

By Peter Romanovsky

Chess life has in the last few decades taken giant strides forward.

However, even this stormy period of development of chess thought which we have experienced cannot in any way dim Soviet chess players' memory of the creative outlook of the founder and organiser of the Russian chess school, Mikhail Ivanovich Chigorin.

And what is more, with the years further and further removing us from the time of life and creative work of this great Russian master, we are giving him even more attention, we sense the need to retain unbroken contact with the inexhaustible well of Chigorin's creative work.

The name of Chigorin stands by itself in the history of the development of chess thought of his day.

Chigorin lived in a period, when, in the arena of chess art, shone such leading lights as Zukertort, Steinitz, Lasker, Tarrasch, Pillsbury, Schlechter, Janowski, Teichmann, Maroczy and Blackburne. It would seem to have been impossible to take up a special place in this brilliant constellation of talent. And yet there was a chess player who managed to do this – and it was Chigorin.

To the chess world, everything was unusual about this representative of Russian chess: the suddenness of his appearance in the arena of at first Russian and then international chess life, the late age – 24 years, at which he, for the first time, in the court of the best Russian masters of that time, Shumov and Schiffers, cast his own creative discoveries, both the swiftness of his chess development and spreading fame as a master, personifying his own ideas of artistic beauty, and many other things.

At first, the chess world regarded Chigorin as a talented individual, almost a new Morphy, this time appearing from the East. Shortly afterwards, however, Western critics, following the example of Steinitz, declared Chigorin an adherent of the 'old' combinational school, which, in Europe, was represented at that time, in the opinion of these same critics, by Anderssen, Blackburne, up to a certain point Zukertort, and several other masters.

It would be difficult to find a greater lack of understanding of the creative outlook of Chigorin. How would it be possible to explain their 'old', that is, archaic, backward, belonging to the past, when Chigorin saw each game as a step forward in the progressive process of the development of chess thought? Not very much in accord with this characteristic is also the fact that Chigorin, supposedly representing the old views, after administering a series of shattering defeats both to Steinitz and his associates, was himself declared by them as being a purveyor of the ideas of the heralded by them 'modern school'.



Chigorin, indeed, did enter international chess life as a lone man. But passionate adherents and followers already soon began to appear amongst masters of the West, not to mention Russia.

The famous Czech grandmaster, Oldrich Duras, wrote: 'It is difficult for me to explain to the wide audience of the modern generation what the name of Chigorin meant and to this day means to Czech players... On the Chigorin traditions which dominated Czech chess art, I also grew up. Remembrance of the great Chigorin lives on in my memory even now, as lives and will live his glory in the history of chess art for as long as people play chess.'

Declaring themselves disciples of Chigorin were the very talented but unfortunately prematurely deceased Rudolph Charousek, the Austrian Rudolf Spielmann, and many others.

Through his creative work, Chigorin actively influenced the attitudes of many foreign chess players, who were attracted by his innovations and the scope of his ideas, the artistic value of his style, and finally his wholehearted love of chess.

'It was characteristic of Chigorin', wrote Spielmann, 'that the main thing in chess for him was not the numerical result, but the search for truth, and through truth – the thirst for knowledge. Immediately after the end of a game he would sit down to analyse it. An endless melody of irrationality, not yielding to calculation, the unexplored, the inexhaustible, he lived through all this during the game, but after the game he worked tirelessly so that the irrational was made rational and intelligible, the incalculable – worked out precisely, the unexplored – explored; this is how he fought for truth in chess art.'

If we are seeking to identify what essentially distinguishes and sets apart Chigorin in the history of chess thought, then the answer will be found in his understanding of chess as a full-blooded art and his principal view that his creative searching should take a truly artistic line.



Yes, Chigorin was a great chess artist and hardly any of his contemporaries could compare with him in the quality and quantity of the artistic chess productions he created.

And so Chigorin was neither a follower of the ideas of the 'old' Italian school, nor a champion of the positional teachings of Steinitz. Chigorin was the founder and organiser of a new progressive chess tendency, which gave life to the Russian chess school.

However, this school consisted not only of creative work, but also organisational collaboration.

When we speak about Chigorin as the founder of the Russian chess school, we

have in mind not only his creative work, due to which, in itself, Russian chess players rallied around him, but also work in the public and literary-publicity field, to which he devoted many years of his life.

Chigorin was the first real public chess worker, organiser of the chess press and enthusiast-propagandist in our country.

There were many strong masters before Chigorin, for example A.Petrov and S.Winawer, but for them chess was a side-line and therefore they could not fully appreciate its immense cultural-educational role. The significance of Chigorin's active work for the development of Russian chess culture was immeasurably greater.

Even in his first years of service to Russian chess, Chigorin launched the magazine *Chess Sheet*. Though he had a very modest income, Chigorin had to put his own money into the business of bringing out his first-born magazine, since the subscriptions (there were not even 250 subscribers in the whole of Russia!) covered only part of the expenses involved in its publication. In the end, the magazine ceased due to lack of resources. The same fate befell another publication, rising out of its ashes and again conducted by Chigorin – *Chess Herald*. Nevertheless, the literary and public propaganda activities of Chigorin expanded from year to year. He conducted extensive correspondence with chess players and chess circles of different towns in Russia, played many games by correspondence, and from time to time visited the provinces, where he strived to support chess enterprises through simultaneous exhibitions and talks, to heighten interest in chess.

The organisational and public activity of Chigorin bore its fruit. The ranks of Russian chess players increased. Chigorin's distinctive and beautiful style of play, as well as his numerous victories over foreign masters, attracted the sympathy of broad circles of Russian chess players, especially the young.

The well-known chess player, Rosenkrantz, wrote: 'Chigorin was in the full sense of the word "a ruler of men's minds" when it came to Russian chess youth... All the young players found themselves under the spell of Chigorin's elegant play and the beauty of his combinations.'

Another young contemporary of Chigorin, E.Znosko-Borovsky, defined his role and place in Russian chess life in the following lively way: 'Chigorin... you know he represents the best in Russian chess life, you know he is the whole of our chess life. To speak about him means to speak about chess in general in Russia, about the most beautiful in it, about the greatest successes, about the best of its time, about the supreme efforts and manifestations of Russian chess creative work... Chigorin has not only elevated the name of Russian chess to an unprecedented height, hitherto unattained by any other Russian, but also justified his own life, as it were, by actually sanctifying chess itself in Russia.'

'His exceptional talent', remarked the prominent Soviet writer and strong chess player, professor A.Smirnov, about Chigorin, 'was expressed in his own individual style of play, which he created and which was successively passed on directly and indirectly to a whole galaxy of disciples, colouring all our most recent chess creative work and leading to the establishment of a Russian chess school.'

# Tables of Important Tournaments and Matches

Berlin 1881																			
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	Joseph Blackburne	*	1	1	1	0	1/2	1	1	1/2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
2	Johannes Zukertort	0	*	1	1/2	1/2	1	1	1/2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1/2	1	1	11
3	Mikhail Chigorin	0	0	*	1	0	0	0	1/2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10 1/2
4	Simon Winawer	0	1/2	0	*	1	0	1	1/2	1	1	1	0	1	1	1/2	1	1	10 1/2
5	Jannes Mason	1	1/2	1	0	*	1/2	1/2	0	1/2	1	0	1	0	1	1	1/2	1	9 1/2
6	Alexander Wittek	1/2	0	1	1	1/2	*	1/2	1	1/2	0	1	0	1/2	1	0	1	1	9 1/2
7	Johannes von Minckwitz	0	0	1	0	1/2	1/2	*	1	1/2	0	0	1	1/2	1	1	1	1	8 1/2
8	Jacques Schwarz	0	0	1/2	1/2	1	0	0	*	1	1	1/2	1	0	1/2	1	1/2	1	8 1/2
9	Johann Berger	1/2	1/2	0	0	1/2	1/2	1/2	0	*	0	0	1	1	1	1/2	1	1	8
10	Louis Paulsen	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	*	1/2	1	1/2	1	1/2	1/2	1	8
11	Wilfried Paulsen	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1/2	1	1/2	*	0	1/2	1/2	0	1/2	1	7 1/2
12	Emil Schallopp	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	*	1	0	1	0	1	7
13	Fritz Riemann	0	0	0	0	1	1/2	1/2	1	0	1/2	0	0	*	0	1	1/2	1	6 1/2
14	Carl Wennmers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1/2	1/2	0	1/2	1	1	*	1	1	1	6 1/2
15	Josef Noa	0	1/2	0	1/2	0	1	0	0	0	1/2	1	0	0	0	*	1	1	5 1/2
16	Carl Schmid	0	0	0	0	1/2	0	0	1/2	0	1/2	1/2	1	1/2	0	0	*	0	3 1/2
17	H. von Schütz	0	0	0	0	0	0	1/2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	* 1 1/2
	Karl Pitschel	.	.	0	0	.	0	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	-

Vienna 1882

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1	Wilhelm Steinitz	**	1½	½½	0½	½	10	½½	11	01	½	01	10	11	11	11	01	1+	1+	24
2	Simon Winawer	0½	**	00	1½	0½	10	11	10	01	½	11	11	11	11	11	11	1+	0+	24
3	James Mason	½½	11	**	0½	½	½½	½½	11	11	10	01	11	½	1½	0½	11	0+	½+	23
4	Johannes Zukertort	1½	0½	1½	**	½½	0½	0½	11	11	00	11	01	01	11	11	11	1+	0+	22½
5	George Mackenzie	½0	1½	½0	½½	**	10	½	1½	½0	11	11	01	01	11	10	½	1+	1+	22½
6	Joseph Blackburne	01	01	½½	½	01	**	½½	0½	10	01	10	11	1½	11	10	11	0+	1+	21½
7	Berthold Englisch	½½	00	½½	1½	½0	½½	**	11	½0	½½	½½	0½	½½	01	11	11	1+	½	19½
8	Louis Paulsen	00	01	00	00	0½	½	00	**	½½	½	½	11	½	1½	½	11	½+	½+	18½
9	Alexander Wittek	10	10	00	00	½	01	½	½½	**	½0	01	10	½½	½½	½	½	½+	1+	18
10	Max Weiss	0½	0½	01	11	00	10	½½	½0	½	**	0½	11	0½	0½	01	00	1+	1+	16½
11	Vincenz Hruby	10	00	10	00	00	01	½½	½0	10	½	**	10	½½	11	01	10	0+	1+	16
12	Mikhail Chigorin	01	00	00	10	10	00	½	00	01	00	01	**	11	00	11	½	0+	01	14
13	Adolf Schwarz	00	00	½0	10	10	0½	½½	½0	½½	1½	½½	00	**	½0	11	½0	0+	1+	14
14	Philipp Meitner	00	00	0½	00	00	00	10	½0	½½	½	00	11	½	**	01	01	0+	1+	13
15	Henry Bird	00	00	1½	00	01	01	00	½0	½0	10	10	00	00	10	**	11	½+	01	12
16	Preston Ware	10	00	00	00	0½	00	00	00	0½	11	01	0½	½	10	00	**	0+	1+	11
17	Josef Noa	0-	0-	1-	0-	0-	1-	0-	½-	½-	0-	1-	1-	1-	1-	½-	1-	**	½-	9
18	Bernhard Fleissig	0-	1-	½-	1-	0-	0-	½0	½-	0-	0-	0-	1-	00	0-	10	0-	½+	**	7
	play-off:																			
1	Wilhelm Steinitz	0	1		1															
2	Simon Winawer	1	0		1															

London 1883

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	
1	Johannes Zukertort	** 01	*11	1*1	11	1*0	11	11	*11	11	11	10	10	1+	22
2	Willhelm Steinitz	10 **	01	00	01	11	1*1	*0*0	11	11	1*1	11	1*1	1+	19
3	Joseph Blackburne	*00	10 **	01	10	*00	1*1	1-	1½	0*1	1*1	11	11	11	16½
4	Mikhail Chigorin	0*0	11	10 **	0*1	11	*01	01	10	10	*10	1*1	10	1+	16
5	Berthold Englisch	00	10	01	1*0	**	½½	00	½½	01	*01	11	11	1+	15½
6	George Mackenzie	0*1	00	*11	00	½½	**	0*1	01	0*1	1*1	½*1	*11	1+	15½
7	James Mason	00	0*0	0*0	*10	11	1*0	**	*10	11	½½	11	*11	1+	15½
8	Samuel Rosenthal	00	*1*1	0-	10	½½	*1*0	*01	**	½½	*10	01	*01	11	14
9	Simon Winawer	*0*0	00	0½	01	10	10	*01	½½	**	*01	10	1*1	11	13
10	Henry Bird	00	00	1*0	01	*10	1*0	00	*01	*10	**	00	11	1*1	12
11	Josef Noa	00	0*0	0*0	*01	00	0*0	½½	10	01	11	**	01	11	9½
12	Alexander Sellman	01	00	*00	*00	00	½*0	00	*10	0*0	00	10	**	11	6½
13	James Mortimer	01	*00	00	01	00	00	*00	00	*00	00	00	00	**	01
14	Arthur Skipworth	0-	0-	00	0-	0-	0-	0-	*0-	0-	*0-	1-	1-	10	3

\*The first two draws did not count and were replayed. The third draw counted

-The second round Rosenthal-Blackburne was not played.

Steinitz-Chigorin, World Championship match, Havana 1889

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	Willhelm Steinitz	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	½	10½
2	Mikhail Chigorin	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	½	6½

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