

## Misha Interviews...

### Misha Savinov

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## Interview with Tigran L. Petrosian

*Tigran L. Petrosian was born in Yerevan in 1984. He obtained the international grandmaster title in 2004, and his current FIDE rating is 2568. He is not related to former world champion Tigran V. Petrosian or grandmaster Arshak Petrosian.*

**Misha Savinov:** Tigran, were you named after the ninth world champion Tigran V. Petrosian?

**Tigran Petrosian:** Yes, my father is a big fan of chess, so when Petrosian defeated Botvinnik, he decided to name his future son after the champion. Naturally, he also wanted me to become a chess player.

**MS:** What attracted you to chess when you began playing?

**TP:** It is difficult to remember what I liked about chess as a 5-year-old!

**MS:** Tell me about your first steps in chess. Where did you study the game?

**TP:** I learned to play at age five; my first trainer was Honored Trainer of Armenia Gagik Sargissian. Later, in 1998, I took lessons from IM Melikset Khachian for a couple of years. Then I entered a chess academy in 2002, where I occasionally received instruction from Ashot Nadanian and Arsen Egiazarian, but I mostly worked on my own.

**MS:** When did you earn your international titles?

**TP:** At 18 years old I didn't have an international title, but I set myself a goal of qualifying for the GM title in two years. It took 16 months to meet the first IM and GM requirements.

**MS:** Did you have any problems with those norms?



**TP:** My first GM norm was completed at the U18 world championship in 2002. The second was recorded at the 2003 Batumi Open, and the last occurred at the 2004 Aeroflot Open. There was nothing dramatic about them, I think I played well and got just what I deserved.

**MS:** What is your next objective?

**TP:** First, I want to qualify for the Armenian national team. The competition is really tough, so I have to work hard to get one of those precious spots! Also I need to improve my Elo rating, which is currently 2568, and I plan to reach 2600+ in six months.

**MS:** Have you won many tournaments?

**TP:** Oh yes, many tournaments indeed. Of course, they are not comparable to Linares or the Aeroflot Open, but quite strong ones for a player such as me. For example, the 2000 Tehran Open, 2002 Batumi Rapid (tied for 1st-2nd with Azmaiparashvili), open tournaments in Iran and Lebanon in 2004. I just finished the 2005 Tehran Open and tied for 1st-5th... There were also many wins in Armenia; almost all local blitz and rapid competitions.

**MS:** Have you played any nice games to include in a game collection?

**TP:** Yeah, I'm more than ready to brag about my nice wins (smiles). It is too early for a game collection, but I think one could select 20 or 30 good games that are entertaining and of a high quality.

**MS:** Do you remember your games? How many of them could you show me from memory?

**TP:** I remember many of them, even some of the blitz and rapid games. I could easily recall fifty games or perhaps more.

**MS:** The life of a professional chess player is full of deprivations and disappointments. What makes you feel you've made the correct career choice?

**TP:** I enjoy the benefits of a life in chess. Meeting people of different nationalities, making friends, having fun, and traveling around the world is great. The financial support isn't comparable to, say, tennis, but if you are a good chess player you're able to earn decent money. Frankly speaking, I can't imagine myself without chess; I am simply irrevocably hooked (smiles). But life is a complicated issue, so I don't reject the possibility of doing something else. Who knows the future?

**MS:** What do you think about the current situation in chess regarding the world championship? Whom do you consider a proper champion: Kramnik,

Kasimdzhanov, maybe Ponomariov?

**TP:** I am a firm supporter of Garry Kasparov. He is the best chess player in the world and the only true champion, today just as much as twenty years ago!

**MS:** Whom did you support in the recent title match in Brissago?

**TP:** As for that match, I supported our young husband (smiles), as did most Armenians. (Leko is married to GM Arshak Petrosian's daughter).



**MS:** Of today's young players, say, under 21 – who in your opinion is capable of joining the world elite and playing a major role in future championships?

**TP:** There are many good juniors that play big chess; I would single out Volokitin, Mamedyarov, Karjakin, and Nakamura... I also qualify by age to that list (smiles), and who knows what will happen in the future? Each big player of my generation plays his own kind of chess. Mamedyarov and Nakamura are exceptionally gifted tacticians, Karjakin possesses a superior understanding of an endgame, and Volokitin's play is impressive as well. They all are very good!

**MS:** Your style of play is quite active; do you enjoy the classical games of sharp attacking players best?

**TP:** Yes, I very much enjoy the games of Tal, Alekhine and Kasparov. However, I have also recently been reading books by Capablanca, Petrosian and Botvinnik. The most interesting modern player is, of course, Morozevich. I also like examining Anand's games.

**MS:** How many world champions have you met?

**TP:** I met Smyslov (during the Aeroflot Open), Spassky (in Stepanakert), Karpov (Paris, 1998), and world champion Ponomarev (smiles ironically).

**MS:** Could you compare those players from the past with modern players? Do you see any similarities in their manner of play?

**TP:** I don't want to make such comparisons. Players from the past and present are very different with very little in common. Chess has slowly become a less exciting game because of the appearance of the computer in our lives. Formerly, becoming a grandmaster at the age of 20-23 was a great achievement, and now 13-15 year-old grandmasters are no longer a sensation. Such improvement wouldn't be possible without computers. Also, the theory is so well-developed that the first 20-25 moves are home preparation, and then it's either a draw or just normal play. These changes are sad, but that's the reality we have to deal with.

**MS:** Let's talk about Armenian chess. I have the impression that Armenian players like to improvise. It is not only about deviating from main theoretical lines, but creating complex positions, and finding and conducting original plans; seeking the unknown in your games instead what is known. You even started one of your games with 1.a3!

**TP:** (after some thought) I can't say with certainty that we have a lot in common because the styles are still so different. Try to compare Vaganian and Sargissian, for example, but we do indeed try to avoid over-analyzed areas. Not everyone is capable of improvisation, so if it works for us – why not take advantage of it? As for my 1.a3 – oh, I played that because of a bet with my friends (smiles).

**MS:** Whom would you add to the list of the strongest Armenian players of all times?

**TP:** Well, Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian is the undisputed number one on any list of the best Armenian players. After Petrosian one should name Rafael Vaganian. He is also a legend of Armenian chess. Vaganian's exceptionally powerful play in recent years bolsters me because he is a good example that age is not a critical factor for a chess player. How young you feel is more important. I am sure Vaganian is going to win many more tournaments in his career. Smbat Lputian is also one of the top Armenian GMs. I am amazed by his exceptionally deep positional understanding. All of the Armenian grandmasters are good in their own way, for example, Minasian, Anastasian... There are also those I never met in person, such as, Karen Movsesian – it is difficult for me to offer specific information about them.

**MS:** There are so many Armenian men that are good in chess, why don't the

Armenian women share the same success?

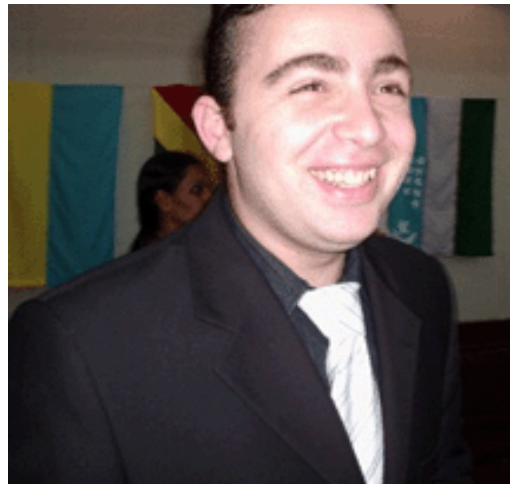
**TP:** That's a good question... You Russians are welcome to come and help us teach them, perhaps we could manage it together (smiles)! That is a joke, of course, but there is always a fraction of truth in each joke. Armenia has good woman grandmasters, Danielian and Mkrtchian, who won a number of international tournaments. If their successes are rather modest compared to the men's, then maybe it is not their fault (smiles), but ours?

**MS:** Would you want your wife to be a chess player?

**TP:** To be honest, I wouldn't want it. But you can't direct your heart, you know. If I fall in love with a girl who plays chess, I'll marry her.

**MS:** What is that you appreciate most in girls?

**TP:** Modesty and honesty. Also, I will reveal a little secret: I am crazy about blondes (laughs)!



**MS:** Of the female chessplayers, who do you think should be in Hollywood movies?

**TP:** Chess is not very suitable for ladies as a competitive activity, so I would send them all to Hollywood (laughs)!

**MS:** How do you spend your spare time?

**TP:** Mostly I meet with my friends. I enjoy exploring the Internet on my home computer. Music is everything for me! I listen to it everywhere: when I eat, study chess, drive a car, etc. I prefer European music. I also enjoy Armenian and Russian authors. I don't want to give names because then it would require too much time and space!

**MS:** What is your favorite place in the world?

**TP:** Wherever I travel, I always return to my native city Yerevan! I would enjoy revisiting some of the places where I have played chess – Artek (Crimea, Ukraine), Beirut, Antalya, Disneyland (smiles). And, of course, Lausanne.

**MS:** How long do you plan to keep playing?

**TP:** I'll certainly play as long as my health allows!

**MS:** Well, thank you for the interview and good luck!

### **Tigran Petrosian Annotates**

*Cornette, Matthieu* (2355) – *Petrosian, Tigran* (2324)  
Wch U18, Heraklio 22.11.2002

This game was played at the Under 18 junior world championship. I trailed the leader, Hungarian GM Berkes, by half a point with three rounds to go; so one can understand my motivation to win this game.

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cd 4.Nd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6**

The Dragon Variation is my favorite defense in recent years.

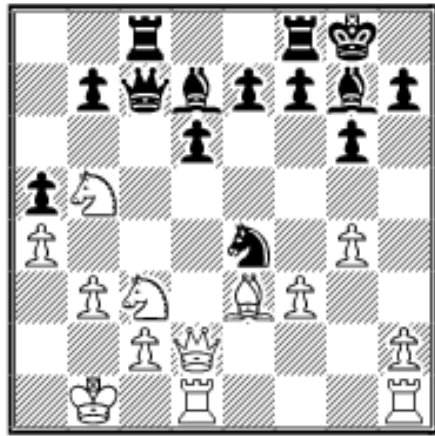
**6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Ne5 11.Bb3 Rc8  
12.Kb1**

12.h4 is more common, but in my opinion 12.Kb1 is better.

**12...a5 13.a4 Nc4 14.Bc4 Rc4 15.b3**

If White rushes with his attack, Black has an opportunity to dampen his opponent's enthusiasm with a promising exchange sacrifice: 13.g4 Ba4 14.b3 Rc3 15.Qc3 Bd7.

**15...Rc8 16.g4 Qc7 17.Ndb5 Ne4!**



A novelty, which I discovered after 30-minutes of consideration. Theory suggests 17...Bb5 18.Nb5 Qd8 19.Bd4 followed by advancing the kingside pawns. Black's queenside counterattack is a fairy tale that does not promise much, so I decided to take a chance.

**18.Ne4**

18.fe Bc3 19.Nc7 Bd2, 18. Nc7 Nc3  
19.Kc1 Na2 (19..Rc7 !?)20.Kb1 Nc3=

**18...Bb5 19.ab d5**

19...a4 deserves attention, avoiding the variation below.

**20.Nf2?**

A mistake that leads to a worse position, but many grandmasters would also choose this move. This is a critical moment of the game! White had to appreciate the dangers of Black's sacrifice and return the material by 20.Nc5! d4 21.Bd4 Bd4 22.Qd4 e5 23.Qd5 Qc5 24.Qc5 Rc5 25.c4, with a slightly more pleasant position.

**20...a4 21.b6?!**

White is already in a difficult situation. He is trying to defend, but only worsens his position.

**21...Qc6 22.Rc1 ab 23.c3 Ra8 24.Nd3 Qc4 25.Nb4? Qb4 0-1**

To conclude this game, I should stress that I primarily outplayed my opponent psychologically. By sacrificing a knight for a pawn without concrete threats, I made a deeper assessment of the position; while my opponent did not sense all of Black's dynamic resources. He missed a critical moment of the struggle and had the worse position thereafter.

*Sengupta, D* (2359) – *Petrosian, T* (2539)

W Jun U20 Kochin , 20.11.2004

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nc3 Nc6 4.g3 Ne4!?**

According to my sources, this move first occurred in Al Modiakhi – Hakki. I know Syrian Master Hakki, so I was sure that he spent many hours analyzing before playing such move.

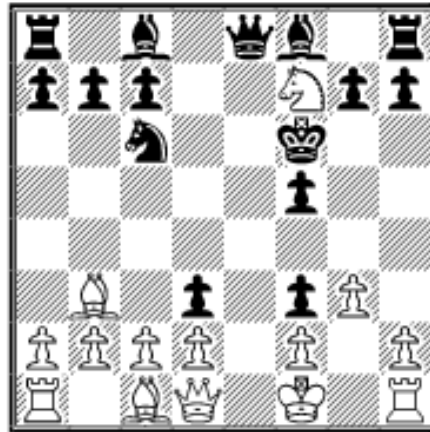
**5.Ne4 d5 6.Nc3 d4 7.Ne4**

A big disadvantage of this sharp knight sacrifice is that White has the option of returning to regular schemes via 7.Bg2 dc 8.bc Bd6 9.0-0 0-0. Also interesting is the “greedy” 7.Nb1 e4 8.Ng1 d3.

**7...f5 8.Neg5 e4 9.Bc4 ef 10.Bf7 Kd7 11.Be6 Ke8 12.Bf7 Ke7!**

This move underscores my passion to fight under any circumstances.

**13.Bb3 Kf6 14.Nf7 (14.Nf3 Qe8 15.Kf1 d3) 14...Qe8+ 15.Kf1 d3!!**



Human intuition is stronger than computer calculation! Set this position up on any analytical engine, let it think for hours, and it still will not be able to find this move. Fritz suggests 15...Qe2+ 16.Qe2 fe+ 17.Ke2 Rg8 18.Nd8 Rh8 19.Nf7 Rg8, with a draw.

**16.Qf3**

Also bad is 16.Nh8 Nd4! 17.cd (17.c3 Qe2+ 18.Qe2 fe+ 19.Kg2 Nb3 20.ab Bd7-

+) f4+

**16...Nd4 17.Qd3 Nb3 18.Nh8 Qc6**

Also possible was the cool 18...Na1 with a winning position.

**19.Kg1 Na1 20.b3 Qc2 21.Qd4 Ke6 22.Qa1 Bd7 23.Bb2 Bc6 24.h3 Bc5!  
25.Bg7 Bf2+! 26.Kh2 Qe4?**

Sometimes you start seeing ghosts in a completely winning position. More convincing is 26...Bg3+! 27.Kg3 Qd3 28.Kh4 Qd8 29.Kh5 Bf3 with mate.

**27.Qf6+ Kd5 28.Rc1?**

White enters a hopeless position and does not take advantage of his sudden chance for salvation after 28.Rf1.

**28...Re8 -+ 29.Rc4 Bg1+ 1-0** With mate in three.



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