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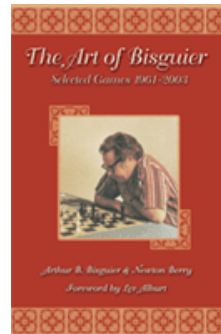
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A Collection of Art

Steve Goldberg

The Art of Bisguier: Selected Games 1961-2003, by Arthur B. Bisguier & Newton Berry, 2008 Russell Enterprises, Inc., Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 272pp., \$29.95

In *The Art of Bisguier: Selected Games 1961-2003*, there are one hundred of GM Arthur Bisguier's annotated games from this period. But it is much more than a games collection; what really adds to the value of the book are the personal comments from the American grandmaster.



Prior to each game, Bisguier provides a little historical perspective to the tournament or his opponent. He then annotates not just with variations, but with insightful comments that explain why he played as he did, or why he accepted a draw in a position that seemed to still have some fight left to it.

In fact, there are a number of draws among the selected games, not what you'd normally expect to find in such a collection. But again, Bisguier's comments can be quite illuminating.

For example, among his introductory comments to Game 17, against Tigran Petrosian in the 1962 Stockholm Interzonal, Bisguier notes:

It is customary for the player proposing a draw to make his move first then offer. However, it was not yet an official FIDE rule. As Tigran explained later, my decision to give up my queen shocked him. He didn't like the complications, and we were about to see plenty of them. So he offered the draw without playing a move. I shook his hand and took the half-point. Speaking as someone who drew a number of games against Petrosian, in each instance I felt my chances of winning were no greater than my prospects of losing.

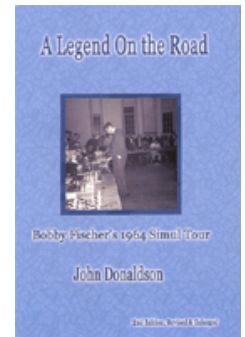
When I pressed Tigran further about his reasons, he said Tal and Keres were looking at the game – rivals he'd have to get past for a shot at Botvinnik's title. Petrosian feared that not accepting the challenge my play presented might make him appear cowardly in their eyes. But if he played on, he could lose. So he chose a middle ground and offered the draw.

On the other hand, Game 36 is a seventeen-move draw with Boris Spassky, about which Bisguier writes, "A comparatively tame game that showed little promise of ever becoming very interesting." So why include the game in the book? Perhaps because Spassky had just captured the world championship title earlier that year. Still, I would have preferred another of Bisguier's masterpieces. Yet, it's hard not to chuckle when the GM says elsewhere, "They say a draw is like kissing your sister. But a loss can be like a kick in the stomach. Besides, I love my sister."

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The ten-page introduction from co-author Newton Berry provides a nice historical overview of Bisguier's career, including many of his contributions to opening theory. He also includes a challenging set of puzzles taken from six of the GM's games.

There are a few minor errors that I encountered. In the very first paragraph of his introduction, Berry misspells the word likelihood as "likelyhood." Then, in the next paragraph, it is stated that the solutions to the quizzes presented begin on page nine. In actuality, the answers start on page ten. This raised concerns about the "likelihood" of further errors, but I didn't encounter any similar issues. What I did find a bit annoying, however, was that the symbol used for checkmate throughout the book (it looks like a tiny tic-tac-toe board) is not quite the same as that noted on the Signs and Symbols page (#). To this reviewer's middle-aged eyes, the actual checkmate symbol utilized appeared more as an asterisk if I quickly scanned variations. I continually wanted to look at the bottom of the page for an asterisk reference.

Nevertheless, I rate the book as a strong buy. Not only are the actual games exciting in almost every case, Bisguier's comments are lively and entertaining. But what first caught my attention when I initially scanned the book was the plethora of historic pictures included throughout.



Kibitzers Conclave: Euwe (left), Kotov, Geller and Bisguier on one pocket set!

There's a 1960 photograph of the U.S. Olympiad team showing Isaac Kashdan, Raymond Weinstein, Robert Byrne, Bisguier, William Lombardy and 17-year-old Robert Fischer. Another picture has Euwe, Kotov, Geller and Bisguier all huddled around a small pocket chess set. Then there's a great close-up of Bisguier with Najdorf and Petrosian. There are many more such photos, including February 1947 and August 1957 *Chess Review* covers featuring Bisguier.

About Miguel Najdorf (called "Moishe" by his friends), Bisguier recalls

how he survived the devastating loss of his wife, child, parents and four brothers in the Holocaust. Najdorf later became an incredibly successful businessman in Argentina, and Bisguier says that he spent millions of dollars supporting chess.

A look at Bisguier's opponents in this collection shows at least a two-generation span. You'll find games against Keres and Smyslov and Tal, but you'll also find the names of Kamsky and Krush among the selected games.

I've never had the pleasure of meeting Bisguier, but one gets the impression that he'd be a delightful person with which to chat. His commentary is light and enjoyable to follow, even if a bit corny in spots – his annotations against physician Anthony Saigy are replete with notes such as “The position is diagnosed as approximately equal,” “My position is out of sick bay, and I'm feeling better already” and “Potentially severe complications.”



At the Manhattan tournament banquet (left to right), James T. Sherwin, Arthur B. Bisguier, Samuel Reshevsky, Al Bisno, President of the Manhattan Chess Club, Larry Evans and Donald Byrne. Missing from the picture is tournament contender George Kramer.

Let's take a look at Game 66 in this collection – one of the shorter games here, but fairly representative of what you'll find.

In the course of a couple paragraphs, Bisguier introduces his opponent, British FIDE master Bernard Cafferty, who had published a book on the English Opening prior to this game. Although I've left out Bisguier's introduction, I'm including all of his game annotations:

(66) Cafferty,B – Bisguier,A
Birmingham, 1975
English Opening [A20]

1.c4 e5

Frequently I answer 1.c4 with 1...Nf6 or 1...c5, flexible moves that often lead to transpositions into the Queen's Gambit family of openings. But I took it as a challenge to play the authority in his own special province. After 1...e5, we were pretty definitely going to play an English.

2.d3

A surprise, as Bernard's *English Opening* gives 2.Nc3 as the best move for White. Maybe he feared I'd read his book and prepared something special.

2...Bb4+

After this move, we can forget Cafferty's book.

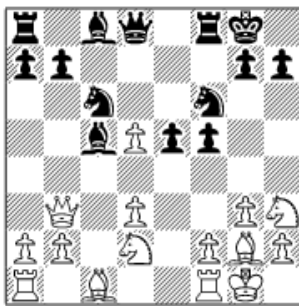
3.Nd2 f5

Giving the game Dutch Defense overtones.

4.g3 Nf6 5.Bg2 0–0 6.Nh3 c6

Blackburne used to play Nh3 against the Dutch, with the idea of planting a white knight on f4 to pressure Black's e6-pawn – a strategy not applicable here.

7.0–0 d5 8.Qb3 Bc5 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.e4 Nc6 11.exd5



White wins a pawn. Recapture is out of the question with Bernard's queen and bishop both protecting d5. However, I get compensation in a wonderful outpost for my knight.

11...Nd4 12.Qd1 f4

I'm in no hurry to make the troublesome recapture at d5, as I now have a solid initiative.

13.Kh1 f3 14.Nxf3 Nxf3 15.Be3

I'm now up a piece for two pawns. If 15.Bxf3, 15...Bxh3. And if 15.Qxf3, 15...Bg4 leaves White's royal lady with no safe retreat.

15...Nd4 16.Ng5 Nxd5 17.b4 Bb6

Cafferty is losing, so he seeks complications – like 17...Bxb4 18.Bxd4 exd4 19.Qb3 – as a strategy. I relish complex positions, and have no doubt my greater tactical abilities would serve me well in a complicated imbroglio. However, I realized it made no sense to oblige my opponent by playing the only kind of game that offered him a chance to salvage something. So I determined to exercise discipline and simplify to a sure win.

18.Rc1 h6

Here 18...Nxe3 is slightly stronger.

19.Bxd4 Bxd4

Inferior, but playable, is 19...hxg5?! 20.Bxe5 Be6.

20.Rxc8



White sacrifices the exchange to try one last desperate trick.

20...Rxc8

If 20...Qxc8?!, 21.Bxd5+ Kh8 22.Nf7+ Rxf7 23.Bxf7 with an even game. White actually gains the advantage after 20...Qxg5?! 21.Rxa8 Rxa8 22.Qb3, as Black's pinned Nd5 will soon fall. [In these variations, I question why the

annotation “?!” is used rather than “?” – Goldberg]

21.Ne6 Qd6 22.Qb3

White wants the Nd5 and maybe the knight-for-rook exchange as well.

22...Rfd8 0-1

What Bernard hoped for, of course, was 22...Qxe6? 23.Bxd5, pinning and winning the black queen. Dream denied: after 23.Nxd8 Rxd8, Black retains the Nd5 and is winning. A piece for a pawn down, Cafferty resigned.

A startling figure mentioned in the book is that when Bisguier achieved his grandmaster title in 1957, he was one of only about forty in the world. However, at the time, the FIDE definition of the GM title was going through a series of changes, and there was a period in which the Soviet Union maintained its own grandmaster classification. Today, of course, there are over one thousand FIDE grandmasters worldwide.

One final note – there was a 2003 edition of *The Art of Bisguier*, by another publisher, which this volume refers to as “AB1.” Whereas the current book includes Bisguier games from 1961-2003, the earlier edition covers games through 1960, when the GM was thirty-one years old. Although I have not seen the earlier edition, it appears that it had a number of major technical flaws (see the review [here](#)). Thankfully, the current book is one that the reader can enjoy, not only for its games and commentary, but for its physical appearance as well.

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by Arthur B. Bisguier & Newton Berry

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