



The Guide to Musical Theatre

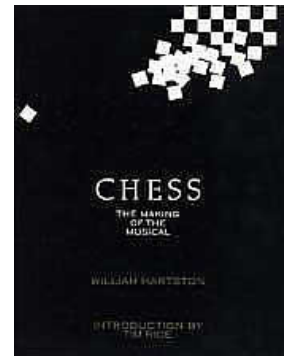
CHESS

Music by Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus : Lyrics by Tim Rice.: Based on an idea by Tim Rice

Prince Edward Theatre, London - 14 May, 1986 (1209 perfs)
Imperial Theatre, Broadway - 28 April, 1988 (68 perfs)

SYNOPSIS

This highly acclaimed musical develops the ancient and distinguished game of chess into a metaphor for romantic rivalries and East-West political intrigue. The principal pawns form a love triangle: the loutish American Grandmaster, the earnest Russian champion, and the Hungarian-American female chess second, who arrives at the international championships with the American but falls for the Russian. From Tyrol to Thailand the players, lovers, politicians, CIA and KGB make their moves to the pulse of this monumental rock score. Several numbers, including "One Night in Bangkok" and "I Know Him So Well", are international hits.



STORY

Act 1

The president of the International Chess Federation—known as "The Arbiter" for his role as the tournament's referee—speculates on the origins of the game of chess before announcing the location of the upcoming world chess championship: the northern Italian town of Merano. As the townsfolk prepare for the occasion, the current world chess champion, Frederick "Freddie" Trumper of the United States, arrives with his second and implied lover: Hungarian-born, English-raised Florence Vassy. In their hotel room, Florence remarks on the press's portrayal of Freddie in a negative light because of his bad boy attitude and brash behaviour. Regardless of Florence's wish that he control his temper, Freddie heads off to a press conference where he immediately assaults a journalist who questions his relationship with Florence. Freddie's Russian challenger, Anatoly Sergievsky, as well as Alexander Molokov, Anatoly's second (and a KGB agent), watch Freddie with curiosity and disdain on television. Afterwards, Anatoly, now alone, laments the selling out of his dreams and ambitions to get to where he is today.

The opening ceremony features the U.S. and Soviet delegates each vowing their side will win, The Arbiter insisting on a fair and clean game, and marketers looking to make a profit. During the increasingly intense match, Freddie suddenly bursts out of the arena, leaving the chessboard on the floor and Florence to pick up the pieces with Anatoly, Molokov, and The Arbiter, whereby she promises to bring Freddie and Anatoly together in order to diplomatically revive the tournament. It turns out that Freddie engineered the outburst to get a higher price from an American media company, Global Television, though Walter de Courcy—the company's agent overseeing the match and a member of Freddie's delegation—criticizes the stunt as ludicrous. Florence and Freddie consequently argue until he spitefully turns the conversation toward her missing father, believed captured by Soviet forces during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. She reflects cynically about chess and politics before heading off to the Merano Mountain Inn for the peaceful meeting she has scheduled between Freddie and Anatoly. Freddie, though, does not immediately turn up, leaving Anatoly and Florence awkwardly alone together; however, they eventually embrace as surprising romantic

feelings arise before being interrupted by Freddie, who has been working out new financial terms with Global TV.

The chess tournament proceeds, culminating in a series of victories for Anatoly with only one more needed to make him winner of the entire tournament. Due to Freddie's atrocious attitude in the aftermath of his defeats, Florence finally deserts him, whereby Freddie ponders how his unhappy childhood left him the man he is today. He sends The Arbiter a letter of resignation, resulting in Anatoly's automatically becoming the new world champion. Immediately, Anatoly defects from the Soviet Union and goes to the British embassy, where he attempts to seek asylum in England. Florence, accompanying Anatoly, reflects on their strange, new-found love. Walter tips off the press as to this recent news story and they ambush Anatoly and Florence. When the mob of reporters asks Anatoly why he is deserting his country, he tells them that his land's only borders lie around his heart.

Act 2

A year later, Anatoly is set to defend his championship in Bangkok, Thailand. Freddie is already there, chatting up locals and experiencing the Bangkok nightlife because he is now Global TV's special presenter for this year's championship. Florence and Anatoly are now openly lovers, and worry about Freddie's sudden reappearance as well as the impending arrival of Anatoly's estranged wife, Svetlana, from Russia, which Anatoly suspects is part of Molokov's plan to shame him into returning to the Soviet Union. Molokov, meanwhile, has trained a new protégé, Leonid Viigand, to challenge Anatoly, while spying on Anatoly and plotting his downfall.

Walter, now Freddie's boss at Global TV (and clearly a CIA agent), manipulates Freddie into embarrassing Anatoly on live TV during an uncomfortable and eventually heated interview between the two former opponents. Molokov, who indeed is responsible for Svetlana's presence in Bangkok, now blackmails her into making Anatoly lose the match. Walter, who has been promised the release of certain American agents if he can ruin Anatoly's play, informs Florence that her father is still alive though imprisoned in Russia, and that he too will be released if she can convince Anatoly to lose. Neither of these ploys work to get Anatoly to throw the game, however. As a result, Molokov and Walter team up to get Freddie to personally persuade Anatoly and Florence, knowing that Freddie is vengeful toward Anatoly and interested in winning back the love of Florence. The couple, though, refuses to negotiate with Freddie.

Svetlana and Florence talk one-on-one for the first time about their respective romantic relationships with Anatoly. Florence ultimately admits that it would be best for Anatoly to return to Svetlana and their children. Anatoly, meanwhile, is sent an anonymous letter telling him to go to Wat Pho, which he does; to his surprise, Freddie appears, having decided to merely facilitate a brilliant match, regardless of his own personal conflicts with Anatoly. Because of this new change in attitude, Freddie informs Anatoly of a significant flaw in Viigand's play that will help Anatoly win.

In the deciding game of the match, with the score at five games all, Anatoly manages to take a superb win against Viigand, and realizes that it may be the only success he can achieve in his life at this time. The victory comes even as Svetlana castigates Anatoly for wallowing in the crowd's empty praise and Florence expresses similar annoyance with him for casting aside his moral ideals. Later, Florence confesses her sentiments that he should return to his family in the Soviet Union and the pair reflects on the conclusion of their romance. Walter later approaches Florence with the news that Anatoly has defected back to the U.S.S.R., meaning that her father will certainly be released. He startlingly admits, however, that no one actually knows if her father is still alive. Florence breaks down, telling Walter that he is using people's lives for nothing, before repeating Anatoly's prior sentiments that her only borders lie around her heart.

THE CAST: - M5 F2, with chorus playing multiple roles

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frederick: arrogant, temperamental, American; 30s.• Florence: attractive, clever confident; 30s.• Anatoly: quiet, gentle, Russian; 40s. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walter: smarmy, sly, American; middle age.• Molokov: cold, Soviet leader; middle age.• Arbiter: no-nonsense, authoritative; middle age.• Svetlana: domestic, dependent, Russian; 30s. |
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MUSICAL NUMBERS:

Act 1

1. "Prologue" — Instrumental
2. "The Story of Chess" — The Arbiter and Ensemble
3. "Merano" †
4. "Merano" — Mayor and Ensemble
5. "What a Scene! What a Joy!" — Freddie and Florence
6. "Merano (Reprise)" — Ensemble
7. "Commie Newspapers" — Freddie and Florence
8. "Press Conference" — Freddie, Florence, and Reporters
9. "Anatoly and Molokov" / "Where I Want to Be" † — Molokov, Anatoly, and Ensemble
10. "Difficult and Dangerous Times" ‡ — Molokov, Walter, and Ensemble
11. "The Arbiter" — The Arbiter and Ensemble
12. "Hymn to Chess" — Ensemble
13. "The Merchandisers" — Ensemble
14. "Chess #1" — Instrumental
15. "The Arbiter (Reprise)" — The Arbiter and Ensemble
16. "Quartet (A Model of Decorum and Tranquility)" — Molokov, Florence, The Arbiter, and Anatoly
17. "Florence and Molokov" — Molokov and Florence
18. "1956 - Budapest is Rising" — Ensemble, Freddie and Florence
19. "Nobody's Side" — Florence and Ensemble
20. "Der Kleiner Franz" — Ensemble
21. "Mountain Duet" — Florence, Anatoly, and Freddie
22. "Chess #2" — Instrumental
23. "Florence Quits" — Freddie and Florence
24. "Pity the Child" — Freddie and Ensemble
25. "Embassy Lament" — English Civil Servants
26. "Heaven Help My Heart" — Florence
27. "Anatoly and the Press" — Anatoly and Reporters
28. "Anthem" — Anatoly and Ensemble

Act 2

29. "Golden Bangkok" / "One Night in Bangkok" † — Instrumental / Freddie and Ensemble
30. "One More Opponent" / "You and I" † — Anatoly and Florence
31. "The Soviet Machine" — Molokov and Ensemble
32. "The Interview" — Walter, Freddie, and Anatoly
33. "The Deal" — The Arbiter, Molokov, Svetlana, Walter, Florence, Freddie, Anatoly, and Ensemble
34. "I Know Him So Well" — Florence and Svetlana
35. "Talking Chess" — Anatoly and Freddie
36. "Endgame" — Ensemble, Molokov, Freddie, Florence, Anatoly and Svetlana
37. "You and I (Reprise)" — Florence and Anatoly
38. "Finale" — Walter and Florence

THE SCENES

Various interior and exterior settings

ORCHESTRATION

Violins A and B, Cello A and B, Bass, Woodwind 1 (Flute/Piccolo), Woodwind 2 (Oboe/Cor Anglais), Woodwind 3 (Clarinet 1), Woodwind 4 (Clarinet 2/Bass Clarinet), Woodwind 5 (Flute 2/Clarinet 3/Baritone Sax), Woodwind 6 (Bassoon), Horn, Trumpets 1, 2 and 3, Trombones 1 and 2, Drums, Percussion, Guitar, Keyboards 1, 2 and 3

AMERICAN VESION

PLOT SUMMARY

The play's American incarnation has noticeably different settings, lyrics, song orders, and a completely different Act 2 from the British version. In particular, in the American Chess the entire show is about one chess match, not two. Act 1 involves the first part of the match, which is held in Bangkok, Thailand, while Act 2 handles the conclusion, and is set in Budapest, Hungary. Also, the incumbent champion is switched in the American version (that is, to Anatoly Sergievsky rather than Freddie Trumper) as is the winner of the Sergievsky-Trumper tournament.



Prologue

In 1956, a Hungarian revolutionary, Gregor Vassy, calmly explains to his 4-year-old daughter, Florence, the history of chess, before the two are separated in the midst of a violent rebellion in Budapest.

Act 1

Decades later at an international chess tournament in Bangkok, Thailand, the wild-tempered American challenger, Freddie Trumper, arrives with his second and presumed lover: a now-adult Florence. At a press meeting, Freddie loses his temper with the reporters as Florence scolds them for their sensationalism. The current world champion, a Soviet Russian named Anatoly Sergievsky, discusses this with his second, Molokov. Afterwards, in private, Anatoly cynically reflects on how his career as world champion has been characterized by empty fame. Meanwhile, Florence grows frustrated with Freddie's seedy financial agent, Walter, and complains to Freddie that her intellectual capabilities are under-appreciated.

The opening ceremony features merchandise vendors and Walter relishing in the tournament's money-making opportunities; the American and Soviet delegates each vowing their side will win; and the beginning of the tournament's first round. When Anatoly begins eating yogurt during the match, Freddie accuses him of cheating before storming out of the arena, leaving Florence to negotiate with the tournament's Arbiter, Molokov, and Anatoly, eventually promising to retrieve Freddie. Florence later scolds Freddie, and they fight about the tournament's politics until he viciously turns the argument toward her missing father; alone, Florence begins to realize her need to abandon Freddie.

Instead of heading off to the Generous Sole restaurant for the reconciliatory meeting Florence has scheduled between Freddie and Anatoly, Freddie is sidetracked by the Bangkok nightlife, leaving Anatoly and Florence awkwardly alone together; however, they eventually embrace as romantic feelings arise before being finally interrupted by Freddie. Anatoly apologizes for the yogurt incident and Freddie returns to the match, but only after a hefty bribe. Distracted by the loss of Florence's love, however, Freddie flounders, finishing the most recent round with one win and five losses; one more loss will cost him the match. Furious, he blames his problems on Florence, who finally leaves him as he reflects on his stature. Florence contemplates her new freedom from Freddie, while Walter secretly arranges for Anatoly to defect from the Soviet Union to the United States. When a mob of reporters ambush Anatoly and ask about his newfound relationship with Florence and why he is deserting his country, he tells them that he will never truly leave his country, and his land's only borders lie around his heart.

Act 2

Eight weeks later, everyone is in Budapest to witness the conclusion of the match between Anatoly and Freddie. Florence is elated to be back in her hometown, but dismayed that she remembers none of it. Molokov offers to help her find her missing father and starts “investigating”. Freddie, under protestations from Walter, is confident that he will win. Florence and Anatoly are now openly lovers, though their relationship is complicated by the arrival of Svetlana, Anatoly’s estranged wife, in Budapest. Anatoly discovers that Molokov is threatening his brother’s family to get him to return to Russia and begins to break down, losing a string of matches and leaving the score tied at five games all. Molokov and Walter, interested in exchanging key individuals for their respective countries, collaborate to achieve their separate goals, and Molokov reveals to Walter that Florence’s father is alive in Budapest, who in turn reveals this to Florence. Pressured by this information and the strain on her relationship with Anatoly, Florence turns to Svetlana for solace. Anatoly, having heard the news of Florence’s father, cannot focus on the match at hand, and so Florence asks Freddie for a postponement, but he refuses and breaks down on live television, reflecting how his broken childhood made him who he is today. In the meantime, Molokov brings Florence to see a man claiming to be her father and the two joyously reconnect.

In the deciding game of the match, Anatoly resolves to ensure that Florence is reunited with her father. He thus chooses to recant his defection and makes a tactical error during the game. Freddie immediately takes advantage of the blunder and proceeds to win the tournament, becoming the new world champion. Florence and Anatoly reflect on the conclusion of their romance. Florence is left alone to wait for her father when she is approached by Walter, who confesses that the old man is not her father, who is most likely dead. It seems that Molokov struck a deal with Walter that if the Russians managed to get Anatoly back, they would release a captured American spy; using Florence, they succeeded. Florence has now left Freddie, been abandoned by Anatoly, and lost the father she never had, realising that she too has been used, and she sadly mirrors Anatoly’s earlier sentiment that her only borders lie around her heart.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

Act 1

1. “Prologue”:
2. “The Story of Chess” – Gregor
3. “Freddie’s Entrance” – Freddie
4. “Press Conference” – Florence and Reporters
5. “Where I Want to Be” – Anatoly
6. “Argument” – Florence and Freddie
7. “Merchandisers” – Walter and Vendors
8. “Diplomats” – Molokov and Delegates
9. “Chess Hymn” – Ensemble
10. “Chess #1” – Instrumental
11. “Quartet (Model of Decorum and Tranquility)” – Molokov, Florence, Arbiter, and Anatoly
12. “The American and Florence” – Florence and Freddie
13. “Someone Else’s Story” – Florence
14. “One Night in Bangkok” – Freddie and Ensemble
15. “Terrace Duet” – Florence and Anatoly
16. “Who’d Ever Think It?” – Freddie
17. Chess #2 – Instrumental
18. “Florence Quits” / “A Taste of Pity” – Florence and Freddie / Freddie
19. “Nobody’s Side” – Florence
20. “Reporters” – Reporters
21. “Anthem” – Anatoly

Act 2

22. “The Arbiter” – The Arbiter and Reporters
23. “Hungarian Folk Song” – Ensemble
24. “Heaven Help My Heart” – Florence
25. “Winning” – Walter and Freddie
26. “You and I” – Florence and Anatoly
27. “Where I Want to Be (Reprise)” – Svetlana
28. “You and I (Reprise)” – Anatoly and Svetlana
29. “Freddie Goes Metal” – Freddie
30. “Let’s Work Together” – Molokov and Walter
31. “I Know Him So Well” – Florence and Svetlana
32. “Pity the Child” – Freddie
33. “Father’s Lullaby” (Apukád erős kezén) – Gregor and Florence
34. “Endgame” – Arbiter, Nikolai, Ben, Freddie, Anatoly, and Ensemble
35. “You and I (Reprise)” – Florence and Anatoly
36. “Finale” – Florence