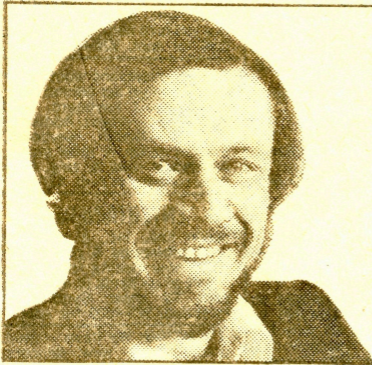


# Dwight Chapin



## Meet a master

**T**HE TABLES were set in a rectangle and 19 players — 18 men and one woman — were huddled intently over their chess sets.

Boris Spassky moved around easily in the space in the middle. He wasn't particularly intent. He didn't have to be. He'd make maybe \$1,500 for this "simultaneous exhibition" with members of the Bay Area press corps, so he had to pay some attention. But he well knew none of these people was Bobby Fischer, who took away Spassky's world championship back in 1972. Not even close. And Spassky's expressive Russian face showed it, frequently with boredom.

Only occasionally would he even have to ponder a move. As somebody said later, it was like Nolan Ryan throwing his 100-mile-an-hour fast ball past a bunch of Little Leaguers.

Spassky's most interesting test this day — a brief

one — came when a late-arriving representative of a local radio station forced a one-sided confrontation. The man said he admired Spassky, but wouldn't play him a game of chess until the Soviet Union pulled its troops out of Afghanistan.

The other people in the room winced and a couple of them swore, but Spassky appeared unfazed. In fact, he didn't even seem to understand the point that was being made.

Spassky doesn't live in the Soviet Union anymore. He and his third wife, Marina, have resided in France for the last four years, on a travel visa granted him by the Soviet government, and he obviously is happy with the arrangement.

"I would like to fight only on the chessboard," he says, "not more."



**Boris Spassky**



His longtime Russian rival, Viktor Korchnoi, who defected to the West in 1976, has criticized Spassky's fence straddling, calling him "a one-legged dissident."

**B**UT SPASSKY appears content to enjoy the relative best of both worlds.

After his loss to Fischer eight years ago, it was widely reported that Spassky was moved to a smaller apartment by Soviet authorities, lost his editorship of a powerful chess publication, was forbidden to play abroad or write chess reviews and had his fat state salary cut in half (all those moves were denied by the government).

Spassky says: "I had problems with the Soviet Sport Committee. I was strongly criticized and I had to do this and this and this. Many things were outside of chess."

He is a little evasive about his status back home now, but he says he has "a very interesting, good relationship with the sport committee and I am an official representative of my country at any international (chess) event."

He also gets 300 rubles (\$400) a month from the Soviet government, but he more or less shrugs that off.

"My wife and I need \$2,000 a month to live in France," he says. "It is a very expensive country."

Although he's still among the best players in the world, at 43, Spassky isn't rewarded the way Bjorn Borg, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Terry Bradshaw are.

He wears fashionable designer clothes and the fleshiness around his middle gives evidence of the good life, but Spassky says, "I'm a typical professional chess player. I make money for playing in tournaments and I ask \$1,500 for playing 25 boards at simultaneous exhibitions, but people don't like to pay me this money."

He says he "gave his name" for a chess computer, but not the one called Boris. "I know of this one and I don't like it," he says. "I tried to fight the company but I am very alone in this fight."

Spassky made his first visit to California in 14 years last weekend, for appearances in San Francisco and at the eighth annual Paul Masson American Classic Chess Championships in Saratoga.

It has been a long time since his real glory years, since the span from 1969 to 1972 when he was on top of the world. He has not been the same player since he was beaten by Fischer in that classic '72 match, although there is enough competitive fire left in him that he talks of another championship.

Ironically, Bobby Fischer, as reclusive as Howard Hughes of late, reportedly has been living with a sister in the Menlo Park area and Spassky says he wouldn't mind a reunion — or a rematch.

"But first I must ask him," Spassky says, "and he is very difficult to find."

Fischer put on quite a show of temperament in his victory over Spassky in Reykjavik, Iceland, seemingly winning at least partially through intimidation. But Spassky still is uncertain how much Fischer's actions upset him.

"At the moment I'm not sure what Bobby's real weapons were," Spassky says. "Perhaps I must ask him personally. When Viktor Korchnoi made a special effort to distract me in a match two years ago, I started to hate him — and after that I started to play better."

"But I don't suppose Bobby ever fought against me personally. I had the feeling he respected me — and I respected him."