

Unfinished symphony

"LEONID STEIN'S brilliant chess career was cut tragically short by his untimely death in 1973. Scoring overwhelming victories against the world's leading grandmasters, Stein not only stormed to the incredible total of three first prizes (out of four attempts) in the USSR championships... but also gained first prize in what were arguably the two strongest tournaments of all time (Moscow 1967 and 1971)."

So says Raymond Keene in his new book, a sad tribute: *Leonid Stein: Master of Attack* (Robert Hale and Co, London.)

Keene explains how Stein was one of the unluckiest "super-grandmasters" ever. The winner of numerous top class tournaments, Stein never did make the candidates' matches. Once he watched silently as vacancies were filled by Ivkov and Portisch due to a rule limiting the number of Soviet places. He died less than a month before yet another interzonal, Petropolis 1973.

The book, however, shows the sunny side of Stein's glorious chess career, with the collection of his most outstanding and imaginative masterpieces doing justice to his creative and tactical prowess.

Vernon Small and I played through the whole volume and we were impressed by Stein's tactical wizardry. But we couldn't quite help but feel that to spring out of the awful positions he ended up in, Stein must have luck on his side! Watch, for instance how poor Krogius obtains what looks like a rather nice game but is really just an instrument for what Keene describes as... "Stein's immortal game".

Russian Federal Republic v Ukraine, 1960.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENCE
Krogius Stein
(International (International Grandmaster) Grandmaster)

- 1. d4 Nf6
- 2. c4 g6
- 3. Nc3 Bg7
- 4. e4 O-O
- 5. Be2 d6
- 6. Nf3 e5
- 7. d5

Petrosian's move, which is usually followed by a pin with Bg5. In typical style Stein prevents this rather bluntly; more accurate is 7... a5 with which he cleverly beat Gligoric in Moscow in 1967.

- 7... h6?!
- 8. O-O?!

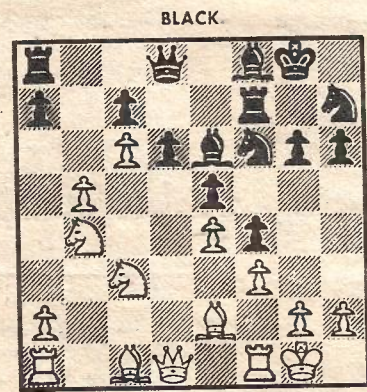
Black's forthright approach is rewarded. Instead of the stereotyped O-O Keene proceeded 8, Nd2 v Westerinen in Berlin in 1971 and gained the advantage after 8... Nd7. 9, g4 a5. 10, Nf1 Nc5 11, Ng3 c6. 12, Be3 Bd7. 13, f3 a4. 14, Qd2 cxd5. 15, cxd5 Qa5. 16, Nd1!

- 8... Nh7
- 9. Ne1 Nd7
- 10. Nd3 f5
- 11. f3 f4
- 12. b4 Rf7
- 13. c5 N(d)f6
- 14. c6 bxc6

14... b6 would temporarily close the queen side but the c pawn would be a liability in any end game. Stein is a firm believer in the offensive and although the move played concedes the d5 square he has in mind a sacrificial plan to seize the initiative.

- 15. dxc6 Be6
- 16. b5 Bf8
- 17. Nb4

With ideas of a huge blockade on d5, Krogius must have been more than happy with his game. But oh no! Good old Whizz Bang (our pet name for Stein) has a surprise or two in store.



- 17... d5!
- 18. N(b)x d5

Stein has brilliantly conjured up powerful threats and already White must avoid the pitfall 18, exd5 Bf5. 19, Nd3 Nh5 when he is hard pressed to prevent the mating process 20... Bxd3 followed by 21... Bc5 ch. 22, Kh1 Ng3 ch. 23, hxg3 Qg5!

- 18... Bc5 ch
- 19. Kh1 Nh5
- 20. Qe1

Obviously Krogius's queen move was to prevent the knight sacrifice — but he forgot to tell Stein that!

- 20... Ng3 ch!!
- 21. hxg3 Qg5
- 22. g4 h5
- 23. g3 hxg4
- 24. Kg2 R(a)f8

The first of a number of quiet moves...

- 25. Bd2 Qh6
- 26. Rh1 Qg7
- 27. gx f4 exf4
- 28. Rd1 g5
- 29. e5

Planning to return the piece.

- 29... Qxe5
- 30. fxg4

Krogius must have envisaged the simplifying 30... Bxd5 ch. 31, Nxd5 Qxd5 ch. 32, Bf3 and White has a great game. But Stein is merciless.

- 30... Qxe2 ch!

Keene's comment: "Please note: that is a whole queen..." If White now recaptures with his knight, then 31... Bxd5 ch. 32, Kf1 (If 32, Kh2 Nf6 and Rh7 ch)



Leonid Stein

32... f3! and if the knight runs 33... Bc4 ch is winning.

- 31. Qxe2 f3 ch
- 32. Qxf3 Rxf3
- 33. R(h)f1 Bxg4
- 34. Ne4 Bh3 ch
- 35. Kh2 Rxf1
- 36. Rxf1 Bxf1
- 37. Nxc5 Rf2 ch
- 38. Kg1 Rxd2
- 39. Nxc7 Bh3

Relentless. Nothing less than mate will do.

- 40. a4 Rg2 ch
 - 41. Kh1 Nf6
- Heading for f2 or g3.

- 42. a5 Ng4
- 43. Ne4 Re2
- 44. Resigns

A masterpiece of the highest order.

Leonid Zakarovitch Stein died of a heart attack on July 4, 1973, at the age of 38.

So much remains incomplete and unsaid in his life, personality and games. Of the two titles Keene could have used, I prefer the one he didn't: *Leonid Stein: Unfinished Symphony*.

MURRAY CHANDLER