

Milan Vukceвич - problemist
by IM Yochanan Afek

Dr. Milan Vukceвич excelled in all forms of chess, however as a problemist he was one of the best of all time. In 1988 he was the first American to be awarded with the title of International Grandmaster for chess composition after entering 120 problems of all kind to the periodical FIDE Albums (the draconic norm for the title is 70 problems in the albums which cover the best of a period of 3 years each).

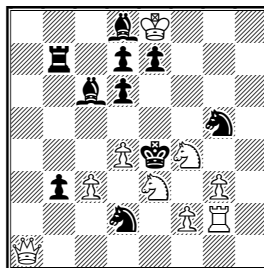
Vukceвич saw in over the board play and in chess problems two equal aspects of the same game and the difference between them is more in the intensity than in the substance. In the introduction to his memorable book '*Chess by Milan*' (1981) he wrote: "Many times I heard that chess problems cannot help anyone play better at chess. Along the same lines, I often hear that understanding quantum mechanics does not help an engineer, that chemists and biologists do not have any use for physics and mathematics and that the theory of relativity is irrelevant to the philosopher... These voices try to get something for nothing, to rationalize laziness and justify ignorance!"

A good chess problem, according to Vukceвич activates more force per move, uses pieces more efficiently and stresses more their cooperation and interference with each extraordinary event, in the same way in which a good novel may condense real lives in a single lifetime of its fictitious hero"

This subtle perception was the guideline of his extraordinary composing career. He composed in all genres but was mainly dedicated to developing new ideas in the old 19th century classical themes and their combinations. The following four-mover demonstrates in grand style a combination of two such themes, which were his life-long favourites: **The Bristol Theme** (a long range piece clears its line to another piece of the same colour) and the **Grimshaw Theme** (mutual interferences of defending pieces).

Milan Vukceвич

1982, 1st prize


Mate in 4
1. ♖h1!

The key move – White threatens 2.f3+ ♜dxf3 3.♖b1+ Kxe3 4.♖d3# or 2...♜gxf3 3.♖h7+ Kxe3 4.♖d3#. Against this threat Black has the following subtle defence:

1... ♜b5 2. ♜g1+ ♜df3 3. ♜a1!!

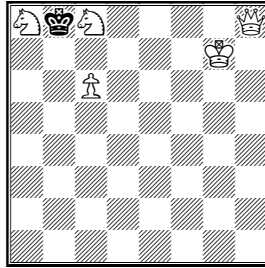
With the Bristol threat 4.♖b1#, which cannot be met by ...♜b5 (a Grimshaw interference!).

The second thematic defence is 1... ♜b5 2. ♜h2+ ♜gf3 3. ♜h8!!

And again the Bristol threat 4.♖h7# cannot be met by ...♜b5 due to another Grimshaw interference. Amazing harmony!

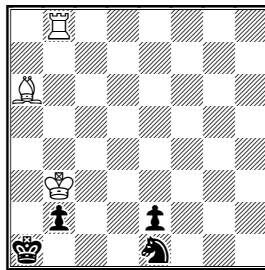
This is a superb example of Vukceвич's depth and virtuosity, however he also composed several light-weight problems aimed at the occasional solver. I am sure it won't take you too long to crack the following miniature and a study (solutions is in the end of this article):

1) Milan Vukceвич, 1970



Mate in 2

2) Vukceвич, study 1951



White to play and draw

Solutions:

1) 1.♞h1! Zugzwang! 1...♜xa8 2.c7# or 1...♜xc8 2.♞h8#

2) 1.♙d3! ♜xd3 2.♜c2 ♜c1 3.♞xb2 e1♞ 4.♞b1+ ♜a2 5.♞a1+ ♜xa1
Stalemate! Vukceвич composed this study when he was just 14!