**Chess**

**By Richard Nelson**

Act 1

The president of the International Chess Federation—The Arbiter—speculates on the origins of the game of chess ("Story of Chess") before announcing the location of the upcoming world chess championship: Merano, Italy. As the townsfolk prepare for the occasion ("Merano"), the current world champion, Freddie Trumper of the United States, arrives with his second and presumed lover: Hungarian-born, English-raised Florence Vassy ("Freddie's Entrance"). Florence confronts Freddie about his brash behavior and rocky relationship with the press ("Commie Newspapers"), which immediately gets out of hand when he assaults a journalist who questions his relationship with Florence ("Press Conference"). Meanwhile, Freddie's Soviet Russian challenger, Anatoly Sergievsky, argues with his own second, the scheming Molokov ("Anatoly and Molokov"). Afterwards, in private, Anatoly cynically reflects on the selling out of his dreams to get to where he is today ("Where I Want to Be").

The opening ceremony features the American and Soviet delegates each vowing their side will win ("Diplomats"), The Arbiter insisting on a clean game ("The Arbiter"), and marketers looking to make a profit ("Hymn to Chess" / "Merchandisers"). During the increasingly intense match, Freddie suddenly throws the chessboard to the floor and storms out of the arena ("Chess #1"), leaving Florence to negotiate with Anatoly, Molokov, and The Arbiter ("Quartet"). Florence manages to arrange a meeting between the two players, after trading heated words with Molokov. It turns out that Freddie engineered the outburst in the hopes of extracting more money from his sponsor, an American sensationalist media company called Global Television, though Walter—the company's representative in Freddie's delegation—criticizes the stunt as ludicrous ("Florence and Molokov"). Florence later scolds Freddie, and they fight about the politics of the tournament until he viciously turns the argument toward her missing father, believed captured or killed by Soviet forces during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution ("1956: Budapest is Rising"). She laments the situation alone ("Nobody's Side") before heading off to the Merano Mountain Inn for the reconciliatory meeting she has scheduled between Freddie and Anatoly ("Der Kleine Franz"). Freddie does not immediately turn up, though, leaving Anatoly and Florence awkwardly alone together; however, they eventually embrace as romantic feelings arise before being finally interrupted by Freddie, who was working out new financial terms with Global TV ("Mountain Duet").

The chess tournament proceeds. Distracted by the loss of Florence's love, however, Freddie flounders, leaving himself just one more loss away from losing his title ("Chess #2"). Due to Freddie's atrocious attitude, Florence finally deserts him ("Florence Quits"), whereby Freddie ponders how his unhappy childhood left him the man he is today ("Pity the Child"). He sends The Arbiter a letter of resignation, resulting in Anatoly's becoming the new world champion. Anatoly immediately defects from the Soviet Union and seeks asylum at the British embassy ("Defection" / "Embassy Lament"). Florence, accompanying Anatoly, reflects on their newfound romance ("Heaven Help My Heart"). Meanwhile, Walter tips off the press about this scandal. When the mob of reporters ambush Anatoly and ask why he is deserting his country ("Anatoly and the Press"), he tells them that he will never truly leave his country, and that his land's only borders lie around his heart ("Anthem").

Act 2

A year later, Anatoly is set to defend his championship in Bangkok, Thailand ("Golden Bangkok"). Freddie is already there, chatting up locals and experiencing the Bangkok nightlife ("One Night in Bangkok"); he is Global TV's official commentator for the tournament. 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 ("One More Opponent" / "You and I"), 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, defeat, and humiliate Anatoly ("The Soviet Machine").

Walter, now Freddie's boss, manipulates Freddie into embarrassing Anatoly on live TV during an eventually heated interview between them ("The Interview"). Molokov, who indeed is responsible for Svetlana's presence in Bangkok, blackmails her into urging Anatoly to throw the match. Walter, who has been promised the release of certain captured American agents if he can ruin Anatoly's performance, informs Florence that her father is still alive though imprisoned, and that he too will be released if she can convince Anatoly to lose. Despite Molokov and Walter's efforts, none of their ploys work to get Anatoly to throw the game. 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; however, Freddie's attempts also fail ("The Deal").

Surprisingly, Svetlana and Florence end up bonding over their respective relationships with Anatoly. Florence ultimately admits that it would be best for Anatoly to return to his children and Svetlana ("I Know Him So Well"). Anatoly, meanwhile, follows an anonymous letter guiding him to Wat Pho, where Freddie appears and informs Anatoly of a significant flaw in Viigand's strategy that will help Anatoly win ("Talking Chess").

In the deciding game of the match, with the score tied at five games all, Svetlana castigates Anatoly for wallowing in the crowd's empty praise and Florence expresses similar annoyance with him for casting aside his ideals; regardless, Anatoly achieves a superb victory against Viigand ("Endgame"). Later, Florence confesses her feelings that he should return to his family in the Soviet Union. The pair reflects on the conclusion of their romance ("You and I: Reprise"). 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, and she sadly recognizes the truth of Anatoly's earlier sentiment ("Anthem: Reprise").