

diagrammes 1973-2013

The final issue of the French chess composition magazine *diagrammes* has just appeared, though there are one or two “judgement supplements” containing tourney awards still to come. Obituaries are normally written only for people, but sometimes it seems appropriate to write them for things as well.

When *diagrammes* (the absence of an initial capital was a matter of deliberate style) came into being, the French chess composition scene already featured the magazine *Thèmes-64*, and I have heard that its birth was not unattended by personal antipathies. Whatever the truth of this may have been, by the time I started taking the magazine those days had long passed. The two magazines were still produced by separate teams and were quite independent (the *Thèmes-64* stable also produced *Rex Multiplex* and *phénix*, each addressing a different aspect of the composition scene, though these three eventually coalesced as *phénix* apparently due to some quirk of the French postal regulations), but the two teams were on very friendly terms and most French-speaking composition enthusiasts took both magazines. Is it good for a country to produce two separate magazines in this way? I would say emphatically Yes, provided that the necessary editorial and administrative effort is available. If a country produces only one magazine, anything not in accordance with the editorial team’s personal preferences tends to be under-represented, or even suppressed altogether. If there are two or more, the coverage can be richer and more varied, to everyone’s benefit.

At its peak, *diagrammes* was by some way the best of the chess composition magazines that were written in languages which I could read, and I think there were two reasons for this: it had an excellent editorial team, and it offered a framework which attracted good contributions. There were three aspects to this framework. To a much greater extent than other magazines, it gave prominence to articles (it even organised a couple of tourneys for them). It also printed “special numbers”, in which a topic could be treated in greater depth than was possible in even the most generous magazine article (and no, they didn’t copy the idea from *British Endgame Study News*, I pinched it from them). And it took its tourney awards out of the main magazine, and presented them as annual “judgement supplements” where they didn’t take space away from the magazine’s other features. However much some of us may deplore the fact, chess composition is a field in which pot-hunting is rampant, so the tourney awards have to be part of a magazine’s content, and from an editor’s point of view they can be a complete curse because he has to provide space for material over whose size and content he has no control. Take them out of the main magazine, and the problem no longer arises.

As regards the quality of the editorial team, when I started taking the magazine the editor-in-chief was Claude Wiedenhoff, with Laurent Joudon as his right-hand man and Daniel Joffart providing the administrative backup. Writing as someone who subsequently became one of the magazine’s contributors, I found Claude a most congenial editor, more than willing to give me the space needed to do the job properly (I trust I did not abuse his hospitality). Laurent was one of the most knowledgeable writers of the time, and it was a major blow to *diagrammes* when his interests moved elsewhere. The chess problem is a limited field, and from the time of Auguste d’Orville leading practitioners have suddenly found that they have exhausted its possibilities, at least in respect of the sort of problems that interest them, and have moved on to other things. But others came in, notably Yves Tallec, and good material continued to appear if not perhaps with the profusion as of old. In particular, we may note a series of three supplements by Guy Sobrecases devoted to the work of Michel Caillaud, and a booklet *L’Histoire authentique d’inédits sortis de l’oubli* in which Roland Lecomte presented some of the problems which had appeared in Albert Camus’s magazine *Combat*. It all added to the good things with which the magazine’s name had become associated.

R.I.P. *diagrammes*. I remain quietly proud to have been one of your contributors.