BOBBY FISCHER:
Icon Among Icons
Photographs by Harry Benson CBE

MARCH 9 - AUGUST 12, 2012
Bobby Fischer: Icon Among Icons  
Photographs by Harry Benson

World-renowned photographer Harry Benson was the only person to have private access to Bobby Fischer during the entire 1972 World Chess Championship match in Reykjavik, Iceland. Benson captured intimate images of this time with Fischer and was the first person to deliver the news to Fischer that he had won the match.

Benson began photographing Fischer when on assignment for LIFE magazine in 1971. Sent to Buenos Aires, Argentina to cover the 1971 Candidates Tournament, Benson began to cultivate a relationship with Bobby, who was known for being notoriously camera-averse, guarded, and socially awkward. Being skeptical of journalists, Fischer would request late night meetings with Benson which generally consisted of quiet walks broken up by Fischer pulling out a pocket chess set to play under lampposts from time to time. Throughout the assignment, Benson and Fischer began to form a friendship and Benson noticed that Fischer seemed most comfortable in the company of animals and children, who also seemed exceedingly drawn to him. Fischer exuded a sense of patience and understanding with these groups that he did not possess with his peers, who he generally dismissed. Fischer defeated Tigran Petrosian at Grossinger’s among the Catskill Mountains due to its reputation as a popular training facility for sports legends such as Rocky Marciano and Jackie Robinson. In addition to his scrupulous chess study, Fischer followed a strict regimen of physical training including running, tennis, swimming, biking, jump rope, and hand strengthening exercises—the latter in an effort to “crush” the Russians and their dominance of the chess world.

The tales of the World Chess Championship in Reykjavik, Iceland in the summer of 1972 are numerous and fantastic. Fischer arrived late to the first game, forfeited Game 2, inspected television cameras and lights, insisting that they were making too much noise or contained devices that were intended to distract him, and had special chessboards created for the match. He made outrageous demands—requesting more money than the agreed-upon prize fund of $125,000 (to be split ⅞ for the winner and ¼ for the loser), and requiring that Game 3 be played in a “back room” away from the agreed-upon setting. Much speculation surrounded this behavior and it was debated if this was “normal” Fischer conduct or if he was intentionally attempting to cause a psychological breakdown of his opponent.

The match was organized as the best of 24 games—wins would count as one point and draws as a half point, with the winner being the first to reach 12 ½ points. The first game took place on July 11th and the last game began on August 31st and was adjourned after 40 moves. Spassky resigned the next day without resuming play and the 29-year-old Fischer won the match 12 ½-8 ½, becoming the 11th World Chess Champion and the first American-born player to do so—ending 24 years of Soviet domination of the World Chess Championship.

Benson continued to cultivate a journalistic friendship with Fischer. The two spent many hours together during the nearly two months in Iceland, walking and talking night after night through the hills of the Icelandic countryside. Benson noted that the pressure on Fischer was enormous—it is known that Fischer received several phone calls from Henry Kissinger encouraging him to play the match when he threatened not to. Noticing Fischer’s lack of social skills and recognizing his loneliness and isolation, Benson stated, “Bobby regarded the press as enemies, yet there had to be one friendly face in the enemy camp, and I figured it might as well be me.”

As the images in this exhibition show, Benson’s photography captures a side of the elusive and controversial chess genius that is rarely seen, and offers a window into the private world of the man Benson calls “the most eccentric and most fascinating person I have ever photographed.”
GAME 7 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Fischer continued his camera protest and play was moved to a private room out of view of the audience. It is believed that this was the best played game of the match.

GAME 8 August 12, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Queen's Gambit Declined
Moves: 45
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 7
Spassky – 5

GAME 9 August 13, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Sicilian Defense
Moves: 45
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 2
Spassky – 2½

GAME 10 August 14, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Queen's Gambit Declined
Moves: 47
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 10
Spassky – 7

GAME 11 August 15, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
French Defense
Moves: 27
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 5
Spassky – 5

GAME 12 August 16, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
French Defense
Moves: 74
Result: Fischer wins
Score: Fischer – 8
Spassky – 5

GAME 13 August 17, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
French Defense
Moves: 27
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 3
Spassky – 2½

GAME 14 August 18, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Queen's Gambit Declined
Moves: 40
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 4
Spassky – 5

GAME 15 August 19, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Queen's Gambit Declined
Moves: 41
Result: Fischer wins
Score: Fischer – 3
Spassky – 2½

GAME 16 August 20, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Sicilian Defense
Moves: 60
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 5
Spassky – 5

GAME 17 August 21, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Ruy Lopez Defense
Moves: 40
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 9½
Spassky – 6½

GAME 18 August 22, 1972
Spassky vs. Fischer
Pirc Defense
Moves: 45
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 10
Spassky – 9

GAME 19 August 23, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Sicilian Defense
Moves: 31
Result: Spassky wins
Score: Fischer – 6½
Spassky – 4½

GAME 20 August 24, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Alekhine's Defense
Moves: 60
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 11½
Spassky – 8½

GAME 21 August 25, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Alekhine's Defense
Moves: 40
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 10½
Spassky – 9½

GAME 22 August 26, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Queen's Gambit Declined
Moves: 45
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 3½
Spassky – 3½

GAME 23 August 27, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Ruy Lopez Defense
Moves: 45
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 6½
Spassky – 4½

GAME 24 August 28, 1972
Fischer vs. Spassky
Alekhine's Defense
Moves: 60
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 12½
Spassky – 8½

OUTCOME: Bobby Fischer won 12½ – 10½ World Chess Championship. He received $78,125 for his efforts and $40,000 in royalties.

Fischer's last published USCF rating was 2810. His FIDE rating was 2785.

September 1, 1972
Bobby Fischer was named World Chess Champion.

October 1972 – September 1973
Bobby Fischer refused commercial sponsorships that would have paid him upwards of $10 million dollars and turned down a $1 million offer to play a match in Las Vegas.

April 3, 1975
Fischer forfeited his title when he refused to play Anatoly Karpov in a dispute over match conditions.

UNOFFICIAL 1972 WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP REMATCH

September 1992
After appearing public throughout the world for 20 years, Bobby Fischer returned to chess to play Boris Spassky in the town of Sveti Stefan, a resort off the coast of Montenegro in Yugoslavia. Fischer played despite United Nations sanctions against Yugoslavia and a warning from the United States Treasury Department, which threatened him with severe penalties for playing.

The prize fund was $5,000,000 of which the winner—the first player to win ten games—would receive $3,350,000. Jezdimir Vasiljevic, President of Jugovioznik Bank, and an affiliate of Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic, served as the match sponsor. Spassky was 55, ranked 101st in the world, and had a rating of 2560. The match was the first chess event to use the "Bobby Fischer chess clock." The

CANDIDATES MATCH

GAME 1 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Score: Fischer – 1
Petrosian – 0
This game marks the 20th victory in a row for Fischer as he competed for a place in the World Chess Championship.

GAME 2 Petrosian vs. Fischer
Score: Fischer – 1
Petrosian – 0
This is Fischer's last loss in over a year and the end of Fischer's 20 game winning streak. The game was replayed in Moscow on the evening's television and radio news programs.

GAME 3 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½
The match was to consist of 24 games. 21 games were played.

GAME 4 Petrosian vs. Fischer
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 2
Petrosian – 2

GAME 5 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 6 Petrosian vs. Fischer
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 7 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 8 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 9 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 10 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 11 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 12 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 13 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 14 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 15 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 16 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 17 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 18 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 19 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 20 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 21 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 22 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 23 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 24 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 25 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 26 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 27 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 28 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 29 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

GAME 30 Fischer vs. Petrosian
Result: Draw
Score: Fischer – 1½
Petrosian – 1½

OUTCOME: Bobby Fischer won 17½ – 12½. Fischer received $1,350,000 for his win.
In addition to the photographs of Bobby Fischer, this exhibition explores the concept of the icon and Harry Benson’s impact on American culture with his choice of celebrity subjects. Fischer was initially known only in the chess world. As he became a representative symbol of the Cold War, these then-new photographs made him once-unfamiliar recluse readily recognizable to the general public. Fischer is shown in context allowing today’s contemporary viewer to see his cultural significance as virtually equal to that of presidents, movie stars, artists, designers, and leaders, whose impact has made them objects of great attention and devotion in society.

This exhibition evolved out of a collaboration between the World Chess Hall of Fame, Moxie Firecracker Films, and HBO surrounding the release of the documentary Bobby Fischer Against The World. The World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) produced an exhibition of Harry Benson’s photographs featured in director Liz Garbus’s film about the World Chess Championship at the Sundance Film Festival in 2011. The WCHOF went on to host the Saint Louis premiere and co-host the New York premiere. The photographs are also featured in Benson’s Bobby Fischer.

HARRY BENSON CBE

Scottish-born photojournalist Harry Benson arrived in America on assignment to photograph the Beatles during their 1964 tour and knew immediately that he wanted to stay. He has been a witness to many of the major political and social events in modern history. His work ranges from photographs of world leaders to pop stars, all portrayed with an immediacy and naturalness that speaks of a confidence and rapport between sitter and photographer.

Harry has photographed every United States president from Eisenhower to Obama; was feet away from Bobby Kennedy the night he was assassinated; in the room with Richard Nixon when he resigned; on the Meredith March with Martin Luther King, Jr.; next to Coretta Scott King at her husband’s funeral; on clandestine maneuvers with the IRA; present when the Berlin Wall went up and when it came down; covered the Gulf War in Saudi Arabia as well as wars in Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia, Cyprus, and the Falkland Islands; and photographed the aftermath of Katrina in New Orleans.

On January 1, 2009, Harry was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, receiving his honor at Buckingham Palace in March, 2009. Harry was honored with a Doctor of Letters from the Glasgow School of Art and Glasgow University in 2007. Benson has been twice named the National Press Photographers Association’s “Magazine Photographer of the Year,” received the 2005 LUCIE Award for Lifetime Achievement in Portrait Photography, the 2005 American Photo Magazine Award for Achievement in Photography, the 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Scottish Press Photographers Association; has twice received the Leica Medal of Excellence; and was also twice named “Magazine Photographer of the Year” by the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Harry was under contract to LIFE magazine from 1970 until it closed in 2000. In addition, he has worked for The Sunday Times, Vanity Fair, Time, Newsweek, Architectural Digest, and People magazine—impressively shooting over 100 covers for the magazine. Harry continues photographing today for Forbes, Town & Country, Quest, Vice and many other major magazines.

His photographs are in the permanent collections of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh and the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.; both museums hosted Harry Benson: Being There in 2006 and 2007. A major retrospective of his photographs was shown at the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow in 2008. He has had over 40 museum and gallery solo exhibitions and 16 books of his photographs have been published, including the recent Bobby Fischer (2011) and the upcoming The Beatles On The Road 1964-1966 celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Beatles coming to America. The latter will be published by Taschen in the spring of 2012.

Harry lives in New York with his wife Gigi, who works with him on his books and exhibitions. Their two daughters, Wendy and Tessa, live and work in Los Angeles.
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Special thanks to Gigi and Harry Benson, Liz Garbus and her staff at Moxie Firecracker Films, and HBO.

Bobby Fischer: Icons Among Icons, Photographs by Harry Benson was curated by Gigi and Harry Benson. Related programming and a downloadable pdf of this brochure can be found at www.worldchesshof.org.

World Chess Hall of Fame
Director: Susan Barrett
4652 Maryland Avenue
Saint Louis, MO 63108
(314) 367-WCHF (9243)

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