

Malt Maniacs E-pistle #2014-03 ***By Nabil Mailloux***

This article is brought to you by 'Malt Maniacs'; an international collective of more than two dozen fiercely independent malt whisky aficionados. Since 1997 we have been enjoying and discussing the pleasures of single malt whisky with like-minded whisky lovers from all over the world. In 2010 our community had members from 15 countries; The United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, The U.S.A., Canada, India, Taiwan, Australia and South Africa. You can find more details on: www.maltmaniacs.org.



The Spirits of Kingston 2014

Another Gold Medal Performance!

On Feb. 22nd, the eve of Olympic glory for Team Canada's Men's Olympic Hockey Team, another tireless champion of whisky was hard at work putting the final touches on the second annual Spirits of Kingston whisky festival. As anyone on Team Canada can tell you, defending your title is one of the most stressful and psychologically challenging feats that one can undertake. However, Sylvain Bouffard – a retired



army colonel and former commandant of the Canadian Forces School of Communication and electronics – had set himself to work organizing the second annual event only a week after last year's event was over, and it paid off in spades. The 2014 whisky festival eclipsed the success of last year's event in terms of attendance and the quality of the exhibitors' offerings.

This year's 450 event tickets were sold out within four days, and boasted a total fundraising haul of \$10000 that will be put towards further expansion and improvements to be made to the Museum of Electronics and Communications. In addition, following closely on last year's success, Sylvain was able to attract a more diverse group of exhibitors, featuring rare and interesting drams. Adding another feather to his cap was the addition of Burkom, Kingston, LeBlanc, & Wilcox as title sponsor for the event, wooing them away from the Kingston Triathlon.



In order to accommodate a larger crowd and more exhibitors, the festival had to expand and make use of the Vimy Officers' Mess, where tutored tastings took place. For many who purchased modestly priced tickets to these tastings, they were able to experience drams that are difficult to find at the local Liquor Control Board of Ontario store. Those who are not strangers to the Kingston Single Malt Society would have noticed that Sylvain had mustered the society members – his wife Mavis

included - to come out in force to assist with guiding guests to their tastings, and address any last minute details.

"It became very clear, as this year's sales skyrocketed, that I needed to bring in a strong team to help with the execution of the plans," said Sylvain, who used to teach the planning of military operations. "But Kingston's whisky community is as generous with its time as it is enthusiastic about dramming!"

Conrad Falkson, longtime Kingston Single Malt Society member, was in full Scottish regalia at the Officers' Mess, directing traffic to and from the tutored tastings. "I was lucky enough to be friends with Sylvain, who has the determination and vision to make things happen," offered Falkson. "Last year was the first, and thus very exciting. This year we improved on many things but still have room for improvement. The highlight for me was the exciting new range of Canadian whiskies including the micro-distilleries."

During a tasting hosted by storied independent bottler, Gordon & MacPhail, samples of Mortlach, Caol Ila, Benriach, and Linkwood were made available. The youngest – but not the least – of these drams was the Benriach 10 year old (yo) which was very lively on the palate, featuring a very fruity profile, all the way up to a Linkwood 25 yo, a more subtle, malty, and sweeter offering. Derek Hancock, Associate Director of Export, and Richard Urquhart, Export Regional Executive, guided us through these tastings, teaching guests how to nose samples and encouraging them to take risks and describe their perceptions. If nothing else, these types of festivals are wonderful environments for novices and experts alike to learn something new about whisky.



It was quite a pleasant surprise to run into Johanna Ngoh and her partner Charles Anderson, who were hosting a tasting, featuring some of their favourite everyday malts. They were kind enough to bring a selection from their very own collection to share with the attendees. Remarkably, they were also preparing for the 10th edition of the Spirit of Toronto whisky festival, this May 3rd. A monumental task in and of itself! Kingston was fortunate to have these two icons of the Canadian festival scene on hand.

Just prior to the opening of the event, Sylvain asked me if I would preside over the great whisk(e)y debate as timekeeper. Here, the longstanding friendly rivalries of these whisky ambassadors came to a gentle boil as they traded barbs, making the case that their version of whisky represented the best this noble spirit has to offer. Attendees had the opportunity to taste Canadian Club 20 yo, Wisers' Red Letter, Woodford Reserve Bourbon, Highland Park 18 yo, and Connemara Irish Single Malt, among many other fine whiskies.

Gourmands in the crowd were treated to wonderfully prepared roast of beef, done to your liking, and succulent smoked ribs that fell off the bone with little resistance. An assortment of cheeses, fruits, and anti-pastos provided a great counterpoint to the smoked oyster wontons and tiger shrimp that were served throughout the



evening. Indeed, there was no excuse not to keep your appetite sated while tasting samples throughout. "A premium show, for a premium people", as Marty Fruchtman, Director of Sales for Woodman Wines and Spirits, put it.



Some highflying whisky offerings included the higher end Macallan Ruby, boasting a higher proportion of European sherry oak maturation, and the affable flair of Marc Laverdière, brand ambassador for Canada. He was also on hand to pour generous portions of Highland Park Loki, one of their Norse God series. If you were fortunate enough to be at the right place, at the right time, he even poured some Highland Park 25 yo, a luxurious malt that would run up your credit card balance another \$375!

For those who know their drams, if you were to look carefully, you would've noticed some Balvenie 17 yo Doublewood, last year's darling, as well as the sumptuous Aberlour 18 yo. If you asked politely, but firmly, you would even get a pour. Another stealthy but notable dram was the Bunnahabhain 18 yo, which featured a rich nose and heavy body, owing to the quality sherry casks used in maturation. Among some other fine drams to be had, were the Glenfiddich 21 yo Grand Reserva, a weighty but fruity malt, and the Bowmore 18 yo with a warm peaty profile wrapped up in sherry nuttiness.

Speaking of sherry, one of the most surprising drams for me was the Glendronach 12 yo. Not an old dram, but the nose on this surprisingly modestly priced single malt could have belonged to some Macallans from the 1990s. When prodded, the exhibitors were adamant that only European sherry casks were used for maturation, and the results bore this out. This was a dram that I could make a standing offering in my personal bar, such were the rich sherry notes and creamy texture.

Alas, there was one factor that was beyond Sylvain's control...the weather! Gusts of wind of up to 70 km/h almost blew away the heated tents that were to be used as a dining hall and exhibition space. Not to be easily deterred, Sylvain and his troops were able to quickly relocate those exhibitors to the Vimy site and make sure that a coach bus shuttled guests regularly back and forth. From an exhibitor's point of view this was less than ideal, but as the night ended at the secondary site, it was clear that there had been no impediment in accessing malts such as Glenmorangie and The Arran Distillery.



"We don't anticipate having this problem next year, as the museum will be adding almost ten thousand square feet in 2015!" says Sylvain, brimming with optimism and pride (Sylvain is also a member of the Museum Board of Directors, and is on the Museum Expansion Committee). "We hope to accommodate upwards of seven hundred guests at next year's event."

At the Officers' Mess, persistence paid off with the Ardbeg staff, and they eventually relented and poured us some Ardbeg Gallileo, where peat meets sherry. The Ardbeg Ten was also available, always a great dram when in the mood for barbecued lemons. Another great find for me was the Arran Malt Portwood Finish, which featured some active brown spice on

the palate and a lively finish. On hand were many Canadian whiskies, and even Canada's only single malt distillery Glen Breton, and they were pouring Glen Breton Rare 19 yo, from Nova Scotia. No matter what you might fancy in a whisky, the Spirit of Kingston had something for you.

At the end of the evening I ran into some old Queen's Alumni from 1993! This is perhaps the best part of the Spirits of Kingston, I could not move on to the next table without bumping into somebody I knew in town. One of the greatest measures of success for this event was that people from all walks of life, men and women from every corner of the city, and all professions were here to celebrate the whiskies of the world.

So, did Sylvain's team continue their winning streak? Well, the people of Kingston spent the evening getting to know one another, while treated to a selection of over 150 sublime drams, surrounded by the unique atmospheres of the museum and the Officers' Mess. By any measure, the Spirits of Kingston certainly successfully defended its title as one of Canada's newest premier whisky festivals. Both Sylvain's team and Team Canada's Men's and Women's Hockey should be proud of their gold medal performances.

PS: I was invited to attend the Spirits of Kingston as a member of the press, and was given a complimentary pass. I would also like to apologize to my American readers for my shameless plug of our Olympic Team's gold medal victories...oops, I did it again!



Nabil Mailloux hails from Kingston, Ontario, Canada, a town that likes to celebrate *almost* becoming our nation's capital. He is originally from southwestern Ontario, a town that is also known as South Detroit (Windsor), the automotive manufacturing capital of Canada. He holds a Master's degree in organic chemistry from Queen's University, Canada. While in the Quiet Pub at Queen's University, he was introduced to the world of single malt whisky by his good friend John Morgan. That very same Morgan also convinced him to buy a hogshead of whisky with him, thus forever changing his life. As a result, he has become obsessed with nosing, tasting and evaluating whisky. He eagerly awaits 2014, the bottling date for his cask. He also wonders what he's going to do with his share of the whisky...