

# MMA 2016



**It just gets better and better**

13 Great years

of

Malt Maniacs Awards

## **MMA 2016; Author's Foreword**

Welcome to MMA 2016 or perhaps the aftermath of it. This is the time of year when I look back at this year's MMA and offer an insider's viewpoint of just what it takes to come to the point where results are announced and Awards and Medals presented.

As usual the first step of MMA was our internal call for judges which after much discussion provided ten Maniacal volunteers from our amateur ranks, which is one of our internal rules; no professional judges allowed for MMA. This year's judges were (in no specific order) Patrick Brossard, Oliver Klimek, David Wankel, Ben Chen, Krishna Nukala, Rob Karlsson, Konstantin Grigoriadis and Peter Silver. We did have two other volunteers but sadly one had to drop out early for personal reasons and the second didn't manage to complete because of illness.

So, judges decided we can start the ball rolling by sending out the invitations to participate, then sit back and wait to see what arrives here at MMA HQ. I didn't have to wait very long as the first few entries arrived from some previous entrants even before the invitations were sent out and then the flood gates opened!

At this point I'm going to break with tradition and hand over to another Maniac for his views on proceedings. Earlier this year we introduced two new Maniacs into our collective and I'm delighted that one of them; Patrick Brossard volunteered not only to be a judge but also to assist me with the organisation, so I'll hand over to him for a further insight:

There are many whisky competitions organised by the trade, magazines or other publications. The Malt Maniacs Awards (MMA) always held something special for me even before I was invited to join the collective. MMA is the only competition organised by passionate whisky enthusiasts with no links to the whisky industry. In some competitions almost every single entry receives a medal and most judges are working in or for the whisky industry, I disregard them.

This 2016 edition was very special for me personally as I was honoured this year to be invited to join the Malt Maniacs and thus my first participation as a judge, in addition to co-ordinating the activities with Keith.

From a public point of view, the MMA might be considered as a nice opportunity to taste fine and sometimes very expensive whiskies for free. The truth is rather different. First, one sends invitations to participate to approximately 200 members of the trade, then later send reminders to all who haven't yet replied or submitted entries, answer their questions, collect the parcels (more on this later...), photograph the entries, prepare the sample labels, organise the tasting flights (i.e., lists of groups of 6 whiskies with comparable profiles), label the samples, pack them, ship them to the judges, pay for the sample bottles, shipment and import fees for the samples (if applicable), evaluate them, consolidate the results, keep the participants of the trade informed on the progress of the competition, publish the results and finally respond to the questions that follow their publication.

Companies have dedicated Press Release Department for these activities, the Maniacs have just volunteer members.

As a substantial number of entries are shipped from outside of the European Union, with sometimes content descriptions in Chinese characters, and eventually from companies or individuals not invited, the reception of the parcels was a real challenge and very time consuming. Keith had very frequent trips to the Airport customs, trying to identify the contents and their values, pay the customs fees, ask the participants to reimburse these fees, etc.....

I regularly taste whiskies to keep my own website [www.whisky-news.com](http://www.whisky-news.com) updated daily with fresh new tasting notes so I was expecting this to be a rather easy task. How wrong I was as this turned out to be a rather intense and strenuous exercise tasting an average of 5 whiskies a day for almost 2 months. As I wanted to be fair with my evaluation, I tasted the whiskies in my standard conditions ([http://whisky-news.com/En/tasting\\_comment.html](http://whisky-news.com/En/tasting_comment.html)) and a flight of 5-6 whiskies took me on average 1.5 hours. If you have a regular job and a family in addition, this is a really tough challenge.

Tasting was done blind with each sample only having a sample number as identifier, with no information on age, strength, and provenance or vintage. Tasting perhaps 10, 20 or even 30 whiskies over a weekend is okay, but tasting 5-6 whiskies on a daily basis over two months is a tough challenge. More than once, I wanted to have a short break...

It's not surprising then, if a judge fell ill during this winter season that he had to step out from the awards.

Overall, I enjoyed this competition very much and I'm ready to volunteer as a judge again next year! As this competition is open to any world whisky it was an excellent opportunity to taste a very wide range of whiskies, without any prejudice, as this was blind.

Now it's all over as I look back at the scores, my favourite whiskies turned out to be a trio of very old Glen Grant from Gordon & MacPhail (and the most expensive ones as well), followed very closely by world whiskies (from India, France and The Netherlands), all rather affordable (around 100 euros). This shows the progress made by world of whiskies over the last few years.

And again, huge thanks to Keith Wood, without whom, these 2016 MMA would not have existed.

Patrick Brossard, December 2016

Thank you Patrick for your own personal insight into MMA 2016 although I would like to point out that in helping me to organise MMA, Patrick wasn't party to what had been submitted, collected from customs by me, delivered, photographed or filled. He still judged 100% blind as did all judges.

One last point from me is that our deadlines this year were rather tight so for the filling process to stay within them I asked for volunteers to help from our Malt Maniacs & Friends facebook page and received valuable help from Boris & Klaus without whom things would have been much more stressful and delayed, so a big thank you from me!

## MMA 2016; The Rules and History

There's no sponsorship or entry fee for MMA, each judge pays their own postage and sample bottle costs and this is exactly how MMA has been run since its inception in 2003. Our three fundamental rules have always been and will remain:

- No entry fee
- 100% Amateur
- 100% blind

Of course, back in 2003 The Maniacs collective was much smaller than it is today with just twelve members and none were from whisky's professional ranks but MMA was born and that first year saw 61 entries being submitted with nine judges taking part.

For the record three gold medals were awarded that year to Talisker 21y 1981-2002 OB, Brora 30y OB bottled 2002 and Ardbeg 21y 'committee bottling' with the overall Supreme Champion being the Talisker.

Since then our Supreme Champions have been:

- **2003 Talisker** (21y, 1981-2002, OB)
- **2004 Brora** (30y, bottled 2003, 55.7%, OB)
- **2005 Laphroaig** (31y, 1974-2005, 49.7%, OB for LMDW)
- **2006 Yamazaki** (1984-2005, 56%, OB)
- **2007 Laphroaig** (27y, 1980-2007, 57.4%, OB)
- **2008 Lagavulin** (21y, 1985-2007, 56.5%, OB)
- **2009 Karuizawa** (1972-2008, 65%, No.1 Drinks)
- **2010 Glendronach** (38y, 1972-2010, Cask 700, 49.5%, OB for Taiwan)
- **2011 Glendronach** (39y, 1972-2011, Cask 712, Oloroso Sherry Butt, 49.9%, OB)
- **2012 Glendronach** (40y, 1972-2012, Cask 713, Oloroso Sherry Butt, 50.2%, OB for LMDW)
- **2013 Karuizawa** (1973-2013, No.1 Drinks, cask No.1607, 67.7%)
- **2014 Kavalan Solist** (OB Cask S060904031 57.8%)
- **2015 Kavalan Solist** (OB Cask S060904024 58.6%)
- **2016 Kavalan Solist** (OB for Drink Fun Cask S060821035 58.6%)

Today, 13 years and 14 winners on from our first MMA in 2003 our fundamental rules haven't changed and even though our collective has grown to 31 members including six professionals, we believe that upholding our traditional values of no entry fee, keeping MMA 100% blind as judges receive only a series of individually numbered sample bottles and that we select our panel of judges from only our amateur ranks, helps to keep MMA both unique and one of the most respected whisky competitions in the annual calendar.

We even impose what we call a 'radio silence' upon judges as they aren't allowed to discuss any aspects of MMA or judging during the competition. The benefits of this are that each judge has the ability to work at their own speed, in their own environment and typically spend much more time with each sample than they would in a 'professional' competition held centrally at a single location over just a few days.

## MMA 2016; The Process

What about judges for 2016? Ahh yes here comes my annual plea to our collective; *“Dear Maniacs, who’d like to subject their noses, palates and livers to sampling up to 200 whiskies in no more than six weeks?”* Yes, as Patrick already alluded that’s what being a judge amounts to. By the time samples have been filled, packed, posted, delivered and received the typical time left for judging is 4-6 weeks depending upon postage times.

Then, as has already been mentioned MMA 2016 started in earnest for me (and Patrick) in mid-August with sending out the invitations to participate to all our contacts new and old and, which will end in late December with the publishing of this Post-MMA report shortly after the initial results announcement.

As is usual with MMA I quickly received some early entries then again as is usual everything quietened down as people enjoyed thoughts of summer holidays rather than whisky competition entries.

My deadline for entries was in late September which would allow time for ‘filling’ which is the weekend or as happened this year the two weekends dedicated to pouring all entries into sample bottles for each judge.

So, we have our volunteer judges, the initial invitations to participate have been sent out, entries are beginning to arrive, I guess it’s now time to ask each judge what size sample they’d like. “What?” I hear you ask, obviously a full bottle of each? No, it isn’t that simple, our judges can opt to receive 3cl (30ml) or 6cl (60ml) samples which may seem like a no-brainer choice, but consider the fact that each judge has to pay for his own postage plus any local Customs / Duty charges upon delivery. This year the 3cl parcels were typically around 18kg in weight and the 6cl ones almost 28kg. For our far-away judges the difference in postage cost between the two sizes can easily amount to over €200. Two of the judges who opted for the 6cl samples lived in countries where the maximum parcel size was 20kg so things were doubly expensive for them as their samples had to be sent as two parcels.

At this point let me introduce you to the annual delivery of what I like to call the palate of glass:





Once unloaded and ready for filling it looks more like this:



Then to put it more into context, this is what MMA HQ looked like after the first weekend of filling and ready to start the second:





After two weekends or four days of hard work we finish up with a pile of cartons ready to be transported to a local Post Office for world-wide delivery to our awaiting judges. Once again this year we were looking at around 250kg of samples and €1100 in postage costs. Add to this a sample bottle cost of just over €1500 and you'll see that MMA isn't exactly cheap for our volunteer judges.



But just what was inside those parcels? To give you an idea of what just a fraction of MMA HQ looks like at this time of year



## **MMA 2016; Scoring and working out who won what**

One question which is often asked of me is whether we impose any specific judging method or criteria on our MMA judges, perhaps like the repartition system of, for example a 25/25/25/25 split of scores between attributes like appearance, nose, palate & finish ... etc.

We prefer not to impose such criteria, or for that matter any specific judging criteria other than keeping everything totally blind. Each of our judges, although amateur, is highly experienced in whisky tasting and already has their own tried and tested methods of scoring and most have already scored hundreds, if not thousands of whiskies in our online database; The Malt Monitor. Of course this means there is an emphasis on personal preference, but judging and scoring is always subjective and will vary a little between individuals, so this is exactly why we utilise a panel of 9-12 judges for MMA and take an average score across the board from all those submitted. Also, in some previous years the scorecard team decided to ignore lower or 'rogue' scores where one judge maybe scored a whisky much lower than all the others, perhaps suggesting a contaminated sample. Once again this year, like last year, our scorecard team decided not to do this and to trust and accept all our judges' scores.

### **Here's what a couple of our members replied when asked about their own scoring criteria:**

*"I for one do never use 'repartitions' (such as 25/25/25/25) because I've never managed to find one that would work with all whiskies. I tend to think that 'proportions' between nose and palate, for example, change with styles and, above all, with the whiskies' ages." Serge Valentin.*

*"Regarding the scores to be allotted to appearance, nose, palate etc... I strongly feel that it will not work out. Scoring for appearance is definitely ruled out for me. Even if points were to be given to each parameter; how many points would you allocate to appearance, how many to nose, how many to palate, how many to finish and the last dimension which is most important for me; how many to overall feeling and impression?" Krishna Nukala.*

*"I too disagree with the 25/25/25/25 scoring process as to me it so limits the range of scores for particular items. I usually have a first impression of score after the initial nose/taste.....and then I might adjust once I have had a few more noses/tastes. But I usually fall within a few points of my initial impression. If I am at all conflicted, I will mark it for a re-taste. But this is based upon what I recall from what I have liked and disliked before." David Wankel*

Finally on this topic, I'm affording the last word to one of our professional members; *"Like you, my scores are founded on experience, and based on overall flavour (aroma, taste, mouth-feel, finish); but unlike you, I never publish my scores!" Charles Maclean.*

Sounds easy really doesn't it? Get scores from judges, put them into a spreadsheet and let the computer work out the overall average score for each entry, simple? Well, that bit is reasonably simple but we have three (price) categories of entries and within each category we look to assign five Awards for supreme winner, best sherried, natural and peated entries and then a Thumbs-Up winner. This means that someone has to not only collate the judges' scores, but also analyse every entry to work out the cask type and attributes of each one and assign the correct Awards (and Medals). So each year we assign a scorecard team whose responsibility it is to do this. In addition as entries arrived here at MMA HQ I start to build what I call my master spreadsheet which contains full details of each entry, including sender, distillery, bottler, strength, cask details and number(s), whether natural colour and NCF, bottle number, outrun... etc. This spreadsheet forms the basis of what will eventually become our officially released scorecard but not without lots of conversion work. Primarily the entry details need to be converted into what we call our Monitor Format and I assure you; this is no easy task. In fact it took various people two full days to complete. Now finally we can release our MMA results.



Throughout 3-4 days the scorecard team discuss all candidates for Awards, some are obvious, others not so; for example when it comes to our “Thumbs Up” Awards they’re not purely based upon single highest score(s) although the scores do play a large role alongside various other criteria.

Finally our scorecard is completed as we prioritise it by score and in groups of medals from gold to bronze. So, just 3-4 days after receiving the last judge’s scores we’ve reformatted everything, worked out the Awards and Medals for this year and are now ready to publish the results simultaneously on our MM&F facebook page, our website and also on fellow Maniac Lawrence’s Whisky Intelligence website so a little more pressure as I have to prepare a press release for him too.

Talking of press releases; don’t forget to inform the winners. Oh well, just another batch of e-mails to send out after which another batch of requests for MMA Award & Medal graphics come steaming back at me. Dear MM Graphics person, could you oblige once again this year ..... Please?

I guess what I’m trying say here is that MMA isn’t only about our poor hard-working judges who have to nose, taste and score an inordinate number of whiskies in an impossibly short time, but also a selection of various other Maniacs working behind the scenes on various tasks to make MMA a success so I’ll end here by thanking each and every one, including of course our judges!

### **MMA 2016; Awards and Medals**

MMA should be considered to be two competitions rolled into one where the main focus and ‘raison d’etre’ of our competition is our Awards process where our entries are split into three categories based upon retail price. We have the Daily Drams category for whiskies which typically retail for a price up to €50. Premium category is for whiskies priced from €51 to €150 and Ultra-Premium category for whiskies over €150.

Within each category we offer just five **Awards** comprising Supreme Winner (the entry with the highest average points total across all judges’ scorecards, then Best Sherried Whisky, Best Peated Whisky and Best Natural Cask. Then we have the Thumbs Up award for an entry which we believe deserves a special mention. The scores do play a part in our Thumbs-Up Awards, but perhaps more importantly we consider other parameters like value for money and consistency of quality.

Secondly, we award a series of medals to recognise the overall quality of entries; any entry managing an average score of 90 points or more across all judges will receive a gold medal which means that, in our opinion, these are exceptionally outstanding whiskies. 85-89 Points will receive silver medals which confirm that, again in our opinion, these are excellent and highly recommendable whiskies. Any which gain 80-84 points receive bronze medals and are acknowledged as good everyday drams.

This year I’m not detailing all our winners here as these can be found on our website along with the official scorecard and photos of all winners: <http://www.maltmaniacs.net/awards/>

## MMA 2016; An unprecedented year

As entries were beginning to arrive I already suspected something special may happen this year. It was obvious even from the early arrivals that we were receiving some unusually high quality entries. I pointed out in my report last year that after the success of Kavalan in 2014 we received lots more not only from the distillery but also from private cask owners. Well, last year was well and truly eclipsed by the number entered this year as we received 23 different cask entries of Kavalan; 2 bourbon, 3 port and 18 different sherry casks. At this point I must add that Kavalan themselves only entered the permitted 3 bottles, all others were from private cask owners.

Add to this some other magnificent bottles including three very old and rare Glen Grant (from 1949, '54 & '61) it's easy to see just what I mean.



When the results started coming in from our judges my thoughts and predictions appeared to be verified, now that would be a first for my #MMApredictions!

Our first judge to declare awarded 29 personal gold medal scores which was just a sign of things to come with other judges going on to award up to 55 personal gold medal scores. I say this year is unprecedented, well there has never been another year of MMA when a total of 267 personal gold medal scores were awarded by judges, but that's only half the story as the gold scores (90 or more points) weren't always awarded to the same few whiskies. In fact with only two more judges left to declare, a point where 176 personal gold medal scores had been awarded there were no actual overall gold medals to be awarded. That's correct, two sets of scores to come and at that point no gold medals won. Those final scores came in and indeed how they changed things as MMA 2016 ended with a total of 11 gold medals being awarded.

These 11 gold medals were won by:

Kavalan	6
Glendronach	2
Inchgower	1
Amrut	1
Chieftain's Speyside	1

At this point I asked one of our judges (Krishna) who has judged in all MMA competitions except one since the inception in 2003 to write about his thoughts on MMA over the years. Of course, being Krishna he managed more than just a few excellent thoughts:

### **Malt Maniacs Awards- looking back from 2003**

It's an honour to be a judge in the panel of MM Awards which started 13 years ago and I am proud and lucky to be a judge since its inception. Barring 2014, I have been on the panel of all the MMAs. What started as a fun event by Serge and Johannes in 2003 has now become a serious and much anticipated event in the annual whisky calendar. An event that was meant to be fun amongst Malt Maniacs has now become a much debated topic in the whisky world thanks to Social media.

#### **Initial years**

Initially MMA was an occasion for fun, frolic, festivities and meeting friends. In fact nobody knew when and how Serge received the 60-ish entries and later on I came to know that his adolescent daughter and teenage son helped to distribute the contents into small samples for the judges. We didn't even know how to distribute the samples to the judges, but when Johannes announced the first MM Awards I didn't want to miss it and without further questions I flew to Amsterdam to do the tastings. One fellow Maniac Mark Adams (now retired) also flew in from California for joint blind tastings. A detailed account of that first MMA can be found here:

<https://www.maltmadness.com/whisky/malt-maniacs-archive/2004.html#SAMPLE2>.

That first MMA saw **Talisker 21 yo, (1981-2002, 62%, sherry cask OB, 900 Bts)** as the overall champion. (So one can see that the tradition of sherry casks winning the awards is not new!)

From 2004 onwards for seven continuous years, Olivier Humbrecht took upon the responsibility of collection of the entries and redistribution to the judges. These were "filling party" years and since the filling and distribution needed helpers, malt maniacs came from all parts of the world for the event at Olivier's vineyard - Domain Zind-Humbrecht. In 2004 Davin flew all the way from Canada to Alsace, checked into a small hotel to judge the samples locked up in his room for 7 days! Later on, I came to know that many of the so called "helpers" turned out for the event mainly for the celebrated wines of Olivier who used to open his cellar and take out jaw dropping wines from his collection.

From 2011 through to today Keith Wood from Erding, Germany took upon the task of gathering and distribution of the samples and much of the time he did the task single handedly. His task has been becoming increasingly difficult due to tough German customs formalities compounded by an explosion of Asian entries from a truly whisky-crazy society.

Mind you, in all these years including to this day, the MM Awards remains an 'amateur' effort, so we have to do all the handling, re-shipping, sampling and scoring in our spare time and at our own costs.

#### **Judging samples**

I am always scared and nervous when it comes to judging samples in MMA. Judging requires immense concentration and peak health condition. Even though each judge has about 30 to 45 days of time depending upon where he lives, he is always at the mercy of local weather, work and other personal factors during the period. Mind you, we have to do the tasting in our spare time. On an average, during this period, every judge falls sick or catches cold for 5 to 7 days. During this time we do not judge as many of you know that it impairs our tasting senses.

Judges do re-taste their samples because each one wants to be uniform about his score. The judges are constantly asking themselves these questions; am I justifying the score of this sample? Am I under-scoring or over-scoring it? Does my description say something that is not there or am I missing something that is obviously there? Personally, I try to give benefit of doubt to the border cases (where I'm giving a medal score) to push up my score by one point. The most difficult part of judging? Judging average samples which do not show minimum complexities. It is very easy to identify and describe the heavily peated and sherried ones but problems occur when I don't get anything in many samples.

My personal best so far in all the MMAs? Well it is one in 2007 that won a Gold Medal but not an overall winner.

**Springbank 35 yo, 1971-2007, 59%, The Whisky Fair, Sherry Wood, 239 Bts.**

#### **My personal notes on some of the MMA 2016 samples**

My most satisfying whisky from scoring point of view has been **Rampur NAS, 43% OB**. Tasting notes went like this:

“A whisky that has spent long age in a good quality oak cask. Lovely woody notes. Very fruity with lots of spices. Ripened pears, apples and some dark fruits. Classic sweet smell of yester-year lozenges. Shoe polish. Very sweet, spicy and dry. Very round and velvety on palate. Long, fruity, deluxe finish” - 90 points

#### **Kavalan 'Solist' (58.6%, OB for Drink Fun, C#S060821035, Sherry Cask, 512 Bts., 2016\*)**

“Sherry porn. You get all those dried fruits like figs, prunes, dates, sultanas and whatnot accompanied by oriental spices like cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg .... Christmas cake with excess rum in it. Strong black oolong tea. Very tannic. All Fruits and sweets come back on palate in loads. Extreme long finish that stays on forever... 92 points (in brackets I had written “maybe some smoothness would have scored one point more”)

#### **Kavalan 'Solist' (57.8%, OB for Red on Tree 4th Anniv., C#S060904050, Sherry Cask, 519 Bts., 2016\*)**

“Sherry voyeurism. Dark plum cake of highest quality with all those roasted walnuts, almonds, nutmeg, all spice powder etc. The complexities as appear on nose do not come in hoards like you expect, but that is enough. What a sherried whisky!” 91 points

#### **Glendronach 21yo 1993/2014 (59.6%, OB for Beija-Flor & Silver Seal, C#38, Oloroso Butt, 622 Bts.)**

“Sherried fruit bomb. Cloves, cinnamon, all kinds of oriental spices. Heavy stuff. A Kavalan must be. This is a pure sherry cask without any hints of smoke. Excellent sweet and spicy notes. Extracted raisin syrup and that fullness on palate. Brilliant sweet honeyed finish”. 92 points

#### **Chieftain's Speyside 1973/2015 (57.4%, Chieftain's, C#7992, 1st Fill Sherry butt 369 Bts.)**

“Concoction of nice smoke with stewed black fruits. Raisins, sugar fruits, poached pear. Delicious, spicy and tannins. Lovely spicy finish that is very long. Top class whisky”. 92 points.

#### **Amrut 2009/2016 (60%, OB for Hot Malt Taiwan, C# 958, Virgin Oak, 102 Bts.)**

“Deluxe nose. Complex- a little smoky. All kinds of dark fruits around. Blackberry jam. Very dry almost like tannins, lots of sweets and spices. The smoke and mild peat comes back on palate and finishes huge” – 90 points

#### **Inchgower 26yo 1980/2007 (59.8%, Adelphi, C#14155, 58 Bts.)**

“Dark and dry fruits festival on nose. It is a riot of all kinds of stewed fruits like blackberries, raspberries and currants accompanied by other dry fruits like dates, figs, prunes etc. Dark bitter Chocolate. On the spices front you get that nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon and star anise. Well-made plum cake with generous amount of rum and brandy in it. Mild hints of smoke. On palate you get that dark chocolate, more of bitters than sweets. Spicy and exceedingly long fruity finish”. – 90 points

#### **Port Charlotte 12yo 2003/2016 (61.1%, Blackadder Raw Cask, C#622, Sherry Cask, 284 Bts.)**

I liked it immensely and predicted it as overall winner.

Tasting notes go like this:

“Wow! This is what I call my kind of whisky. Smoke, peat and fruits. A smoky and peaty whisky matured in sherry casks. A rare find nowadays. Dry on palate, excellent spicy and sweet notes, creosol that burns on your palate yet enjoyable. Some sweet bitter notes, a finish that you would not like to end. Brilliant whisky” 93 points (And in remarks column I wrote it to be a Lagavulin or a Ledaig!)



**Glenfarclas 1989/2014 'Family Cask' (54.7%, OB, C#13026, 628 Bts.)**

"What a fruity giant! All those dried fruit's characteristics... perfectly made Christmas cake. Very smooth, lots of tannins that you expect with this kind of whisky, delicious with organics and you get that sherried orgasm in the end. What a whisky! A long aged Strathisla, Longmorn or a Glen Grant in a perfect sherry cask." 93 points

**House Malt 25yo 'Islay but not Peated' 1990/2016 (54.2%, Wilson & Morgan, C#55, Half Sherry Butt used, 284 Bts.)**

"Fruit and sherried stuff with hints of smoke. This is right down my alley. Christmas cake, raisins, cloves, dried prunes etc. Smoke of half burnt palm leaves. Dried and tannic palate. All the concoction of dried fruits appears back on palate. A symphony of sherry and smoke display. Everlasting stewed dark fruits and organics"- 93 points

**Nantou 'Omar' 2009/2016 (57.6%, OB, C#21090758, Sherry Cask, 187 Bts)**

"Sherried fruit bomb, with organic juices. Some kind of raw notes suggesting a forced fruitiness from a sherry cask. But you get all those dark fruits that accompany this kind of whisky. Do I get some smoke? Yes. Very tannic. Spicy and hot. Long sherried finish". 90 points

**Laphroaig 10yo 1996 (50.6%, Specialty Drinks Masterpieces Range, PX Sherry Butt, 516 Bts.)**

"Sweet smoke and peat. Luxurious nose. Lots of sweet rich notes like the raisins, pomegranates etc. As time passes we get oodles of all those dried fruits like prunes, dates and raisins competing with smoke and peat. In fact this is a symphony of phenolic notes with complex dried fruits. Looks like a high class Lagavulin. The dry fruits and smoke play on palate. Exceedingly sweet and just enough spicy. This is a class act". 92 points

**Isle of Jura 1975/2016 (51.7%, OB for LMDW 60th Anniversary, Amoroso Oloroso Butts, 784 Bts.)**

"Classy sherried fruity nose. Tropical spices. Stewed fruits. Some mild smoke and salty notes. Some complexities here. Nice tannic palate. Lots of organics. Some more spices. Long enjoyable finish". 91 points

**Zuidam 1998/2016 'Millstone' (55.5%, OB, C#2530, Oloroso Sherry Cask, 203 Bts.)**

"Looks like a different class of whisky. Very complex. Deep sweet and honeyed notes with mild smoke and all kinds of restrained dry fruits. Dry fruit notes are not so blatant like you get from those obscene sherried malts. Lots of tannins. Does not show as much promise on palate. Some organics and finishes long with mild bitters". 90 points

**Lagavulin 25yo (51.7%, OB for 200th Anniv., Sherry Casks, 8000 Bts., 2016)**

"Dry palm leaves smoke with peat. After some time we get those rich dried fruits concoction like sultanas, dates, figs etc. An interplay of smoke, peat with dry fruits. Very intense nose. Class. Smooth and a correct balanced of sweet and spice on palate. Exceedingly long finish with peat and sweets returning." 91 points

**Amrut 'Rye Single Malt' (50%, OB, New US Oak, 2016\*)**

"Elegant sweet notes of wood. I assure you this has spent long age in a quality toasted wooden cask. Beautiful sweet notes of complex dried fruits and caramel custard. Is there some smoke? Not sure. Some Chinese allspice and nutmeg. Very sweet on palate. Elegant. I would have liked a stronger finish. But excellent whisky"- 86 points

Slainte!

Krishna Nukala

Thanks Krishna and it's good to see some of your predictions on distillery and age of the samples are, well, ermm ..... interesting to say the least.

## MMA 2016; And finally ... what about the left-overs?

This is a question which is asked annually and 2016 has been no exception. Our optimum number of MMA judges each year is 10-12 and each judge can choose between 3cl or 6cl samples. You may think choosing 6cl is a no-brainer but as I already mentioned when it comes to far-away judges the difference in postage costs can be very significant at €200+.

This year our not quite full complement of judges has meant a generous amount of left-overs for me which will be going towards a little thank you gathering in the new year for those who helped with the task of filling across the two weekends.

In addition I've managed to once again add a full set of samples to my ever growing impressive MMA archive which has now expanded to a second shelf. I call this photo my *MMA Shelfie*

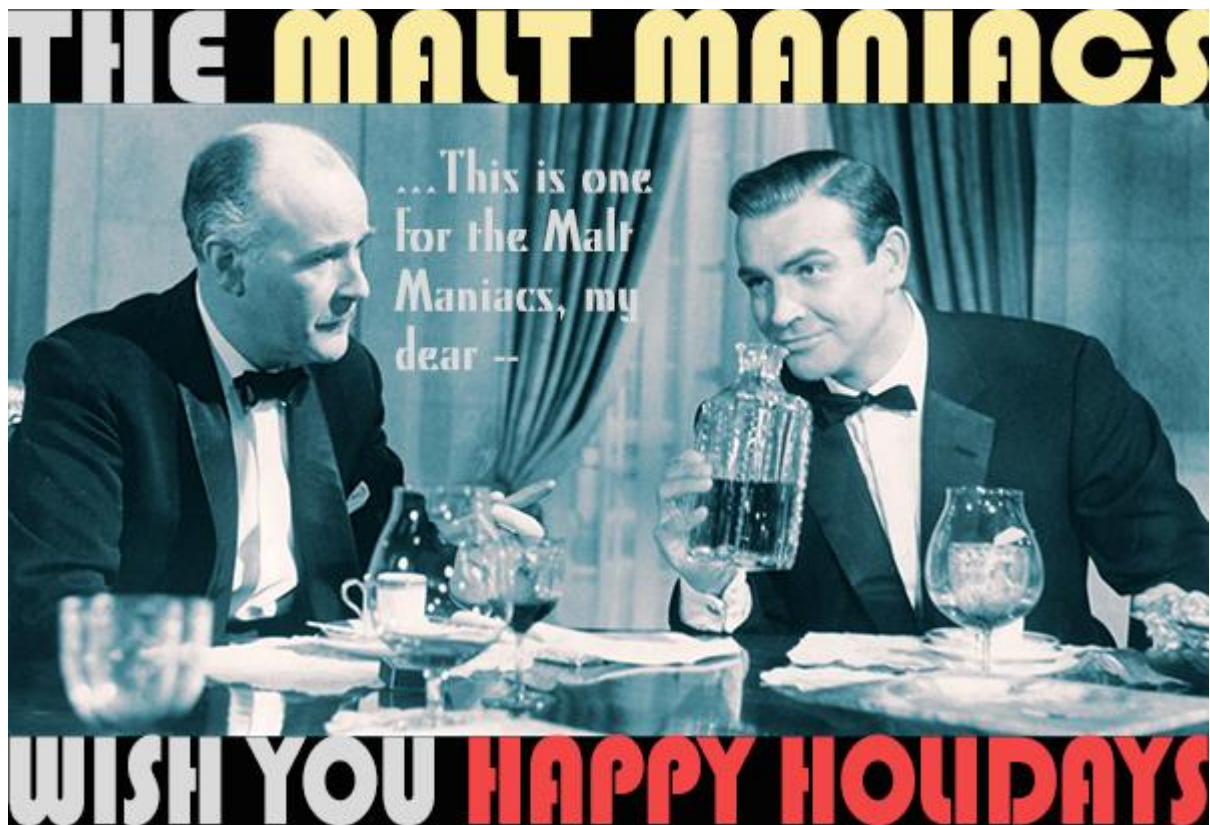


## 2016 A personally disastrous year for me

Did I say “and finally ...” well not quite as I have one last thing to add:

2016 was a disastrous year for me personally as in late February I lost my beloved wife. Her death was totally unexpected and knocked me sideways to the point where MMA wasn't even in my vocabulary, let alone my plans for the rest of the year. In the end I offered to run it once more before deciding what my further future would bring. I've now decided that I need to concentrate on more personal projects so I'm announcing that 2016 was my last year of organising MMA. Patrick did a great job in helping and he's more than capable of picking up the reins so please join me in wishing him well.

I guess that's it so I'll just take this opportunity on behalf of all our Maniacal Collective to wish you:



Keith Wood is a relic of the late 1950's and a self-proclaimed Old Luddite and currently lives in Bavaria, close to Munich.

He has been one of the Malt Maniac collective since the beginning of 2011 and has now organised the last six Malt Maniacs Awards. Each year he questions whether this will be his last and to be honest, this year he's seriously asking whether it's time to hand over, or not? He thinks it finally is.

Slàinte Mhath,  
Keith Wood