

The Blethers

July 2009

New C.O.M. Slate: Congratulations and thank you's are in order for the members of next year's Committee of Management: Dave Neuffer, Chairman; Mady Newfield, Secretary; Marsha Spurlock, Treasurer; Noel Chavez, Gwen Leyffer, and Robin Gaston, Members at Large. A sincere note of appreciation goes to outgoing member Corinne McArdle for serving on the Committee. The C.O.M. continues to meet regularly and encourages dancers to come to the meetings and bring their ideas. A special meeting is being held in July to organize Branch records. If someone has additional records or wants to help with the sorting, please contact a C.O.M. member. Also, watch for more news about the 2010 Weekend Workshop as plans for this event move forward.

Dancing at Fermi Lab: Cool your feet at Fermi Lab's air conditioned hi-rise auditorium this summer. Silk and Thistle meets each Tuesday night at 7:30 throughout the summer for a full evening of jigs, reels and strathspeys.



Sweet Spell of Success: The Scripps National Spelling Bee, held in Washington earlier this year, offered no problem for 14 year-old St. Louis competitor, Yulkendy Valdez. According to a news report out of San Francisco, "In the second round of the competition, Yulkendy successfully spelled 'Pegasus,' a mythical flying horse, to inch closer to the semi-final round... Later Valdez's success continued when she correctly spelled 'strathspey' -a Scottish country dance."

Armchair Touring: The Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh is featured in The Da Vinci Code, the popular novel in which it is suggested that the 1466 chapel was built to house the secret of the Holy Grail. Since the publication of the book, the chapel has apparently seen a steady stream of curious visitors. Now an interactive CD-Rom which offers a virtual tour of the chapel is available. More information about this item is available by visiting the Rosslyn Chapel Web site at www.rosslynchapel.com

Spotlight on Whisky: The following article grew out of an idea to hold a "virtual whisky tasting." Bryan Luce, Bill Polensky and Bryan Parks were asked to join a panel of "whisky tasters." They not only were up to the task, but they've shared some comments that are good places to go for anyone who is interested in knowing more about whisky.

From Bryan Luce:

Whisky tasting is, of course, a most subjective pursuit, and I do not pretend to hold special expertise in the art. But I know what I like, and what I like not quite as much, and am happy to share some of my experiences. I am particularly fond of the "peaty"-style malts characteristic of many of the whiskies distilled on the islands off the Scottish coast. The infusion of peat into the whisky provides the unmistakable flavour and aroma. It is not a taste that agrees with all whisky lovers, even many of your most refined.

One such peaty malt is Laphroaig, and I am a proud member of its "Friends of Laphroaig" club. My certificate of membership certifies that I am deeded one square foot of the distillery's estate on the island of Islay (pronounced "Eye-lay"). In exchange for the use of the holding, Laphroaig agrees to pay the Lessor, i.e., me, a yearly rent in the sum of one dram of Laphroaig to be claimed in person at

the distillery. Upon the Lessor's arrival at Laphroaig, they will provide "a map with directions for locating the plot, a pair of wellingtons, protective headgear for low-flying geese, a lifebelt and anchor to safeguard against being blown out to sea, one ball of string for securing trouser legs from inquisitive stoats, and a towel for the Lessor to dry off in the event of unwelcome attention from affectionate otters." I've not yet had the opportunity to visit my plot, but by the time I do, I think I will have much back rent to collect.

One distillery I have had occasion to visit is Bushmill in Northern Ireland, situated on the north coast near the *Giant's Causeway*. Bushmill has a marvelous array of underappreciated malts. Although Bushmill has whiskies that are considerably older, the 10 year-old is my personal favourite, proving once more that age alone does not define quality.

As an aside, the Bushmill distillery is but a stone's throw from the ruins of Dunluce Castle. My wife, stepson and I made a short side trip to Dunluce ("Fort Luce") during our trip in 2004. Armed with the knowledge that the fortress had been established by Scottish immigrants to Ireland, I showed the caretaker the surname on my passport, and playfully demanded half price admission to my clan's castle. She obliged without a word, and held steadfast when I then protested that I had spoken only in jest. (Fortunately we found a donations box on the way out.)

I will conclude my "review" with mention of a couple of lesser known spirits. At this year's Whiskyfest Chicago at the Hyatt Regency, a few colleagues and I had the opportunity to sample the Japanese foray into the art of whisky-making. With eager curiosity we tried the product of Suntory, a venerable Japanese brewer and distiller. My colleagues felt that the Suntory carried an unpleasant after-taste. I begged to differ, finding it most repugnant from the get-go. A Scottish malt with the moniker of Pig's Nose also is not highly recommended, proving that bad taste can bridge the widest of cultural divides.

Hello to all. I'm Bill Polensky and I've been asked to contribute some thoughts and recommendations on whisky and possibly other distillations that might interest others. I will try to introduce you to three single malt whiskies that are fairly easy to find and will not break the bank and so interest the novice and well as the more experienced whisky drinker.

The first whisky comes to us from Ireland and if you have ever done a tasting of Irish Whiskies at the distilleries in Ireland, this is the one they didn't give you a sample to try. It is REDBREAST, a 12-year-old and probably the finest example of a pure pot still whisky. Almost everyone who has had a dram has thoroughly enjoyed it. It is lighter in body than the Scotch Whiskies and is complex and fairly bold on the palate and then finishes to dried fruit or maybe spice cake. It is an excellent whisky to start your whiskey drinking experience and one that you can return to time after time.

The second whisky is from island of Orkney in Scotland and is the northern most distillery. It is HIGHLAND PARK, a 15-year-old. Highland Park produces whisky that brings together the best of all the Scottish regions and melds them into a whole that gives us the best all around whiskey. There is a hint of peat, a little smoke and sweetness. It is thick and smooth and a deep amber color. I like all the expressions of this distillery and find that as the whisky is aged it builds its character as well as becoming smoother. The 15-year-old is a good compromise between taste and cost.

The third whiskey is produced by ABERLOUR and is called "a'bunadh", meaning "The Origin". It is made of at least 10 year-old to more than 15 year-old whiskeys vatted together. It is cask strength at 59.6 vol. -that's about 120 proof! It is not a whisky to try on your first outing. I enjoy this whisky neat but do recommend adding a wee bit of good water to the dram. To the nose it is powerful and

gives a hint of sherry and a little caramel. To the palate it is smooth and creamy, finishing to a little smoke, brandy and ginger. This is a good one for after dinner and as a final drink of the evening.

Greetings all who would appreciate good Whisky. My name is Bryan Parks and I have been invited to join a group of like-minded individuals commenting on Whisky and its nuances. I do not claim to be expert in this area but I do enjoy a good character laden robust glass from time to time. My initiation to Scotch Whisky occurred during graduate school at a gathering hosted by one of the school leaders, Ronald McGregor. Indeed, a gentleman with a deep appreciation of the subject. I still remember fondly his proclamation that evening at his house, "Now we start your real education boys" as he presented a series of Whisky tastings each more complex and memorable than the last. I found this to be quite a pleasant experience and continue to search out new Whisky whenever the opportunity presents. One other personal note, I have lost a significant portion of my sense of smell, and so I will not be overly verbose about the nose of a Whisky as what I smell will be significantly different than what you may discern. I also tend to gravitate to the stronger cask strength expressions for each whiskey type.

We have been asked to comment on three of our "Go To" distillations, and I would like to highlight a Scotch, an Irish and a Kentucky Bourbon. These are all reasonably priced, easily found and very drinkable. Certainly not the best in my cabinet but a very good starting point.

My choice for Scotch is The Macallan cask strength. Now this is a heavily sherried Scotch, in that it has been matured in Spanish sherry oak cask for about 10 years (although finding an age statement can be difficult). This is not for the timid! It is a decidedly robust dram at about 58 % / volume. The color is dark, almost cherry. The nose is very rich and thick with lots of fruit. The body is thicker than standard with a tendency to coat. I find the palate to be powerful with lots of tastes up front on the tongue like lingering oak and strong fruit overtones. The finish is very long and hot, ending on the tip of your tongue. Whew! I love this one in the dead of winter with the wind howling outside. I also use this Scotch as my first choice for adding to barbeque sauce for grilling season and for Whisky pound cake as it doesn't disappear.

Next is the Irish. My choice here is also the most expensive of the three presented, but still quite reasonable. Bushmill's 16 year old. This Whisky is matured in three casks (old bourbon, Oloroso Sherry and Port Buts) and benefits greatly from it. The color is a rich dark caramel. The nose is much more complex and fruity with a hint of spiciness absent from some of the younger offerings from Bushmill's. I find the body to be medium in creaminess with no tendency to coat the tongue. Palate is clean with some wood or nutty hints and the Sherry and Port overtones are present and pleasant. The finish is lingering with fruit and a touch of peat. Overall, a satisfying evening taste.

Finally, I would like to introduce you to a recent acquisition of mine this winter. A bottle of Woodford Reserve distillers select from Labrot & Graham. This is a small batch Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey at 45 % / volume. This Whiskey has won multiple awards world wide. The Woodford Reserve Distillery is a national historic landmark and they specialize in small batch processing of exceptional quality. Or so say the advertisers.

I decided to give it a try after Whisky Magazine reviewed it quite favorably. What I found surprised me. The color is Honey or coppery. The nose is simpler than the previous two but not without character. I smell caramel with hints of honey. The body is surprisingly rich, much more so than I was expecting but not as thick as The Macallan. The palate is flowery with some oaky citrus hints. The finish is short and over quickly with a hint of mintiness that teases the tongue. This is not without its merits. An easy dram for a summer's evening with the wind in the trees. Enough flavour to intrigue but not so challenging as to intimidate.

I shall close now and add a quote if I may;

"Moderation sir, aye, moderation is my rule.
Nine or ten is reasonable refreshment,
but after that it's apt to degenerate
into drinking"



An Old Highland Saying

Not-So-Smart Phone: According to a recent article in Scottish Life, an American-designed software application has been designed for iPhone users to search the Internet with voice commands alone. However, there is a slight glitch: When a Scottish user said "iPhone," the software thought he said "sex." On a second try, the software heard "sledding." The Scots are evidently not alone in this predicament. The new software has apparently proven even more hopeless at understanding Welsh accents, hearing "gorillas" and "kitchen sink" when the word "iPhone" is spoken.

Photo Gallery:



Mary Ellen Endo during a trip to Bangkok in 2008.

2009-2010 Committee of Management: Dave Neuffer, Honorary Chairman; Mady Newfield, Honorary Secretary; Marsha Spurlock, Honorary Treasurer; Gwen Leyffer, Noel Chavez and Robin Gaston, Members at Large.

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