

# Romancing the Foam No. 104

---



I was always large and learned early on I could get jobs by exaggerating my age. In the 4<sup>th</sup> grade I got my first newspaper route by claiming that I would soon be going into the sixth grade. Around 7<sup>th</sup> grade or so some friends of mine and I figured out that if we showed up at the county fair the day before it opened, we could get a job setting the fair up. We would hitch-hike to the fair grounds and work from 6 at night until sometime after dawn. They'd ask if we were 16 and we'd say of course. No one ever asked for proof. The work paid a buck something an hour which at 13 or 14 in the mid-60s seemed like a lot and we got to hang with the carnies. We always tried to get hired to build the Rock-O-Planes because the ride owner usually let us ride them for an hour or so when we finished. Tim was especially adept at doing several revolutions upside down. It was pretty

cool watching the sun rise upside down from the Rock-O-Planes.

We would also make a point of helping the guy with the ape wrestling show. The ape was a chimp. It took less than an hour for our gang (our teachers called us the rat pack) to set up the show. It involved setting up a cage that the chimp lived in, setting up a cage to wrestle in, setting up a tent and setting up a stand for the barker out front. The barker ran the show. For \$1 you could wrestle the chimp and if you could pin the Chimp to the mat, then you won \$20. It cost 2 bits to watch and the barker could usually fill the tent for a show. As a benefit for helping to set up the show, we could hang out with the ape wrestling barker and the chimp. When not wrestling, the chimp was cute and we could pet him and feed him bananas or fruit. We'd run errands for the barker during the fair like get him a coke or a hotdog and he would let us in for free. No one ever beat the chimp in all the time he had the show except once. During fair week we'd watch football players, wrestlers, pipefitters, construction workers and in general, large strong fit men and small quick men take on the chimp using a variety of techniques and strategies. The chimp was fast and strong and despite the muzzle he wore while wrestling, the chimp used his hands and feet well, was good at not getting caught, equally good at getting loose and could fly around the cage. Football, wrestling, boxing, karate, judo, jujitsu, and other techniques were all for naught. The chimp creamed them and the harder they fought, the more they got creamed. Those who caught the chimp, got the worst of it. After the fair had closed, as we took the show down, Tim, who could talk better than anyone I ever met, got the barker to tell us how to beat the chimp. You go into the cage

March 26, 2017



with the chimp and act calm and friendly. Sit on the floor, wait for the chimp to come to you, then pet its back. When the chimp relaxes, pet his tummy and he will roll over on his back. You win. You wrestle an ape by petting its tummy.

Kombucha beer embodies the principles of ape wrestling. I first ran into kombucha when 20 or so years ago my brother and mother were making something of the sort in hopes that it would convey immortality. While packed with probiotics and antioxidants, their concoction tasted ghastly but mom is now approaching 90 so it might have done something. In years since I have tried various commercial varieties and many are not too bad. Kombucha is made by fermenting tea with a “symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeast” or SCOBY for short. SCOBY may contain *Saccharomyces*, *Lactobacillus*, *Gluconacetobacter xylinus* and other yeasts and bacteria. The end product may contain gluconic, acetic, lactic and other acids and a small amount of alcohol (0.5 to 3.0%). Most commercial varieties are sweetened and may have fruit juices added. The result is a lightly sweetened acidic soda with a light to strong vinegar taste.

Unity Vibration is in Ypsilanti, Michigan. It’s founders, Tarek and Rachael Kanaan, began brewing Kombucha Tea in 2007 and selling it at farmer’s markets. In 2010, the FDA figured out that Kombucha had alcohol in it. The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau regulates everything over 0.5% alcohol as an alcoholic beverage. This forced Kombucha brewers to reformulate their process to get the alcohol down. The Kanaans thought of another way. Why not kick up the alcohol and make beer? This is not as easy as it sounds because some of the bacteria in the SCOBY used to make Kombucha Tea, especially the *Gluconacetobacter xylinus*, convert the alcohol produced by the *Saccharomyces* to make acids. Tarek and Rachel spent some time playing with the bacteria and yeast mixture, add some *Brettanomyces* and

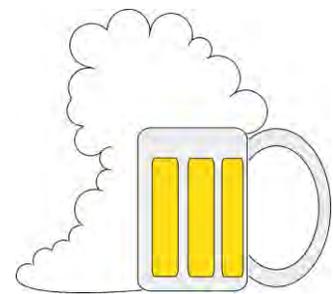
got the alcohol content up to a respectable 8.0% by volume. They ferment their Kombucha in oak barrels, use all organic ingredients, and their beer is vegan and gluten free.



Unity Vibration Triple-Goddess Raspberry Kombucha Beer (8.0% alcohol by volume) smells like kombucha presenting at least four kinds of tart aromas - vinegar, *Lactobacillus* (yogurt), citric, and fruit tartness. Raspberry, a hint of tobacco and mild funk add to the tart aromas. It is reddish pink in the glass with a thin foam cap that quickly dissipates. It is a tart, funky, kombucha palate with a big raspberry presence on the palate. The tart flavors have the same aspects as the aroma and are medium high while the raspberry and sweetness are medium. Lemon and mild vinegar notes work well with the raspberry. The raspberry and alcohol knock a little intensity off the kombucha but the acidity and carbonation still give it a little bite. The body is light to medium light and the carbonation is high. This is a very refreshing, unusual and

March 26, 2017

interesting beer should appeal to those who like kombucha or are looking for a gluten free beer. I rate it 85.



Unity Vibration Triple-Goddess Ginger Kombucha Beer (8.0% alcohol by volume) pours hazy straw under a white foam cap that last a millisecond longer than a normal kombucha cap. It smells like a mild ginger kombucha with tart funky fruit in the background. It tastes tart and funky, and lightly sweet. The ginger comes through nicely providing both flavor and a mild ginger heat. Lemon and orange mix with the ginger to tone down the kombucha character slightly. The alcohol is barely noticeable. It is light and highly effervescent. While on the edges of beer territory, it is light, refreshing and easy to drink. I rate it 85.

Unity Vibration Bourbon Peach (8.0% alcohol by volume) follows the same basic recipe as their ginger and raspberry beers and then ages the beer in bourbon casks with peaches. The ratings for this beer fall into two camps. It is either one of the top beers the reviewer has had or it is undrinkable. First off, it smells like kombucha and a wild ale. There is lactobacillus (the bacteria used in yogurt),

some vinegar, a hint of grain, some peach and a hint of bourbon. In the glass it looks like kombucha. the initial fizz disappears quickly to a hazy gold elixir with no trace of head. The palate tastes like beer and kombucha and after a moment you realize that this is a good thing. The lemony, lactobacillus, vinegary tartness balances the peach sweetness. The bourbon is in there and while it is not very big it adds complexity and balances the kombucha aspects. The beer aspect tones down the Kombucha bite a little bit and makes it more drinkable. The peach flavors are medium to medium high. It has a sweetness not found in Kombucha from the peaches and this is a definite plus. There is a trace of bourbon barrel in the background that provides some tannin and a faint hint of vanilla. The body is light to medium light and the carbonation is high with a softened kombucha bite. Draft Beer Magazine named Unity Vibration's Bourbon Peach as one of the top 25 beers of 2013. I agree and rate it 90.



March 26, 2017

Making Kombucha beer strikes me as “a wrestling the monkey” kind of thing. The Feds tell you to cut the alcohol so the Kanaans figure out how to make beer. Kombucha fans will like Unity Vibration’s beer. My wife Nancy drinks kombucha and she loves this beer.

Gluten free fans should hunt this beer down and drink it. I have reviewed several gluten free beers or gluten reduced beers and I would drink the better ones if I had to be gluten free. Unity Vibration’s beers are the first gluten free beers where I will drink them anyway. They are all interesting and flavorful. The Bourbon Peach is my favorite, then the Raspberry but the Ginger is also good.

