

July 31, 2017

Romancing the Foam No. 108



Shakey Jake arrived in Ann Arbor Michigan in 1973 – about a year before I moved there for a construction job converting a TV studio that had once been a morgue into a bar. Shakey Jake was a street musician and bull shitter extraordinaire. They lured him to Ann Arbor with a gig at the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival and he never left. The first time I saw him, Jake was wearing a white linen suit and was holding an impromptu concert in the middle of State Street. The crowd had the street blocked off and the police concluded that it was easier diverting traffic than diverting the crowd. Jake often set up somewhere along my walk home from work or from my home to somewhere else and I would stop for a story or a tune. Jake told me he was over 100 years old, slept under a freeway overpass and had a band of invisible body guards protecting him. Other people claimed he was a millionaire, drove a Cadillac, lived in a big house, and/or lived off a military pension. Generally, the story changed with each telling. Only later when I read his obit in 2007 – he died at 82 of kidney failure - did I find out that Shakey Jake was born Jake Woods in Little Rock, August 24, 1925 and moved to Saginaw Michigan as a kid and lived there until he moved to Ann Arbor. In Ann Arbor, he rented an apartment.

Shakey Jake earned his living selling Shakey Jake T-Shirts, bumper stickers that proclaimed, “I brake for Jake,” and by what some people called “singing.” When inspired he could strut about like Chuck Berry. He only knew one cord on his guitar but he strummed the heck out of it, nothing really had much of a tune and he hollered more than sang but he was a character and pretty much everywhere. Everybody loved him and his stories. He was a minor irritant to the City fathers and they did things like pass laws

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requiring vendor's permits and vendor's insurance but everyone would chip in and help Jake out whenever he got caught without the proper permits.



I was wearing my Shakey Jake T-Shirt when I left Ann Arbor for good. It was around this time of year in 1975 on a Sunday and Norm Haack and I decided to hitch-hike to San Francisco. Norm was the only person I knew at the time who had read all of Wittgenstein and when properly inspired could lapse into a delightful lunacy and was game for anything. We started out on Washtenaw Avenue trying to get to I-94 or US 23 to get headed south. A city bus stopped. We climbed aboard. I dug into my pocket for some change and all I had was a wooden nickel. The driver and the whole bus roared with laughter and the driver proclaimed that anyone wearing a Shakey Jake T-shirt who gives him a wooden nickel rides free on his bus. He told us he had 4 more stops to the end of his shift and if we weren't in a hurry, he would take us to the interchange of I-94 and US-23. I am drinking these beers for Shakey Jake and the adventures that he inspired.



Samuel Smith Old Brewery was established in Tadcaster, Yorkshire in 1758. Samuel Smith bought the brewery for his son John in 1847. John Smith built a new brewery next door (John Smith's Brewery) left the old brewery to his nephew Samuel in 1886 (Samuel Smith's Old Brewery). Samuel Smith's still brews with the Yorkshire Square system and uses water from the original 1758 well. I started drinking Samuel Smith's ales when Merchant du Vin first imported them to the US in 1978. Their Nut Brown Ale, Taddy Porter, India Ale, Oatmeal Stout and Imperial Stout are world class classic beers. I, like many home brewers at the time, made valiant and often futile attempts to copy these beers. They were the standard we all aspired to.

In the 1990's Samuel Smith's purchased the Melbourn Brothers' All Saints Brewery & Pub in Lincolnshire, England, restored its Victorian brewing equipment and began making organic beer at the restored brewery. In 2009, Merchant du Vin first imported Samuel Smith's

Organic Fruit Beers to the US. There are four of them: Organic Cherry Fruit Beer, Organic Strawberry Fruit Beer, Organic Raspberry Fruit Beer, and Organic Apricot Fruit beer. I avoided these until last week. My first fruit beers were Lambics I found in Europe and most American fruit beers just didn't taste right to me. Plus, how could such a venerable brewery make fruit beer? Having your favorite classic brewery making a fruit beer struck me like catching your health food store owner smoking a cigarette. Too many fruit beers taste like wine coolers or they just don't fit together well.

Last Tuesday I bought a Samuel Smith Old Brewery (Tadcaster) Organic Apricot Ale at Zipps. Samuel Smith brews Samuel Smith's Organic Apricot Ale (5.1% alcohol by volume) at its Melbourne Brewery to

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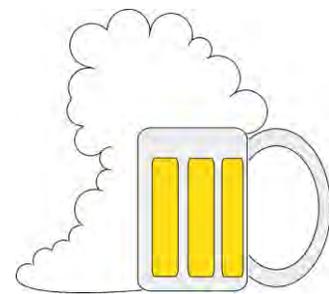
ensure that it is completely organic. They then blend the beer with organic apricot juice and finish it off at it the Tadcaster Brewery. It smells like a fresh shortbread biscuit slathered with apricot marmalade. Apricot is the big aroma followed by light biscuit, and traces of citrus and fruit. It pours hazy gold permeated by streams of rapidly rising bubbles under a 1.5" off-white to cream foam collar with good retention. Initial flavors of apricot, sweet biscuit, honey, orange, citrus precede very mild hop flavors and bitterness. The apricot is the big player on the palate but it is well balanced by the other elements. This is a very creamy beer with medium to medium low carbonation. Samuel Smith adds just enough apricot to not over power the malt and other flavors in the beer. This beer works and it works very well because the malt flavors from the British malts are exactly what you want with apricot. The British yeasts develop fruit flavors that complement the apricot and give it depth and complexity. The hops provide just a dash of tea like bitterness in the finish. Serve this beer with pork. Try this beer with a nice runny Brie or drink it with a fresh garden salad. My wife Nancy does not like most beer. This is her favorite beer. After the first bottle last week, I had to go to two different stores to find some more Samuel Adams Organic Apricot Ale. I rate Samuel Smith's Organic Apricot Ale 90.



21st Amendment Brewery's Toaster Pastry (7.6% alcohol by volume, 74 International Bittering Units) is the first beer out of their new brewery located in an ex-toaster pastry factory and the beer blows me away a little bit because it has toaster pastry smells and tastes. This is an India Red Ale and 21st amendment claims to achieve these flavors with malts and experimental hops which blows me away even more. The nose starts with big resiny hops and some pine and wood aromas but a definite nutty, slightly sweet pastry crust aroma floats around behind the hops. The hop aromas are medium to medium high while the toasty malt aromas are medium low. It pours brilliant copper amber under a 2.5" cream colored foam cap with a slight copper tint. The cap is lacy and persistent. The palate starts with sweet toaster pastry crust with biscuit, hints of caramel, traces of stone fruit and nuts but quickly gives way to an assertive bitterness that rides right through the finish. The flavors are complex and layered but nicely balanced. The malt is medium to medium high balanced by medium high to high bitterness. Toaster Pastry leaves a long

bitter finish that lasts and lasts. High praise to the brewer for concocting a beer that evokes toaster pastry with big hops and having it work so well. I give it a 90.

Beer brewed with cucumber absolutely should not work. My can of 10 Barrel Brewing Company Cucumber Crush (5.0% alcohol by volume, 4 International Bittering Units) was packaged 2 months ago. This is a sour beer brewed with cucumber. It sounds outrageous but it reminds me of the agua frescas I first encountered in the market in Mazatlan a very long time ago. They had big 5-gallon glass jars lined



up on rows of shelves in tiny stalls inside the market. The selection included every conceivable fruit and vegetable and were refreshing and delicious. One year my garden produced an overabundance of cucumbers and I resolved the problem by making mass quantities of agua fresca with cucumber and lime and it worked quite well. It also works with watermelon, and cantaloupes. It works even better with a shot or two of vodka. When I saw this on the singles shelf at France 44 Liquors I thought - "Oh, this might work." It does. It has a clean refreshing smell reminiscent of a summer salad. The first whiff is vegetal but then it becomes more cucumber and tart. It pours hazy straw filled with streams of fast rising bubbles under a massive white foam cap with poor retention. The mildly sweet cucumber lemony tart start reminds the drinker how well lemons and cucumber go together. It leans slightly to the tart in

the middle and then finishes with the cucumber and tart in balance. The body is light and the beer is effervescent. This is an unusual yet highly refreshing beer that goes well with Thai food, anything with cilantro or mint, or just sit back and enjoy it with a nice fresh summer salad. I rate it 85.

Beers brewed with apricot, or brewed to taste like a toaster pastry or brewed with cucumber strike me as suitable to drink in Shakey Jake's memory. The beers hit on some of the insane creativity, gregariousness, and humor that made Jake so loved by the people of Ann Arbor. My Shakey Jake T-Shirt rotted and became a dust cloth a couple of decades ago and my "I Brake For Jake" bumper sticker is affixed to the back of a '59 Chevy ragtop that went to the great car crusher in the sky in the distant past, but Jake, these beers are for you.

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