



## Romancing the Foam No. 114

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It was sometime in the mid-70s. I had spent the last year as the big dumb guy on a variety of construction jobs in Ann Arbor and had just returned to college in Mt. Pleasant as a graduate student to avoid working outdoors in the mud and snow. I stood in the Student Union in February or March looking at a flyer posted on the wall. Boogie Woogie Red was scheduled to play in the Woldt-Emmons food commons Thursday night. Poor Red. Born Vernon Harrison in October 1925 in Rayville, Louisiana, his family migrated to Detroit in 1927 and as a teenager Red earned a place in the local Detroit jazz and blues scene playing piano with Sonny Boy Williamson, Washboard Willie, Baby Boy Warren, Lonnie Johnson, Tampa Red, John Lee Hooker and Memphis Slim. During the 70's he played a regular gig at Ann Arbor's Blind Pig every Monday night and while in Ann Arbor, I was usually

there. He played piano solos and sang in the basement. The ceiling was so low that if I wasn't careful, I would hit my head. He had a relaxed style punctuated with entertaining chatter and jokes. I collected a small gang of friends and we made out way to the food commons. The food commons did not allow alcohol, but I had a depression era long tweed overcoat I had inherited from my grandfather that was blessed with inside pockets galore and I could secret several pints of whiskey in that coat. During his sets we supplied Red with whiskey cokes and we spent his breaks with him smoking in the parking lot. He recognized me from his Blind Pig audience and appreciated the whiskey. At the finish of his show, his ride back to Detroit never showed. A friend of mine had a piano in his apartment on Main Street a block or two south of the Bird and we invited Red to come wait with us. We taped a sign telling where to find Red on the door. Red ran his hands over the piano keys like old ladies crochet or knit. He didn't pay any attention to his hands. We sat transfixed with the





occasional questions as Red mostly talked and told stories with the music in the background and once in a while a song would come out. He had played jazz or blues with just about everybody and had stories about them. He also talked about his music. Red's ride showed up around dawn. I don't think anybody who was there will forget our night with Red. He played into the '80s when the arthritis in his hands forced him to quit. Red died in 1992. April 28, 1993 the Detroit Blues Society's Memorial Project held a benefit concert at Zal Gaz Grotto to buy Red a tombstone.

I recently sold my vinyl – I haven't had a working turntable in a decade – and after I sold the records I realized that among my collection was Boogie Woogie Red's *Live at the Blind Pig*. The album was special – in addition to my evening with Red, I was probably there the night his first album was recorded. So to

commemorate Red and mourn the loss of his album I am drinking a Delirium Red. When I first picked up a bottle of Brouwerij Huyghe Delirium Red (8.0% alcohol by volume) I somehow expected a Belgian take on a red IPA or a red ale, forgetting all about Flanders Reds. As soon as I released the cork, cherry, fruit, berry, spice, nuts, a trace of funk and wet wool told me to expect something other than a red IPA. It fills the glass reddish brown under a 1/2" lightly pink tinted cream cap with fair retention. The palate starts mildly tart and lightly sweet as rich malt flavors layer with cherry, dark dried fruit, fig, dates and spices and hints of a sweet red grape burgundy-like character. The tartness has a sweetened lemonade to well-aged balsamic vinegar intensity. It dries on the finish with a vague hint of tobacco. The body is medium and the carbonation is medium low but it has a light acidic bite. The alcohol is mildly warming and grows gently while you drink. This is a complex, layered beer with a big malt body that nicely balances the tartness. I rate it 85.

Deschutes Brewery Red Chair NWP (6.2% alcohol by volume, 60 International Bittering Units) is what I was expecting when I opened the Delirium. It pours copper with a slight haze under a 2" cream colored cap that has a



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very fine bead and takes a full 5 minutes to reduce to 1/3 its original size. A continual stream of bubbles rises quickly from the bottom of the glass. From arm's length the nose easily detects spicy hop aromas along with biscuit, mint, resin and citrus. Creamy citrus, tangerine, and malt flavors roll over the tongue. A medium to medium low malt sweetness nicely accentuates the herbal and citrus hop flavors. Deschutes has loaded Red Chair NWPA with hops, but most are expressed as flavor rather than bitterness. In the finish tangerine flavors resume their prominence and mingle with a mild malt sweetness and a dash of citrus rind bitter. The medium body has moderately high carbonation. I rate this medium octane, highly flavored beer 95.

Fulton Libertine is an imperial red ale which is a red ale with more alcohol. Fulton Beer Barrel-Aged



Libertine (8.5% alcohol by volume, 45 International Bittering Units) is an Imperial Red Ale aged in bourbon barrels. You know this immediately upon prying off the cap as bourbon, rich malt, fruit, molasses, brown sugar and spice aromas drift up from the bottle. It's bright reddish brown in the glass and is brilliant around the edges. It has a thin cream to light tan cap with poor retention. This very full-flavored beer tastes like bourbon with a hint of chocolate sweetened by brown sugar and dark dried fruit and seasoned by spice. The hop bitterness is mild but provides balance and keeps the beer from being cloyingly sweet. The flavors increase as the beer warms. This is a big, chewy beer with medium low carbonation. It is sticky on the lips and has a pleasant warming. It's a beer for bourbon lovers. I really enjoy this big, bold full-flavored beer. I rate it 90.

Of the three beers, the Delirium Red is an elegant beer and appropriate for remembering an old friend. Had the Red Chair NWPA been available, it probably would have been the beer of choice for the evening with Red. Of the 3 beers, the

Fulton Barrel Aged Libertine is the one I most wish I could have shared with Red. As much as he liked my whiskey, I imagine he would really like the libertine with its bourbon notes. And damn, I wish I still had that album and a turntable and could hear Red's voice and remember his laughter and kindness.