



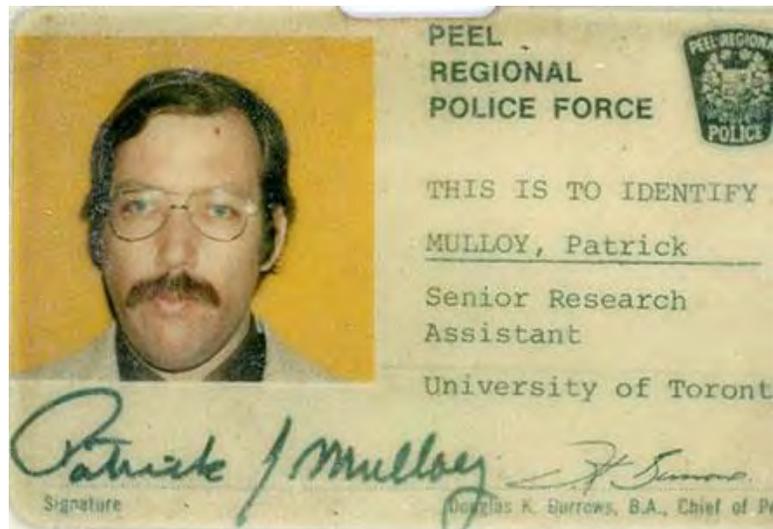
Romancing the Foam[®] No. 129



I'm reading a book on the History of Jazz by Ted Gioia and his discussion of Oscar Peterson takes me back to my run in with the man. It's around 1974 and I have a job with the University of Toronto Criminology Centre in a participant observation study of the Peel Regional Police Force. I ride in cop cars. I take notes on how they make decisions. I'm randomly assigned to cops. I'm doing a 7 to midnight shift. I'm riding with a guy who emigrated from Scotland and I

think his name was Giovanni Petrangelo or something like that. As I recall everyone called him Petro. We had done a midnight to 7 shift a few weeks back and when you sit in a car all night with somebody and all you have to do is drink coffee and talk, you talk a lot. Petro and I turned out to have a lot in common – he grew up in Glasgow, had a thick Scottish brogue, was at least as liberal as I was, I got all his opinions of policing, his father was a baker from Italy, and Petro liked jazz. We figured this night was going to be slow, so we got coffee and went to a spot to hide from the sarge and BS all night. As soon as we settled in we got a call of a burglary in Mississauga, tossed our coffee out the window, turned on the lights, floored it, and flew down to a wealthy part of the Toronto suburb and pulled up to a rather large, well-kept house with a spacious lawn surrounded by large, mature trees.

We get to the house and a woman answers the door. She is Mrs. Peterson but we could call her Sandra. While she and her husband were out for dinner somebody broke a window in the back door and got in. Not much was taken. We did our investigation and as we were ready to leave a man nearly my size (6'3", 250 lbs.) came to thank us and as he entered the room, both Petro and I said something like "holy shit you're Oscar Peterson." Yep. Petro gushed about what a big fan he was and said



he had some albums back home and could he come by sometime and have Oscar Sign them. Oscar said he would be happy to but that he was leaving tomorrow for a gig in New York. If we could bring the

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records by tonight, he would sign them. So Petro and I raced back to his house in a nearby suburb and were back with two arm loads of LPs in about 20 minutes. We spent the rest of the evening – well over half a shift, sitting in Oscar’s living room while he signed albums and told stories as we peppered him with questions and showered him with adoration. I don’t remember a thing he said but what I always remember is that in my opinion the greatest Jazz pianist of all time, took an evening of his time on the night before he had to fly to New York, sharing with two of his fans and signing albums and I remember the warmth and comfort that Petro and I felt in Oscar’s living room.

Oscar died 12 years ago this month of kidney failure on December 23. I have an Oscar Peterson Live at the Blue Note 3-disc box set that I usually put on this time of year. Whenever I hear his music I feel that I am hearing the piano the way it should be heard. Here are a few beers I like to drink with Oscar’s music that I feel approach the same level of excellence.



The first beer is from Oscar’s native Quebec. Quebec brewer Unibroue first brewed Maudite (a Belgian Dubbel with 8% alcohol by volume, 22 International Bittering Units, 20 SRM) in 1992 and by 1994 their beer started dribbling out of Canada. In 1992 Unibroue partnered with a Belgian Brewer to develop their line of beers and the results can stand with any Belgian import and cost quite a bit less. I found Maudite on the shelves of Surdyks and South Lyndale Liquors around 1994 and took notice. The name means "the damned" and that got the bottle into my hand. The cork releases with a pop and a small white misty cloud escapes from the bottle. It pours hazy deep copper amber producing a rocky, mousse-like light cream-colored foam stand that takes over 5 minutes to drop to a thick sticky film. Streams of bubbles slowly rise from the bottom of the glass. The aromas include an array of Belgian yeast notes - hints of banana, bubble gum, and clove along with added spices - orange, coriander, and some more remote spice aromas, some

hints of hops, and then malt in the background. On the palate the blend of Belgian yeasts, rich malts, added fruit and spices and spicy hops combine to initially evoke a rich, caramelly, spicy banana bread and then it dries slightly as a mild bitterness emerges to lead into the lingering finish with light fruit notes. There is a slight warming, but the alcohol is hot or harsh. I rate Maudite 98.

Brewery Ommegang Three Philosophers (9.7% alcohol by volume, 19 International Bittering Units) is a blend of 98% Belgian Quad, Quadruple Ale, or Belgian Dark Strong Ale (three names for the same thing) with 2% Leifman's Kriek, and ale brewed with cherries. It pours brilliant russet with a persistent, lacy, clingy 3" cream colored foam collar. The nose is big and spicy with notes of dark moist bread and a surprising amount of cherries considering that the Liefman’s Kriek only makes up 2% of the beer. The



yeast also suggests cherries. The flavors are very spicy with cinnamon, a hint of cardamom and a third spice – possibly anise, over a fruit cakey bread spiked with cherries that dries on the finish – maybe a hint of licorice in there somewhere. The body is highly effervescent with above average carbonation, medium to a little above on the body, and very creamy. Ommegang calls this a beer made for contemplation and this full-flavored Quad certainly fits. It is a beer made for slowly savoring and drinking with some stinky cheese or thick stews and Oscar Peterson on the piano. I rate it 90.

North Coast Brewing Company has been brewing since 1988, they are a Certified B Corporation which sets certain standards for community, philanthropy, and environmental stewardship. Google the company and look at their roof - it is stuffed with solar collectors. If you are in a sustainable state of mind, the solar collectors on the roof are sufficient enough excuse to load up on their

beer. North Coast Brewing Company's Brother Thelonious honors the late jazz pianist, Thelonious Monk. It is produced under an agreement with the Thelonious Monk estate and a portion of the proceeds of every bottle and keg of Brother Thelonious goes to the Monterey Jazz Festival education programs.

Thelonious Monk was another stellar jazz pianist – a bit more eccentric than Oscar but certainly an important artist to listen to and a beer dedicated to Monk is certainly a suitable companion for listening to Oscar Peterson's Live at the Blue Note. Brother Thelonious is a Belgian Style Abbey Ale (Belgian Dark Golden Strong) - a dark strong ale with big alcohol that blends malt richness, dark fruit, and spice. The beer pours brilliant deep copper brown with a thin light tan cap with poor retention. It has a rich fruity nose with fig, dates, some wine notes, cherry, pepper and spice. Cherries, dates, figs, dark sugars and mild malt notes dominate the first sip. The second notices smooth alcohol that leaves a mild warming, a moderate bitterness and you start to notice how well the fruit, the malt, the spice, the alcohol and the hop bitterness all work together.



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The beer is full bodied, almost chewy, with medium carbonation but it still has the wanting more quality of a much lighter beer. The beer is a big elixir that improves as it warms, revealing more flavor and revealing an exquisite balance. Nothing is out of place and nothing is wasted. Everything fits. I rate it 89.

These are three excellent big beers perfect for sipping slow and getting into the music.

See my review of Ted Gioia's The History of Jazz here:

<https://www.romancingthefoam.com/Books/book-Gioia-The-History-of-Jazz.html>

