

Malt Maniacs E-pistle #2011-?? **By Louis Perlman, USA**

This article is brought to you by 'Malt Maniacs'; an international collective of more than two dozen fiercely independent malt whisky aficionados. Since 1997 we have been enjoying and discussing the pleasures of single malt whisky with like-minded whisky lovers from all over the world. In 2010 our community had members from 15 countries; The United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, The U.S.A., Canada, India, Taiwan, Australia and South Africa. You can find more details on: www.maltmaniacs.org.



Guilty Pleasures

The Glenfiddich Snow Phoenix

Guilty pleasures, we all have them. There are a number of definitions, but I'd like to suggest that a guilty pleasure is something that you'd rather not have other people know about at your stage of life. Like the TV shows and movies from your youth. A guy who actually likes chick flicks. Or a professional woman with a responsible career, who reads romance novels. And then there are the guilty pleasure foods. [Mallomars](#), for example. A thin cookie topped with a glob of marshmallow, and the whole thing coated with chocolate. When you were a kid, you were happy if your mother let you have a second one. As an adult, you eat the entire box (during one of the TV shows from your youth). And then there is Captain Crunch breakfast cereal, available in plain, peanut butter and Crunch Berries. Banned from parent company Ralston Purina's website after landing on the least healthy cereals list, it now has its [own web site](#). Why, because people, i.e. adults, still eat it. I used to eat as much as half of the box the morning that it was opened, but after getting the 50th birthday lecture from my doctor, I now leave most of it for my sons when my wife occasionally picks up a box.

Now you might remember that I wrote a Speyside e-pistle two years ago, and had many good things to say about various Glenfiddich expressions. During the pre-publication e-mail exchange, I got the distinct impression that The Editor had figured that I had gotten soft, at least around the edges if not all the way thru. So all of this a lead-in the Glenfiddich Snow Phoenix, which hit the shelves in the US back in March.

You've probably heard the story; it is documented more completely [on the distillery web site](#). Back in the winter of 2009-2010, roofs all over Scotland were collapsing under the weight of the unusually heavy snowfall. Distillery warehouses were not exempt. So one day when Glenfiddich distillery manager Brian Kinsman was standing in a warehouse staring up thru the collapsed roof, he came up with the idea of creating a whisky from selected barrels in the damaged warehouses. And thus, the Snow Phoenix was born. The various ages included range from the teens up to thirty years or so. It comes in a nice presentation tin that adds to pride of ownership, but not much to the price tag. It is bottled at 47.6% ABV, without chill filtering.

After allowing almost two months for break-in with some casual sampling along the way, I lined up the Snow Phoenix with the rum cask finished 21 and the 15 year old Distillers Reserve, bottled at 102 proof (51% ABV, but the label uses proof) and no chill filtering. The 15 was the only one of the group that had any sherry influence, despite what the Snow Phoenix's little booklet



says. It was hardly a sherry monster, but stood out from its stable mates in this regard. The 21 had the boldest profile of the group; even though I had considered it less assertive than the Glenlivet and Glengoyne 21's that I had sampled it with the first time around. The Snow Phoenix was the most laid back of the group. The one thing that I found dominant was the pear element, which is actually quite pleasant. The apple, honey, and chocolate that the distillery mentions in their advertisements were very hard to discern, at best. Still, the Snow Phoenix came closer to my distant memory of the 30 year old that I sampled at Whiskyfest back in 2009, than it did to the 15 or 21. At the same time, I would have liked to see a bit more complexity, considering that there is some (unspecified amount) older malt in there.

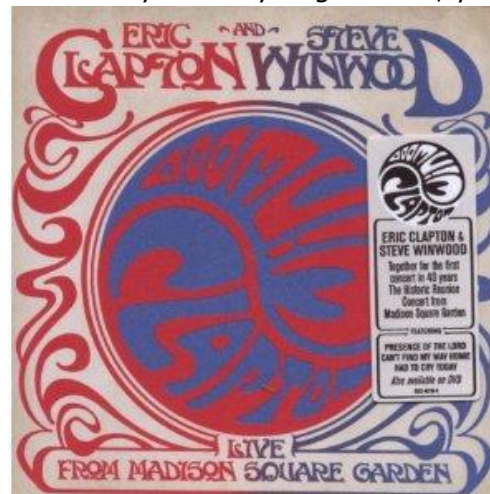
But of more note, was the body. At 47.6% ABV, I was expecting a bit more viscosity. But instead the Snow Phoenix could best be described as smooth (much as I hate that term). In fact it was silky smooth, even sensuously smooth. And that's when it hit me. This is not my type of whisky, not at all. The Snow Phoenix is in fact, a guilty pleasure. Reality check came by re-sampling the 15. Now that's more what I would be expecting. But the 15 doesn't do anything to indicate that it is anything other than around 15 years old. The Snow Phoenix OTOH is dangerously drinkable. One friend of mine who I talked into buying a bottle reported to me, that his entire family fell for the Snow Phoenix, and it was gone in barely a month.

And just for the record, I have not gone soft. The Snow Phoenix arrived just in time for the couple of nice spring days that we had, well, right at the beginning of spring. My dramming sessions in the weeks before and after that involved Ardbeg, Bowmore, Laphroaig, and home brew peat monster (Ardmore and Caol Ila). And I polished of a bottle of The Big Peat in a mere five months. So let's put that one to rest :)

Moving on, back in March, I also took my youngest son to hear the Allman Brothers at the Beacon Theater for his seventeenth birthday. It's become an annual tradition for the Allmans to hang out in NYC for the month on March, and put on a dozen or so concerts at the Beacon. A lot of people go to at least one concert every year, and some people go to more than one as well. Because the shows aren't the same each night, and you never know which special guest might join the band that night. This year, Derek Trucks, nephew of Allmans' drummer Butch trucks and actually named for Derek of Derek and the Dominos, joined the band for the tour. As a result, the evening was one massive guitar jam-fest. New York Yankees great Bernie Williams played guitar on a few songs as well. The last time I was at one of the Allmans a couple of years ago, it was a bluesy, keyboard dominated affair, even with Warren Haynes on guitar. That's what makes the Allmans at the Beacon so special. And for the icing on the cake, you can even get the [concert CD of just about every concert in recent years](#).

And if you are into this type of music, and if you're not then you really ought to be, you might want to pick up [Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood Live from Madison Square Garden](#). I was fortunate to catch that concert too. They go thru the standards on the first disk, with some great jamming on tracks 9 & 11, Double Trouble and To Tell the Truth. The highlight of the evening though, was the 36 minutes that included Little Wing, an 18 minute Voodoo Chile, Can't Find My Way Home, and Dear Mr. Fantasy. Steve Winwood played keyboards on the original Voodoo Chile, and I'm sure that Jimi was up there smiling during this one.

But these kinds of concerts are not for everybody. No, no. Not for the prototypical FM listener, who boasts .5 second song recognition



and demands note perfect renditions of the originals in concert. He (or she) would be much happier with [David Gilmour's Live in Gdansk](#). There is no reason to buy this album IMHO, if you've got the Pink Floyd albums, and DG's own On an Island. Maybe if you really want the included concert DVD. But I really would have liked to have been in Las Vegas back in 1998 for [The Bee Gee's One Night Only](#). OK, I'll admit it, the Bee Gee's are one of my musical guilty pleasures. I can listen to them together with my wife, who prefers scorching guitar solos in small quantities. Sometime it's nice just to kick back and sing along, and leave the pyrotechnics for another time.

Now back to the whisky. There is a good reason that Maniac types have dozens, or even hundreds of open bottles. And why we seem not to stop until we have every permutation of age, strength, and cask type from every distillery, past and present. And why we conduct vertical tastings, horizontal tastings, HTH's and HTHTH's. We want each dram to show us something new, something to expand our malty universe. But not the 12 year old Glenlivet and Glenfiddich (and blends) drinkers, they want sameness and predictability, note perfect renditions of the last bottle. And the one before that. And the one before that, etc.



But there's only one problem. There are more of them than there are of us. We live in their world. You are far more likely to hear Lady Gaga or the Bee Gee's in the waiting room at the dentist's office than Voodoo Chile. And you are equally likely to find Glenfiddich at the next office party than some un-chill filtered, non-caramel colored Glen Obscure. But every once in a while, you discover that life on the other side can be rather pleasant. Everybody is entitled to their guilty pleasures. It's OK to listen to the Bee Gee's, and it's OK to enjoy a dram or two of Glenfiddich. Well, as long as it's only once in a while. Because even the Bee Gees themselves said 'Love so right, turned out to be, so wrong'.

Slainte.



Louis Perlman was born in 1959. He got hooked on single malt scotch whisky in the late nineties. After stumbling around various web pages, he came across the announcement introducing the original Malt Madness page, and started exchanging emails with Johannes. Suddenly one day, the Malt Maniacs were introduced, with Louis being one of the original three.