



December 2007

### Lumpy Gravy

Lagunitas Brewing Company, Petaluma, California

7.2%abv \$3.75/22oz

It has only been about a year since the last time we featured a beer from Lagunitas, but when I heard that this would be released in time for the Holidays, I thought it would be an interesting twist on the usual Holiday Ale selections that we have used in December – Drunken Santas, Mischievous Elves, and the like.

Like many of the younger American microbreweries that we have featured over the years, Lagunitas Brewing Company began as the hobby of a home-brewer. Founder Tony Magee was working as a marketer in the printing industry, and brewing for himself at home on the weekends. However, being an experimental sort of guy, he was soon producing far more beer than he could consume, so he began giving it away to friends and family. When the positive feedback started rolling in, Tony decided to forego his paying job, and pursue brewing as a lifestyle. At first, no one in Tony's sphere of influence thought this was as good of an idea as Tony did, especially his wife, Carissa, but since she is now the operations manager for the brewery, he seems to have won her over. The brewery began in 1993 in Tony and Carissa's garage, in the town of Lagunitas, but within a year they had moved to a slightly larger, purpose-built facility in nearby Forest Knolls. By the end of 1994 they had outgrown that space, and they then relocated to the town of Petaluma, where the brewery exists today. Being a brewery without a pub, the toughest thing for Lagunitas has been, from the start, marketing their wares. Thankfully, Tony has an unusual sense of humor, and this, combined with his experience in marketing, has led to a series of brews with as much humor in packaging as skill in brewing, such as their 'Undercover Investigation Shut-Down Ale', which was prompted by a 20-day suspension of Lagunitas' brewing license following a visit by the BATF, when the Feds found a bit too much – ahem – 'smoking' on the brewery's patio during a public party.

Magee had long been a music fan – and more specifically, a Frank Zappa fan – when he noticed late last year that the fortieth anniversary of Zappa's first album release was quickly approaching. In a moment of inspiration, he contacted Frank's wife Gail Zappa and the Zappa Family Trust, and secured the rights to release commemorative beers on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of each of Zappa's albums, with a portion of the proceeds going to the Trust, and the Zappa Family's favorite cause, prostate cancer research (Frank Zappa died of prostate cancer in 1993). The first in the series, *Freak Out*, was released at the end of 2006, and was followed this past spring by the tribute to Zappa's second album, *Kill Ugly Radio* (actually, the second album was called *Absolutely Free*, but the Feds nixed that name – you can't imply the beer is free!). Now, just in time for the Holidays, and everybody's favorite part of the Holiday feast, *Lumpy Gravy*, named after Zappa's first album without the Mothers of Invention, and his first conducting a symphony orchestra, in this case the Abnuceals Emuuka Electric Symphony Orchestra & Chorus. *Lumpy Gravy*, the beer, is a reincarnation of Tony's first winter seasonal, called *Lagunator Solstice Ale*, which he retired in 2004 when he decided to change his winter seasonal to a Cappuccino Stout. It is loosely patterned after the dark winter bock beers of Germany, but since it is fermented with a top-fermenting ale yeast rather than a bottom-fermenting lager yeast, it doesn't fit that description entirely. It would be more accurately described as an Imperial Red ale, if it weren't for the fact that Tony Magee doesn't like to pinhole his beers ("Its beer", he says), and he won't divulge even the slightest bit of technical information on his brewing process. So, we are left with conjecture (my own, and that of some home-brewer friends, who kindly gave me their impressions). It seems to be brewed with a combination of pale, Crystal, and caramel malts, with an emphasis on the caramel; the hops, while present in their bitter-balancing role, are mildly pungent, and probably represent the more traditional West Coast bittering hops, while eschewing the more aromatic high-Alpha hop varieties that are all the rage right now. The finished ale is quite well-rounded, with the focus on the rich malt flavors. It would be best served in a traditional pint glass slightly chilled – say 45-50°F.

The *Lumpy Gravy* pours into the glass with a dark ruby-copper color, and – thankfully – the only thing lumpy about it is its rocky pale brown head. The aromas are very fruity and estery, with hints of tart pit fruits, as well as citrus and candied citrus, toasted grains, and an herbaceous, almost juniper-like green note. The flavors accurately follow the nose, with the rich, sweet malt just balanced by the tangy citrus notes from the hops. While malty, it finishes quite dry, with just a touch of bitter tang at the end. Try this with hearty breads and cheeses, braised or grilled sausages, or a robust winter stew.



## Black Cat

**Moorhouse's Brewery, Burnley, Lancashire, England**

**3.4%abv     \$4.75/500ml**

William Moorhouse founded his company in 1865 as a mineral water concern. By 1870, his business was so successful that he purchased a piece of land in the nearby town of Burnley, where he built a new facility for the purpose of manufacturing soft drinks and mineral waters. During the Temperance movement of the late 1800's and early 1900's, he brewed a selection of Hop Bitters, low alcohol (under 2%) concoctions that were deemed at the time to be "non-intoxicating liquors", and even sold quite well in the Muslim world – in fact, a second plant was built in Cyprus, then a British colony, to supply the Middle East. When William died in the early 1900's, his youngest son, Thomas, took over the family company. Shortly thereafter, Thomas Moorhouse was injured by an exploding bottle, and he died of complications from the injury within a matter of days. William's older son, then took over the business, which continued as a family owned business until 1978, when the last surviving heir sold the brewery property, business, and all of the family recipes to a local builder named Michael Ryan that had an interest in brewing Real Ales, a return to traditional British brewing that was just taking hold at the time. It was at this time that Moorhouse's brewed their first "alcoholic" brew, their Special Bitter. Unfortunately, Mr. Ryan was unable to make a serious run with the brewery, struggling to sell ten barrels of beer per week, and the brewery ended up changing hands a further four times over the next two years. Finally, after a long spell of only periodic production, a Manchester businessman by the name of William Parkinson, who had originally come from Burnley, tried a pint of the brewery's 'Pendle Witches Brew' Bitter over lunch one day. Enjoying the beer immensely, he started making inquiries, only to find out that the brewery was in danger of being shuttered for good. Within days, he had made an offer, and the business was granted a new lease on life, saving some dozen jobs. Now in completely modernized and refurbished facilities on the original property, the brewery is employing more than fifty full-time employees, and is brewing in excess of 400 barrels of ale per week.

The inspirations for all of the Moorhouse beers are the myths of the surrounding moorlands and forests. In the late 1500's, the area around Burnley was rich with stories of witchcraft and black magic, kind of the British equivalent to Salem, Massachusetts. Their flagship beer, the aforementioned Pendle Witches Brew, makes a direct reference to the nine people that were hanged in Burnley in 1612 for practicing witchcraft on Pendle Hill, just outside of Burnley. Our beer this month, the Black Cat, is a natural extension of the brand. One of the classic old styles of Real Ales in Britain, the Black Cat is a Dark Ruby Mild, a beer made with dark malts, and meant to be a winter warmer, but very mild in terms of alcoholic strength. It is brewed using Maris Otter barley malt from the south of England, English Fuggles hops, and pure cane sugar for extra body. The water comes from the nearby Lake District, and is some of Britain's most pure. The yeast is a proprietary strain that has been used at the brewery since the days of the Hop Bitters, and lends a very distinct fruitiness to the finished beers. The Black Cat was the CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ales) Supreme Champion Beer of Britain in 2000. This is a beer that should be served medium-cool, around British cellar temperature, or 50-55°F. I find that it shows best in a red wine glass or Belgian beer goblet with a slightly fluted rim to contain the aromas.

Moorhouse's Black Cat pours into the glass about the color of a lighter brewed coffee, with just a slight hint of red at the center. The head is rocky beige in color, but fades to a faint lace almost immediately. The aromas are a rich blend of reds fruits and roasted grains, with notes of coffee, steamed brown bread with raisins, and cherries Jubilee. It is a very light ale on the palate, with an almost caressing touch, and a drier flavor profile than the aromas suggest. Once again, coffee and roasted grains dominate, with the fruitiness of the malt much less evident, with a crisp, slightly earthy and bitter finish. This is a great session beer, when the weather gets a little chilly outside, but will also pair well with simple winter foods, such as roasted game birds, vegetable stews, and mushroom dishes.