

Rubens, p.10



Flemish dance breaks out

How the Flemish turned contemporary dance on its head

Katharine Mill

A quarter of a century after Flanders stunned audiences with its brave new dance, local companies are getting top billing in theatres around the world.

One of Flanders' lesser-known exports exits the country not in crates on container ships but in track pants and gym shoes. Unlike beer, chocolate and textiles, it doesn't feature in statistics that show Flanders to be the world's largest exporter per capita. Nevertheless, home-grown contemporary dance has for the last two

decades been staged in major theatres from New York to Tokyo, Moscow to Cape Town, winning prizes across the world.

Britain has no scene to compare with it; France's contemporary companies find it hard to excite interest abroad. Yet the Flemish have a knack for hitting the bulls-eye. Just what is so special about

this dance to have made it the most significant artistic export since a group of painters known to us as Flemish Primitives knocked Western painting sideways with their special way with oils?

"There's an energy, a strength, and poetry. They say things simply and in a straightforward way, with a lot of emotion. That's why they

are so sought after throughout the world," says Gerard Violette, director of the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris. He was the first to invite many Flemish troupes to France, and his theatre regularly co-sponsors their works.

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Arts

One year after her debut album hit the waves, Mira's wayward lyrics are still lingering on the radio. We profile a fresh Flemish voice.

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Active

Oostduinkerke is changing fast, but a few local fishermen still keep alive a North Sea tradition. We dip a toe in the water.

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Interview

Tom Vermeersch is an environmental field worker in West Flanders. We find out what he's doing to save the countryside.

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Belgians march for unity

35,000 take to the streets

Derek Blyth

An estimated 35,000 people marched through central Brussels last Sunday to protest at the stalemate in forming a new government. The march was the initiative of Marie-Claire Houard, a civil servant from Liege, who launched a petition demanding that politicians stop squabbling and focus on the "real" problems affecting the country. Some 140,000 people have signed the petition since its launch three months ago.

The aim of the march – which took participants from the Noordstation to the Jubelpark in the city's European Quar-

ter – was to demonstrate a commitment to Belgium and a desire for politicians to arrive at a solution that can hold together the two language communities. Many of the marchers sang the national anthem and draped themselves in the Belgian flag.

The petition was handed over at the end of the march to Armand De Decker, president of the Senate. "We, Belgians of birth, heart or choice, demand that politicians respect our country and our unity," the declaration said.

Police said that 15 members of a Flemish nationalist group were briefly detained after trying to organise an unauthorised counter-demonstration in front of the royal palace.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Rockox House

The Rockox House in Antwerp is normally a quiet museum where the solitary visitor feels like an intruder while walking through empty rooms with creaking floors, a guard following at a discreet distance. The building is far from the tourist trail, in a cobbled street that was once the most splendid in the city but is now a bit of a backwater. Tourists often hesitate on the threshold, not sure whether they are looking at a museum or a private investment bank (it's actually owned by a bank, so the confusion is understandable). It's well worth surmounting your fears and going inside, as this is as close to the 17th century as you can get.

The house was built for a local burgomaster who wanted to live in a Renaissance *palazzo* filled with expensive oak furniture and sumptuous art. The garden, like many in 17th century Antwerp, is surrounded by an elegant colonnade. In Italy this would offer shade from the hot sun – in Antwerp it is more of a place to shelter from a torrential downpour blown in from the North Sea.

The rooms are decorated with authentic renaissance cabinets

and old earthenware dishes, which adds to the sense of walking through a 17th-century home. The paintings all date from the 17th century and include a few notable works – an old man's head by Anthony van Dyck, a Madonna by Rubens and a copy of Pieter Brueghel's famous "Dutch Proverbs" done by his son Pieter Brueghel the Younger.

The house was bought by the KBC bank 30 years ago and restored to its original condition. To mark the anniversary, several paintings that once hung on the walls of the *Kunstkamer* (art gallery) have been returned to their original locations (see review on page 10). So now is the perfect time to see the house as it looked in its prime.

The garden has been laid out and planted in the style of a formal renaissance garden. It doesn't look its best at this time of year, but you can perhaps imagine the ornamental tulips, the orange trees in blossom and the grapes hanging from the elderly vine.

online
www.rockoxhuis.be



Rockox House in Antwerp

Cover picture

Flemish contemporary dance attracted worldwide attention in 1982 when Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker staged her production *Fase, four movements to the music of Steve Reich*. The international success of this piece contributed largely to the foundation of the company Rosas in 1983. Our cover photograph this week was taken by Herman Sorgeloos, who has worked as official photographer for Rosas since 1986. A graduate of the Sint Lukas Instituut in Brussels, Sorgeloos has photographed theatre productions across Flanders, as well as working as a set designer.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Nele Somers

Last month the 17th Miss Belgian Beauty was crowned in Knokke. She walked away with tens of thousands of euro in cash and prizes, a new Nissan Cabrio and a paid position representing the pageant organisation for the next year. The question of why a young woman who just earned a law degree would want to enter a beauty contest quickly melts away.

"From now on, I'll have more chances to get to know people, to network," says Nele Somers, 23. "I would like to work in the media and ultimately host television programmes." And there's the other reason a parade of bright and beautiful young women enter this contest every year: exposure. Somers' goals are already being realised; she has just been offered a job as a "fly reporter" on radio station Donna. "I go to parties and tell people how it was and what happened behind the scenes. Who did it with who," she laughs.

Somers will now represent Miss Belgian Beauty – an annual contest run by a privately-owned firm in Kortrijk that does event organising – by appearing at receptions, parties and charity events around the country. The title is not to be confused with Miss Belgium, the other big national pageant. Miss Belgium is the more prestigious: the winner represents Belgium in the Miss Universe pageant. But Somers isn't concerned about that. "I notice that most people don't even know the difference," she says.

Somers put in months of campaigning ahead of the big selection ceremony, attending events with her "contestant" sash clipped to her waist and making her own marketing materials: one was Miss Belgian Beauty bags (for bread and bulk sweets) that she designed and supplied to her corner grocery store.

Somers was born and raised in Brasschaat, a small town just north-east of Antwerp, where she continues to live with her parents. She graduated this summer with a law degree from the University of Antwerp. Not all of her fellow students were exactly supportive of her decision to enter what is essentially a beauty contest. "Some people don't understand why anyone would want to do that, but I didn't let them bother me," she says.

Besides, Somers denies that the title Miss Belgian Beauty only refers to your looks. "I don't think that being 'attractive' has anything to do with being 'beautiful'. That comes from the inside," she says. "The jury doesn't only consider your looks; they pay attention to how you express yourself and what you are like as a person. Are you down to earth, do you want to work towards something in your life?" Of course...she certainly is drop-dead gorgeous. "Well, you can't weigh 200 pounds, for instance; there are certain standards. But I've found that the jury is very flexible."

Ultimately, these contests are good for young women, she insists. "They open up a lot of doors and not only to the one who wins. You meet people who can offer you opportunities you wouldn't otherwise have had. It's all about what you do with it." To wit: Somers' role model is Goedele Liekens, the Flemish sexologist, author and presenter of a TV series on strong women (and a former Miss Belgium). "She is very pretty, and she is also very capable. She can do anything."

Lisa Bradshaw

online
www.missbelgianbeauty.be
www.nelesomers.be

TALKING DUTCH
notes on language

Te koop

One of the first things you will have done on arriving in Belgium is to look for somewhere to live. Once you have decided on the area that suits you, you drive around looking for *te koop* or *te huur* signs, depending on whether you are looking to buy or to rent. Some Dutch words immediately bring English words to mind: *huren* is not a million miles away from to hire. But *kopen*? Well, it's closer that you might think. The word "cheap" originally meant to buy. The Dutch word for cheap is *goedkoop* – a good buy!

Are you looking for *een appartement of een huis*? Let's say you want to buy a house. You see an advert for *een villa*, which is just a house and not a residence for the mega-rich. You can tell in the advert below by the number of bedrooms: *3 slaapkamers*.

Omvattende: ruime inkomhall met apart wc, ruime living (42m²) met inbouwhaard, vol ing kkn en badk, aanpalende berging, 3 slpks, garage 1 wagen (automatische poort), zolder, kruipkelders, staanplaatsen voor 4 wagens, tuin (7a) met overdekt terras (zuid-gericht),... Instapklaar!

You don't want an enormous garden and seven ares is just about right. You are not much good at DIY and your significant other is even worse, so when you read *vol ing kkn en badk an*, expand that in your head to *vol ingerichte keuken en badkamer* you know that the kitchen and the bathroom are fully equipped. You want to move in straight away and think this really might be ideal for you when you see the word *Instapklaar!* "step-in ready".

What else is included? A sizeable living room with a built-in fireplace, *zolder, kruipkelders*: an attic and "creep cellars". If you are wondering what you can do in a "*kruipkelder*", well, there is only room to creep. And there is *een tuin met overdekt terras*: a garden with a covered terrace, and it faces the right way, south.

English seems to have got into every language but not always without some damage along the way. *Een living* is an example of such words in Dutch. English words ending in -ing which often describe an activity usually become something concrete in Dutch: *een parking* is a car park, *een dancing* is a dance hall, and *een jogging* is a track suit.

You will find out whether there is enough storage and parking space when you see the house. Or you can work out the meaning of *aanpalende berging, garage 1 wagen (automatische poort), staanplaatsen voor 4 wagens*.

The house suits in every way, and you have some money saved in your *spaarrekening* but probably not enough, so you will most likely need to speak to someone at your bank about *een hypotheek*. And then you will have to make *een aanbod* tempting enough for the seller to accept. And then you will have to see *een notaris*. But that is another story.

Alistair MacLean

online
www.vandale.be

P.S. Last week I had *een warm bad*. It should of course have been *een warme bad*.

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FEATURE



Zero Degrees

Dance comes of age

Continued from page 1

Belgium has no dance history to speak of. It was only in the 1960s that the Royal Ballet of Flanders became autonomous from the opera company. Soon after that, French choreographer Maurice Béjart, in residence at Brussels opera house with his Ballet of the XXth Century from 1960-87, broadened public interest in modern ballet. Students who trained at Mudra, his dance school opened in 1970, would kick start a new movement.

Most notable among them was Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, whose minimalist *Fase, four movements to the music of Steve Reich* (1982), a piece for two dancers, was both formally rigorous, tracing repetitive geometric patterns, yet playful and light-hearted. It

marked a confident new departure for Flemish dance.

That same year, Jan Fabre, a graphic artist from Antwerp who had shocked audiences in 1978 by burning banknotes on stage and drawing with the ashes, made an eight-hour performance piece showing the human body pushed to physical and emotional extremes – and included a procession of tortoises. *Het is theater zoals het te verwachten en te voorzien was* (*This is Theatre as was to be Expected and Foreseen*) transfixed audiences. The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London booked it, quickly followed by others in Europe and the United States. The “Flemish wave” had begun.

“There was a completely new energy in theatre and performing arts from the late 1970s,” says architect Pieter T’Jonck, a highly

regarded observer of the Belgian dance scene and critic for *De Tijd*. “But Belgium was at the fringe of what was happening elsewhere in Europe. When De Keersmaeker, Fabre, Platel and Vandekeybus started working, no one had done it like that before.”

Wim Vandekeybus studied psychology and photography before joining Fabre’s Troubleyn troupe, with which he toured for two years before forming his own, Ultima Vez. Alain Platel, a special needs teacher from Ghent, started making Absurdist dance-theatre with friends in 1984; his Les Ballets C de la B evolved into a collective for choreographers he had nurtured: Hans van den Broek, Christine De Smedt, Koen Augustijnen and the prolific Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, who now has a following of his own and is curat-

ing a dance festival in Bruges in December (see box below).

“For some reason, there are conditions in Flanders that produced a strong wave. Those who have emerged there in the last 25 years have been exceptional artists,” says Alistair Spalding, chief executive and artistic director of Sadler’s Wells, London’s premier dance theatre. “Although they are quite different, the work of De Keersmaeker, Platel and Vandekeybus has a certain quality: it’s very contemporary, it pushes boundaries. It’s very collaborative, and it’s extremely high quality.”

The success of these pioneers transformed the scene. Public authorities gave it their blessing, in the form of subsidies; these, plus the hugely influential P.A.R.T.S. dance school, set up by De Keersmaeker in Brussels in 1995, attracted dancers from across the globe. The influx of these nimble-footed young people made Brussels a hotbed of creativity, where classical and folk dance traditions mixed and mingled with new forms, like break-dance and hip-hop.

“Many of the best known choreographers have Flemish roots,” says Johan Reynier, artistic director of the Kaaithheater, “but most of the younger generation actually come from elsewhere.” This fresh input led dance down a different route during the 1990s, towards more experimental work. Without the structure of a formal dance company, there were looser connections between performers and a huge influence from and to other countries, and from other art forms.

Audiences, meanwhile, got the best of everything: a wealth of dance from home and abroad in theatres across the land. Reynier says: “In Germany, even in Berlin, people don’t get the chance to see [seminal German choreographer] Pina Bausch, since she works and performs in Wuppertal.

In Belgium, you can see her every two years in Antwerp. Our cities are close together, so you can see a lot throughout one season and get a good overview.”

But if today is a good time to be watching dance in Flanders, or Flemish dance elsewhere, the situation may not be so rosy for the new generation. Graduates of P.A.R.T.S., or others who have come here for the vibrancy of the place, find it hard to compete with companies established over two decades ago, with guaranteed residencies and bums-on-seats saleability.

“What’s good today is that there is more dance than ever and there is an audience for it, built up over years,” says Reynier. “At the same time, however, there is a risk that the younger generation will become invisible. There is a tendency now to work with other types of performance and live art, and they do this in smaller venues.”

“The big names draw the crowds, but many other artists making excellent work sometimes have considerable difficulty in finding an audience,” says T’Jonck, who blames lack of funding. “In the mid-90s, there was a big increase in funding for performing arts, but recent years have seen a marked decline in investment in dance, especially compared to theatre. Outside Belgium, people are very aware of the unique position of Belgian dance,” he adds. “Within Belgium, this is not fully appreciated.”

A renewed attempt to support young choreographers is afoot in Brussels, with the establishment of a *werkplaats* to provide artistic and logistical backing for their creative work. However, after its budget was scaled back by two-thirds, many expressed a fear that, without more government support, the dizzying whirl of Flemish contemporary dance is at risk of entering a tailspin.

Dance dates in Flanders

Coming up soon

Wim Vandekeybus/Ultima Vez *Menske*

Latest large-scale work by the influential choreographer with a magic touch for physical dance-theatre, which jump-cuts from the brutal to the poetic. With music by Flemish pop artist Daan.

Until 23 November at the KVS, Brussels; 6-8 December at Vooruit, Ghent; 19-22 December at de Singel, Antwerp
www.ultimavez.com

Les Ballets C de la B/Lisi Estaràs *Patchagonia*

A Sartrean *Huis Clos* scenario set in a motel with six dancers and two musicians, by a choreographer who has danced with Alain Platel’s Les Ballets C de la B since 1997. Also showing at December Dance (see below).

23-24 and 27 November-1 December at Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent
www.lesballetscdela.be

Kris Verdonck I/II/III/IV

Première last weekend at the Vooruit, a new work by the Ghent-based performance artist who frequently incorporates dance in his installations, which explore hi-tech materials and technology.

30 November at Kunstencentrum Buda, Kortrijk; 26-27 February at Kaaithheater, Brussels

December Dance

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui has curated the first edition of this new annual festival in Bruges, which honours his output and selects a bundle of works by him and those he has worked with over the years (Meg Stuart, Louise Lecavalier). Includes the last performance of his duet with Akram Khan of Great Britain, with set by Antony Gormley and music by Nitin

Sawhney.

2-15 December at Concertgebouw Brugge and other venues
www.decemberdance.be

Jan Fabre *I am a mistake*

Multidisciplinary treat from the Antwerp theatre-maker who’s been challenging traditions of performing arts for 30 years. With film of Fabre’s Troubleyn troupe dancers shot on location by director Chantal Akerman and live music composed by Wolfgang Rihm.

11 December at Bozar, Brussels
www.troubleyn.be

Meg Stuart *Maybe Forever*

Intimate love duet to a haunting rock soundtrack from this most successful choreographer of the “middle” generation, between the pioneers and the newbies. Stuart hails from the US but produced her first full-length work for

Leuven’s ground-breaking Klapstuk festival in 1991. Her company, Damaged Goods, has been based in Brussels since 1994.

12-14 December at de Singel, Antwerp; 20 December at Stuk, Leuven
www.damagedgoods.be

Thierry Smits/Compagnie Thor *V. Nightmares*

Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* gets a rough-and-tumble awakening by this Brussels-based choreographer fixated on the fragile human body and the ills that assail it.

15 December at De Velinx, Tongeren and on tour
www.thor.be

Jan Lauwers/Needcompany *The Lobster Shop*

Latest work by innovative and eclectic Brussels-based company, whose work is a true theatre-dance crossover and draws on

the considerable choreographic talents of long-time members Grace Ellen Barkey and Tijen Lawton.

12-15 December at Halles de Schaerbeek, Brussels; 20-22 December at Vooruit, Ghent
www.needcompany.org

Rosas *Creation*

New work for 2008 by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and her unfailingly good Rosas company. From 6 March; De Munt opera house, Brussels
www.rosas.be

Bouge B

Festival of promising young choreographers from Belgium and abroad: secrets of the programme will be unveiled on the website in January.

9-12 April 2008 at de Singel, Antwerp
www.desingel.be



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March for unity

Leterme optimistic on ending deadlock



Continued from page 1

Participants in the march included a number of well-known figures. The French-speakers were clearly in the majority, with just 30% of marchers coming from the Dutch-speaking part of the country.

Meanwhile, Flemish Christian Democrat leader Yves Leterme, who is currently trying to form a centre-right coalition government, believes he will be able to secure broad agreement on state reforms by the end of the week. He made the announcement following talks with

Didier Reynders, leader of the French-speaking liberals, who indicated that he was prepared to discuss this issue.

Leterme said that he believed the meeting represented a significant breakthrough in the talks on future state reforms. The French-speaking parties have up until now refused to discuss the issue of proposed reforms, which include the splitting up of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency and changes to tax legislation which would allow the regions to set their own tax levels.

Clash over new radio frequencies after 2015

The Flemish government intends to oppose proposals to sell off radio frequencies to private operators after analogue TV broadcasts stop in 2015, a spokesman for media minister Geert Bourgeois said. The plan to allow private operators to use the frequencies for broadband internet, telecommunications and portable TV services was aired at the World Radiocommunication Conference in Geneva, and received the support of the Belgian Institute for Postal Services and Telecommunications, as well as the European Commission. The Flemish minister wants to retain the frequencies for broadcasting, though without giving details at this stage.

Unions call for action on "mafia tactics" of hotel cleaners

Women working as chambermaids for hotel cleaning sub-contractors are being exploited thanks to the government's "laissez-faire" approach to workers' rights, two major unions have claimed. The ABVV and ACV unions said some women were only registered as working for three hours a day to allow the employer to avoid paying social charges and received €8 per hour instead of the legal minimum of €11. The unions called on the Employment Inspectorate to do its job in checking the "mafia tactics" used by employers and offered hotels a plan to protect workers' rights, even when cleaning sub-contractors are used.

Military Wikipedia is brainchild of Belgian ex-para

A former Belgian paratrooper has launched Milpedia, an online collaborative military encyclopaedia. Pieter Brancaerts, 27, quit the service following a serious jumping accident that put him in hospital for six months. Now studying computer science, he set up Milpedia to keep up his interest in all things military. "But a site like this is not the same as being in the Army," he says. The encyclopedia, constructed along the same lines as Wikipedia, is at present available only in Dutch and consists of 378 articles at the time of writing. French and English versions are planned within six months.

Anti-Flemish protest draws one demonstrator

A planned demonstration in front of the Flemish Parliament by the Indivisible Brussels-Wallonia Front (FBWI) attracted a grand total of one protestor last week. The man, heavily outnumbered by press and police, was ordered to move on. Demonstrations are forbidden within a radius of one kilometer of parliament buildings. The demonstration had been announced on the group's website and called on French-speakers to block the roads into Brussels from Flanders and disrupt train commuters. According to the website, the protest has been "postponed".

Ex-IBM man takes waffles to streets of New York

A 37-year-old Bierbeek man is giving up his job with IBM and going into business selling genuine Belgian waffles on the streets of New York City. Thomas De Geest, who has lived in the Big Apple for 10 years, decided to change professions after encountering the US version of "Belgian waffles", which were a big hit at the Belgian pavilion at the New York World Fair in 1964: "A huge, heavy blob of dough with as many toppings as possible," he said. "What they have made of the waffle is inedible." He will sell both Brussels and Liege waffles from a yellow Chevrolet van, for the price of \$4-7 (€2.13 - €4.11).

NEWS FLASH



Red Devils lose to Poland

Poland qualified for the European Championship finals for the first time ever after beating a lacklustre Belgian Red Devils team 2-0. Euzebiusz Smolarek scored both goals for Poland in front of a jubilant crowd in the Slaski stadium in Chorzow. "We have made history," Smolarek said after the match.

€7 million paid for giant diamond

A South African company last week paid over €7 million in Antwerp for a diamond weighing more than 493 carats. The uncut diamond, named Letseng Legacy, is the 18th-largest ever and was found earlier this year in Lesotho. It was bought by Safdico, South African Diamond Corporation, whose owner hopes to be able to cut a single 100-carat stone and several smaller stones from the original. Safdico last year paid €9.76 million for the 600-carat Lesotho Promise diamond, also sold in Antwerp. Eleven companies were reported to have placed bids for the latest diamond. Meanwhile the Lesotho forestry minister said the country would be bringing an 800-carat diamond to Antwerp next year.

Cyanide leak at airport

Sixty litres of the deadly poison cyanide were leaked last week at Brussels Airport as workers pumped the liquid from one tanker to another. Nobody was injured. Cyanide is used in aircraft maintenance, and inhalation of the fumes is rapidly fatal. Fire services installed a safety perimeter around the area. They were assisted in the clean-up by a company specialised in chemical spills.

World Cup bid

Belgium and The Netherlands have indicated that they plan to put in a bid to co-host the 2018 World Cup. Nominations do not have to be declared until 2009, but representatives from the two countries met with FIFA president Sepp Blatter in Zurich to indicate they would bid. The two countries previously co-hosted the 2000 European Championship.

Cities get windfall

Mayors across Flanders have received a windfall from Budget Minister Dirk Van Mechelen, who has allocated €600 million to cities for them to decrease or obliterate their debts. The money is being spread evenly so that it works out at €100 per resident. "Their 8.8 billion in debts hangs like a millstone around their necks," Van Mechelen said.

The King Steps In

King Albert II sets deadline



King Albert II stepped into the political fray last week when he instructed the presidents of the Senate and House of Representatives to come up with a solution to the political deadlock. He gave Armand De Decker, president of the Senate, and Herman Van Rompuy, president of the House of Representatives, one week to come up with proposals to activate the formation of a new government.

The aim of the royal intervention was to heal wounds and bring more cohesion between the two language communities in a country that many see heading towards a dangerous split. The King wants the two presidents to organise a dialogue between the Dutch and French speakers on the contested state reforms that have left Belgium without a government for more than five months.

He also met leaders from the

socialists and the greens in an attempt to persuade them to vote in favour of reforms, but they were reluctant to lend their votes to secure the two-thirds majority needed.

Meanwhile, Armand De Decker told a French-language radio station that he would like to see a "Committee of Wise Men" established to prepare the way for state reforms. He proposed a body that would include leading politicians

from all the main political parties – Flemish and Francophone liberals, Christian democrats, socialists and greens. Such a body would be able to secure the two-thirds majority needed to approve the state reforms in a parliamentary vote, he claimed, adding that he believed a new government could be in place by the end of the year.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



1,338

Number of people over 100 years old in Belgium, according to recent government figures. The total has been rising steadily over the years, from 546 in 1990 to 917 in 2000. The majority live in Flanders (55.8%), compared with 27.9% in Wallonia and 16.4% in Brussels. Almost 90% are women, up from 80% in 1990.

1 million

One million people have donated blood in Flanders since the Red Cross introduced blood collections in 1972. The one millionth donor was a bio-engineering student in Leuven. The Red Cross is currently trying to encourage more students to give blood.

10.3%

Percentage of the gross national product spent on health care in Belgium, according to an OECD report. The country is ranked in fifth position for healthcare spending out of the 30 OECD countries. The United States comes top in the list, with 15% of GNP going to health care, followed by Switzerland, France and Germany.

€17,143

Average per head income in Belgium, according to a new study by consultants GfK. The country held 8th place in the ranking in 2005, but has now dropped to 12th position. The Swiss top the list with €27,521 to spend annually, followed by Luxembourg citizens with €27,395 in their pockets and Norwegians with €24,993. The Belgians fall behind the French and Germans in spending power but are ahead of the Dutch.

111 minutes

Eurostar journey time from Brussels to London following the opening of a new fast line to St Pancras station. The re-routing of services has shaved 25 minutes off the travel time.

BHV must be split, says court president

The new president of Belgium's Constitutional Court, Marc Bossuyt, confirmed last week that no further elections could be held until the BHV constituency was split. His statement confirms the decision made three years ago by the Arbitration Court (now the Constitutional Court), which ruled that the BHV constituency violated the principle of equality guaranteed by the Belgian Constitution. Under this ruling, the election held last June was the last time that the old voting arrangement could be applied. The court has not said what system should replace the BHV constituency, but any solution would have to respect the principle of equal treatment of all citizens.

Correction

In our article last week titled "BHV for Beginners," in which we attempted to explain the BHV situation to foreigners, we considerably oversimplified the case when we said that a split in the Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency would result in French-speaking voters living in Halle-Vilvoorde losing the right to vote for French-speaking politicians. In fact, they would still have the right to vote for any party of their choice. The only difference is that they would not be allowed to vote for a candidate on a Brussels list in elections for the House of Representatives, nor would they be allowed to vote for a candidate on a Walloon list in elections for the Senate or the European Parliament.



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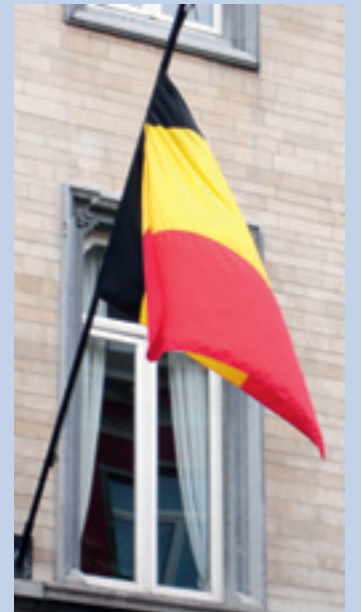
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CRISIS

What the papers are saying



What the Belgians are saying



There are almost as many opinions on the crisis as there are Belgians. We pick out a few expressed last week.

The long farewell

"There are two extremes, some screaming that Belgium will last forever and others saying that we are standing at the edge of a ravine. I don't believe Belgium is about to split up right now. But in my lifetime? I'd be surprised if I were to die in Belgium."

Caroline Sägeser, political analyst at Crisp, a socio-political research institute in Brussels

The forgotten language

"In this perpetual musical performance – or this symphony or this opera, I leave the choice of style up to you – which is the institutional evolution of Belgium, the German-speaking community is not the composer, nor conductor, nor the first violinist. We only play a marginal role: if you want you could compare us to those who play the triangles or an instrument of that kind of importance."

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the German-speaking community, in an interview with Reuters

Hold on

"Belgium is more than emotion. It's an urge not to give up what we have achieved over 177 years."

Andy Vermaut, participant in last Sunday's march in Brussels, quoted in De Morgen.

As the political crisis in Belgium rumbles on unresolved, the foreign press continues to take unprecedented interest in this small country. We delve into the press to find out what is being said across the world and at home.

Business as usual

"Belgium is in crisis, apparently, though I have to say it doesn't really look it. At least, no more than it usually does. The theoretically handsome Place Flagey in Brussels, which was a building site three years ago, is still a building site, only more so and much muddier. The trains are running normally, but Bruxelles Midi station is as beaten-up and pissed-upon as ever. The *frites* remain excellent, of course, as does the chocolate. And in the street the people curse the taxman, as they have always done, and the price of petrol, which is new."

Jon Henley, The Guardian
13 November

A civil affair

"As crises of these sorts go, this one has been relatively civil. No one has pulled a gun or exploded a bomb or threatened to behead

the king, who went off on holiday this summer as the crisis ground on. Rather, grievances are aired on television, in competing editorials and in debates on the floor of Belgium's six governing parliaments. And there are such skirmishes almost daily.

Geraldine Baum, Los Angeles Times, 13 November

Is Belgium necessary?

"But is it really necessary? That, increasingly, is becoming the question, if not quite yet for ordinary Belgians, then certainly for their political leaders and the media. The "Czechoslovakia option" of a more or less amicable divorce, with Brussels becoming a kind of international city state, is being openly discussed."

Jon Henley, The Guardian
13 November

Ill omen for Europe

"If Belgium has any image internationally, it is as the home of the 27-member European Union, founded 50 years ago to transcend just this kind of Balkanization that plunged Europe into two world wars in the last century. So no one has missed the irony that over the

half a century the EU came together, the country that plays host to its capital has spiraled further apart."

Geraldine Baum, Los Angeles Times, 13 November

No panic

"While the crisis has generated passions among politicians, it has left most of the public unmoved, thus giving leaders little incentive to compromise. With many basic functions of the state devolved to the regions, most Belgians have gone 155 days without a government with few ill effects."

Stephen Castle, International Herald Tribune, 13 November

All we want

"All that Belgium wants for Christmas is a government."

David Charter, The Times
19 November

Not business as usual

"To the Flemish, it is anomalous for French-speakers to live in pristine Dutch-speaking suburbs but still enjoy the rights they would have if they lived in Brussels. To their opponents, the Flemish are

bent on a polite form of ethnic cleansing, creating a linguistically "pure" Flanders from which French is banished....Until this week, the establishment could pretend that five months of talks over forming a new government were merely an extreme form of business as usual...this soothing talk sounds less convincing now that an ugly truth has been exposed: that the Flemish majority are bent on re-ordering Belgium so that they have less to do with their French-speaking compatriots, whether they like it or not."

The Economist, 10 November

Money markets get the jitters

"Splitting up a country is very difficult. The Belgian Treasury has no plan at all. We could think about two systems: one where the debt is guaranteed as a whole by the two regions. Or we could split it between the two regions, but that is not easy because they have different credit ratings. Flanders has AAA, while Brussels and Wallonia are lower."

Jean Deboutte, director of risk management at the Belgian Debt Agency, interviewed in The Daily Telegraph

FEATURE

Sex in the city

Antwerp leads the way in healthcare services for prostitutes



Monique Philips

Ten years ago, you could walk from the town hall all the way to the old port and encounter window prostitution at random places along the way. But Antwerp's red light district is now rigorously restricted to a mere three streets, a pedestrian zone. The Schipperskwartier area is destined to become part of the city's larger scheme of urban renewal. The former inhabitants – mostly prostitutes and artists – protested at plans involving major real estate investors, but now it's a done deal. At this point, the neighbourhood displays a rather sad yet fascinating mixture of dilapidated buildings and hyper-design offices and lofts.

On the corner of Verversrui and Vingerlingstraat stands the building that houses a healthcare centre for prostitutes. Gh@pro, which stands for "Gezondheidshuis Antwerpse Prostitutie", or Health Centre for Antwerp Prostitution, provides free and anonymous assistance to both men and women working in the sex trade. (The "@" stands for the "A" in Antwerp.) Gh@pro was founded in 2002 by Pierre Van Damme, professor of epidemiology and social medicine at the University of Antwerp. Van Damme remains its president, and the organisation maintains working relationships with the city council, its older sister-organisation Pasop in Gent and Antwerp's Payoke, which assists victims of human trafficking. Representatives from the city of Amsterdam just visited Gh@pro in advance of opening their own health service centre in January.

Anne Vercauteren is a social nurse and Gh@pro coordinator. She works the bars and streets of Antwerp and, indeed, the entire province with her small team day

and night. We caught up with her at the Gh@pro offices right in the heart of the red light district.

What does Gh@pro do?

"We work on an industrial healthcare model, which means that not only do we offer free consultations for job-related medical problems at our centre, but we also visit the sex workers in their working environments all over the province of Antwerp. They often can't find the time to come to us, so twice a week a team of two people – a doctor and a nurse – set out with a big backpack for either the province, the Antwerp suburbs, or the Schipperskwartier. To reach the night shifts, we, too, do night shifts. At this point, we are also prospecting the bars around De Coninckplein, but, unfortunately, we won't be able to include De Coninckplein in our tight schedule much longer. Which is a pity as most girls who are picked up in the bars there are often illegal and therefore extra vulnerable and in dire need of our medical attention."

What's in the backpack?

"A portable PC, test results, medical test material to take blood samples and swabs, vaccines, and safe sex information. It's all quite heavy, so you can imagine us panting up lots of little steep stairs in the *pandjes* (old, small buildings) around here."

How do you know where to go?

"We make appointments and then do follow-ups. Whenever new girls ask, we offer them our standard test set for STIs [Sexually Transmittable Infections] and a hepatitis B vaccine. So we never go knocking on doors unexpectedly. We do actively search the internet for private sex workers and check

if we already know "Mandy from Beerse". If we don't, we call her and suggest our services. Fortunately, most bar owners realise the importance of our service, and they invite us. They know what we do, and we know what they do, so that's that. Of course we only reveal test results to the sex workers themselves, who we sometimes know only by their working names, and never to their bosses or others. In this business confidence is essential."

Do you treat a lot of STIs?

"Actually, you don't find more STIs here than in any other cross-section of the Belgian population. Thanks to our screening and treatment of STIs, we're preventing them from spreading."

Are the customers aware of safe sex requirements?

"No, it's a disaster area. Sex workers often tell us about the strange notions some customers have about safe sex. "But I'm a regular customer; I don't need a condom." Sex workers will argue the point and will put up the poster we've made about safe sex – in three languages. The problem is that there's no specific forum for the customers. So we make it our job to help the sex workers educate their customers. I'm rather adamant about the issue."

Did you used to have prejudices about prostitutes?

"No, it all came very naturally to me, really. But a lot of students and people from the media who visit us, as prostitution is such a popular topic, often harbour negative ideas. Whereas I feel that prostitutes are just ordinary women and men like you and me. Many of them are fascinating and fun. They come from all strata of life, have families

and children. They go out at weekends. They dream. But I don't feel it's a regular job. It remains a peculiar activity. Not everybody is able to do it. Usually they didn't choose this job; somehow they got into financial or other problems. These are often highly intelligent people who know what they are doing."

Are there new trends in prostitution work?

"Lots of very young East European girls are working behind the windows nowadays. Apparently young girls have less inhibitions about working here than they used to. They think they can make a quick buck. But in reality things often turn out differently."

How would you advise someone who's thinking of working in this business?

"The prostitutes say: 'It's a very bad world'. The things they see and have to do...but we're surprised by how many new workers arrive on the scene every day. It's a huge busi-

ness; how big exactly is anybody's guess. We have about 3,000 workers in our database, but there are many more. Lots of them are foreigners, but many are Belgian."

Are there things that get to you?

"As Gh@pro we never take a social or political stand. We can best help by remaining neutral. But what I personally have noticed lately is that there is a little group of women on the job who just don't seem to fit in. They are 30- to 50-year-old mothers with teenagers, educated, with a job – but divorced and the sole provider. When their alimony doesn't come through, they are basically forced to gain this extra money while the children are at school. When I listen to their harrowing stories, I can't help feeling society fails them."

online

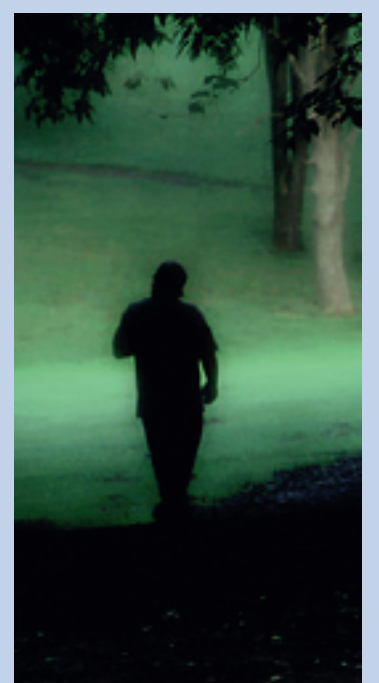
www.ghapro.be
www.pasop.info

Boysproject

Gh@pro's Boysproject focuses on the male prostitutes who work the streets around the Stadspark near Antwerp Central Station. The all-male team has worked hard to become highly approachable as they walk around. They've also established a small apartment where the boys can drop in to talk or take a shower. A doctor passes by once a fortnight, offering free and anonymous medical assistance. Even if you don't have any specific complaints, Gh@pro encourages regular check-ups for STIs and is well aware of the law: everybody who lives in Belgium, even illegally, has the right to urgent medical assistance.

online

www.boysproject.be



Connect@

Gh@pro has also begun a pilot project called Connect@. A social worker helps both male and female prostitutes to tackle the myriad of social problems they encounter and, if they want, to change careers. That isn't very easy, explains the coordinator, Anne Vercauteren. "When you're deep in debt, poorly educated and have few professional skills, it's quite difficult to reconnect to the regular labour market or social benefit organisations. We don't judge prostitutes or force them to quit the job. If, however, they do want to quit, we offer step-by-step assistance."

Connect@ works in cooperation with a number of social organisations, such as the welfare service OCMW and the VDAB employment centre. "Prostitutes are usually confronted with a series of financial, social, relational and judicial problems that anyone would find hard to tackle by themselves," says Vercauteren. "We refer them to the appropriate specialists and oversee that it's all working out."

Airline tickets too expensive, says EU

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Belgian websites selling airline tickets are among Europe's worst offenders in breaking the rules on misleading advertising, according to a study carried out for the European Commission. The EU Commissioner for consumer protection, Meglena Kuneva, ordered a survey of 447 sites in 15 EU member states as well as Iceland and Norway, which took place over four days in September.

The results showed more than half of the sites – 226 in all – were in breach of the rules in some way. In Belgium, however, the results were much worse than average – 46 of the 48 sites checked broke the rules.

The sites were checked on three criteria. The first was transparency, which requires sellers to show clearly at every stage exactly what the end-price to the consumer will be, and not only at the end of an ordering procedure. All extras from taxes to credit-card charges must be shown immediately.

The survey then looked at

clear availability. Many sellers advertise ultra-low prices to lure customers and persuade them to start the booking process. It only becomes clear later that the prices were of strictly limited availability, and the customer's actual choice will be much more expensive. "Prices and special offers are often used to lure consumers into the process of booking a flight," said Ms. Kuneva. "In reality, there are only a very limited number of seats available under the advertised offer."

Finally, the survey looked at clear contract terms. Some sellers include additional insurance policies such as "cancellation insurance" as a default which the buyer must decline, but the choice is made unclear. The law says all such extras must be opt-ins – in other words, customers must make a clear choice to accept, not a choice to decline. "Misleading pricing not only prevents consumers from making informed choices but also distorts market competi-

tion and slows down growth. Informed consumers – working in transparent conditions – seek out the best deals. They chose the best economic operators and reward innovative and competitive businesses offering the best quality and value. Where there is no transparent pricing, this kind of competitive pressure does not apply," Ms. Kuneva said at a press conference.

The EU has already launched an investigation into nine of the offending Belgian sellers, and the Belgian federal government has been given four months to bring the remaining 37 into line with the law. If they do not, the companies involved risk having their names published in a public black-list, not to mention legal proceedings, leading to fines and even possible closure.

"Today, I am sending a clear warning to all the companies concerned – take swift action now to bring your websites in line. Because once that deadline expires, I will not hesitate to name and shame companies where further legal action is required because they still insist on breaking the law. Because Europe's consumers deserve better," the commissioner said.

The EU airline travel market covers about 700 million passengers a year. The commission said airline tickets had been one of the first to be chosen for this sweep operation because it is the sector consumers most often complain about to the Europe-wide consumer centres.

Alan Hope

Hold the line, caller

Telephone receptionists in Belgium are not always very helpful, according to a survey carried out by Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School and the consultancy firm Quality by Surprise. The researchers found that 88% of receptionists pick up the phone after it had rung three to five times. But the calls are badly handled in two-thirds of cases. Large companies were often the worst offenders – half of receptionists were rated as unfriendly, uninterested or poorly trained. The report, produced by professors Deva Rangarajan and Bert Weijters, was based on a survey of 1,186 receptionists across the country.

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Audi lays off staff

Staff at the Audi plant in the Brussels municipality of Vorst were temporarily sent home last week because of a German rail strike which cut the supply of spare parts.

Many of the parts are sent by rail to Brussels from southern Germany and Slovakia, but deliveries were halted because of the 48-hour strike called by unions, who are demanding a 31% pay rise. The unions argue that German rail workers receive

significantly less than their counterparts in other European countries. The Ford factory in Genk and General Motors in Antwerp managed to keep production lines running by switching from rail to road transport.

Royal favour

Several companies were granted a royal warrant last week by King Albert II. The lucky recipients included the BMW car dealership in Bornem, Antwerp Province, the home decorating company Flamant, headquartered in Geraardsbergen, East Flanders, and the textile wholesaler Buvetex from Mechelen.

The granting of a royal warrant allows a company to display the Royal Crest above its entrance along with the motto "By Appointment to the Belgian Royal Court" in one or more of the three national languages. The regulations stipulate that the royal crest must be used "tastefully and with discretion". Three companies were dropped from the royal list this year.

BUSINESS FLASH



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AS Adventure

AS Adventure, an outdoor and sport equipment retailer with 25 stores across Belgium, has been acquired by the British Lion capital investment fund for some €263 million. It was previously owned by the Mitiska holding company and the Emiel Lathouwers family. The company, which expects to open up to seven new stores in Belgium over the next five years, is also planning to develop its activities in the UK with 30 new outlets.

Sabmiller

Sabmiller, the US-based brewer and Inbev's leading competitor for world leadership, is to launch its Italian brand Peroni on the Belgian market. The company has plans to increase its volumes in West Europe at a time when consumption is dropping.

Antwerp World Diamond Centre

The Antwerp World Diamond Centre last week witnessed the sale for \$10.4 million (€7.1 million) of a 493-carat diamond, the world's 18th largest ever.

Belgian Railways

NMBS, Belgium's railway operator, is to invest some €90 million to acquire 50 double-decker coaches for one of its main trunk lines, the Antwerp-Charleroi connection.

Babcock and Brown

Babcock and Brown, the Australian investment company, is to acquire a minority interest in the Antwerp-based Westerlund wood-products handling and distribution company.

Martin's Hotels

Martin's Hotels, the fast-growing chain with properties in Genval, Rixensart, Waterloo, Brussels, Leuven and Ghent, will soon begin work on an 80-room hotel in Mechelen. It also plans to open 60 new rooms in Leuven over the next three years.

Splichal

Splichal, the Turnhout-based publisher of Bibles, is to sack up to 25 employees because of dwindling sales.

KBC Bank

KBS Bank, Flanders leading financial institution, is to bid in a televised auction for Serbia's second-largest insurance company. The sale forms part of the country's drive to privatise its state-owned assets.

DK Rental

DK Rental, the Deerlijk-based construction equipment and elevators rental company, is to be acquired by the British Lavendon equipment hire company for some €88 million.

Distrigaz

The French electricity supplier Electricité de France has announced it is preparing to bid for Distrigaz, the natural gas transport and handling company with extensive operations in Zeebrugge. Several other firms such as Britain's Centrica, Germany's Eon, and Spain's Iberdrola, have already expressed their interest. Distrigaz, controlled by the French Suez company, has to be sold as part of the conditions set by the European Commission for approving the French firm's merger with Gaz de France.

Warehouses De Pauw

Warehouses De Pauw (WDP), a property investment fund, has paid €19 million to acquire 180,000 square metres of industrial land in Sint-Niklaas. The acquisition is earmarked for distribution centres.

Château Caravans

Château Caravans, the Lommel-based manufacturer of caravans and mobile homes, has filed for bankruptcy after its sales dropped by 40% in the Netherlands, its major market.

EXHIBITION

A Rubens comes home

Disputed masterpiece hangs above fireplace once more



"Samson and Delilah"

Derek Blyth

It's rare nowadays to find a 17th-century Flemish painting hanging in its original place on the wall. Most works have been sold off long ago to rich collectors or museums in far-flung places. So the Rockox House in Antwerp has pulled off something of a miracle by getting hold of four separate paintings – and four classical busts – to occupy their original places in the Rockox mansion.

The biggest catch is Pieter Paul Rubens' "Samson and Delilah," a powerful work from about 1609-10 that illustrates the Old Testament hero Samson asleep in the lap of the woman who betrayed him by cutting his hair. The young Rubens painted this work soon after he returned from an eight-year stay in Italy.

The Burgomaster admired it enough to give it pride of place in the *Kunstkamer*, or picture gallery, on the ground floor of his Keizerstraat mansion. The work was later sold and in 1980 ended up in the collection of London's National Gallery. It's one of the gallery's highlights, so Antwerp has been quite lucky to get hold of it for an exhibition marking the 30th anniversary of the Rockox Museum.

The other paintings that once hung in Rockox's *Kunstkamer* are now scattered across the world's art collections. But three more have returned to the burgomaster's picture gallery. The logistics weren't all that difficult, since two paintings hang in Antwerp's Museum of Fine Arts (Quinten Metsys' "Christus Salvator" and "Mary"), and the third still hangs in the Rockox house (a painting by Jan Sanders van Hemessen).

The Rockox Museum has also managed to secure the loan of a *Kunstkamer* painting that shows the exact locations of the paintings at the time. Frans Francken the Younger's "Kunstkamer of Burgomaster Rockox" normally hangs

in Munich's Alte Pinakothek, but has been returned to Antwerp to complete the show.

Francken's detailed painting reveals that the Rubens hung above the fireplace and was lit from the left side by weak daylight filtering through a garden window. It's now back in the same place, something that clearly excites Hildegard Van de Velde, curator of the Rockoxhuis. "The daylight enters the room

through a window to the left of the painting," she explains. "That is precisely the side which is illuminated in the painting." She notes too that Rubens took account of the light coming from the fireplace when he painted the figures.

The result is a unique opportunity to see a Rubens in the place it was intended to hang. "There's only one other work by Rubens still in its original location – the ceiling of the Banqueting Hall in London," Van de Velde says. "That's what makes the return of 'Samson and Delilah' so exceptional."

The homecoming is all the more exciting because Burgomaster Rockox's house looks almost exactly as it did when the owner of the paintings lived there. When the house was restored in the 1970s, the architect stripped the building of its 19th-century wood paneling and restored the rooms to their 17th-century state. So we are seeing the painting hanging in the same interior space that Rubens knew.

Yet there is a nagging question about this painting's authenticity that has been politely put to one side by most of the critics. The work hung for 180 years in the collection of the Princes of Lichtenstein but was listed in the inventory as being by the minor Flemish artist Jan Van Den Hoecke. The family finally sold it in the 19th century (apparently because the meaty flesh offended them), and it ended up in Berlin. In 1929 the respected German scholar Ludwig Burchard declared it to be a long-lost Rubens. This turned it into a hot property, and London's

National Gallery snapped it up in 1980 at a Christie's auction.

As a result of its patchy provenance, some critics have suggested that the work may not be by the master at all. The toughest line is taken by a Greek scholar, Euphrosyne Doxiades, who has been investigating the painting for more than a decade. She promulgates her views on an impressive internet site, www.afterrubens.org, which came online in 2005 just as the National Gallery was launching a major Rubens exhibition with the disputed painting as its highlight.

Doxiades maintains that the work is painted in a heavy-handed style that is different from Rubens and that Samson's foot is badly executed. She explained her doubts in a 2005 interview with the online magazine *Salon*. "When I first saw the National Gallery's 'Samson and Delilah' in 1987, I immediately thought it could not have been painted by Rubens and I supposed that it was a copy – a 20th-century copy."

David Jaffe, senior curator at the National Gallery, has steadfastly refused to be drawn into an argument on the issue. "Anyone can say anything about a painting in a public collection," he said. "But we're confident the painting is by Rubens." The argument is far from over.

Until 10 February 2008

online
www.rockoxhuis.be



Stadsgemiddelen, München

View of Burgomaster Rockox's Kunstkamer with "Samson and Delilah" above the fireplace

A bizarre contradiction

Mira conquers the Flemish music scene – and the world



An Gydé

Mira's contagious debut album was released a year ago but is still lingering on the radio and in many a Flemish living room. *In de daluren (In the Quiet Hours)* is a contemporary album filled with authentic, often tragi-comic songs. Randy Newman is an inspiration, and it shows. The singer-songwriter's wayward lyrics are powerfully driven by her piano and delivered in a cosy kind of Flemish with a distinct Antwerp accent. "For me, it is the most natural way to sing", she says. "The language I use is very close to home. My lyrics are also often very homey – about ordinary people, people you meet on the street. My kind of language is better suited to that than the official Dutch language, I think."

The 25-year-old singer-songwriter has experience well beyond her years. When she was eight, she started a classical education on the piano. At 12, she wrote her first song. After studying arts and performance at Antwerp's legendary Studio Herman Teirlinck, she made her live debut in 2002.

Still coasting on the success of the record, Mira is currently touring all over Flanders – and thoroughly enjoying it. Sometimes she plays solo (*uitgekleed* shows, she calls them), sometimes with a band (*Mira en de maten*). Mostly she plays theatre-style venues

because her music is so at home there. Even today she's still reveling in the success of her debut and the variety of people who are attracted to it. "The CD did what it had to do: reached a large audience and got a lot of airplay," she says. "I have discovered that my audience is really diverse, people from all walks of life. During the last year, I was asked to perform at a very posh private party but also to play at a benefit for the homeless in Brussels. That's a bizarre contradiction."

She sings in Dutch and is surprised by a question about whether non-Dutch speakers will like her. She claims those who don't speak Dutch are actually the ones who get the point. "I get a lot of reactions via MySpace and the website – from Croats and Bosnians to English and Americans. Often along the lines of 'I don't understand a word, but it sounds great!' Of course, I consider that a compliment."

It's encouraging to know that the Flemish voice is being heard round the world – despite the language barriers. "I am trying to find my own personal sound apart from the lyrics. In Flanders, people tend to focus on the lyrics if they are in Dutch – as if lyrics are suddenly all-important if you sing in your own language. That's one thing that doesn't influence people

who speak a different language, and that's why their comments are very important to me."

Mira's album mirrors the daily clash of the poetic and the prosaic: drag queens as well as roofers, blasé celebrities as well as schoolboys on mopeds spinning out of control. The tone is a daring combination of deep emotion and dark humour. "Things like that just tend to creep in, and I find it's a nice little gadget to throw people just a bit off balance. Making people laugh is one of the most tangible ways of getting to them; their reactions instantly tell you if it works."

You can plan to see and hear a lot more of Mira: she's working on a new album she hopes to release next year and has been asked to write a song for the music compilation *Tē Gek*, an initiative to challenge the taboo revolving around mental illness. "I really support that cause," she says.

But for now, she's packing a punch in her live shows. "I don't want to protect people from too much emotion. I want them to hurt when they hear music, just like I do."

Mira plays in *Rudedervoorde* on 23 November, in *Maaseik* on 29 November and in *Heusden-Zolder* on 30 November, as well as many dates in December. For ticket information, visit www.mira-online.be.

FILM FREAK

The Gold Rush

A delightful day awaits you and your children at Bozar on December 2. The Brussels venue screens Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*, which is certainly good enough but just might be overshadowed by a visit from Sinterklaas the same morning.

Easily Chaplin's masterpiece, *The Gold Rush* finds his little tramp alter ego heading to the wintry mountains of Alaska in search of

gold. True to form, chaos ensues, with the silent film star getting stranded in a remote cabin with a prospector and an escaped convict. Voted one of the Best 100 American Films ever made by the American Film Institute, *The Gold Rush* includes two of Chaplin's signature scenes: in one, he is so hungry he tries to eat his boot; in the other, he makes those little dinner rolls dance.

Later in December, Brussels' venue Flagey begins a Chaplin retrospective with many new prints of his best work.

Lisa Bradshaw



Alone and cold in Alaska: *The Gold Rush*

CLASSICAL NOTES

Europe at their feet

A Brussels' festival celebrates the great Franco-Flemish composers

If a scene by Bruegel, a portrait by Memling or a *pietà* by Petrus Christus could sing, what music would we hear? A chanson by Clément Jannequin, a motet by Johannes Ockeghem, or perhaps a lament by Gilles Binchois. These and many others formed the so-called Franco-Flemish school, a group of composers that flourished in the Low Countries during the Renaissance and had Europe at their feet.

Both Ockeghem and Binchois but also Guillaume Dufay, Adriaan Willaert, Nicolas Gombert, Josquin des Prez and Roland de Lassus started out as choir boys in the cathedrals of Mons, Antwerp, Ghent, Cambrai and other cities in northern France and what is now Belgium in the 15th and early 16th centuries. They then set out on the roads of Europe to work in the most powerful courts and churches of their time.

Their presence was felt most strongly in Italy, where local composers complained that the Franco-Flemish hoarded the most desirable posts. They were genuine proto-Europeans who could speak five or six languages, and their music was equally international, blending the complicated ornaments of Italy's *ars subtilior* with the counterpoint and new harmonies favoured by English composers into a rich and haunting polyphony. Some claim that their use of superimposed voices and motifs created an impression of space and mirrored the invention of perspective that was happening in the visual arts at the same time. Although they fell out of favour towards the end of the 16th century, when Italy ousted Flanders as Europe's new musical centre, their legacy lived on, and echoes of it can be traced in Bach, Stravinsky and through to contemporary composers like Arvo Pärt.

Today, this repertoire is all the rage, and an ever-growing contingent of early-music specialists continues to chart new expanses of it. Their latest discoveries can be heard in Brussels' Miniemen Church over the next few months as part of Musica Universalis, a festival organised jointly by Bozar and Europalia and whose mission is to highlight the central role of Flanders in the shaping of the western musical tradition.



The distinctly unique Spanish-Flemish ensemble La Hispanoflamenca plays on 29 November as part of Musica Universalis

The first concert of the series took place this week, but there are four more to come: on 29 November is a performance by La Hispanoflamenca, made up, as its name indicates, of six musicians from Spain and Flanders, which explains its peculiar, idiosyncratic sound. The programme focuses on the works of Pedro Rimonte, a late 16th-century Spanish composer who travelled up to Brussels from his native Aragon to work for the governors of the southern Netherlands, then under Spanish rule.

December will bring the exciting Belgian ensemble Graindelavoix and its founder, Björn Schmelzer, in works by Ockeghem and Binchois, which they have recently recorded for the Spanish label Glossa. Binchois, whom Schmelzer regards as "one of the greatest songwriters of all time", was a native of Mons who worked in the Burgundian court and crafted beautiful, bittersweet songs in old French. Ockeghem's masses and motets, by comparison, are dense, intricate affairs, and the concert includes a lament he penned after the death of Binchois.

Also in December are Italian sonatas, songs and motets by Belgian wind ensemble Oltremontano and soprano Dorothee Mields. Specialising in early brass and reed instruments, the group takes its name from the moniker these northern polyphonists received in Italy – "Oltremontani" means "those from over the mountains". Bringing the cycle to a close in January, the celebrated Paul Van Nevel and his Huelgas Ensemble traces the Franco-Flemings' legacy in the achingly beautiful music of Portugal's João Lourenço Rebelo – or what is left of it; most of it perished in the 1755 earthquake that destroyed Lisbon.

Marie Dumont

online
www.bozar.be

Riding the waves

In the tiny Oostduinkerke, a few locals keep a fishing tradition alive



Lisa Bradshaw

Oostduinkerke, nestled between the much larger Koksijde and Nieuwpoort on the Flemish coast, is what you might refer to as a “one-horse town”. But fortunately for the locals, that horse wades into the ocean, dredges up shrimp and delights the tourists.

Twice a day you can find a *paardevisser*, or horse fisherman, trawling for shrimp off the coast of Oostduinkerke. One or two will go out two hours before low tide and one hour after, when the shrimp are abundant in the shallow waters of the North Sea. Ropes attached to either side of the saddle drag along nets pulled taught by hand-made wooden frames. When the horse is about up to its shoulders, the fisher turns it one way or another and pulls his nets along for two or three kilometres.

When horse and man emerge from the sea, they empty their catch into two big wicker baskets and the odd little crab scrambles out onto the beach, where kids fool around with them until they crawl back into the ocean. (I’ve been known to fool around with a few myself.)

Horse fishing is methodical and, to the observer, meditative. The

large horses – generally Hainauts or Brabants, which are a good, strong breed for this kind of work – are calm and gently handled by locals who take a great deal of pride in this method of fishing, which dates back to the early 16th century.

“The beach here is still the same as it was 100 years ago,” says Eddy D’Hulster, who has been shrimp fishing on horseback for 45 years now. “The shallow waters are still there for fishing, whereas in other places they’ve mostly turned into beach.” These warmer shallow waters mean the delectable little grey shrimps the Flemish are so fond of still come close to the shore. Though shrimp fishing on horseback used to be practised up and down the coasts of England, the Netherlands, France and Belgium, Oostduinkerke is now the only place left that continues the practice.

Though visitors to the coast love to watch and chat with the horse fishermen, they would still do it, says D’Hulster, even if no one were paying attention. “The sea and the horse – it’s a passion,” he says. “It’s difficult and hard work, and in the winter it’s really cold. But we are very passionate about it.” And locals benefit richly – the fishermen sell their shrimp to friends

and family. “Neighbours will say to me: ‘Don’t forget to bring me shrimps!’” D’Hulster says.

Horse fishing on the Belgian coast has gone in and out of practice over the centuries, but in the mid 1500s, it was very popular. At one point, more than 50 horses and riders were actively shrimping along the coast, and Charles V actually tried to ban them, citing economic danger to the shrimp fishing industry.

Today, the number of horse fishers fluctuates, but right now there are ten of them. D’Hulster waves away my concern that this is dangerously few. Three years ago, there were only six,” he says, “and at one time in 1963 we had only three.” So numbers are actually up. Last year, two young men trained and are now horse fishing – one of them only 18 years old. D’Hulster, who was born and raised in Oostduinkerke, is the senior fisherman at 64. “I always say that if my horse stops, I will stop. But she’s young, and she’ll go many more years.”

The fishermen train their own horses for the task. There is no actual business or organisation – interested newcomers simply learn the trade from the others and buy or fashion their own equipment. Most of them don’t even work in the fishing industry; they have

other jobs during the week and head into the sea on the weekends. “It’s difficult to teach the horse to fish, but, once it learns, it stays in the water its whole life. It’s a story of love between the horse and the man. It’s his second wife,” laughs D’Hulster, who worked as a coast wilderness ranger before his retirement. Most of the horses used for fishing are female. “I always say it’s because female horses are smarter,” says D’Hulster. “But with people, it’s the other way around!”

Speaking of women, D’Hulster’s wife was a horse fisher for several years and his daughter took it on for two years. Now D’Hulster’s son-in-law rides the waters with him – which is appropriate considering that D’Hulster learned it from his own father-in-law.

Horse fishermen go out two hours before low tide and one hour after. If you want to see them this season, you need to visit the beach as soon as possible. They stop at the end of this month because the shrimp retreat to deeper waters during the winter. The horseback fishing starts up again in April.

online
www.oostduinkerke.be
www.paardevisser.be

FOOTPRINT



The Scheldt: part one

The river Scheldt flows up from northern France, passes through East Flanders and then moves north-easterly into Antwerp province before heading into the Netherlands. Along the way, it offers some fantastic views, plenty of habitat for wildlife and a lapping murmur that gently sounds through your mind while you stroll along its banks on one of many walks. In East Flanders, there are countless opportunities to discover the Scheldt, each one with various offshoots that circle you around through field and forest. One of my favourites is the “Doornhammeke”, which you reach off the N60, a few kilometres south of Ghent. Follow the signs to Zevergem and pull into the carpark in front of the church. The path starts to the right on the very next street, marked by wooden posts. Immediately, you’re taken in by the scenery: a large pond is awash in lily pads, and poplar trees lean precariously towards the water. Cornfields, cows and pretty houses disappear in favour of nature’s green foliage. Soon the Scheldt is on your left, populated by ducks, heron and seagulls.

You’ll share this paved path with bicycles, but soon you see a picnic table with an offshoot path alongside it. Take it, and it leads you to a dirt road. Though it’s a bit cold for them to hang about right now, there are occasionally rabbits in the field on your left, as you continue on to a whole new scene of grass and farmland. Soon an unobtrusive white house comes out of nowhere, and here is where the walk gets its name: the Doornhammeke pub. Don’t hesitate to stop in for a drink with the rest of the walkers and bikers. This time of year, they will lodge themselves in the cheery interior, but in the summer, they sprawl outside under the oak trees and along the river, which has reappeared.

Your Westmalle Triple solidly enjoyed, you can continue along and take a right at the fork in the road to come back to the start in about 20 minutes. If you veer left, though, you’ll pass some horses and a braying donkey and go right onto a dirt road under a canopy of trees. This is the most pleasant (if occasionally muddy) route. Come out at one of those tiny, rural chapels, cross the street and head back toward the church. The whole walk has taken about 90 minutes.

This route changes beautifully every season and right now on a sunny day the increasingly leafless trees provide a starkly magnificent background to a winter blue sky. In the summer, it’s best to go towards the evening when there’s hardly a soul about and the lowering sun shimmers through the birch trees just so.

Lisa Bradshaw

Don’t miss next week when we visit two other areas on the Scheldt in East Flanders.

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Brussels

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
NOV 22 20.00 Grigory Sokolov, piano: Schubert's Sonata D 958, Chopin's 24 Preludes, op 28
NOV 23 20.00 & NOV 25 15.00 Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by Walter Weller, with Plamena Mangova, piano: Glinka, Strauss, Martinu
NOV 24 20.00 London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Valery Gergiev: Mahler's Symphony No 6
NOV 25 11.00 Trio Sarrasine: piano trios by Coomans, Fauré, Ravel
NOV 26 20.00 Opera Fuoco, conducted by David Stern: Handel's Jephta HWV 70.
NOV 27 20.00 Europe Chamber Orchestra, with Leif Ove Andsnes, piano: Mozart, Schönberg, Ravel

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
NOV 23 20.15 Vlaams Radio Orkest, conducted by Carlos Kalmar with Yossif Ivanov, violin: Mussorgsky, Shostakovich, Beethoven
NOV 25 Victor Nicoara, piano: Chopin, Mazurka, Nicoara, Mussorgsky, Ravel

Kapel van de Miniemen
Miniemenstraat 62; 02.507.82.00, www.minimes.net
NOV 25 10.30 Kapel van de Miniemen Choir and Orchestra, conducted by Benoît Jacquemin: Bach's cantata BWV 234

Royal Conservatory of Brussels
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37, www.kcb.be
NOV 22 20.00 Israël en Musique 1947-2007, with musicians from Israel and Belgium (tickets: 02.543.02.70 or www.ambisrael.be)
Royal Museums of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.512.82.47
NOV 21 12.40-13.30 Albrecht Breuninger, violin; Roberte Mamou, piano: Beethoven, Ysaÿe
NOV 28 12.40 Joseph Jongen Ensemble: Jongen's Quatuor op 23

Saint Michael and St Gudula Cathedral
Sinter-Goedeleplein; 02.217.83.45
NOV 28 20.00 Louis Robilliard, organ: Widor, Liszt, Fauré, Franck

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
NOV 24 21.00 Hermes Ensemble: An Environment, new work by Thomas Smetryns
NOV 25 21.00 Anima Eterna soloists: Beethoven, Labarre, Boscha, Schubert, Neukomm

DeSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
NOV 21 20.00 Andreas Haefliger, piano: Beethoven and Schubert sonatas
NOV 23 20.00 Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, conducted by Philippe Herreweghe: Brahms' Symphonies Nos 2 and 4

Bruges

Concertgebouw
34 't Zand; 070.22.33.02
Concerts at 20.00
NOV 21 La Chambre Philharmonique, conducted by Emmanuel Krivine, with Viktoria Mullova, violin: Beethoven violin concerto, Schubert's Symphony No 9
NOV 22 Thomas Zehetmair, violin; Ruth Killius, viola: Skalkottas, Hartmann, Bartok, Holliger, Scelsi, Martinu
NOV 28 Les Muffatti, conducted by Peter Van Heyghen: Bononcini's San Nicola di Bari

Opera

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be
NOV 25 19.00 Rigoletto by Verdi, conducted by Lukas Beikircher, staged by Marianne Berglöf

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera
3 Schouwburgstraat (070.22.02.02)
Until DEC 1 Der Ring des Nibelungen: Siegfried by Wagner, conducted by Ivan Törzs, staged by Ivo van Hove, with Lance Ryan

Jazz & blues

Brussels

Archiduc
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52
NOV 24 Jazzisfaction
NOV 25 VVG Trio with Jozef Dumoulin & Magic Malik

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50
NOV 28 20.30 Soundcheck, jazz/experimental/electro

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
NOV 21 20.30 Sonny Rollins

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
NOV 22 21.30 Magic Malik, flute; Nelson Veras, guitar
NOV 24 20.15 Belmondo Sextet with Yusef Lateef

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
NOV 21 20.30 Roditi/Ignatzek/Rassinfosse
NOV 24 18.00 T Unit 7

Le Grain d'Orge
Waversesteenweg 142; 02.511.26.47
NOV 23 21.30 Southside Mojo Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
NOV 22 Jonathan Taylor's Double Bass Quintet
NOV 23 Jean-Pierre Froidebise
NOV 24 Peter Hertman's Quartet
NOV 26 VVG Trio & Guests

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
NOV 22 TAO Quartet
NOV 23 Almadvav
NOV 24 Jazzstrings & friends
NOV 27 Domas Aleksa & D'Orange

Ghent

De Bijloke Muziekcentrum
J Kluyskensstraat 2; 09.269.92.92
NOV 22 20.00 John Taylor Trio

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
Concerts at 20.00:
NOV 22 Delavega
NOV 22 Anathema + Porcupine Tree
NOV 23-25 2 Days Carte Blanche, choreographer Wim Vandekeybus selects a weekend of music ranging from punk to folk to electronic

Koninklijk Circus
Onderrichtsstraat 8; 02.218.20.15
NOV 26 20.00 Aaron

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Concerts at 20.00:
NOV 21 Pocket + Half Asleep + Moufle
NOV 22 Monsoon
NOV 23 Luke
NOV 24 The New Pornographers
NOV 25 Kim Novak + And Also The Trees
NOV 25 Joseph Arthur
NOV 26 I Like Trains
NOV 27 The Good Life
NOV 28 Hey Hey My My
NOV 29 Kill The Young

Recyclart
Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34
NOV 21 20.00 The Brunettes + Crèvecoeur

Vorst-Nationaal
Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
NOV 22 20.00 Rihanna
NOV 23 20.00 Blonde Redhead + Interpol

Antwerp

Lotto Arena
Schijnpootweg 119; 0900.26.060
NOV 23 20.00 The Chemical Brothers

Luchtbal Cultuurcentrum
Columbiastreet 8; 03.543.90.30
NOV 22 20.30 David Murray Black Saint Quartet

Queen Elisabeth Hall
Koningin Astridplein 26; 0900.26.060
NOV 24 20.30 The Four Tops & The Temptations

Ghent

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01
Concerts at 20.00

NOV 21 20.00 Spinvis
NOV 22 20.00 Zita Swoon
NOV 25 Kurt Wagner
NOV 28 Hanne Hukkelberg

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44
NOV 25 20.00 HTRK + Liars
NOV 29 On stage with: Jeff Goddard

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
NOV 21 20.00 The Van Jets
NOV 22 20.00 Fixkes

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.320.300
NOV 21 20.30 Pinback + The Dudley Corporation
NOV 22 20.30 Andrew Bird
NOV 23 20.30 Kurt Wagner solo

World, folk

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
NOV 21 20.00 Loney, Dear + Vic Chesnutt
NOV 23 20.00 Akron/Family

Au Stekerlapatte
Priesterstraat 4; 02.512.86.81
NOV 22 21.30 Chambre 203
NOV 24 21.30 Daniel Vincke solo + Moustapha Ouriaghli

Espace Senghor
Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40
NOV 21 20.30 Bonga, Angola

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
NOV 25 20.15 Cristina Branco, fado

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
NOV 21 20.00 Serge Teyssot-Gay and Khaled Aljaramani
NOV 25 20.00 Tom Brosseau + Nancy Elisabeth

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
NOV 24 20.00 Cristina Branco & Ensemble, fado

Dance

Brussels

Kaaithheater
Square Saintelette 20; 02.201.59.59
NOV 21 20.30 Thierry Smits & Compagnie Thor in V.-Nightmares

KVS Bol
Lakensstraat 146; 02.210.11.12
Until NOV 23 20.00 Ultima Vez/Wim Vandekeybus in Menske

Wolubilis
Ave Paul Hymans 251; 02.761.60.30
NOV 27 20.30 Compagnia Aterballetto in Romeo and Juliet, choreographed by Mauro Bigonzetti (part of Europalia)

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.320.300
NOV 22-23 20.30 Why We Love Action by Mette Ingvartsen

Theatre

Brussels

De Markten
Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
NOV 26 10.30, 13.15 & 14.30 Paard met Koe (Horse with Cow) by and with Youri Dirckx and Ilsa Roman (without dialogue for ages four and up)

Oudergem Cultural Centre
Vorstlaan 183
NOV 22-25 20.00 Brussels Light Opera Company in The Mikado Goes to the Seaside, adapted from the work of Gilbert & Sullivan, staged by Barbara Campbell, music by David Miller (In English, tickets from 02.660.03.03 or www.themikado.eu)

Scarabaeus Espace Theatral
Hollestraat 19; 02.649.79.16, www.scarabaeus.net
NOV 27-DEC 1 Quintessence: an evening of Synge & Yeats by the Irish Theatre Group (In English, tickets from 0475.585.462 or www.irishtheatregroup.com)

Théâtre 140
Eugène Plaskyalaan 140; 02.733.97.08
Until NOV 22 14.00 & 20.30 Ape by and with Gary Stevens (in English, part of Europalia)

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
NOV 29-30 20.00 Motus in Pre-paradise Sorry Now, little episodes of everyday fascism (in Italian with Dutch and French surtitles)

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
NOV 26-27 20.30 Wunderbaum in Welcome in My Backyard (in Dutch)
NOV 27-28 20.30 Cie Barbarie in Untertwasser wasserwasser (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Arts en Marge

Hoogstraat 312; 02.511.04.11
Until NOV 24 Outsider art by Serge Delaunay

Bibliotheca Wittockiana
Bemelstraat 23; 02.770.53.33
Until JAN 30 La Nuit bleue, books by the late Belgian poet Pierre Lecuire

BELvue Museum
Paleizenplein 5; 02.545.08.00
Until DEC 9 Mangia Mangia, the influence of Italian immigration on Belgian cuisine, secrets of Italian cooking, anecdotes and Belgian-Italians' recipes (part of Week van de Smaak)

Box Gallery
Maliestraat 88; 02.537.95.55
Until DEC 1 Les Silences du promeneur, photographs by Bernard Descamps
NOV 23-DEC 22 Photographs of water reflections by Dalia Nosratabadi

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
Until NOV 30 The Void, architecture show with models, plans and photographs of projects by Portuguese architect Gonçalo Byrne
Until JAN 6 Melting Ice, group show on the theme of global warming

Centre Albert Marinus
Karrestraat 27; 02.762.62.14
Until DEC 9 Le Temps, representations of time in art from the Middle Ages to today

De Electriciteitscentrale - European Centre for Contemporary Art
Sint-Katelijnestraat 44; 02.279.64.31, www.brupass.be
Until JAN 13 Agorafolly Inside, works by 27 young European artists

De Markten
Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25, www.demarketen.be
Until DEC 23 Cf. (Natuur, Nature), multi-media exhibition on the theme of nature with work by Klaar Cornelis, Kikie Crèvecoeur, David Delesalle and others

Elsene Museum
Jean Van Volsemstraat; 02.515.64.21
Until JAN 26 All Roads Lead to Rome. Artists' travels from the 16th to the 19th centuries, paintings, texts and a variety of objects related to travel
Until JAN 27 Ontmoetingen: 1997-2007 (Encounters, 1997-2007), photographs by Géraldine Langlois

Espace Photographique Contretype
Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until DEC 30 Variations, photographs by Armyde Peigner

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The Marriage of Figaro

Vlaamse Opera, Antwerp, December 11-16. Tickets from 070.22.02.02 or www.vlaamseopera.be

Depicting a day sizzling with intrigue, betrayals, reconciliations and dramatic twists at the residence of Count Almaviva, this brilliant collaboration between Mozart and his Italian librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte returns to the Vlaamse Opera for the third time in a much-fêted production by Flemish director Guy Joosten. With Finnish baritone Tuomas Pursio as the wily Figaro, young Spanish soprano Ainhua Garmendia as his sparkling wife-to-be Susanna, Belgian mezzo Angélique Noldus as the pubescent Cherubino and German conductor Andreas Spering in the pit. Plus this December performance is the first opera to be performed in Antwerp's newly renovated opera house. Tickets will go fast. (Vlaamse Opera also performs *The Marriage of Figaro* in Ghent in January.)

Fondation pour l'Architecture
Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80
Until APR 20 Landscapes of Architecture: 150 years of Drawings by Belgian Architects

Huis der Kunsten (Schaerbeek)
Haachtsesteenweg 147; 02.218.79.98
Until DEC 21 From Here to There, photographs and installation by Marin Kasimir

Husson Gallery Bookshop
Alsebergsesteenweg 142;
02.534.33.54
Until JAN 31 People in Motion by Michel Duszarek

Indigo Studios
X96 Rue de la Victoire; 02.534.75.72
Until JAN 31 Golden Years-Rock 70/80, photographs by Paul Coerten

ISELP
Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until DEC 1 Eves' Phase I: le complot, video, drawings, photographs and installation by Didier Mahieu.
Until DEC 1 Interactions, paintings by Claude Celli and sculptures by Clémence van Lunen
Until DEC 1 Porcelain sculptures by Clémence van Lunen

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre
Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until DEC 16 Quel beau cadre!, paintings by Filip Denis

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until DEC 31 Jewish Spaces and Itineraries: The Shoule of Molenbeek, Aspects of contemporary Judaism
Until FEB 24 Sarah and her Brothers, history through the eyes of the Kaliskis family of artists

La Médiatone
Stokkelsesteenweg 45; 02.761.60.29
Until NOV 25 Works by Gwendoline Robin and Eric Angenot

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
NOV 22-DEC 30 Les Poux et les couleurs, works by Cécile Bertrand, prize winner of Press Cartoon Belgium 2007

Loge Architecture Museum
Kluisstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until DEC 23 Vienna-Brussels: the Secession Years, the reciprocal artistic influence of the two capitals at the turn of the 19th century

Park Tournai Solvay
Terhulpensesteenweg 201; 02.660.99.80
Until DEC 23 Sculptures in bronze, steel and neon by Portuguese artist José de Guimarães

Royal Library
Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until NOV 30 Bollandistes, Saints and Legends: 400 Centuries of Research, exhibition commemorating the 400th anniversary of the publication of Héribert Rosweyde's Fasti Sanctorum
Until FEB 8 Formatting Europe: Mapping a Continent, maps from the Middle-Ages to the 20th century

Royal Museum of Art and History
Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until DEC 2 A Princely Hobby, some 150 works from the workshops created by Charles de Lorraine to furnish his palatial residences
Until DEC 31 België op kijkdoosprenten, some 400 views of Belgian cities dating from the 17th and 18th centuries
Until JAN 6 When the Manga Dreams About the West, comic strips by Jiro Taniguchi.
Until JAN 6 XPO2π: 50 jaar Jeugd en Wetenschap van België (50 Years of Youth and Science in Belgium)

Royal Museums of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
Until JAN 27 Rubens: A Genius at Work, major show of works by the Flemish master and his workshop
NOV 23-MAR 30 Alechinsky from A to Y, retrospective of work by the Belgian artist on the occasion of his 80th birthday
NOV 23-MAR 30 Quadrum: International Magazine of Modern Art, tribute to Ernst Goldschmidt, curator and publisher

Saint Michael and St Gudula Cathedral
Sint-Goedeleplein; 02.217.83.45
Until NOV 27 Paroles Ouvertes, paintings by Anne Piron

Schaerbeek Cultural Centre
Lochtstraat 91-93; 02.245.27.25
Until DEC 7 Pekin Contemporain, contemporary art from China

Sint-Gorikshallen
Place Sint-Goriks 1; 02.502.44.24
Until DEC 31 Brussels, urban landscapes and computer-reworked photographs by Georges De Kinder

Stadhuis
Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50
Until JAN 13 Van't stad in schoone buytens, drawings and paintings of Brussels and its surroundings by 18th-century artists Ferdinand-Joseph Derons and Andreas Martin

Stadsarchief
Huidevettersstraat 65; 02.279.53.33
Until DEC 31 Zicht op licht: Het licht in de stad, the history of the use of lighting in Brussels and its effect on society, past and present

Antwerp Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60
Until JAN 6 If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Edition II: Feminist Legacies And Potentials In Contemporary Art Practice
Until JAN 6 Lonely at the Top #6, Recyclable Refugee Camp TOURISM by Ives Maes

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Until DEC 5 35m³, projects by Ghent architects BARAK
Until DEC 16 The Wrong House: Alfred Hitchcock & Pauhof, exploration of architecture in the films of Alfred Hitchcock with installation by Austrian architectural firm Pauhof

Extra City, Center for Contemporary Art
Klumperstraat 40; 0484.42.10.70
Until DEC 16 Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome, works by Joachim Koester
Until DEC 16 The Nine Monads Of David Bell, works by Luke Fowler

Fifty One Fine Art Photography
Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58
Until DEC 19 Nude Dune, photographs by Simon Chaput

FotoMuseum
Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00
Until JAN 6 Belgicum, Stephan Vanfleteren's humorous and nostalgic photographs of Belgium

Until JAN 6 Oorlogsmaterial by film director Robbe De Hert. Ost.Modern, images from Eastern Europe by Annemie Augustijns
Until JAN 6 Stage fright, thematic exhibition on the effects of the ever-growing presence of cameras in society

Hessenhuis
Falconrui 53; 03.206.03.50
Until NOV 25 Bivak Gloria, group show by Dwight Marica, Michele Matyun and friends

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts)
Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until DEC 31 The Rijksmuseum comes to the Scheldt, 40 masterpieces from the 16th and 17th centuries lent by the Amsterdam museum

Mayer van den Bergh Museum
Lange Gasthuisstraat 19; 03.232.42.37
Until JAN 27 Facing death, drawings of the artist's dying wife by Eugene van Mieghem (1875-1930)

Middelheim Museum
Middelheimlaan 61; 03.827.15.34
Until JAN 20 Spomenik: The End of History, photographs of communist monuments in former Yugoslavia by Jan Kempenaers

MoMu
Nationalestraat 28; 03.470 .27.70
Until FEB 10 Exuberant fashion designs by Bernhard Willhelm

Rockox House
12 Keizerstraat; 03.201.92.50
Until FEB 10 Samson and Delilah: A Rubens Painting Returns, the famous painting shown along with other works of art originally owned by Antwerp's mayor Nicolaas Rockox

Bruges Groeninge Museum
Dijver 12; 050.44.87.11
Until JAN 6 Brugge-Parijs-Rome: Joseph Benoît Suvée en het neoclassicisme, paintings

Eupen Ikob
In den Loten 3; 087.56.01.10
Until JAN 13 La Ricarda, multi-national installation and video project

Ghent Caermersklooster
Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until DEC 9 VIPS - Very Important Paintings, portraits by Karl Meersman
Until DEC 9 Provinciale Prijs voor Vormgeving 2006 (Design Prizewinners)

Design Museum
Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until DEC 31 Studio Glass, the Alonzo glassware collection from Art Nouveau to the 1960s
Until JAN 13 Retrospective covering the 65-year career of architect and designer Ettore Sottsass, with furniture, ceramics, glass, jewellery, architecture and industrial design
Until JAN 13 Christopher Dresser, pioneer of modern design, display of Eastern-inspired minimalist objects by the Scottish designer (1834-1904)

Museum Dr Guislain
Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be
Until APR 27 2008 Sick: Between Body and Soul, the links between mental and physical pain

Museum of Fine Arts
Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00
Until JAN 13 British Vision, Observation and Imagination in British Art 1750-1950, with works by William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough, Stanley Spencer and Francis Bacon, among others

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)
Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03
Until DEC 2 Kunst Nu: Leaving These Landscapes Behind, monumental sculpture installation by Tim Volckaert
Until JAN 13 Daria Martin, 2 films by the American artist
Until FEB 17 Head Shop/Shop Head, Paul McCarthy retrospective 1966-2007

Hasselt Z33
Zuivelmarkt 33 (in begijnhof); 011.29.59.60
Until DEC 12 Toegepast 12, works by young designers from Limburg

NOV 24-FEB 10 Nr17 Slow: Looking at things differently, video installations by designed Marina Yee

Knokke-Heist Cultuurcentrum Scharpoord
Merlaan 32; 050.63.08.72
NOV 24-JAN 20 Impressionisten in Knocke & Heist, more than 200 paintings by Impressionist artists who were in Knokke between 1870 and 1914, including Permeke, Rops and Parmentier

Lagunahal
Krommedijk - Duinbergen; 050.63.04.30
Until NOV 30 Kunst & Wunderkammern, artists' rooms by Eric Angenot, Franck Bragigand, Loek Grootjans and others

Leuven Abdij van 't Park (Park Abbey)
Abdijdreef 7; 016.20.30.20, www.parkabdij.be
Until DEC 21 In the name of God: 1000 years of monasticism, from the origins of the first monastic orders to today

Ypres In Flanders Fields Museum
Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75
Until MAR 30 Oorlogsgetuige: 1914-1918 (War Witness: 1914-1918), drawings by Henry De Groux

Festivals & special events

Audi Jazz Festival: blues, world, avant-garde and hip-hop
Until DEC 10 in venues across Belgium 02.456.04.85, www.audijazz.be

Europalia: Festival of music, literature, dance, exhibitions and cinema celebrating the cultural diversity of the 27 EU countries
Until FEB 3 at venues across Belgium 02.507.85.94, www.europalia.eu

Week van de Smaak (Week of Flavour): celebration of food and cooking, including workshops, exhibitions, special menus, markets, visiting master Italian chefs and kids' activities
Until NOV 24 across Flanders 02.208.02.32; www.weekvandesmaak.be

Brussels Ars Musica-Winter Events: Second part of the contemporary music festival dedicated to the crossover of artistic disciplines
Until DEC 11 in venues across Brussels www.arsmusica.be

Bougliane Circus: long-standing Belgian circus
Until DEC 9 in the Park van Laken near the Atomium 0476.49.12.03, www.bougliane.be

Cimatics Festival: Combines live and audiovisual arts, including concerts, performances, screenings and installations
NOV 22-24 at Beursschouwburg and other venues in Brussels www.cimaticsfestival.com

De Frivole Framboos presents the show Furioso: a musical/theatre variety show, from chanson to classical to opera
NOV 27-DEC 31 at Bozar Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

Des Geraghty: Activist and former trade union leader reads from his new book 40 Shades of Green
NOV 27 18.30-20.30 at Kitty O'Shea's, Karel de Grotelaan 42, Brussels james.odonnell@europarl.europa.eu

ExpoItalia: focus on Italy - tourism, culture, gastronomy and technology
NOV 23-25 at Brussels Expo, Heysel 02.582.08.57, www.expoitalia.be

Hors Pistes: Contemporary circus festival. Guest of honour is Johan Le

Don't miss this week



Flanders Paranormal Fair

November 25, Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1, Ghent. www.paranatura.be

Get your aura sorted and your chakras aligned this Sunday. More than 200 psychics, healers and other spiritual specialists will be on hand to offer help through readings, workshops and presentations. Sponsored by Paranatura, an organisation bringing together paranormal experts from throughout Flanders and Brussels, the fair focuses on alternative therapies to deal with spiritually-centred issues as well as the expected tarot card readers, psychometrists, palmists and crystal healers.

Guillerm with several performances of his show Secret/Cirque ici
Until NOV 28 at venues across Brussels 02.218.21.07, www.halles.be

Jonctions/Verbindingen X: Multidisciplinary festival that offers reflections on our bodily, psychological and formal relationship to technology, including screenings, installations, concerts, performances, workshops and lectures
Until DEC 2 at three locations in Brussels 02.539.24.67, www.constantvzw.com/vj10

Musica Universalis: Polyphony festival with music by composers from Flanders and northern France
Until JAN 11 at Kapel van de Miniemen, Miniemenstraat 62 02.507.82.00, www.minimes.net

The Ocelot Show presents the show Dreams: inventive performance by Polish circus troupe
NOV 24-25 at Sint-Pieters-Woluwe Cultural Centre, Charles Thielemanslaan 93, Brussels 02.773.05.88, www.art-culture.be

Other towns Antiquairs Antwerpen: Antwerp's antique dealers open their doors for promenade tours across the city during this annual event
NOV 23-25 & 30, DEC 1-2 across Antwerp 03.237.93.89

Cirque du Soleil presents the show Varekai
Until DEC 2 under the circus group's big top in the Zuiderdokken, Antwerp 070.22.32.30, www.cirquedusoleil.com

Dedonderdagen #14: a special evening promoting new talent at deSingel with music, dance and visual art
NOV 22 from 20.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25, Antwerp 03.248.28.28, www.dedonderdagen.be

Holiday on Ice: mystery ice-skating show
NOV 21-25 at Ethias Arena in Hasselt
NOV 28-DEC 2 at Sleuyter Arena in Ostend www.holidayonice.be

MY FLANDERS

Tom Vermeersch

Tom Vermeersch is an environmental field worker with the province of West Flanders, acting as a mediator between environmentalists and farmers. We talk to him about how he keeps everyone happy and about the region's most endangered species

What do you do exactly?

I act as a go-between, dealing with environmental and agricultural groups and the government at both a provincial and municipal level. What to do with the wetlands in our area is a question on a lot of people's minds. Should trees be planted there? In what ways can we make these areas open to the public? Should we protect the plants and animals there at the moment, restricting human access? Agreements have to be reached, and we are involved in setting up strategic plans.

Are there endangered species in West Flanders?

There is a red list of endangered animals and plants that must be protected. We have chosen certain species to support, like the tree frog near the Zwin region on the coast. The polders—low-lying areas under strict water management and protected by dikes—are home to this frog. Only 70 males are left, and there are only 500 males in Zeeland in The Netherlands. We can count the males because they croak—the females don't. Another example is the pink-footed goose, which migrates south for the winter from Norway to Belgium. It's a very special species, and 90% of them stop off in the polders of Flanders, which is great—unless you happen to be a farmer nearby. Geese eat young corn stalks.

Is there a lot of conflict between farmers and environmentalists?

There can be. Farming is an

important economic activity in the region. Soil in the south of West Flanders is sandier, meaning it's better for cabbage, potatoes, lettuce and trees. In the north, the soil is more like clay, making it easier to use as grasslands or to grow corn and beets. Over the past year, there have been many government discussions about what areas to designate "green", for nature, and "yellow", for agriculture. It's been a real struggle between environmental groups, who of course want land set aside or reclaimed for conservation, and farmers, who produce food. The wooded areas are home mostly to small-scale farms, so claiming land for more forestation is, in general, easier. Space for development in the wetlands of the polders area is often more controversial because that's where larger companies own fertile ground.

How do these conflicts become resolved?

My organisation has set up round tables to see if common ground can be found between farmers and environmentalists. Discussions like these can get very emotional because it's difficult for farmers to see the positive side of thousands of geese visiting the nearby wetlands when the birds are threatening their income. Finding a compromise that would neither cost the farmers nor harm the geese was a challenge, but the Flemish government has agreed to find a new and efficient way to compensate farmers for damage done by the geese.



Yoni Berland

Why are so many conservation projects focused on West Flanders?

Environmental administration of the province of West Flanders develops initiatives within four regions: my region, which is Bruges-Ostend to the north, Kortrijk in the southeast, Roeselare-Tielt in the middle and Westhoek-Ypres to the west. Although there are two cities in the area, it's much more green and rural than, say, the areas around Brussels and Antwerp. A large part of this is because Bruges missed out on industrialisation at the beginning of the 20th century and because in the 70s there was a very conscious effort to develop urban

planning policies. That's why we don't have the suburban sprawl that there is around Ghent. Bruges has managed to remain a major tourist attraction for culture and museums, but it hasn't sacrificed its woodlands, polders and wetlands for it. That's a real strength.

Is yours the kind of job that's impossible to leave at the office?

It is difficult to stop thinking about environmental and landscape issues when I'm not at work: I'll be out cycling in the woods with my partner, and I'll see something that attracts my interest—she says it's always about my work. But everyone should think about the environment all the time. Last

weekend the province of West Flanders was one of the sponsors of *Dag van de Natuur*, or Day of Nature, which encouraged people to enjoy and think about nature. It's an event that encourages people—citizens, farmers—to get out and work in nature, doing things like planting a tree or mowing reed. Different villages had various activities for children and adults, and pumpkin soup, mulled wine and roasted chestnuts kept everyone warm.

Steven Tate

online
www.west-vlaanderen.be

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

"Partner violence is still a seriously taboo subject. In Flanders, women seek help too hesitantly and too little. The message we need them to receive: there is help."

Steven Vanackere
Flemish minister of public health, family and welfare

"This is no Santa Claus politics. This is just good governance, which some of us want to strive for."

Dirk Van Mechelen
Flemish budget minister in response to his decision to spread €600 million between Flemish cities to pay their debts

"We want to tell the politicians to stop playing in their sand pit"

Marie-Claire Houard,
Belgian civil servant who launched a petition calling on politicians to end the deadlock

SecretsofAfrica AmCham Paranor
malFair Allochtoon Concertgebouw
Brugge TonyLeDuc
next week in Flanders Today