



Groeningemuseum, p.2

DECEMBER 12 2007

N°9

INDEPENDENT NEWSWEEKLY

WWW.FLANDERSTODAY.EU

Erkenningsnummer P708816



The atomic village

The nuclear families of east Antwerp province

Fifty years ago, six European countries signed a treaty committing themselves to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Two Flemish villages still play host to this dream – and the enclave of expats that go with it.

Derek Blyth & Lisa Bradshaw

On 25 March 1957, the foreign ministers of six European countries sat down in Rome to sign two treaties. One of them – the more famous – set up the European Economic Community, while the other one – which most people have forgotten – established the European Community for Atomic Energy, or Euratom.

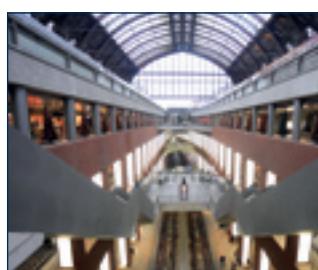
The goal of the Euratom Treaty was to direct nuclear research towards peaceful purposes, such as energy production and medicine. Belgium played a crucial role because much of the world's uranium was mined in the Katanga region of the Belgian Congo. But there was another reason why Belgium went for the nuclear option: one year earlier, on 8 August 1956, a fire swept through the Marcinelle coal mine near

Charleroi, killing 262 men. Nuclear energy suddenly seemed like a clean and safe alternative.

The government wasted no time in setting up the Central Bureau for Nuclear Measurements in the town of Geel in Antwerp province near the Dutch border. One of the seven institutes of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, it's now known as the Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements (IRMM) and establishes common measurement systems in support of EU policies from food safety to environmental pollution.

The choice of Geel was strategic: several years earlier in the border town of Mol, the Studiecentrum voor de Toepassingen van de Kernenergie, or Research Centre for the Applications of Nuclear Energy, was established.

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Business

A new underground high-speed train station has opened in Antwerp. It cuts down the journey time from Paris to Antwerp and provides travellers with a scintillating shopping centre.

Arts

The girl's choir Scala started out singing in small festivals in Flanders. This week they perform with José Carreras in front of a German TV audience of ten million.

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Active

The towns of the Kempen spend the winter months building elaborate wooden cribs. We admire the results and sip some mulled wine.

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Railways rebuked over new timetable

Companies forced to change working hours

Alan Hope

More than 500 complaints were lodged last week with the country's rail ombudsman over the new railway timetable – before it even came into force on Monday morning.

The aim of the new timetable, according to the rail authority, the NMBS, is to provide an additional 1.2 million train/kilometres over the course of the year. The authority hopes that it can achieve this improved service using existing personnel and rolling-stock.

The first complaint came from rail unions protesting that the NMBS had provided them with information too late. In addition,

they said too much of the rolling-stock was "hopelessly antiquated". Union representative Jos Digneffe said: "The train is a victim of its own success."

Trains at peak hours are so full that waiting times at stations are growing longer as more passengers get on and off. That adds to delays, which then have a domino-effect on later trains, which are forced to wait. Since many sections of the network are already filled to saturation – in particular the North-South link through Brussels – even slight delays can have catastrophic side-effects across the network.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Joseph Benoît Suvée

Of the six million or so tourists who visit Bruges every year, hardly any travel there to look at the neoclassical paintings of Joseph Benoît Suvée. Almost everyone goes to Bruges for the Flemish Primitive works of Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling. People are ineluctably drawn by the misty mediaeval mood of the Flemish city and tend to overlook anything that conflicts with their expectations.

Yet there's more neoclassical than gothic in Bruges – at least in terms of architecture. The city has just two mediaeval houses still standing (yes, two) – the others may look mediaeval but are in fact late 19th-century or even early 20th-century imitations. Wander along the canals with a critical eye, and you soon begin to notice that a lot of the houses have 18th-century facades.

So Joseph Suvée is as much a Bruges artist as Jan van Eyck. Born in Bruges, he studied in Paris and Rome before settling as an artist in his home town. His period abroad taught him to see the world through classical eyes. The most impressive result was the 1791 painting "The Discovery of Drawing" (page 1, top right).

Some critics might argue that

Suvée was a marginal figure in the Flemish tradition, but far from it. As the current exhibition in the Groeningemuseum and Arentshuis shows, he influenced a wide circle of young Bruges artists, such as Franciscus Josephus Kinsoen and Joseph Ducq. An entire school developed in Bruges, bringing fresh ideas to an economically-stagnant Flemish port.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is Ducq's 1818 "Portrait of Mary Lodge", which looks as if it might have been painted in a villa outside Rome. Some of the works were in fact painted outside Rome, such as Paul Josef de Cock's "Landscape with Roman Ruins" (below). On leaving this exhibition you may well begin to notice the neoclassical side of Bruges for the first time.

DB

Bruges-Paris-Rome: Joseph Benoît Suvée and neoclassicism. Exhibition in the Groeningemuseum and Arentshuis, Bruges, until 6 January 2008.

online

www.museabrugge.be



Flanders Today

independent newsweekly

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Sabine Duy



Antwerp Zoo

The zoo is not the first place you think of visiting in the winter. Anticipating this, the Antwerp Zoo has put together an irresistible tour, available only during winter holiday breaks – like the one coming right up, for instance. You go behind the scenes into animal cages, veterinary operating rooms and the kitchen for the animals.

You'll also see and learn about the various fascinating research projects the zoo is involved in. Their speciality is in DNA analysis of certain species of bears from Peru and Argentina that they have in the zoo. They work directly with colleagues in those countries to support the species, as well as with scientists in Brazil in support of the golden-headed Tamarin monkey, and in Cameroon to protect chimpanzees. "We work in co-operation with people there to try to stop poaching," says the zoo's communications manager Ilsa Segers. "We try to create alternatives so these animals can stay alive."

The Antwerp Zoo also has a programme for training rats to detect land mines. You get to see how they work with them and go through a bit of a training yourself – seeing if you can recognise the smell of explosives and other animals. "People find out that they can't compete with animals in that way," smiles Segers. "Nature is something that we really should respect; we can learn a lot from it. We want to explain our conservation projects and show people what they can do because we are all living together on this planet, and we are just destroying a great part of it."

Another reason to visit the zoo in the winter is to see the glorious winter coats many of the animals are growing, particularly the lions, tigers, reindeer and mountain goats. Because animals in the zoo are well fed and protected from the elements all year round, you won't find any hibernating animals – everyone is wide awake and moving around. Even animals from tropical climates like to come out for an hour or so a day, Segers assures me. And the zoo also takes precautions in the winter to protect visitors, too – workers check the moats around the pens of the large cats often to make sure they haven't iced over. "If the ice is too thick, they can escape," notes Segers.

Of course, Antwerp Zoo offers many indoor viewing areas in case you feel a little chillier than the yaks, who thrive this time of year. All the birds and reptiles, for instance, are inside, and there are indoor spaces for the giraffes, elephants and the fantastically cute hippopotamus baby born earlier this year. Babies are also born during the winter – just a few weeks ago, workers discovered a newborn ebony langur monkey clinging in a little furry ball on its mother's stomach.

Starting this week, a winter scene greets you at the entrance to the zoo, with snow owls, reindeer and a little warm-up glass of jenever. The zoo is open every day of the year, including Christmas and New Year's Day and all other holidays. A special reduced price is available all winter for combined rail travel and zoo visit. Just ask at your NMBS station for the "B Day Trip zoo".

Lisa Bradshaw

online

www.zooantwerpen.be

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



Spelling

Spelling in English often requires a flight of the imagination: compare "through" and "tough". It has changed little since the invention of printing 500 odd years ago. But English pronunciation has changed considerably since then – and no one is at the tiller to direct the changes.

Mark Twain saw no use in having a uniform and arbitrary way of spelling words. From the 1970s until fairly recently, this approach was often adopted in British schools: let the little ones express themselves. Attempts at reforming the spelling to more closely reflect the pronunciation of words have never got off the ground.

Dutch, on the other hand, is in the hands of *De Nederlandse Taalunie*. The Dutch Language Union is a collaboration between the Netherlands, Flanders and Surinam. Yes, Surinam. It decides on spelling reforms, which seem to come round every 20 years or so. The most recent was in 2005. You can check current spelling in *Het Groene Boekje*. It is green and small.

The result is that *Nederlandse spelling* much more accurately reflects spoken Dutch. It would be wrong to say it's phonetic, but it certainly makes written and spoken English appear like two separate languages.

So you would think all Dutch speakers could spell with ease. However, there are enough inconsistencies to make spelling challenging and interesting even for the native speaker.

This concern for spelling is reflected in *Het Groot Dictee der Nederlandse Taal*, held this year on 19 December and broadcast on Dutch and Flemish television. This is not some spelling bee for smart school kids (though *Het Groot Kinderdictee* will be held on the Saturday before). No, the dictation competition will be held in the Dutch Parliament in The Hague. The Upper Chamber will play host to 60 contestants: actors, writers, celebrities and people who have competed in preliminary rounds organised by newspapers.

Here is the first of eight paragraphs of last year's dictation, which describes a well-dressed svelte woman on the right side of 40 entering a trendy café. *De vrouw die her hippe grand café binnenliep, een miss twiggy aan de goede kant van de veertig, was smaakvol uitgedost in een bordeauxrode deux-pièces en een blouse met ovale vlakken, het prachtige gezicht perfect in de make-up.*

These dictations contain many loan words from other languages, since these cause the problems in Dutch. The main bulk of the vocabulary has been regularised by spelling reforms. The winner of *Het Groot Dictee* is often Flemish, to the great consternation of the Dutch. I'll leave it to you to work out why.

For regular readers of this column, here is a short spelling test. At the beginning of November, I wrote about long weekends in the article *Brugdag*. Which is the correct spelling of the Dutch words I used?

droog en zonnig – *drog en zonig* (dry and sunny)
pannekoeken – *pannenkoeken* (pancakes)
koffie – *koffie* (coffee)
een vacantie – *een vakantie* (a holiday)

All correct? Test your Flemish friends to see if they can spell the Dutch word for pancakes.

Alistair MacLean

online

<http://grootdictee.nps.nl>

FEATURE



The Tang-Lanaerts family: from Hong Kong to Mol

Continued from page 1

"We felt we were giving our country access to a new energy source that it urgently needed," said former director general Julien Goens. Known as the SCK-CEN, it was the largest building project in Belgium after the Second World War and led to Mol becoming known as "the atomic village".

The atomic age dawned for the average Belgian in 1958 when the Atomium was built in northern Brussels. The lowest sphere contained an exhibition organised by the Belgian Association for the Peaceful Development of Nuclear Energy to demonstrate "the immeasurable potential arising from splitting the atom, as well as the marvellous horizons that it opens for the welfare of man and for a better standard of living."

That was before Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. The declining confidence in nuclear energy is reflected in employee levels at SCK-CEN, which dropped from a high of 1,400 in 1982 to just 600 today. Mol and Geel have changed a lot in the last 50 years, but in one way they have stayed the same: nuclear scientists and other foreign professionals move to the area in a steady stream to work in these research facilities, as well as other technologically-based corporations. "Those institutes need very specific specialities, so their pool of fish has to be large," says Roeland Kortlevens, Mol municipality's communications manager. Genzyme Flanders, a bio-tech company with headquarters in the US, is located in Geel, and Janssen Pharmaceuticals is based a few kilometres away in Beerse.

Mol, with a population of 33,000, is also home to one of the first European Schools. Founded in 1960 to educate the children of IRMM employees, it now takes the children of employees who work throughout the area in a multitude of scientific professions. This little part of east Antwerp province is so packed with expatriates that it can almost be compared to Brussels – except that, in the minds of these educated and often young professionals, it's in the middle of nowhere.

"The first impression can surprise you," says Ann David, who moved from Milan to Mol nine years ago with her husband, who is a nuclear engineer at the SCK-CEN. "We came without thinking about it, and it was a shock." The couple were unfamiliar with horses and cows grazing right next to homes in the neighbourhood, and Ann didn't drive a car. "I couldn't believe that there was no tram or metro," she says. She enrolled her daughter at the European School, but "I couldn't even get there."

Brian Monks had a slightly different reaction when he moved into the area two years ago. His wife was transferred from Genzyme Corporate on America's east coast to Genzyme Flanders in Geel. "I thought Geel was great," he says. "We were between lots of farms, cows all around us. We bought chickens and got back to country living and a slower lifestyle." But, he admits, "It's worn off a little bit. We don't have the chickens anymore." Monks, whose wife is French, thinks they will stay in Europe, but not in the Geel area. "If this was France, it would be perfect; the country thing is good,"

he says. "But because of the third language, you feel like an outsider."

Dutch is something most of the foreign workers struggle with. "You are in an expatriate bubble," says Monks. "It's a strange little cluster." Many of the foreigners, like David and her husband, have learned or are learning Dutch. But Monks and his wife realise that their stay in Flanders is less permanent, and they are comfortable speaking English and French with the locals. They're enrolling their three children, meanwhile, in tennis lessons at a local Flemish club to help them integrate. Like David's daughter, Monks' children all go to the European School. "The school is great because it brings all these outsiders together," he notes.

The school in Mol is the only

European School in Belgium outside Brussels – and the only one with a broad intake that extends beyond the EU and diplomatic circuit. The campus is located in woodlands near both the IRMM and the SCK-CEN. It has some 700 students. "We have 40 nationalities in the school right now – or I think it's 41 as of this morning. It can change every day," says Remy Demaeseleer, the school's administrator. Some of those 700 kids actually come from Brussels. Their parents send them to a boarding facility during the week so they can attend the European School in Mol rather than one in Brussels.

"It's a very green area with an enormous amount of space. Children feel really good here," Demaeseleer says. "We hear from our Brussels colleagues that we have less behaviour and learning problems. They start a new way of life here."

With less distractions and bustle of the city, kids devote more time to schoolwork. But isn't it boring living in such a provincial place? Teenagers Aurelie and Marisa Lanaerts are convinced that it isn't. Not only are they learning multiple languages at the European School, there are plenty of sports and music programmes offered in the town. Plus, they note, there is a train to Antwerp every hour. They use it often. Why? They answer in unison: "shopping!"

As the research facilities begat the European School, the school

is international, and it's an international environment," she says. "There are a lot of qualified people here."

Tang speaks her native Cantonese with her kids. Her oldest daughter, who speaks English and Dutch and is also learning French and Spanish at the European School, is beginning to study Mandarin. "It's an advantage," says Tang. "She'll have European and Asian languages, and then she can decide what she wants to do and where she wants to go. She'll end up speaking the languages of the world."

The expats in this part of Antwerp province mix with the locals to varying degrees of success, but they all say that there are plenty of opportunities, especially for young people. David's daughter goes to a Flemish music school and plays volleyball after school with locals (as does her dad). Now that David has learned to drive, she says she and her family are happy in the area. "The community we live in is very international, but we also integrate with the locals. And Mol is a lovely place for children; it's safe."

So before Monks and his family decide to pack it in and move to the French countryside instead, they might want to check the Geel website, where they will find the small city's motto. Geel: You come there, you stay there.

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Railways rebuked over new timetable

Continued from page 1

According to the passenger organisation, the Union of Train, Tram and Bus Users (BTTB), delays had been getting worse even before the new timetable came in. The BTTB's method of calculating delays – which includes missed connections (which add to the passenger's delay even though the second train is not late at all) – will next year be taken up by the rail infrastructure agency Infrabel, which compiles statistics on train delays. The immediate effect of the change in measuring delays is likely to be to make matters seem worse, but the minister in charge, Bruno Tuybens, stressed that the government's aim was to develop an accurate and reliable method of calculating delays. "That is the first step on the road towards an improvement in the time-keeping of the service," he said.

The BTTB was able to welcome a few improvements in the service along with the new timetable. Among them: a direct train from Turnhout to Antwerp, as well as more frequent service between Antwerp and surrounding towns like Geel and Mol. There will also be an extra train every hour between Antwerp and Ghent, while trains between Brussels and Antwerp are better spread out. For Leuven and Hasselt, on the other hand, there are no improvements to report, the organisation said on its website (www.bttb.be).

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Meanwhile, companies and schools were reported to be changing working hours so as to fit in with the new timetables, particularly in the mornings. According to ombudsman Guido Herman, changes are often as little as

four minutes, but some starting times have to be shifted back 20 minutes to match the new train times. The bus network De Lijn, likewise, will now have to totally adapt its own timetable to ensure that buses and trams connect with trains.

Infrabel on Monday reported no problems with the first day of the new timetable. There were a few delays, a spokesman said, on the Brussels-Mons line, Brussels-Leuven and Blankenberge-Brugge, but those were technical problems not connected to the new timetable.

The news came as a relief to the rail operator, as there had been predictions that a strike by the small independent union OVS on Saturday would throw the introduction of the timetable into chaos. NMBS head Marc Descheemaeker called the strike, which involved only a small number of drivers and guards, "irresponsible". The union claimed the new timetable would increase pressure on drivers, which the NMBS denies. It also calls for more drivers to be employed.

Services were mainly affected on the Antwerp-Brussels line, Brussels-Liege and Kortrijk-Ghent. Further actions are planned by OVS on the remaining Saturdays in December, as well as strikes beginning at 14.00 on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The new NMBS timetable, meanwhile, will be re-evaluated after one month.

NEWS FLASH



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TV Brussel scrapping news to save money

TV Brussel, the Dutch-speaking local TV station, will suspend its news operations for two weeks in August 2008 to save money. Repeats of magazine programmes will be shown as usual in August, and staff will be obliged to take holidays during that period. In effect, from 1 to 15 August the broadcaster will produce no new output at all. TV Brussel hopes to save €50,000 to cover increases in spending next year. The station is subsidised by the Flemish Community and the Flemish Community Commission and complains that grants have not kept pace with inflation since the station was set up in 1994.

Balthazar considers US remake of *Ben X* hit

Flemish film director Nic Balthazar is considering an offer to remake his recent hit film *Ben X*, he said last week. The film, based on the true story of a boy who committed suicide after being bullied about his autism, has won widespread praise in its Flemish version, which was seen by 250,000 people in this country. Balthazar said the production company Wamerica had expressed an interest in a remake in English, which he would write and direct himself. The plan to remake the film was leaked in the American industry newspaper *Variety*, which described Balthazar as an "Oscar hopeful".

Flanders fails to reduce social disadvantages at school

Flemish schools have failed to close the gap between the performances of well-off and poorer children, according to the latest three-year study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The study shows that Flanders scored reasonably well on literacy (fifth place), science (eighth place) and mathematics (fifth place), whereas Belgium as a whole was ranked 21st, 14th and 14th in these categories. Flemish education minister Frank Vandenbroucke said that legislation to improve educational equality needed time to achieve its aims.

Night warning

Police are warning Belgians to avoid using bank automats at night during the holiday period. They say that thieves target people at this time of year because of the large amounts of cash withdrawn.

Anti racism law should be less strict, says human rights watchdog

The Human Rights League has asked the Constitutional Court to change the anti-racism law – to make it less strict. The League claims a previous amendment to the law has created a new offence not in the original, by making it now an offence to express a racist opinion on one occasion only. In the original statute, an offence was committed by the "systematic incitement" to hatred, discrimination or violence. "This is a step too far," said League representative Charlotte Herman. "Everyone has the right to an opinion, and, in our view, the new law does nothing to guarantee an efficient fight against racism."

The organisation clashed last week with the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism (CGKR) over their reaction to a single released by Vlaams Belang leader Filip Dewinter which bemoans the growth in the number of mosques in Antwerp. The single also has a clip on YouTube, and is available as a ringtone. The single was disowned, however, by party chairman Frank Vanhecke, who

called it a "purely Antwerp initiative". According to the CGKR, the single was not an incitement to hatred in the legal sense. "It's too bad it's there, it's a sign of bad taste and is really vulgar," commented director Jozef De Witte. "But it isn't racist."

The Human Rights League disagreed, describing the words as "certainly criminal. A perfect example of what ought to be prosecuted," said League chairman Jos Vander Velzen. "Not so much the song in itself, but the whole anti-Islamic campaign of the Vlaams Belang."

The campaign is, some observers said, a sign that the party is moving back towards its former extremist line. In 2004 the Vlaams Blok as it then was called, was found guilty of racism by the Cassation court and had to disband in order to avoid losing its public subsidy. It immediately resurfaced as Vlaams Belang, unchanged in every other regard but slightly less stridently racist and xenophobic.

Recent setbacks for the party include the arrival of the new Dedecker Party led by rene-

gade MP Jean-Marie Dedecker to steal voters away. And the inability of the Flemish cartel to form a government robbed the Belang of its chance to play a larger role in Flemish nationalist areas. Former member Jurgen Verstrepen, himself now teamed with Dedecker, said the single is "a sign of the hardening I complained about in April when I left. The old hard style is back, totally aimed at provocation and confrontation."

Meanwhile the Vlaams Belang this weekend celebrated its 30th anniversary with a call for Flemish independence as a solution to the current government crisis. "Flemish public opinion is so sick of Walloon or French-speaking arrogance that any Belgian solution can only bring temporary solace," Vanhecke said. Independence for Flanders was, he said, "the only guaranteed way of keeping and protecting our Flemish identity."

Alan Hope

Funeral for murdered policewoman

Police officers paid their last respects to murdered policewoman Kitty Van Nieuwenhuysen, who was shot dead by armed gangsters when she tried to stop a car-jacking in Lot, near Brussels. The car driver and a second police officer were also seriously injured, but both are recovering in hospital. Van Nieuwenhuysen, who had recently graduated from police school, was about to celebrate her 23rd birthday. The thieves had not been caught when *Flanders Today* went to press.

Some 300 people took part in a silent march on Sunday in honour of the dead policewoman. Hugo Casaeer, mayor of Beersel, awarded Van Nieuwenhuysen an honorary medal. "Our community will not forget her," he said.



Belga

Air quality has improved

The air quality in Flanders has improved dramatically since 1990, according to the annual report of the Flemish Environment Agency (VMM). The latest figures show that the region has successfully reduced the levels of almost all pollutants – apart from particulate matter – to a level below the EU's safety guidelines.

Carbon monoxide emissions have dropped by 41% since 1990, while dioxin levels have been cut by a massive 92% over the same period. Sulphur dioxide and ammonia – the pollutants responsible for acid rain – have fallen by 47% since 1990, while the emissions responsible for high concentrations of ozone in the atmosphere are down by 34%. The biggest improvement is in CFC emissions, which have dropped by about 75% since 1995.

But the region has failed to bring the level of particulate matter to below EU guidelines, the report said. The towns of Roeselare and Oostrozebeke, in West Flanders, exceeded the recommended annual limit of 40 micrograms per cubic metre. The EU recommends that the daily safety limit of 50 micrograms should not be exceeded more than 35 times in a year – but the limit has been breached at 25 of the 31 Flemish air quality testing stations in 2006. The safety limit was breached more times in 2006 than in the previous year, but a weather expert



argued that this was because of winter smog in January and a long dry spring period.

The report said that carbon dioxide emissions had increased, although the overall level of greenhouse gases had fallen. The main source of greenhouse gas emissions was car transport (21%), followed by industry (19%), central heating (17%) and power stations (16%).

Alan Hope

Man who assassinated Lahaut wanted to confess

The man who admitted to the TV station Canvas that he had assassinated a member of parliament 57 years ago was ready to be identified by the programme, until his son intervened and forced Canvas to cut identifying information, according to a report in *De Morgen* newspaper. The man is the only surviving member of an execution squad who gunned down deputy Julien Lahaut outside his home in Seraing in 1950, after Lahaut had cried out "Vive la République!" at the oath-taking ceremony during the accession of the late King Boudewijn. A documentary on the case, which includes the man admitting that he fired the fatal shots, will be broadcast on 17 December. The programme will also look at how clear signs pointing to top suspect François Goossens were ignored by investigators.

Military hospital loses blood transfusion credentials

The blood transfusion unit of the military hospital at Neder-over-Heembeek has been stripped of its official recognition following an investigation by the federal agency for drugs and health products, reveals the professional magazine for GPs *De Huisarts*. The hospital received a negative inspection report in September and failed to defend itself against the accusations in October. Details of the agency's complaints are not made public. The hospital's boss, Colonel Geert Laires said the hospital's blood standards were higher than the law required and promised official recognition would be restored before the end of the year.

Battle over new name for Flemish Radio Orchestra

Last week the Flemish Radio Orchestra (VRO) announced it would be changing its name to the Brussels Philharmonic-Vlaams Radio Orkest for domestic purposes, and Brussels Philharmonic-The Orchestra of Flanders for international publicity. But the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra already exists, having been set up in 2002 and based since then in the Théâtre St Michel in Etterbeek. The BPO has taken legal advice. "Two symphony orchestras in Brussels both with such similar names is undoubtedly going to cause confusion for the public, which we should be seeking to avoid," said orchestra manager Clare Roberts.

Woman who snatched baby from Hasselt hospital freed

A woman who snatched a newborn baby from the Virga Jesse hospital in Hasselt last week has been ordered to be admitted to a psychiatric institution. The woman, aged 42, pretended to be a nurse and took the baby, only three days old, from the mother to take it for a walk. She was found and the baby returned unscathed 45 minutes later. The hospital said it would consult with experts over security. "But we cannot turn the hospital into a prison," a spokesperson said. There have been four cases of babies being snatched in Belgium in the last 21 years. The oldest of them, in Tournai in 1986, remains unsolved.

Koen Vervaeke appointed Europe's first ambassador

Koen Vervaeke, 48, a Flemish-born diplomat, has been appointed as Europe's first full ambassador. Vervaeke will serve as an ambassador to the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on behalf of the European Union and the Council of Ministers. Vervaeke, an experienced Belgian diplomat, has headed the EU's Africa office on behalf of Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, for the past four years. He has extensive experience working in Africa, having served in the Belgian embassies in Tunis and Bujumbura. According to the EU press release: "This appointment reflects the closer ties between the European Union and Africa enshrined in the new partnership to be launched at the EU-Africa Summit. Africa is a strategic continental player and a vital international partner of the European Union."

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



5.9 million

Number of pigs in Flanders, according to the latest statistics. The number has dropped slightly from a peak of more than six million some years ago. There are also 28 million chickens in the region, 16,000 goats, 94,000 sheep and 1,500 ostriches.

€12,000

Stolen last weekend from the Golden Games casino on the Grote Markt in Ronse. The robbers, who were armed, escaped without a trace.

3,000

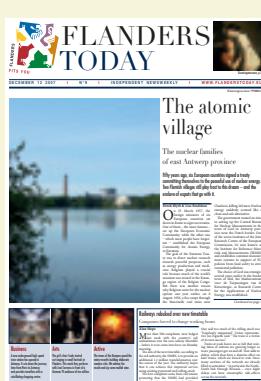
Demonstrators marched through central Brussels calling on governments to take more action to combat climate change. The march was organised by the Climate Coalition, which brings together 70 organisations committed to social and environmental issues. They want the industrialised nations to cut carbon emissions by 80% by 2050.

1,100

Number of Belgian soldiers serving abroad. Troops are involved in operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Lebanon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their families were invited last weekend to an open day in the army barracks at Peutie, near Vilvoorde.

506

Number of French-speaking municipal employees in Brussels in 2006 without a language certificate attesting they had achieved a minimum standard in Dutch. Technically, staff members who fail to obtain a certificate can be sacked, but Brussels Region minister-president Charles Picqué can avoid that if it would affect the "continuity of service provision". Municipal councils in Brussels are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit enough bilingual staff to meet legal requirements, according to a year-end report released last week by Picqué in the Brussels parliament. In 2005 only six contracts were scrapped because of the language rule.



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Antwerp high-speed station opens

Antwerp Centraal Station officially opened its new high-speed station on 6 December. The new station, constructed below the existing 19th-century terminal, is designed for high-speed Thalys trains running on the Paris to Amsterdam route. The new route takes trains through a new 3.8km long tunnel built under the city. The project means that international passengers are taken to Antwerp Centraal station, rather than having to change at the suburban station Antwerpen-Berchem. The direct link will save travelers some 15-25 minutes. The journey time from Paris to Antwerp is now down to 2hrs 7mins.

Belgian railways also launched their new timetable last week. But many commuters have complained that their journeys are now likely to be longer.

online

www.nmbs.be

Belgium holds onto AA+ rating

The credit ratings company Fitch Ratings said last week that it does not expect the political stalemate to put downwards pressure on Belgium's stable outlook or its AA+ rating. Fitch Ratings, which provides the world's credit markets with an independent assessment of creditworthiness, also said that it did not expect financial fallout from the proposed constitutional reforms. "A strong track record of achieving budget targets and the automatic reversion to 2007 expenditure ceilings mean that risks to the fiscal outlook from extensive legislative delays are limited," said Brian Coulton, managing director of Fitch's sovereign group, which provides credit ratings for countries.

The country went to the polls last June, but coalition talks have so far failed to produce a government. But Fitch noted that the machinery of government was continuing to operate in the short term, despite the lack of a new coalition.

Fitch does not expect any significant expenditure shocks to arise in the short term and predicts a general government deficit of 0.3% of GDP in 2007 and 0.4% in 2008, leading to a decline in the government debt/GDP ratio from 84.6% in 2007 to 81.8% in 2008.

The ratings firm accepted that Belgium might one day split in two but said that it was unlikely to happen over the medium-term. It added that the most likely scenario is that hard-fought negotiations will result in constitutional changes that further decentralise the Belgian state.

GOING NOWHERE

One in four drivers stuck in traffic

Derek Blyth

One-quarter of Belgian drivers gets stuck in at least one traffic jam on their commute to work, according to a recent report in the Flemish daily *Het Nieuwsblad*. The problem has now reached a critical level, with one employee in three looking for a different job to escape traffic delays. Drivers under 30 are the most frustrated road-users, with 40% saying that they want to change their jobs.

Many of those interviewed said that better public transport could

offer a solution to the problem of traffic congestion. A considerable number of drivers were willing to telework from home to avoid the daily grind. Heavy trucks were seen as a major cause of traffic jams, and many people said that lorries should be banned from the motorways during the rush hours or at least prevented from overtaking.

Road transport authorities are increasingly being called upon to find a solution to the daily misery. But experts are divided about what causes traffic to grind

to a halt. "There are two schools of thought in traffic jam studies," says Sven Maerivoet of the traffic study group Transport & Mobility Leuven. "One group argues that traffic jams happen spontaneously as a result of driving behaviour. The other group see the cause lying in the road network and traffic bottlenecks."

Last Wednesday traffic was brought to a standstill on the Brussels Ring when a Lithuanian truck loaded with pork hit a car on the Vilvoorde flyover. The accident, caused by a burst tyre, caused 500

litres of diesel fuel to spill across the southbound carriageway. Several cars skidded on the spillage, but no one was seriously injured.

Two days earlier the Flemish traffic centre recorded 200 kilometres of traffic jams across the region. The queues were longer than average because of heavy rain, which led to a series of minor accidents. But the situation was considerably worse in The Netherlands on the same day, when some 500 kilometres of traffic jams blocked a large part of the Dutch motorway system.



Randstad takes over Vedior



Belgium's biggest private employer just got bigger

Derek Blyth

The temp agency Randstad recently acquired rival agency Vedior for about €3.5 billion in a deal involving a mix of cash and shares. The takeover, which still has to be approved by shareholders, was widely reported in the Dutch press as both companies are based near Amsterdam. But the takeover also has an impact in Belgium, where the two companies are active in the ever-expanding temp market.

If the merger goes through, Randstad/Vedior will become the second largest temp agency in the world, ahead of the US-owned Manpower but below Switzerland's Adecco. With an extensive network of offices in Britain and France as well as Belgium and The Netherlands, the new group is likely to generate annual revenues worth €17.3 billion.

Randstad Belgium is already the biggest temp agency in the country, holding a 25% share of the market and employing some 30,000 temp workers in 17,000 local companies. It also has 1,450 employees on its own payroll, making it the biggest private employer in the country (exceeded only by Belgian railways and De Post).

The smaller Vedior Belgium is the fourth biggest temp agency in the country, good for 11% of the market. It employs about 11,000 temp workers, along with 600 staff of its own. Turnover in 2006 was €358 million against Randstad's €923 million.

The fusion will inevitably have an impact on Randstad's 141 and

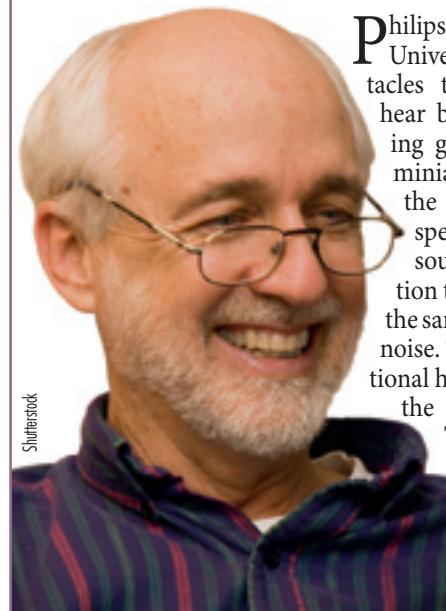
Vedior's 90 job centres, along with Randstad's 104 and Vedior's 50 in-house offices (which are attached to large companies). Analysts are already asking what will happen to this megolith, but those at the top remain tight-lipped about possible plans. "We have various options open to us," Jan Denys of Randstad told the Flemish daily *De Standaard*. "They range from selling off assets to setting up new temp agencies. But it's far too early to be speculating."

Yet staff will want to know what is going to happen to their jobs. A merger like this almost inevitably leads to branch closures. However,

Jan Denys believes that they can avoid any lay-offs. "The temp market is still growing, and there's always a rapid turnover of staff. That should prevent any shock."

The temp market has grown sharply in recent years, providing a broad range of employment opportunities. Randstad has made a name for itself as a dynamic agency with a positive policy on employing ethnic minorities. Vedior has created a niche in favouring older workers and young unskilled people. The merger could result in big changes in the global temp market.

Did I hear that correctly?



Philips Leuven and Delft Technical University have developed spectacles that enable the wearers to hear better. The *hoorbril*, or hearing glasses, incorporate a row of miniature microphones in each of the arms. The microphones are specially designed to amplify the sounds coming from the direction the person is looking, while at the same time reducing background noise. This is different from conventional hearing aids, which amplify all the sounds in the environment.

The glasses were launched on the Dutch market in spring 2006. They proved a success and are now on sale in 10 hearing-aid shops across Belgium.

BUSINESS FLASH



Cars

New car sales were again higher in November with a 4.8% increase to 36,351 vehicles registered according to industry federation Febiac. Total for the year so far topped the 500,000 mark and is less than 1% lower than for the same period in 2006. Volkswagen, with sales of 53,241 cars so far this year, is market leader with a share of 10.6% followed by Peugeot, Citroen and Opel.

Icos Vision Systems

Icos Vision Systems, the Leuven-based specialist in optical control systems, has won a €2.3 million contract from a Taiwan-based customer to supply photovoltaic inspection equipment. The deal follows an earlier €1.9 million contract from another Chinese company in October.

Sea Invest

Sea Invest, the Ghent-based petroleum products transport company, has acquired the French Petromarine ship-owning company, which operates 15 small tankers. The move follows the acquisition last month of another French firm in the business, Fouquet Sacop. Sea Invest is expected to invest some €500 million over the next six months to develop capacity at its terminals in Rouen, Bordeaux, Fos-sur-Mer, Antwerp and Ghent.

UPS

UPS (United Parcel Service), the US-based express delivery and courier company, is to transfer its supplies logistics division from Bienna in Switzerland to Brussels. The move will take place in May next year.

Jan De Nul

Antwerp-based dredging company Jan De Nul has won a contract worth some €100 million for its share in the development of Port Botany, on Australia's east coast close to Sydney.

Jo Cornu

Jo Cornu, the former deputy general manager of Alcatel, is to become the new CEO of the ailing Antwerp-based Agfa-Gevaert medical imaging equipment company.

KBC

KBC Asset Management, an affiliate of Flanders' leading financial institution, has acquired 45% of the Taiwan Sunrises Asset Management company in partnership with Concord Securities.

Vandemoortele

Ghent-based food products manufacturer Vandemoortele is to build a new €25 million bakery near Arras, in northern France, to produce the famed French baguettes and deep-frozen bread for export to the Benelux countries and the UK. The new unit, which will produce 40,000 tonnes a year, is expected to begin production in early 2009. Vandemoortele already operates two similar plants in northern France.

Aberdeen

Aberdeen, the Scottish property fund, has acquired the Zilverpand shopping centre in Bruges. The complex, located close to the cathedral, includes 25 shops and boutiques.

Topgen

Topgen, the Brussels-based producer of generic pharmaceutical specialties, has been taken over by the Canadian Apotex.

Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines wants to join one of the three main airline alliances. The airline hopes to begin negotiations in the spring with One World, Skyteam or Star Alliance. Etienne Davignon, CEO of Brussels Airlines, announced the idea last week. He says that the airline, which merged last March with Virgin Express, needs to find a partner to compete in the global market. A working group is now investigating the options.

Dogging Flanders

Millions of Japanese are obsessed with Antwerp – all because of one little British novel



East meets West by way of Flanders: The new documentary *Patrasche: A Dog of Flanders* uses clever multi-media images to explore a curious and touching phenomenon



Turning Japanese: filmmakers An van. Dienderen and Didier Volckaert

Lisa Bradshaw

Some 25 years ago, Jan Corteel of the Antwerp tourist office was approached by a Japanese traveller who asked: "Have you ever heard of 'A Dog of Flanders'?" Corteel, who prided himself on knowing everything there was to know about Antwerp province, questioned the tourist further. After hearing the Japanese man out, "I was dumbfounded," he says.

This is a common feeling among the people featured in the new documentary, *Patrasche: A Dog of Flanders*. Through interviews here and in Japan, along with film footage, biographical information and a delightful use of miniature toys, the film tells the strange and fascinating story of a cross-cultural

phenomenon largely unknown in Flanders.

In 1874, British author Louise de La Ramée, under the pen name Ouida, published a sentimental short novel called *A Dog of Flanders*. Set in "a small village near Antwerp", it tells the story of a boy named Nello who saves a big dog that has collapsed after being forced to pull a heavy cart by its cruel owner. He and the dog, Patrasche, become inseparable as they work for Nello's kind old grandfather selling wares. Nello is a budding artist, and his dream is to see the Rubens masterpieces in Antwerp Cathedral – but he cannot afford the entrance fee. Endless tragedies strike and, eventually – freezing, alone and penniless in a snowy Flemish winter

– Nello and Patrasche die in the cathedral in front of Rubens' *The Descent from the Cross*.

The book was published in England and the US, and a Japanese businessman sent it to his homeland to be published there. So began a powerful and unparalleled obsession with Flanders by an outside culture.

The book became a bestseller and a literary classic in Japan – where it continues to be taught in high schools. In 1975, a Japanese studio produced a year-long animated series, which aired every Sunday night. More than 30 million Japanese tuned in for the harrowing final episode. You'd be hard pressed to find a Japanese person who hasn't heard of *A Dog of Flanders*. And you'd be just as hard pressed to find a Flemish person who has.

This is what so interested the Flemish artists and filmmakers Didier Volckaert and An van. Dienderen. He had grown up seeing Japanese anime on French TV, and she has a PhD in anthropology. Together they became fascinated by the cultural implications of the *Dog of Flanders* phenomenon. "I'm very interested in topics like migration, colonisation and cultural identity," van. Dienderen tells me from the couple's home in Ghent. "In terms of documentaries, I really appreciate the fact that we can link urban legends or anecdotes to these larger issues." The more they delved into the story, the more links they found between disparate peoples

and countries. Van. Dienderen likens it to opening different drawers in a big "stuffed cupboard" and finding more and more pieces of the same story. "There are so many funny and weird aspects to it," she says.

It does indeed get weirder. Japanese tourists flock to Antwerp Cathedral and burst into tears in front of Rubens painting where Nello and Patrasche died. They also have a hard time understanding why Flanders doesn't resemble the land in their 1975 animation film and why there is no reference to *A Dog of Flanders* in Antwerp. By contrast, the biggest metro station in Tokyo, where 2.8 million people pass by every day, houses a shop owned by the animation company that made the Japanese film. "Half of it is devoted to *Dog of Flanders*," says van. Dienderen. "They sell toys, cookies, gum, pencils – everything." For Japanese tourists in Flanders, "it's really so disappointing," she explains. "They are moved by being in the cathedral, but then there is nothing that goes beyond that."

Well, there are a couple of things, actually, as the films shows – though they have only served to confuse the Japanese. After some research, Corteel, who still works for the Antwerp tourist office, decided that the original book *A Dog of Flanders* was probably set in Hoboken. In the mid 1980s, the city began producing Nello and Patrasche chocolates and put up a statue in the middle of a busy street. Willy Vandersteen, the famous creator of the *Suske en Wiske* cartoon strip, devoted an entire album to the story.

The Japanese came to Hoboken. They immediately hated the statue. "He looks so unhappy, so thin and miserable," says Naoko Miyashita, who runs the Belgian tourist office in Tokyo. "In the cartoon, Nello always had a round, happy face." They were also offended by the Japanese stereotypes in Vandersteen's comic. "Once again, we had fallen in their estimation," sighs Corteel.

The documentary is full of such wonderful and often hilarious anecdotes, but it's the exploration of images and legend that make the film so intensely interesting. The Flemish people cannot get the myth-building around *A Dog of Flanders* right because the story really has nothing at all to do with Flanders.

Americans have made five film versions of *A Dog of Flanders*. All but one changed the ending to a happier one for Nello and Patrasche. The Japanese version, meanwhile, paints a picture of Flanders that much more resembles The Netherlands – cartoon windmills, tulips and wooden shoes fill the screen. "The Americans transform the ending and

make it very religious. It says more about America than it does about Flanders," explains van. Dienderen. "With the Japanese, it's the same. They created 52 episodes from this tiny book of 65 pages, and it's a world that is so Japanese! Ninety-nine percent of their film is not real; they are imaginary images of Flemish people."

The same is true for the original book. Ouida only spent a day in Antwerp but certainly formed a clear opinion: "Flanders is not a lovely land, and around the burgh of Rubens it is perhaps least lovely of all," she writes. The author was an animal rights activist and was shocked to find dogs working – pulling carts for their human masters. "He had been born to no other heritage than those of pain and toil," she writes about the dog Patrasche. "And why not? It was a Christian country, and Patrasche was but a dog." Again, notes van. Dienderen, "it says more about the British view of Flemish people than about Flemish people at that time."

But it's the Japanese that really capture the imagination in the documentary. "They see many values in the story that we don't identify with," says van. Dienderen. "For them, it's more important how you die than how you achieve a goal. Nello is dying in a very noble way with a smile on his face." This resembles the construction of the hero myth in Japan, as evidenced by revealing interviews. "Winning isn't the only important thing in life," says Miyashita. "Sometimes you should lose."

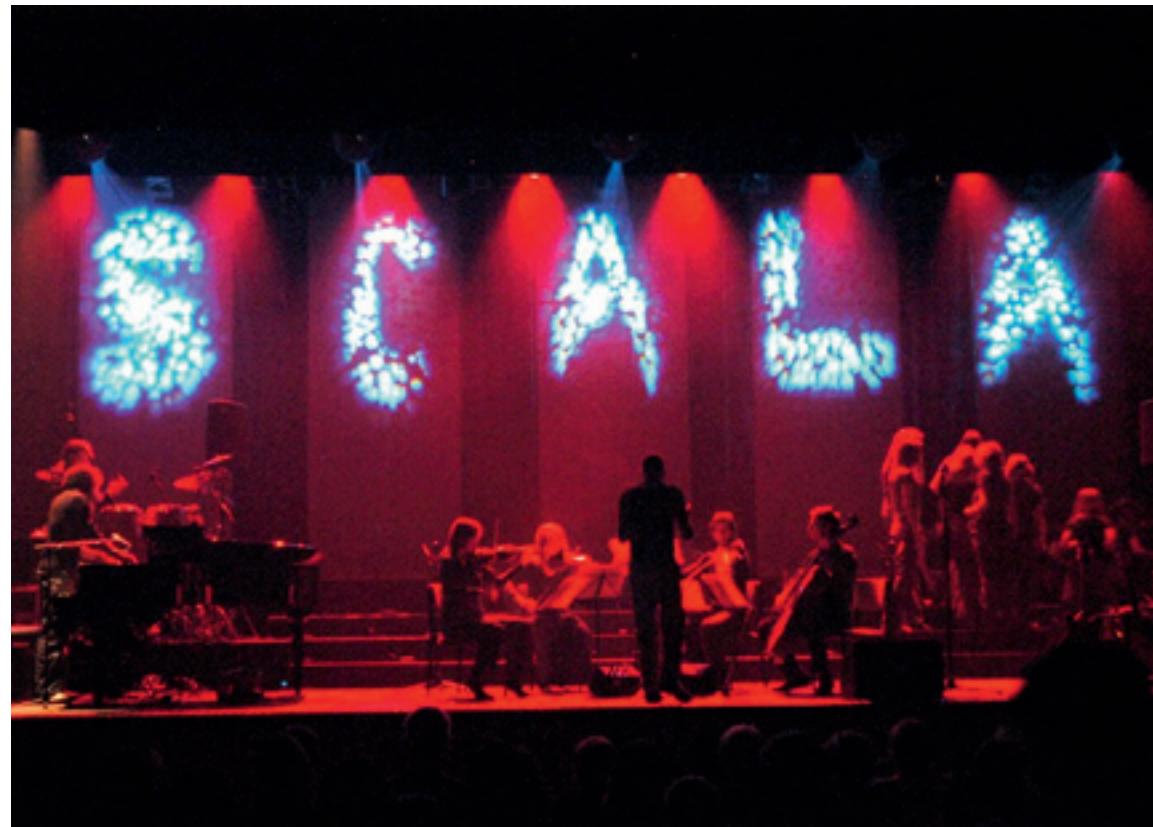
Patrasche: A Dog of Flanders plays this month in Antwerp, and a companion exhibition is on show at UGC Antwerp until 7 January. The filmmakers are planning a new Dutch translation of the novel. (The Dutch translations from the 1980s are out of print.) But they hope that Antwerp will create something more permanent to represent *A Dog of Flanders*. "There is resistance towards this book and towards meeting the expectations of others," says van. Dienderen. "But we're talking about millions and millions of people who know this story about Flanders. There should be some respect given to the Japanese concerning their depth of feelings about this story."

Patrasche: A Dog of Flanders premieres at 20.00 on 11 December in UGC Antwerp and then gets eight screenings inside Antwerp Cathedral until 6 January. The film is in Dutch, English and Japanese with Dutch subtitles. In February, it will show in Brussels' Beurschouwburg as part of the venue's DocHouse series.

online

www.dogofflanders.be

BROADCAST



Scala in Leipzig

In 1996 Flemish pianists Stijn and Steven Kolacny assembled a small choir of young women in Aarschot to try to create an alternative classical sound. Eleven years on, Scala has grown to 200 young women aged 16 to 26 and the audience is now in the tens of millions.

The choir is due to perform on 13 December on the German ARD TV chain as part of the José Carreras Gala Concert. They will sing a songs from their new album *One-Winged Angel* and accompany Carreras in another song.

It's a long way from their beginnings when Scala was performing in small-scale classical choir contests across Flanders. After scooping the European Youth Festival first prize in Neerpelt and topping the Hamamatsu World Youth Choir Festival in Japan, Scala's productions gradually became slicker, and their repertoire grew to include one-of-a-kind pop and rock covers.

The big breakthrough came in 2002 with the release of their first CD, *Scala on the Rocks*. The Scala sound hit the right note with

Flemish radio stations such as StuBru and TMF, and they started to be invited to big festivals like Dranouter Folk and Lowlands in the Netherlands. The concert on 13 December is the biggest yet, with an expected audience of ten million. Not bad for a girl's choir from Flemish Brabant.

The show is being broadcast live on 13 December from the Leipzig Messehalle beginning at 20.15.

online

www.kolacny.com

FILM FREAK

Woody Allen is coming to town



Manhattan in Brussels: Woody Allen and the New Orleans Jazz Band play this month

Next week is the one film and jazz fans have been waiting for: Woody Allen comes to Brussels. His new film, *Cassandra's Dream*, premieres at Bozar on 20 December, and, the following night, the inimitable New York director and player of the clarinet appears at the venue with his New Orleans Jazz Band. The concert has been sold out for months, but you can still get tickets to the film, the third in a row Allen has set in London.

Cassandra's Dream, which opens wide in Belgium on 26 December, stars Colin Farrell and Ewan McGregor as working-class brothers with cash-flow problems. Farrell has gambled his savings away, and McGregor wants to take advantage of a California real estate deal to get out of his family's restaurant business. Their uncle Howard (a wonderful Tom Wilkinson), a shady businessman, offers them a job that will solve their financial problems but introduce ethical ones: how far are they willing to go save themselves?

The black comedy is a little darker than most of Allen's previous efforts but maintains the character studies that have made him famous. You'll read reviews on both sides of the Allen debate on this one: the always-popular "it's not up to his previous work" vs "the performances make it worth every minute". You probably won't hear any criticism of his clarinet, though.

Lisa Bradshaw

CLASSICAL NOTES

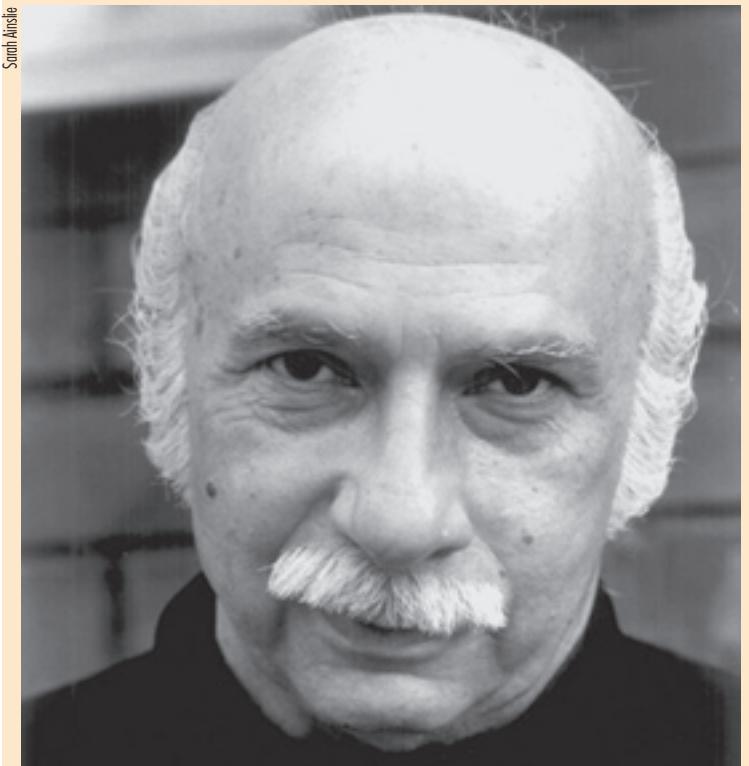
For the living

Belgium finally hears the work of the brilliant Russian composer living in our midst

Few Antwerpers suspect that one of the most gifted and idiosyncratic composers to have emerged from the former Soviet Union is living among them. Giya Kancheli, a 72-year-old native of Tbilisi, Georgia, made the city his home in 1995 when he was invited by the Royal Flemish Philharmonic to be composer in residence. That was only for one year, but he ended up staying, enjoying the friendly, small-city atmosphere and taking frequent trips back home.

"I feel comfortable here," he tells me, with his wife Lula acting as interpreter (after 12 years in Belgium, Kancheli still only understands Georgian and Russian). "In terms of size and pace of life, Antwerp is not unlike Tbilisi."

Often compared to other former Eastern-bloc composers (such as Arvo Pärt, Henryk Gorecki and Sofia Gubaidulina) for the sophisticated lyricism and strong spiritual element of his music, Kancheli has been described by Time magazine as "the most important Soviet composer since the death of Shostakovich". While still living in Georgia, he penned an opera (*Music for the Living*) and seven symphonies, worked as music director for a theatre and composed soundtracks for dozens of Russian films. Fleeing the political unrest that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, he moved to Berlin before landing in Antwerp.



Finally being heard in Belgium: composer Giya Kancheli

If not exactly glib, Kancheli comes across as cheerful and content. His music couldn't be more different: described by Russian composer Rodion Shchedrin as a "smouldering Vesuvius" and bearing gloomy titles such as *Lament*, *And Farewell goes out Sighing* and *Life Without Christmas*, it's all haunting, plaintive sounds interspersed with anguished outbursts and interminable silences. ("I always try to make silence audible" he tells me.) Unnerving at times, Kancheli's work can also be astonishingly beautiful. "Beauty," he reflects, "is not something I aim for when composing. What is beautiful to some might sound very ugly to others. I just want my works to be performed and heard."

Sadly, performances of his work are few and far between these days, especially in his country of adoption where he is bizarrely neglected. The more reason not to miss the 15 December concert at Brussels' Bozar, when Kancheli's champion and friend, Latvian violinist Gidon Kremer, will play a piece for violin and orchestra that Kancheli wrote for the 75th birthday of the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Kremer will be backed by Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest under conductor Mariss Jansons.

The title of the piece, characteristically, is *Lonesome*.

"Great musicians and artists are always lonely," says Kancheli, although he takes care to add that "Rostropovich was one of the happiest people" he knew. Kremer premiered the work in London in 2002, but this concert will be the first opportunity for us in Belgium to hear it. And about time, too.

Marie Dumont

December 15, 20.00, Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels. Tickets from 02.507.82.00 or www.bozar.be

And lo, a nativity was born

Deep in Antwerp and Limburg provinces, Christmas is looming



Monique Philips

In the Kempen, the sandy area in Antwerp and Limburg provinces, pine trees grow all year round, and people are tough as nails. They like to prove their resourcefulness by making festivities this time of year extra memorable.

In the Kempen, they take Christmas very seriously. Seasonal plays are written and staged in Zoersel, while more traditional stories like *Where the Star Stopped* (1924) by Felix Timmermans, local hero in Lier, are being retold in a festively-decorated barn in Lille. But perhaps most importantly, this weekend sees the opening of the area's traditional life-size nativities – feverishly built over the past few weeks by towns, parishes and individual families, often with home-grown materials. They've chopped statues out of wood or shaped them out of straw, tested recipes for *Glühwein* in cold living rooms and tamed the curls on their sheep – who stamp alongside other livestock in the nativity scenes. (Live oxen are too rare a commodity, as they take more time and space to beef up than bulls.)

Competitions are held between enthusiastic street committees or neighbouring villages to decide whose stable is the most beautiful. Usually it's only an excuse to bond with neighbours at the *Glühwein* stand – vandalising rival mangers is a thing of the past. Though it does seem to be a perfect time to settle some old scores: last year in

Bolder, near Riemst, a baby Jesus was thrown up onto the roof of its Bethlehem stable.

Seasonal goodwill prevails in Kessel Station, which every year turns into a real Christmas village. You can stroll past no less than 40 very diverse DIY nativities. "Everybody is free to build his stable as he pleases: miniatures or life-size, everything goes," says Johan Verhoeven, one of the village organisers. "We never know what to expect – although after 18 years there are some regulars like the local bee-keeper's beehive-shaped nativity. There have been nativities in an aquarium, a wine barrel and a wheelbarrow."

Every year hundreds of people join Kessel's traditional guided walking tour on Boxing Day evening. The walk begins at the Onze Lieve Vrouw church just down the street from the train station, which has maps available so you can also do the walk on your own. "Our record for the guided walk was 1,000 people," says Verhoeven, "but last year only 350 joined in, as Christmas Walks are all the rage now."

Some towns organise special guided coach tours, driving you past all their fancifully illuminated streets and stables. The town of Geel hosts them on 15, 16 and 18 December starting at the 17.00 at the tourist centre. Drinks are served on the bus, and a nice *koffietafel* awaits those who sit out the three-hour drive, in an historic old mill. A *koffietafel* isn't a coffee table,

but a life-restoring coffee, pie and sandwich spread (also offered after a funeral in Flanders). Or chomp down free pancakes in Vlimmeringen, where another seasonal walk leads you past the three hamlets of Beerse. Children can hitch a lift in the covered wagon.

This year's Christmas fever is a bit overshadowed by a public announcement from Belgische Landelijke Inspectiedienst Dierenwelzijn (BLID), Belgium's animal welfare inspection agency. *Levende kerststallen*, or "living nativities", will be checked. Depressed sheep or donkeys with untrimmed hoofs will be reported to the police if

necessary. Stables and animals were set on fire by hooligans in The Netherlands last year, so Flanders is taking extra precautions. "We would like to see that the animals get some privacy from midnight onwards, so a stable door is compulsory," says Dirk Blanchart of BLID. "And the Christmas muzak should be restricted to a few hours a day. Donkeys and sheep get crazy listening to that 'jingle-jangle' for days on end. We're also advocates of animals taking turns. Enclosing the same animals on a few square metres for three weeks is sheer torture."

BLID is demanding the intro-

duction of an animal-friendly label for live nativities. The city council of Antwerp took the lead in banning all live animals in nativities in the city and surrounding districts. So you won't find any sheep under the Norwegian pine tree on the Grote Markt anymore. In Antwerp, though, people are more anxious about the weather than about the animals: New Year's Eve fireworks had to be cancelled last year due to a storm. As is traditional, all the ships in the port tooted their foghorns at midnight but the "oohs" and "aahs" were postponed until 29 June, when the fireworks were finally set off. In Geel, on the other hand, they might have welcomed a nice gale, as the theme of their Christmas Market and street theatre last weekend was *Mary Poppins*.

Speaking of theatre, kids from the Steiner schools in Flanders put on old-fashioned nativity plays in Middle Dutch on the last evening before the Christmas break. Don't worry if you don't understand the language, most Flemish don't either.

Moving into next month, on the twelfth day of Christmas, the Three Kings can be added in the nativities, and in some areas people eat sausage rolls and apple cakes on what is called *Verloren Maandag* (Lost Monday), the first Monday after Epiphany. After the feast of Epiphany, however, all holly, mistletoe and ivy should be removed from your house. And at the end of December or in early January, burning Christmas trees has become a great way for Flemish communities to bond: gathered around bonfires, chasing out the darkness and celebrating the return of the light.

online

www.geel.be
www.toerismebeerse.be
www.turnhout.be/toerisme
www.antwerpse Kempen.be



Bright lights, big city

Forty Antwerp artists have been asked to produce their own personal versions of floating light balloons. The results – 40 light sculptures each 1.5 metres in diameter – are floating above De Coninckplein until 6 January. There's a small café to keep warm and show "the making of" video. In February, the balloons will be sold at an auction.

online

www.kunstlicht.net

Antwerp's small Museum Mayer van den Bergh, which accommodates the famous "Dulle Griet" painting by Pieter Brueghel, does special holiday tours on 23 and 27 December and on 5 January at 10.00. "Christmas at Henriëtte's" celebrates Henriëtte Mayer van den Bergh, the mother of the famous art collector, who founded the museum at Christmas in 1904 and called it the House of the Three Sages. With its wonderful collection of rich tapestries, paintings and shiny glasswork, it has a genuine Christmas atmosphere. Reserve for the tour in advance on 03.203.95.85.

online

www.museum.antwerpen.be

In good spirits

Flanders launches its first ever whisky

Steven Tate

For centuries, the Scots and Irish ruled whisky (or whiskey, if you prefer), while vodka was where Russia and Poland excelled. But booze boundaries have been banished: there are over 6,000 whiskies worldwide, distilled in countries as unlikely as Japan, India, Thailand and France. And a new brand of vodka seems to appear on the planet somewhere every week; Flanders got into the vodka game six years ago with their Van Hoo spirit. And, last month, the very first Flemish whisky, Goldlys, was launched on the market.

just six regions of the world: the Benelux, northern France, the Quebec province of Canada and, interestingly enough, Argentina," says Filliers. But whisky is a worldwide endeavour. Still, he doesn't see Filliers competing with something on the scale of Johnnie Walker, the world's leading whisky, anytime soon. Five bottles of Johnnie Walker are consumed every second, totalling 150 million bottles sold every year. Filliers is producing a very modest 150,000 bottles of its three-year-old variety and 15,000 of its 10-year-old Owner's Reserve.

"We are not the size of the larg-

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Most members of the society express a penchant for the Scottish variety of whisky, although those who prefer a lighter taste go for Irish whiskies. Laphroaig, from the island of Islay off the west coast of Scotland, is a single malt that you either love or hate, creating amusing arguments amongst society members. Whisky authority and events organiser Fernand Dacquin is a fan, while Bockstaele cringes at the mention of its name. Search it online and descriptions of its taste include "bottled smoke" and "seaweed".

Down the hatch

At the year-end dinner of the Flemish Malt Whisky Society, men were outfitted in kilts, while women opted for more continental dress. Spirits were high while everyone feasted on North Sea prawn soup, sole, salmon, duck breast and Granny Smith apple sorbet. Six different whiskies were sampled over this leisurely Sunday afternoon, with a bit of bread eaten to clear the palate between different brands.

Everyone there felt that Goldlys, the new and first-ever Flemish whiskey, added something distinct to the range of whiskies. The younger version is smooth, with hints of spice, vanilla, dark chocolate and apple. The older Owner's Reserve is spicier and more full-bodied. "Banana, pepper, salt, coconut, chocolate, pear," lists Dacquin. "There are supposedly 25 different flavours that can be tasted in a single whisky, 60 to 70% of which comes from the wood it's aged in. I'm pretty good, and I normally arrive at about seven to 10 flavours."

Find membership details and a calendar of events for the Flemish Malt Whisky Society at www.fmw.be.



Whisky might seem a departure from tradition in Flanders, where jenever is the staple spirit. "But whisky and jenever can both contain unmalted barley and other grains that are the same," says Bernard Filliers. His family has been producing jenever since 1881, today pumping out 1.6 million litres of the juniper-flavoured liquid annually, making them the country's top producer.

"Someone visited our facilities a few years back, and remarked on how some of the jenever we had aging tasted very similar to whisky," says Filliers. Inspired, the Deinze-based Filliers family began developing what would become Goldlys.

Jenever is a close cousin to gin, with juniper added for flavouring. Despite similar ingredients, jenever is a young alcohol, while whisky is aged. A whisky's taste depends on the choice of water, barley, yeast, still and the kind of barrel used for aging, as well as climate changes during the aging process. The complexities involved in creating a new whisky would make it a challenge for most companies.

But the foray offered Filliers a chance to move beyond jenever's limited geographical market. "Jenever is mostly consumed in

er distillers, nor do we want to be," Bernard says. Filliers is the only family-owned and operated jenever maker in Belgium. Headquartered in East Flanders, "we pride ourselves on the fact that the name on the front door of the business is the same name as the people running it. In fact, my cousin Jan and I laugh that we are now aging and storing whisky that our children will end up selling," says Bernard.

Goldlys is literally in a class by itself, thanks to the process Filliers created for its production. Historically, there were two types of whisky: malt and blended. Blended makes up 95% of whisky sold and is made from malted and unmalted barley and other grains and distilled in a column or patent still. Malt whisky uses only malted barley and is distilled in a pot still. Filliers took elements from both processes to create a new kind of whisky: "Double Still". Aged in the Flanders village of Bachte-Maria-Leerne, both the three-year-old and the Owner's Reserve have an alcohol content of 40%.

Though it may not have a whisky tradition, Flanders has always loved this liquor – as evidenced by the Flemish Malt Whisky Society, an 80-strong group that

online
www.filliers.be

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Classical & new music**Brussels**

Astoria Hôtel
Koningstraat 103; 0900.28.877
DEC 16 11.00 *Les Anonymes du XXième siècle* with Marie-Noëlle de Callatay, soprano: Schubert, Haydn, Williams, Micha

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
DEC 12 20.00 Cecilia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano: Garcia, Persiani, Mendelssohn, Rossini, Donizetti, Balfe, Hummel, Bériot, Bellini **DEC 13** 20.00 Il Gardellino ensemble: Vivaldi, Tartini, Galuppi **DEC 14** 20.00 & **16** 15.00 Belgian National Orchestra conducted by Walter Weller with Ricarda Merbeth, soprano: Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* op 40 **DEC 15** 20.00 Koninklijk Concertgebouw orchestra conducted by Mariss Jansons, with Gidon Kremer, violin: Kancheli, Bartok, Hindemith, Stravinsky **DEC 16** 11.00 Aviv Quartet: string quartets by Mozart, Shostakovich 20.00 Carols for Christmas: Bruocella Symphony Orchestra Orchestra and International Choir and children's choirs

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
DEC 13 & 19 20.00 *La Monnaie* Choirs, conducted by Piers Maxim: Respighi's *Lauda per la natività del Signore*, Saint-Saëns's *Christmas Oratorio* (Christmas concert)

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
DEC 13 20.00 Boris Berezovsky and Plamena Mangova, piano; Marie Hallynck, cello; Tatiana Melnichenko, soprano: Chopin, Brahms, Rachmaninov (charity concert) **DEC 14** 12.30 Milos Popovic, piano: Schumann 15.00 Vlaams Radio Orkest, conducted by Jan Stulen: Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* **DEC 15-16** Vlaams Radio Orkest, conducted by Jan Stulen: Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*

Kapel van de Miniemens

Miniemensstraat 62; 02.507.82.00, www.miniemens.net
DEC 14 20.00 Ensemble Graindelavoix, conducted by Björn Schmelzer: Binchois, Ockeghem **DEC 16** 10.30 Chapelle des Minimes Orchestra, conducted by Julius Stenzel: Bach

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Depicting the brief and ill-fated encounter between a Carthaginian queen and a Trojan hero on his way to found Rome, Purcell's only through-sung opera can be heard in two separate productions this month. One, by German choreographer Sasha Waltz, is a crowded affair featuring singers, dancers and a giant swimming pool; the other, by Fleming Jan Decorte, is more minimalist. The magnificent score will be performed, respectively, by the Akademie für alte Musik Berlin and new Belgian ensemble B'Rock under Briton Richard Egarr.

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
DEC 12 12.40-13.30 Olivier De Spiegeleir, piano: Handel, D Scarlatti, Leduc
DEC 19 12.40-13.30 Christmas concert: Werner Van Mechelen, baritone; Jozef de Beenhouwer, piano: Schubert's *Winterreise*

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00
DEC 16 15.30 Gala concert marking the Portuguese presidency of the EU with composer Luis Cipriano, sopranos Ana Camelia Stefanescu and Teodora Gheorghiu and the Belgian Piano and Percussion Quartet: Cipriano, Ravel, Dikovic, Brediceanu, Rahbee
DEC 17 20.00 Piotr Anderszewski, piano: Bach, Szymanowski, Schumann
DEC 18 20.00 *Áнима Eterna* with Jos van Immerseel, conductor and fortepiano: Beethoven

Sint-Lambertus en Heilige Hartkerk
Sint-Lambertusplein; 02.428.12.50
DEC 16 16.00 Fusion with Brussels Music Academy children's choir, European Christmas carols performed on traditional folk instruments (charity concert)

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
DEC 16 15.00 *The Caecilia-Concert*: 17th-century instrumental music by Buxtehude, Weckmann, Theile

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Concerts at 20.00
DEC 14 Artis Quartet Vienna: Pleyel, Shostakovich, Schubert
DEC 15 Freiburger Baroque Orchestra, conducted by Masaaki Suzuki: Bach's Magnificat, Cantata BWV 63, Cantata BWV 122
DEC 19 Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin and Rias Kammerchor, conducted by Hans-Christoph Rademann: Bach's Christmas Oratorio

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
DEC 20 20.00 Claire Chevalier, Erard piano; Joris Verdin, Mustel harmonium: Franck, Lefébure-Wély, Saint-Saëns, Guilmant, Widor
Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk
Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerkhof Zuid; 050.34.53.14
DEC 13 15.00 Wellesley House School Choir: Berlioz, Rutter, Christmas carols

Turnhout

De Warande
Warandestraat 42; 014.41.69.91
DEC 13 20.15 Liège Philharmonic, conducted by Kirill Karabits, with Valery Sokolov, violin: Biarent's symphonic poem *Tremor*, Saint-Saëns' violin concerto No 3, Dvorak's Symphony No 8

Opera**Brussels**

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Until DEC 23 *Werther* by Massenet conducted by Kazushi Ono, with Andrew Richards, tenor; Ludovic Tézier, baritone; Sophie Koch and Jennifer Larmore, mezzos

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
Until DEC 23 *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Mozart, conducted by Andreas Sperling, with Paolo Szot and Tuomas Pursio, baritones; Maria Bengtsson and Ainhoa Garmendia, sopranos

Jazz & blues

Brussels
Archiduc
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52
DEC 16 17.00 Bass n Bass

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
DEC 13 21.30 Tord Gustavsen Trio

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
DEC 12 20.30 *Cordes and Vibrations*
DEC 19 20.30 *Collapse*

Le Grain d'Orge
Waversesteenweg 142; 02.511.26.47
DEC 14 21.30 *Classic & Troubles*

Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
DEC 12 22.00 *Caribe Con K*, salsa
DEC 13 21.00 *The Singer's Night* **DEC 14-15** 22.00 *Da Romeo Band & Guests*
DEC 17 22.00 *Master Session* **DEC 18** 22.00 *Da Romeo Band* **DEC 19** 22.00 Chamaquindo, salsa **DEC 20** 22.00 Ben Prischis Trio

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
DEC 12 One Trick Po **DEC 14** The JeggPap Jazz Band **DEC 15** Amina Figarova **DEC 18** Thomas Champagne Trio **DEC 19** Ancka Parghel-Emy Dragoi, Romania (Europalia.europa) **DEC 20-21** Katalina Segura & Strings

Borgerhout

Rataplan
Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
DEC 13 20.30 aRTET

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul**Brussels**

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
Concerts at 20.00:
DEC 12-13 *The Go Find + Hooverphonic* **DEC 14** *Admiral Freebee*
DEC 16 *Fait d'Anvers + Fixkes* **DEC 17** *Praga Khan*

Belle Vue Café
Hengouwenkaai 43; 02.410.19.35, www.vkconcerts.be
DEC 13 21.30 *Quit Your Dayjob*
DEC 14 20.00 *Cupp Cave + Dan Deacon*

Fuse
Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
DEC 15 23.00 *Andrew Weatherall + Dj Pierre*

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
DEC 13 20.00 *Laibach. Scout Niblett. Startin' Pop: San Remo, Belleclose, Sevenpm, Virgil, The Vogues* **DEC 14** 20.00 *Startin' Pop: 14 Weeks, Jakob*

Maersk, Six is Down, Championship Manager **DEC 15** 19.30 *Finale Concours Circuit Rock Dur 2007: Amadeus + Black Bleeding + Evergrey + Kill My Doll + Suicide of Demons + The Chargers* **DEC 20** 20.00 *Freddy Loco and The Gordo's Ska Band + New York Ska Ensemble*

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34
DEC 13 20.00 *The Ex & Getatchew Mekuria and friends + Kill*
DEC 15 21.00 *Dj Surgeon + MMM + Omen Jot's + Rustie + The Hermutt Lobby + Dj Foton*

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
DEC 12 20.00 *The Weakerthans + House & Parish*
DEC 19 20.00 *Divine Heresy*

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
DEC 13 20.00 *50 Cent*
DEC 18 20.00 *IAM*

Antwerp

Sportpaleis
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
DEC 12 20.30 *Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band*
Until DEC 29 *Clouseau*

Borgerhout

Hof Ter Lo
Noorderingel 30; 03.543.90.30
DEC 13 20.15 *The Human League*

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
DEC 14 20.00 *Athlete*

World, folk

Brussels
Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
DEC 15 20.00 *Tom Russell*

Stadsschouwburg

Vlaardingstraat 29; 050.44.30.60
DEC 14 20.00 *Shantala Shivalingappa*, traditional Indian dance

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
DEC 12-15 Royal Ballet of Flanders in *Forsythe-Soto-Moles-Elo: Hermann Schmeyer*, choreographed by William Forsythe, with music by Thom Willems and new works by Cayetano Soto, Matteo Moles and Jorma Elo

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28
DEC 20-22 20.00 *Jan Lauwers & Needcompany* in *Le Bazar du homard*, theatre/dance (in Dutch, English and French)

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
DEC 20 20.30 *Damaged Goods & Mumbling Fish in Maybe Forever* by and with Meg Stuart and Philipp Gehmacher

Theatre**Brussels**

Cultural Centre of Woluwe-Saint-Pierre
Charles Thielemanslaan 93; 02.507.82.00, www.ticketclic.be
DEC 20-23 *Tom Sawyer*, adapted from Mark Twain's work by David Miller, musical comedy (in English)

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.12
DEC 15-23 *Missie* by David Van Reybrouck, staged by Raven Ruell with Bruno Vandendriessche (in Dutch with English and French surtitles)

Kaaitheteaterstudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59
DEC 13-20 20.30 *Tristero* in AN, based on *Attempts on her Life* by Martin Crimp (in Dutch)

Stadsschouwburg
Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39
Until DEC 15 20.00 Cyrano de Bergerac staged by Bruno Van Heystraeten (in Dutch)

Leuven
Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
DEC 17-18 20.30 Ontroerend Goed & Monk in Vrede op aarde aan alle mensen van goede wil (in Dutch)
DEC 18-19 20.30 Action Malaise in Tristesse (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Brussels

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

Box Gallery
Maliestraat 88; 02.537.95.55
Until DEC 22 Photographs of water reflections by Dalia Nosratabadi

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
Until JAN 6 Melting Ice, group show on the theme of global warming.
Until JAN 20 The Grand Atelier: Pathways of Art in Europe, 350 paintings, drawings, sculptures, manuscripts, books, prints, furniture and objects dating from the 5th to the 18th centuries

Clockarium Museum
Reyerslaan 163; 02.732.08.28
Until JAN 28 Steen-Goed: From Art Nouveau to Art Deco, with ceramics by Edgard Aubry and Roger Guérin

Costume and Lace Museum
Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until JAN 27 Gerald Watelet, retrospective of work by the Belgian fashion designer

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 (part of Europaia)

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

deBuren
Leopoldstraat 6, www.deburen.be
Until FEB 8 90dagenrotterdam: Exhibition of photographer Friederike von Rauch's work in Brussels and Rotterdam

Espace Parallèle (in Anciennes écuries de l'Abbaye)
Stallingen Roodkloosterstr 7a; 02.675.27.23
Until DEC 16 Abstraction textile, textiles with geometric patterns from the Kuba, Mbuti, Ngongo and Shoowa peoples of the Congo

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

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
Alsembergsesteenweg 142; 02.534.33.54
Until JAN 31 People in Motion by Michel Dusariez

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until JAN 9 Medieval and Cosmic Creatures, prints by Laurence Gonry. Textiles and accessories by Cécile Bertrand and artists' books by Eva Evrard
DEC 14-JAN 12 National Parks, by German nature photographer Norbert Rosing

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

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimstraat 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

Koekelberg Basilica

Basiliekvoordeplein 1; 02.420.55.05
Until MAR 15 Leonardo Da Vinci: The European Genius, paintings, mechanical models, original drawings and manuscripts

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until 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

Terhulpensteenweg 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 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
DEC 14-MAR 2 Beauty Singular-Plural, 5th Design Triennial, on the theme of beauty, its criteria, diversity and subjectivity
Until DEC 31 België op kijkoosprenten, 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
Until MAR 30 Alechinsky from A to Y, retrospective of work by the Belgian artist on the occasion of his 80th birthday
Until MAR 30 Quadrum: International Magazine of Modern Art, tribute to Ernst Goldschmidt, curator and publisher

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24
Until DEC 31 Brussels, urban landscapes and computer-rewritten photographs by Georges De Kinder

Stadhuis

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

Stadsarchief

Huidevetersstraat 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

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until MAR 23 It's our History!, multi-media exhibition on the development of the EU and the lives of Europeans citizens since 1945

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33
Until DEC 16 Dots Obsession, walk-in balloon installation by contemporary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama

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 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

Klamperstraat 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 humourous 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

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 Eugeen 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

Keizerstraat 12; 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 by Henry De Groux

Eupen

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

Ghent

Design Museum
Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until DEC 31 Studio Glass, the Alonso 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 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 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 FEB 10 Nr17 Slow: Looking at things differently, video installations by designer Marina Yee and work by artists who have inspired her, including Léon Spilliaert, Luc Tuymans and Erik Verdonck

Knokke-Heist

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

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

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
Until FEB 3 Video works by Keren Cyttar

Meise

Belgium's National Botanic Garden
Nieuwelaan 38; 02.260.09.70
Until DEC 30 Hard Rain, photographs by Mark Edwards based on Bob Dylan's eponymous song

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11
Until AUG 31 Knock on Wood! Forest and Wood in Africa

Ypres

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

Don't miss this week



Cirque du Soleil in Varekai

Until December 16, under the Grand Chapiteau, Gedempte Zuiderdokken, Antwerp. Tickets from 070

MY FLANDERS

Patrick Duynslaegher

Patrick Duynslaegher is Editor-in-Chief of *Knack's* weekly *Focus* magazine. He talks about the need to be critical and about getting – and keeping – the readers' attention

What's the focus, so to speak, of *Focus*?

The publishers of *Knack*, Belgium's leading newsmagazine, wanted to reach a younger audience. Young people aren't famous for being interested in reading about news, so the publishers thought an entertainment magazine would be a stepping stone to *Knack*. There was already *Weekend Knack*, which covers lifestyle. *Focus* covers entertainment. My then editor-in-chief at *Knack* Rik van Cauwelaert suggested me for editor-in-chief of *Focus*, and I've been here since the beginning in 2000. I'd been a film critic for *Knack* since 1973, so they knew my work.

Focus is supposed to appeal to younger readers – so is Paris Hilton cover girl material?

We're not that kind of magazine. We might joke about her in a column, but we're not interested in her or Britney Spears' sex life. *Focus* is about entertainment, not about age. We could have Jack Nicholson on the cover, and he's 70. But he's still relevant, and that's what's important. I hate the term 'role model', but the people and things we cover are what we think are the best: the best films to see, the best music to listen to, the best television to watch. With the Internet and other media, there is so much stuff out there – and our team of seven people tries to tell you what is worth it. Think of a travel guide: sure, you could visit a country and discover things on your own, but a guide helps you find what's worth seeing without having to go through every town.

How have magazine readers changed since you started as a journalist?

I always say that there have been more changes in the last nine years than there were in the 18 years before it. The Internet has changed how we live: people read less in print because they have all these other options, plus DVDs, games, etc. So magazines have had to change their profile. People won't stop reading them, but we've had to be more creative. The Internet has a vast amount of information, but magazines are much more reliable.

You say that *Focus* is targeted at a younger audience than *Knack*. Does that mean that readers eventually grow too old for *Focus*?

I still read it, and I'm not exactly 20 myself. *Focus* is about entertainment, not about age.

How is the Flemish readership different from other readerships?

According to industry surveys, our readers are educated, high wage-earners who are interested in the latest technology and the newest thing. My French-speaking colleagues do say that people in Flanders are more interested in the experimental and high culture and are more involved in getting those kind of projects off the ground.

Speaking of experimental art, do you ever get negative reactions from readers about something being too racy?

We don't like to provoke, but we do add something glamorous and sexy to the mix. So far, readers haven't complained.

As the head of the magazine, do you only choose subjects that you're interested in?

We're a team, and we all have input. If it was only what I was into, then every cover would be Japanese cinema, Hitchcock and art film. When *The Da Vinci Code* was coming out, we knew that we had to do a cover on it. It was directed by Ron Howard, who had never directed a decent film in his life, but we knew we had to do something – and there were no advance screenings in time to do a review. So we put the "Mona Lisa" on the front, and covered "The Da Vinci Code" as a cultural phenomenon. When I saw the film, it was even worse than I thought it would be: Ron Howard actually outdid himself!

Focus has very strong opinions – and Belgium is a small country. How do you deal with Flemish directors, musicians and artists who get upset when you give them less than stellar coverage?

Screw them [laughs]. People always remember the negative more than the positive. When I was a film critic, I had this strange reputation for being especially hard on Flemish cinema, in particular. But recently, the Belgian Film Archive did a compilation of film reviews, and I was surprised at how many good reviews I'd given. But, anyway, why should I be any more supportive of Flemish film



than I would be of Albanian film? It should be about supporting the best cinema there is.

For those who think you're negative about all things Flemish, name five great Flemish things and/or people that are world class.

The music of Tom Barman of dEUS, conceptual artist Wim Delvoye, Del Rey chocolates from Antwerp, the film *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short* by André Delvaux and the choreography of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker.

Interview by Steven Tate

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Hanging around

"What, are you still here? Do you still not have a new prime minister?"

Angela Merkel
German Chancellor
On meeting outgoing Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt at the Lisbon summit

Business as Usual

"We see that companies continue to do good business and that the political crisis has had little real influence. I have the impression that many people exaggerate the impact politics have on the economy."

Karel Van Eetvelt
head of Unizo, a Flemish organisation representing small enterprises

Top bureaucrat

"The federal administration has changed more in the past three years than in the previous 50. But no one is interested in that."

Frank Van Massenhove
head of the federal social service office on being voted "government manager of the year"

Port of Antwerp **Euthanasia** **Christ**
masMarkets **Kids Activities** **Kerst**
Architects **Dreams** **Flanders in Action**
next week in Flanders Today