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Parler



Fashion with passion: Dries van Noten presents his autumn/winter 2007/08 collection in Paris

Fashioning an image

Flemish fashion looks good on the catwalk, but can it survive in a globalised market?

Stéphanie Duval

Fashion has always been important to Flanders. Yet the fashion and textile industry may not be doing all that well at the moment. There are no exact figures available on the sector, so Flanders DC, the Flemish organisation for encouraging business creativity, joined up with

three others – the Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI), Creamoda and Fedustria – to produce a report on the current state of Belgian fashion.

The study, titled "Fashionate about Creativity", was carried out by Vlerick Management School. It took a broad look at all the creative industries in Belgium, including art, architecture and

fashion. At the end of 2006, this sector of the economy created 3% more jobs every year, whereas other sectors were only able to generate 0.6% new jobs. The study confirmed the importance of the creative sector, but it also highlighted potential problems that needed to be confronted.

In 2006, 84% of all clothing

manufacturers had outsourced at least part of their production to foreign countries. This should come as no surprise to anyone. The production costs in Belgium are more than 10 times higher than in Vietnam. Belgian fashion companies now accept that they can't compete with the low wages and mass production capacities of

other economies. But this doesn't necessarily spell the end of the Belgian fashion industry. By shifting the focus to innovation and creativity, Belgium can continue to play a leading role, the report argues.

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Business

Flanders has plans to build the world's biggest wind turbine park off the North Sea coast. But can the region meet the ambitious targets for cutting carbon emissions set by Europe's leaders?

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Arts

The Vlaamse Opera will perform a new production based on Fellini's 1954 film masterpiece *La Strada*. Our music critic previews this unique opera by Antwerp composer Luc Van Hove.

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Active

Looking for something to do with the kids over the Carnival holiday? We propose a children's film festival taking place in Antwerp and Bruges, and two wonderful museums in Mechelen.

9 and 11

House prices rise as cities become more popular

Ostend becomes "most expensive city"

Alan Hope

Belgian home-owners are moving into city centres as never before, driving up house and apartment prices in urban areas by as much as 188% over a 10-year period, according to a report by the Antwerp-based research bureau Stadim.

The survey found an increase in demand for apartments in city centres and a consequent rise in prices. Ostend is now the most expensive city in which to live, with an apartment costing an average of €213,000. Bruges comes next at €210,000. Over the past 10 years, property prices in Bruges have doubled, while in Ostend the increase was 121%.

Brussels was third with the average apartment

selling at €205,000 and is now the most expensive urban centre for house prices, with an average price of €405,000, followed by Leuven and Arlon at €287,000 and €265,000. Not all cities have seen prices go up: apartment prices last year fell slightly in Turnhout, Hasselt, Genk and Bruges.

Nationwide, and not only in cities, the price of a three-bedroom house rose by 4.97% in 2007 to an average of €205,000, according to property network Era. A two-bedroom apartment cost 3.86% more at €154,000. According to the director of Era, Dirk Jacobs, this year will see prices rise by between 3% and 5%.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Linde Hermans

Your correspondent was recently taking a group of British and Commonwealth women on a walking tour of Brussels when one of the party noticed a cluster of unusual wooden chairs on the square in front of the Sint-Michiels en Sint-Goedele Cathedral. "What lovely chairs!" she exclaimed. "I'd love one of those for the garden."

These urban *chaises longues* are the work of a young Flemish designer, Linde Hermans, 33, a soft-spoken Limburger who has just been awarded the 2007 Henry van de Velde prize for young talent. After studying product design at the Katholieke Hogeschool Limburg (now more snappily named KHLim) in Diepenbeek, Hermans spent time working with the designer Jorge Pensi in Barcelona before setting up her own studio.

She designs quirky pieces that use natural materials like wood and leather (shoe fetishists might want to track down her eccentric footwear), but there's also a vein of humour running through her work. This caught the eye of the Van de Velde jury, which said: "The humorous and poetic aspects of her work gave her the winning edge."

The nine chairs in front of Brussels cathedral were installed by the Brussels environment institute BIM as an experiment in urban furniture. They form part of a collection called Crucial Street Furniture made for the Belgian outdoor furniture company Wolters. You can buy some of her other products

at trendy Donum in Antwerp and Hasselt or at Lift in Ghent. There's also an online store under construction, but "it still needs some work," she says.

Launched 14 years ago, the Henry van de Velde Awards are considered the most prestigious design awards in Belgium. Other winners this year were fashion designer Anita Evenepoel, who won the lifetime achievement award, and Durlet, a West Flanders furniture company which took the design company of the year award.

The winning designs, along with products that have been granted a Van de Velde quality label, are currently on show in the Design Flanders Gallery in Brussels. But you can maybe get a better idea of Hermans' quirky imagination by heading into central Brussels with a book and settling into one of the *chaises longues* in front of the cathedral. The aim of the chairs, according to BIM, is "to provide a place to relax in the middle of a busy city". The undulating shapes have been compared to flying carpets, which is somehow appropriate in a city like Brussels, where magical things happen in the most unlikely of places.

DB

Henry van de Velde Awards & Labels 2007, until 2 March, in the Design Flanders Gallery, Kanselarijstraat 19, Brussels.

online

www.rodeschoentjes.be



Linde Hermans/Wolters

FACE OF FLANDERS



Debby & Nancy

Tear-eyed families, embarrassed celebrities, confetti flying, and the occasional cow parading through – it must be *Debby & Nancy's Happy Hour*. The two, erm, women are back for a second season of the hit show, which airs Sunday nights on TV één.

"Would you like to make someone happy?" asks the website. "Would you like to show what makes you happy? Do you want to announce your love in front of the whole of Flanders? Give someone a beautiful gift?" Debby & Nancy want to hear from you. Atop their round stage in the middle of an audience encased in a plush red interior, they dole out happiness and laughs. Big laughs, in fact. And the occasional tear.

Debby & Nancy are, respectively, Flemish actors Peter Van den Begin and Stany Crets in drag. Most of the guests are unsuspecting members of the audience, brought by friends or family who have arranged something in advance with the high-heeled pair. Children figure heavily (their mixture of astonishment and hesitancy towards the men in makeup lending a boost to proceedings).

In one episode, for instance, parents brought their tween-age boy, a competitive rope skipper. Accosted by Debby in the audience, the surprised kid stares with open mouth while his parents explain that he is the only boy in the rope-skipping circuit, and they want to show him that it's okay for boys to skip rope. Voila, Debby and Nancy bring out hunky young men who are pro rope skippers. They take the kid backstage, teach him some tricks, and he comes back at the end to delight the audience.

Another time, the hostesses surprised a blind girl, who had just finished her last year at an average public high school, overcoming many difficulties along the way and mainstreaming herself with the other kids. Along with congratulations, they gave her an MP3 player and a label maker that prints Braille labels to take with her to university.

There are also celebrity guests, and not just the run-of-the-mill kind, but the truly entertaining – such as when Yves Leterme and former head of the Sp.a party Johan Vande Lanotte came on to be chided by the ladies. They were terrific sports, even when forced to pretend they were stranded on a desert island, sport fake long beards and be rescued – out rolls a big ship with Lijst-Dedecker party leader Jean-Marie Dedecker as captain. Debby and Nancy aren't shy about a bit of political commentary.

One of the best celebrity visits of last year was when the pair tried to help Flemish film director Erik van Looy find a date. The dating game-style show that followed was nothing short of hilarious.

In between all the guests, Debby and Nancy volley quips back and forth and sometimes offer each other spontaneous challenges – one time Debby had to wax Nancy's legs, another time she had to try pole dancing, etc. And, true to its name, everyone leaves very, very happy.

Lisa Bradshaw

online

www.een.be

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



Shutterstock

Overlijden

Life is full of little surprises, especially when you live in a country you were not brought up in. The humour is not always self-evident. TV impressionists are the most difficult to appreciate: you have to be familiar with their victims before you get the joke. Sometimes you laugh along thinking you've got it. For years I have enjoyed Flanders' great impressionist, Chris Van den Durpel's high-pitched nasal impersonation of a certain Dr Le Compte. I now realise that I was laughing without knowing who the joke was really about. Although I knew something about the doctor, it is only lately that I actually heard him speak in a news archive, and he sounded just like his impersonator, only more so.

Well, the good doctor has recently died – *een hartstilstand werd hem fataal*. For years Herman Le Compte appeared on television to promote his claims about longevity. As a doctor in geriatrics, he swore by vitamin C in mega quantities. In an obituary I read: *hij beweerde dat hij met behulp van massa's vitamines en een dagelijkse portie biergist minstens duizend jaar zou worden*. Quite a claim! I suppose the trick is in getting the daily intake of vitamins and beer yeast exactly correct in time to build up your strength to survive a millennium. His theories and books, including *Hoe word ik duizend jaar*, made him so unpopular with the medical profession that the *Orde van Geneesheren*, the medical council, struck him off.

Death in Flanders has its own formalities. As with births, cards announcing the death are dispatched to friends and relatives. Preparing such cards for printing and distributing them, usually by hand, give the bereaved something to do immediately after their loss. These *overlijdensberichten* are displayed in local shops, and funerals are well attended. Newspapers carry large death notices, sometimes filling a quarter of the page. They usually contain an invitation to the funeral: *wij nodigen u vriendelijk uit op de uitvaart*.

The origins of a word often help you to remember it. Although *overlijden* means passing over, I prefer my own etymology based on the word *lijden* meaning to suffer: in death we are past suffering.

Dood is used in a similar way to dead in English to intensify: *doodenvoudig* is dead simple; *doodkalm* is dead calm; *doodsbang* is dead scared. Some words don't translate with *dead*: *doodjammer* means a great pity; *doodnormaal* is quite normal. Most correspond directly with English: *doodsangst* – fear of death, *doodsbleek* – deathly pale, *doodstraf* – death penalty, *doodlachen* – to die laughing. And if you irritate someone, one might hear *val dood!* ringing in your ears.

So, *de dokter is gestorven*. I hope this article has not dwelt too much on dark matters, but *de dood is de sleutel van de deur naar leven* – death is the key to the door of life. Or if you prefer, *leven en sterren zijn twee kanten van dezelfde medaille*. After all, just like Dr Le Compte, we are all *gewone stervelingen*.

Alistair MacLean

online

www.vandale.be

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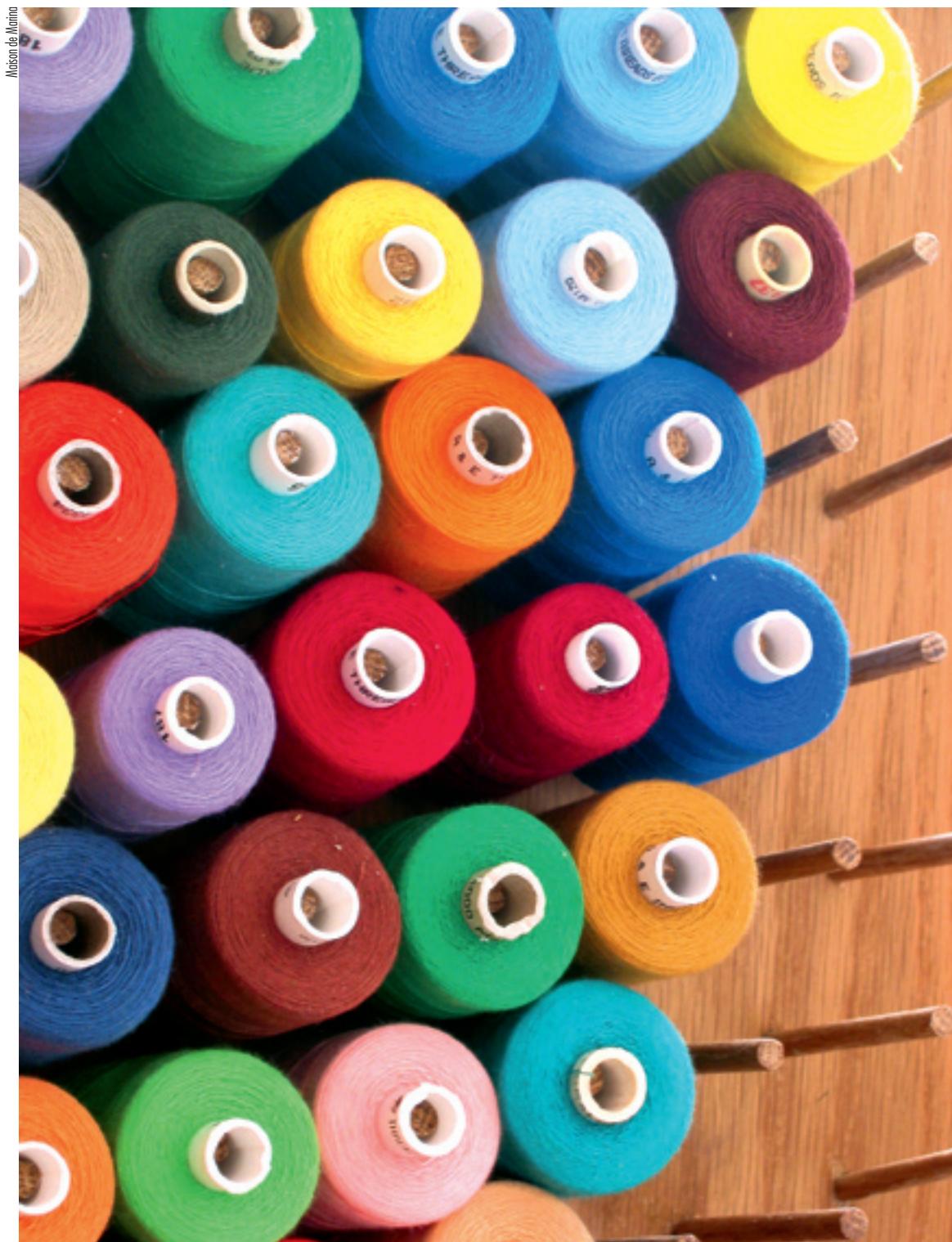
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FITS YOU

FEATURE



Back to basics: Maison de Marina in Brussels

Fashioning the future

Continued from page 1

According to Isabelle De Voldere a senior researcher at Vlerick, the fashion industry is often regarded in Belgium as virtually extinct, whereas it is in fact a dynamic and innovative sector of the economy. Utexbel, one of the companies interviewed for the Vlerick study, offers a perfect example of the strength of the Flemish industry. This textile firm specialises in new materials and technologies and has several patents to its name. They have invented a mosquito repellent material which has proved useful to the military.

Anne Chapelle of BVBA 32 (the company behind designers Ann Demeulemeester and Haider Ackerman) argues that creativity and innovation exist in different forms. "Creativity is what the job of a designer is all about," she explains. "They have to be able to dream and then translate those

dreams onto paper. It's the job of the business manager to test those views against the economic and commercial reality to see whether it is profitable."

Some of the designs are intricate and complex, which means they are too expensive to be produced commercially. But BVBA 32 is trying to innovate in other ways; they are currently trying to develop a bio-degradable thread that will lead to a new eco-fashion.

Creativity doesn't necessarily have to be limited to technical inventions. A large number of companies are taking up the practice of Gijsemans Clothing Industries, which has outsourced large-scale production to foreign countries, although the finishing touches are still carried out in Belgian workshops, along with the production of limited collections. This means that the company can reduce the number of employees in Belgium but still keep the core

of their knowledge and technical skills in the country.

This suggests a model to ensure that Belgian fashion can survive well into the future. The battle may have been lost when it comes to standardised mass production, but Belgium can still make a difference when it comes to small volume and flexible production in specialised niche products. Fashion journalist Veerle Windels summarises the importance of this creative attitude: "The Vlerick study cites innovation and creativity as the 'light' part of the study, and I find this unfortunate because these factors are the essence of fashion. It is exactly that which gives fashion its image!"

The image of fashion seems to be split in two. On the one hand, Belgium has spawned some of the most celebrated fashion designers in the world. The story of the Antwerp Six is well-

known and has helped to boost the image of Belgian fashion and launch the careers of new designers. Brussels' La Cambre and the Antwerp Fashion Academy keep attracting record numbers of international students, all fired with a passion for producing the most creative fashion.

The foreign and domestic press closely track the careers of Belgian graduates, and most are considered cutting-edge, avant-garde and ground-breaking. But fashion is not all glitter and glamour, as Edith Vervliet of the FFI underlines. It's hard work as well – a fact that is not always appreciated by the media. The industry obviously needs to fashion itself a new image.

With the effects of globalisation visible to everyone, many parents are warning their children that there is no future in a career in the textile industry. Fewer students are enrolling in specialised schools or taking up technical courses such as sewing and pattern making. The result is that the fashion industry has many job openings that are left vacant due to the lack of skilled craftsmen. The shortage is exacerbated by the fact that most educational institutions don't take the subject seriously enough to provide an adequate training. "The University of Ghent is the only school offering a Bachelor in Fashion Techniques. Obviously this is not enough to fill in the existing needs," states Pascal Cools of Flanders DC.

Several solutions were proposed at a recent press conference held in Antwerp. Anne Chapelle suggested school television: a series of programmes that would show young students what it is like to work for a particular company. The aim would be to prove to students that a job as a seamstress, for example, is a fashion job, and that it has nothing to do with the old-fashioned image people have of the profession.

Cools sees a possible solution in broader terms: "It is important for everyone to work together, from sketch to fitting room." A comprehensive approach is needed when it comes to recruiting new people, but a crossover

between the different branches will also deliver more innovation and a stronger image for the whole fashion industry. "Take, for example, a campaign in which Walter Van Beirendonck says that he is nothing without his seamstresses," contemplates Cools. "Imagine the effect such a quote would have!" Furthermore, the goal of the campaign would help Van Beirendonck as well, if he wants to continue working with people in Antwerp and not have to communicate with employees in a distant country using webcam.

At the moment, there is no integrated solution in the works to solve the fashion industry's problems; everyone is working alone. But if the Belgian fashion industry wants to be able to compete with countries like China, this needs to change. As long as the world of fashion and business can work together, creative Belgium will have a serious advantage over countries that have focused exclusively on mass production.

The Flanders Fashion Institute has set an example by making it a top priority to help creative talent deal with the business side of their work. "It's not easy for young designers to attract investors because this business doesn't provide a quick return on investment," says Vervliet. FFI functions as a platform for everyone who works in fashion. It guides designers in various ways – such as the Plato project (where an established fashion designer acts as a mentor for a young student) – but it also tries to bring different people into contact with each other.

There are still a lot of opportunities for innovative partnerships in fashion – between suppliers of raw materials and designers, for example, or between work attire and high fashion. The Vlerick report shows that it is important for the Belgian fashion industry to focus on these special cases if it wants to remain competitive in a global market.

online
www.modernatie.com



Flemish fashion is still hot on top – but needs to consolidate its efforts



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ING 

City living gets expensive



Coasting along nicely: Ostend is the most expensive place to buy a house

Continued from page 1

But the recent boom in prices is not expected to continue into 2008. As house prices begin to stabilise, the market slows down as a result of a fall in demand. Though the number of properties coming onto the market remains unchanged, the demand is not keeping up, Jacobs explained. That can be seen from the length of time a property remains on the market before being sold. For a house, the time from offering a property for sale to closing is now 91 days, and for an apartment more than 110 days. In addition, the difference between the asking price and the (usually lower) actual sale price is now 10.25% and 11.4% respectively.

Buyers are being put off by the high monthly repayments they now face on credit, running on average at about €1,000 for an apartment and €1,400 for a house. Banks also drive the trend with a cautious new attitude towards lending. Up until the middle of last year, banks were still relatively relaxed about agreeing loans, but they are now much less likely to give mortgages of 100%.

Meanwhile, consumer magazine *Test Aankoop* warned against the practice of mortgage lenders linking their better rates to contracts involving other financial products like current accounts and insurance. Once the costs of these so-called "bundled" products and services are taken into account, the preferential mortgage rates lose much of their attraction, the magazine said.

Elsewhere last week, a new group appeared to promote living in empty premises, such as factories, or even in public spaces, like under bridges. Having seen their campaign picked up by the Belga press agency and the papers, the FreeLiving group revealed itself to be a stunt designed to draw attention to the lack of social housing, particularly in Ghent, and the lack of any alternative for the poor to the private rental market. Ghent currently has a waiting list for social housing of 9,900 people, and a growing problem of homeless people and illegal immigrants, who are not entitled to housing and are easy prey for slum-landlords.

online

www.freeliving.be

IN THE PRESS



Flanders picks top intellectual

Emeritus philosophy professor Etienne Vermeersch has been voted Flanders' leading intellectual in a poll organised by *Knack* magazine. Professor Vermeersch, 73, formerly of the University of Ghent, was a leading campaigner for euthanasia rights. As a leading moral philosopher, he has been a prominent figure in many public debates but considers the euthanasia question to have been his "finest performance".

The *Knack* list places former Leuven professor and sociologist Luc Huyse at number two and Antwerp vice-rector Bea Cantillon, an expert on social security policy, at three. The list's top politician was foreign minister Karel De Gucht at number five, followed by Catholic primate Godfried Danneels at six. Writer Tom Lanoye came in fourth place.

Eight of the top 10 in the list were also members of the judging panel, which was made up of 100 Flemish intellectuals, each of whom had to select their own top three. The editor of *Knack*, Rik Van Cauwelaert, made number seven. The magazine is now asking readers to vote for Flanders' most influential intellectual. Voters can choose from a long-list of names including artist Luc Tuymans and *De Morgen* editor Yves Desmet, or propose a nomination of their own.

Alan Hope

online

www.knack.be/knack/intellectuelen

Homeless in airport wait a year for somewhere to sleep

The growing number of homeless people who sleep in the national airport at Zaventem will have to wait until next winter before steps can be taken to provide them with facilities, including places to sleep and sanitary provision, vice-premier Yves Leterme said last week.

The number of homeless using the airport for shelter has risen steadily in recent months,

as more railway stations close for the night. The airport's chaplain, Father Michel Gaillard, sounded the alarm last year, and the numbers have now reached five times their previous level. About 20 homeless people are now more or less permanent airport residents. Homeless charity representatives have called for sanitary facilities and a sleeping corner – described by Manuel Chiquero of Poverello as "a mini-

mum, not a luxury but a right". Such facilities should in any case be in place for anyone – whether homeless or not – who is forced to spend a night at the airport for any reason.

The airport operator, Brussels Airport Company, took action on the growing number of homeless in November by removing some seating and installing arm-rests on others, making it impossible to lie down.

VUB researchers announce breakthrough in diabetes treatment

Researchers at the Diabetes Research Center of the Flemish university VUB in Brussels have succeeded in isolating insulin-producing cells in the pancreas of mice, opening the way to a possible breakthrough in the treatment of diabetes. Diabetics cannot produce insulin, a hormone which converts dietary sugars into glycogen to be stored in the liver for later use. As a result, they are obliged to inject insulin on a daily basis.

The VUB team under Professor Harry Heimberg discovered so-called progenitor cells which help in the creation of insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. The same progenitor cells will now be tracked down in the human pancreas, with the hope that they can then be either transplanted or "switched on" to help diabetics produce their own insulin. The team stressed that such a result is still far in the future.



This won't hurt: new cure for diabetes on the horizon, say VUB researchers

In Bruges opens Sundance

In Bruges, the new film by Irish playwright Martin McDonagh, enjoyed its first public screening this month when it opened America's prestigious Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. The movie was chosen to screen as part of the opening night gala because it is "a quintessential Sundance film," said the festival's director Geoffrey Gilmore. "It's brutal, philosophical, funny and totally original." Shot in the Flemish city last year, the film stars Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson as hitmen who flee London to hide out in the city.

Early reviews from the festival are mixed, with *Variety* calling the film "erratic" and "overly far-fetched" but *The Hollywood Reporter* raving: "Martin McDonagh has fashioned an audacious combination of Old World grace and modern ultraviolence." *In Bruges* opens across the US next month and in Belgium in March.



Brendan Gleeson (left) and Colin Farrell on location in Bruges

Joop Buitendijk

New inquiry into Antwerp "blood diamonds"



Panning for rough diamonds in Sierra Leone

Employees of four major Antwerp diamond firms face charges later in the year relating to trade in "blood-diamonds" worth some €41.5 million. The case concerns 25 employees charged with smuggling diamonds from Angola in 2002, despite a United Nations embargo. They were subsequently sold by rebels to buy weapons in Angola's civil war.

Three executives and eight couriers from one company are alleged to have smuggled diamonds worth €26.3 million into Antwerp via Guinea and South Africa using false papers to cover the blood-trail. They are also accused of criminal conspiracy and of using €60 million in false invoices to defraud the tax authorities. The company was previously named in a United Nations report as responsible for dealing in blood diamonds out of Liberia.

Another company is charged with smuggling €6 million in diamonds from Angola through Guinea. A third company is accused of smuggling blood diamonds out of Ivory Coast.

The trade in blood diamonds came to light in a UN report in 2002. At the time, Flemish economy minister Jaak Gabriels called the allegations "an intentional action aimed at causing damage to the Antwerp diamond industry". The Diamond High Council said the evidence in the UN report was "a little thin".

Economic gloom hits car show – and sales

The European Motor Show Brussels closed last Sunday with an estimated 50,000 fewer visitors this year. Some 650,000 people shuffled through the Heysel exhibition halls during the 10-day event compared with 700,000 at the previous show. The Belgian car federation Febiac, which organises the fair, said the poor figures were largely due to the gloomy economic climate and the stock market crash that happened during the fair. "People are afraid that their purchasing power is dropping and that the future is uncertain," said Febiac spokesman Joost Kaesmans.

Meanwhile, shopkeepers have been complaining about poor figures during the winter sales period, with turnover down 5% on last year. "People hear that their purchasing power has dropped, and they spend less money," said Luc Ardies of Unizo, the federation representing SMEs and self-employed people.

Survey predicts 8,000 businesses will go bust in 2008

The numbers of businesses going bankrupt in Belgium will this year top 8,000 for the first time ever, according to credit insurance experts Euler Hermes. This gloomy forecast is partly the result of a slow-down in growth, in line with global trends, bringing the rate down to just 1.9% for the year. Europe's competitive position is already hampered by the strong euro, which makes European goods more expensive on world markets. To make matters worse, a fall in growth to around 1.5% in Japan and the US will see inward investment fall from last year's 5.2% to 2.2%.

In the developed world as a whole, Euler Hermes predicts, bankruptcies will reach a level of 5%. For the Belgian economy, that means some 8,200 businesses will shut down for good – the number being inflated by the large number of new start-ups in 2006 and 2007 which will not see the year out. Last year, some 75,500 new businesses were created, on top of 67,600 in 2006. "These enterprises are especially vulnerable because of their lack of financial resources and the inexperience of their managers," Euler Hermes warned.



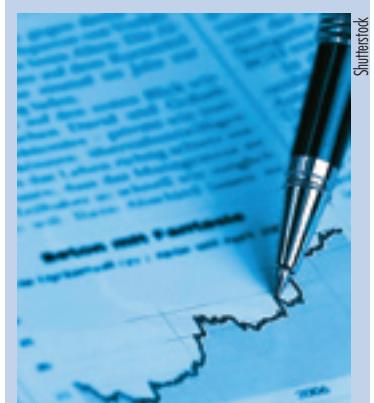
Going bust: some of the files in the Lernout & Hauspie case

Premium for Flemish teachers in Brussels

The teachers' union COC has protested at a plan by Flemish education minister Frank Vandenbroucke to introduce a premium worth about €1,000 a year for teachers who come to work in schools in the capital. The union opposes differential pay within the education sector, and said the measure would do nothing to solve the real problem of pressure of work. "If the minister wants teachers to settle and work in Brussels, there are better ways of going about it: smaller classes and more support staff, for example," COC said. The premium plan would concern teachers who had taught in a Brussels school for three years, making it more attractive to young teachers to stay in the capital rather than leave soon after graduation, as is often the case now.

Vandenbroucke's package also includes a requirement for parents to take part in school contact evenings, but a plan to allow fines for those who did not show up was scrapped.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



8,500 tons

Reduction in carbon emissions achieved last year due to energy-saving measures introduced in 300 schools across the Flemish Region. The scheme, which has been running for the past two years, has already saved some €1 million, according to Flemish education minister Frank Vandenbroucke. Schools now have an extra €8 per student to spend on education needs, the minister added.

37,000 tons

Total amount of food thrown out every week in Belgium, according to a study by the packaging manufacturer Toppits. A single household is likely to discard 11 slices of bread, 250g of fruit, 80g of meat and 64g of cheese. The average household disposes of some eight kilos per month, with young people throwing out the largest quantity, while older people produce the least.

1.2 million

Square metres of empty office space in Brussels, according to a report by the Brussels regional development agency GOMB. Almost 10 percent of office space is lying empty, most of it located in the outlying districts. Many other European cities have more empty space, such as Amsterdam (18%) and Frankfurt (16%), but Paris has just 5% vacant.

15

Number of successful adoptions by gay couples since new legislation was introduced 18 months ago. All the couples were lesbian, according to spokesperson Anne Ottevaere of the federal adoption agency.

€13.3 million

Royal family budget for 2008, up €800,000 on the previous year. Some €10 million goes to King Albert II, while Prince Philip receives €940,000.

€250 million

Cost of 102 new "Flexity Outlook" trams ordered by Brussels transport operator MIVB from the transportation company Bombardier. The order is the biggest in MIVB's history.

BREWING

Heineken acquires Alken-Maes

Dutch giant to get Belgian brewer in S&N takeover



Derek Blyth

The Dutch brewer Heineken has gained control of Alken-Maes, Belgium's second-largest brewing group. Heineken and Carlsberg have finally succeeded in a joint takeover bid to acquire Scottish & Newcastle, the Edinburgh-based brewery that owns Alken-Maes.

An initial offer of 720 pence per share last October was rebuffed by the board at the Edinburgh head office as "unsolicited and unwelcome", but the Dutch-Danish bidders finally won over the board with a revised bid of 800 pence a share, 11% up on the initial offer, or £7.8 billion (€10.5 billion).

S&N is one of the world's oldest breweries, dating back to 1749 when William Younger established a brewery in Leith. It became Scottish & Newcastle Breweries after merging with Newcastle Breweries in 1960. Over the past decade it has evolved into the second-largest brewing group in Europe, following global acquisitions such as Foster's, Kronenbourg and Finland's Harwell Breweries (which gave it a stake in Russia's Baltic Beverages Holding).

S&N acquired Alken Maes in 2000, giving the Scots a stake in the Belgian beer market, including some of the country's favourite tipples. As well as Maes, the company brews Grimbergen, Cristal,

Mort Subite, Ciney, Zulte, Judas and Watneys.

The two buyers are primarily interested in S&N's international assets, with Heineken eager to take over S&N's stake in India's United Breweries as well as its UK arm, while Carlsberg is hoping to keep shareholders happy by buying into the lucrative Russian market and acquiring S&N's interests in China's Chongqing Beer Group.

As well as gaining a foothold in Belgium, Heineken is to take control of S&N's operations in Ireland, Portugal and Finland.

Alken and Maes breweries were founded within one year of one another, in 1880 and 1881 respectively. The two breweries fused in 1988 to create a single company.

Alken-Maes in figures

750

Number of employees

2 million hectolitres

Amount of beer brewed every year, of which 1.5 million hectolitres is brewed at Alken

€200 million

Annual turnover

3

Brewing plants owned by the company. They are located at Alken, Jumet and Kobbegem.

2

Number of distribution centres. They are located at Waarloos and Ciney.

online

www.alken-maes.be

ENVIRONMENT

Climate plan could cost €60 million a year

Every Belgian will have to pay €4 a week

Acting prime minister Guy Verhofstadt claimed last week that he had won a significant concession from the European Commission in regard to Belgium's contribution to the EU's plan to tackle global warming.

Under the ambitious project unveiled last week, EU leaders set a target of reducing carbon emissions by 20% by 2020. But the European Commission listened to Belgium's arguments that it was a small industrialised country with only limited opportunities to draw energy from renewable sources such as wind-power. As a result, Belgium was given the target of reducing carbon emissions by 15% and generating 13% of its energy from renewable sources. One project already in the pipeline involves the construction of three wind farms in the North Sea, including the largest in the world.

Yet the EU plan has already raised concerns about the total cost of the project. Verhofstadt estimated the measures would cost €2 billion a year from now until 2020, or 0.7% of GNP. The Flemish daily *De Morgen* totted up the cost to each Belgian as €4 a week for the next 12 years.

Belgian business leaders have already said that the plan could harm industry and lead to job cuts. The Belgian employers' federation VBO argued that the plan was unaffordable and unrealistic. It also claimed that Belgium was paying a higher price

than some other EU countries, which could damage industry. The country's main electricity supplier, Electrabel, said the target of 13% of energy from renewable sources was unfeasible and that customers would have to pay higher bills.

The plan has also been criticised by environmental groups because it does not go far enough. Bram Claeys of the environmental group Bond Beter Leefmilieu (BBL) argued that the EU should have set out to lower emissions by 30%. But he was cautiously optimistic about the effects of the plan. "I hope this will have as much impact as the introduction of the euro," he told *De Standaard*.

DB



Wind power is the answer: but how much will it cost?

BUSINESS FLASH



Shutterstock

KBC

KBC Bank, Flanders' largest financial institution, is to acquire via its Luxembourg affiliate the Paris-based Richelieu Finance investment house in a move that will push its assets under management base to well over €5 billion. Richelieu's main asset is an 18% stake in Club Med, the holiday and leisure company.

Quick

The Belgian fast food chain Quick will open 100 outlets in Russia over the next five years in partnership with the local Tashir group, a conglomerate with activities in the retailing, property and fast food industries. The first four restaurants will open in March in the Moscow area with an additional 10 later this year. McDonald's is currently Russia's leading fast food chain with some 180 outlets.

Etap

Etap, the Melle-based yacht builder, has been bought by one of its competitors, the German Dehler company.

Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport passenger traffic increased 7% last year to some 17.8 million people. Thirty-six new routes were opened in 2007, and the airport's management expects the trend to continue this year. Meanwhile, Flemish authorities claim that up to 40,000 new jobs would be created in the adjacent Zaventem area if land occupied by unused airport facilities could be redeveloped.

Bekaert

Bekaert, the Zwevegem-based steel cord and wire producer, is to invest some €97 million in Russia to build a brand new production unit in Lipetsk, 400km south of Moscow. The Belgian firm had been negotiating a partnership agreement with the local Uralkord, but the discussions stumbled on unresolved accounting issues.

Deme

Antwerp-based dredging company Deme has won a €53 million contract for the development of the coal handling operations of the port of Newcastle in Australia.

IKEA

IKEA, the home furniture supplier, will close its Ternat store near Brussels and transfer its activities to a newly-developed site near the Ghent exhibition centre Flanders Expo. The move follows the successful opening of the Anderlecht store two years ago that has been attracting many of the west Brussels customers who used to visit the Ternat location. IKEA has another store in the Brussels area at Zaventem, east of the city.

Côte d'Or

Côte d'Or, the Halle-based chocolate company, has opened a flagship store on the fashionable Kleine Zavel square in Brussels. The move is part of the company's 125th anniversary celebrations.

Belwind

Belwind, the renewable energy company specialising in wind turbines, has received a preliminary agreement to build a wind farm with a capacity of some 300 megawatts in Belgian waters, 45 km off the Flemish coast. Up to 150 wind turbines are to be built, enough to supply electricity to 300,000 households.

Votorantim

The Brazilian conglomerate Votorantim is to centralise all its traffic of fruit juices, cellulose products and metals for its European clients through the Vrasenedok, operated by the Antwerp-based Westerlund stevedore.

FILM

Moonstruck

A local studio's not-so-crazy foray into 3D feature filmmaking



The fly's the limit: three little stowaways save the Apollo 11 mission in *Fly Me to the Moon*

Lisa Bradshaw

Because we're crazy." That's Ben Stassen's response to a question about why his Brussels' production company, nWave Pictures, made the leap from short, amusement park 3D movies to its first feature film. But, actually, there are a few other good reasons.

For one, nWave is the first studio ever to make a full-length 3D animated film. A few normal 2D animated movies from the United States, like *Monster House* and *Chicken Little*, have been converted into 3D. But nWave's *Fly Me to the Moon* was created, from the very first frame, as a 3D motion picture. "You can make a 2D film and then add 3D elements, but those films are not designed as 3D experiences," says Stassen. "I think people

will tire of that very quickly."

Stassen, who directed *Fly Me to the Moon*, spent years looking for just the right script – one that would bring a good story and 3D effects together in a meaningful way. "It's what I call 'immersive 3D,'" he explains. "As a filmmaker, you use the screen as a window that the audience looks through, and the traditional way of doing 3D is to keep that window. What we try to achieve with immersive 3D is to get rid of that window and bring the viewer directly into the space."

Though most in the industry are referring to 3D as a 'transition', Stassen calls it "the second revolution in the history of cinema." The first, he says, was the switch from silent films to talkies, which

changed the way films were made – from the casting to the writing to the sets. "Everything changed, and the experience became completely different as well. It was a new language of cinema. That's what has to happen with 3D films, too."

Now that Kinepolis is using mostly digital projection systems, 3D has been given a big boost. The projection technology "is really good in Belgium," says Stassen. "Better than a lot of what I've seen in the US. The advent of digital technology, in fact, is the main reason 3D is coming back into fashion. Gone are the days of the funky red and blue glasses and the headaches. You still need the glasses, but that technology has improved, too. And digital projection means the price of adapt-

ing systems to project 3D movies has plummeted. The other reason 3D is coming back is that "Hollywood needs it," says Stassen, "to get people back into the cinemas."

So if Hollywood is keen, why weren't they the first to make an animated 3D film from scratch? Because "making a stereoscopic film is a nightmare," says Stassen. "It's very technical filmmaking. If we had not been able to finance it ourselves, we would not have been the first." This means that they worked with a small team and a small budget with no interference from financers or producers, which constantly slows down US projects. Plus, Hollywood studios are not racing to produce films that can only be released in cinemas that have the proper technology.

And, frankly, nWave is the best at what they do. Having spent 25 years making 3D, Imax and "ride films" for theme parks, they are the industry leaders in technologically-advanced filmmaking. "We decided that now was the time for us to move into the more speculative feature film business," Stassen explains.

Fly Me to the Moon is the story of three adolescent flies who stow away on Apollo 11, America's first manned flight to land on the moon (see review below). Stassen bought the script from an American who did not write it specifically for 3D filmmaking. "To me, you don't write for 3D," says Stassen. "Even excellent writers, when they write 3D, think they have to write all these gimmicks – you know, the finger in the eye sort of thing. But that's not what it's about. It's about the positioning of the viewer."

The Flemish director refers to an unforgettable scene in the movie where the three flies experience weightlessness for the first time. "It's almost three minutes long with no cut. That's almost unheard of in 2D cinema. It works because of the relationship between the viewers and the characters – the fact that we're there with them."

The original soundtrack for the movie is in English, but only French and Dutch dubbed versions are being released in Belgium. "I'm begging them," says Stassen, who wants them to release the original version. Though he admits that "the dubbed versions are excellent," he wants viewers to have the chance to hear the original, with the voices of Christopher Lloyd and Tim Curry. But subtitles are not possible with 3D, and Kinepolis is not keen to release a non-subtitled film in a third language.

Fly Me to the Moon will open in the US this summer, and Stassen says that "the floodgates are open" for 3D cinema. But there is something around the corner that will be even more groundbreaking – 3D television. "It's going to explode on the scene in the next two or three years." The director has already seen big-screen TV systems in the US, which will soon be sold with glasses and 3D video games.

So is this the end of an era of 2D filmmaking? "I'm not 100% sure it isn't," admits Stassen, "but it shouldn't be. There is as big a difference between a 2D film and a stage play as there is between a 2D film and a 3D film. They should co-exist."

REVIEWS

Fly Me to the Moon

Flemish director Ben Stassen's *Fly Me to the Moon* uses the best of 3D's abilities to tell a cute story about three pre-teen flies who, in 1969, decide to make the trip with the American astronauts aboard Apollo 11.

The group is led by Nat, who is enthralled by his grandpa's stories of adventure. Nat convinces his two best friends – the brainiac IQ and the pudgy Scooter – to stowaway on the ship to the moon. Though Nat's mother insists that "dreamers get swatted," the three brave little flies learn how to eat from tubes, deal with weightlessness, escape capture and plug in loose wires to save the mission from imminent failure. But danger lurks in the form of Russian flies, who are none too happy that the

Americans are beating them to a moon landing.

Fly Me to the Moon is not the best animated film you'll ever see – the dialogue is simplistic, and the stereotypes feel dated. But the effects will keep adults interested while their children laugh themselves silly – which they did in the screening I attended. There are indeed some hilarious highlights, such as "the grubs", who will sleep and play on *anything*. And the scene where the three young heroes do an anti-gravity synchronised dance to *The Blue Danube* is absolutely priceless.

Aanrijding in Moscou

Matty backs her carful of groceries and kids bang into a big semi truck in the parking lot of Colruyt. The bearded truck

driver saunters over in his undershirt and acts according to type. A heated argument ensues, and the police are called. It seems that the truck driver, Johnny, is already known to them.

Back home, Matty is surprised to get a phone call from Johnny.

Clearly impressed by her strong will and sharp tongue, he wants to see her again. She calls him several names that, even in Dutch, I will not repeat here, and promptly hangs up.

Barbara Sarafian (*8 1/2 Women*) is wonderful as the slightly



A passionate feud becomes simply passion in *Aanrijding in Moscou*

rumpled Matty, whose husband left her "five months, two weeks and three days ago" and is now in and out of their apartment in Ledeberg, a suburb of concrete in Ghent. It's this situation (and her teenage daughter) that finally convinces Matty to give the much-younger Johnny a go.

First-time director Christophe van Rompaey isn't exactly sure where he wants to take this story, and the final half sort of stumbles about like Johnny coming out of a local tavern. But the performances are first-rate. Stage actor Jurgen Delnaet embodies a young man with more good intentions than abilities, and Johan Heldenbergh (the religion teacher in *Ben X*) is a natural as Matty's pathetic husband, whose ticking face records the indecision that everyone around a table of Matty's blood sausages seems to face.

LB

DANCE

The never-ending dance

ZOO celebrates 10 years of the body electric



Steven Tate

Few art forms match dance in terms of its ephemeral nature. Music can thrive through state-of-the-art recordings, but filmed dance feels flat: it has to be experienced live.

Choreographer Thomas Hauert uses the evanescence of dance in ZOO, the company he founded. "Practiced improvisation" is the technique he uses to give every ZOO performance a unique, organic appeal. "Just as in phys-

ics, one movement sets off a reaction, which, in turn, causes another reaction," he says.

ZOO is now celebrating its 10th anniversary with a series of performances throughout Europe. Their programme was launched last week at Brussels' Kaaitheater with a production of *Cows in Space*, the piece that was the catalyst for the group's coming into being. "I was fascinated by the laws of perspective," Hauert says in explaining his inspiration. "The idea of being on

a train and watching cows in fields as you pass them – but they are the ones that seem to be moving." What was to be a one-off collaboration with fellow dancers Mark Lorimer, Sara Ludi, Samantha van Wissen and Mat Voorter gave rise to an artistic vision that could not be realised in another company.

"In a lot of dance today, there is too much convention," Hauert says. "Especially in classical dance, which is very stylised. Each joint of the body has a certain number

of movements it can make, but the combinations are endless. So we throw ourselves into movement: one body acts, then another reacts to create a dance."

Swiss-born Hauert had studied in Rotterdam before coming to Brussels in 1991 to dance in Rosas, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's world-renowned group. "It was a dream to be coming out of school to dance with a choreographer I'd so admired," he says. "It opened up so many opportunities for me –

and introduced me to Brussels."

Brussels also brought Hauert into contact with Venezuelan choreographer David Zambrano, whom he credits with being his biggest artistic influence. "His approach is that the body needs time to learn how to improvise. We spent eight months learning 'Ballroom' – not the conventional steps of ballroom dancing, but learning how to relate to our partner, how to jump while remaining in a constellation and in action with another body."

This method influences several of Hauert's other pieces, including *puzzled*, which uses medieval canon as a springboard for creativity. A co-production with the Flanders Festival, *puzzled* was first presented at De Velinx in Tongeren and the Concertgebouw in Bruges last summer. ZOO will stage another performance of the work in February in Brussels.

Hauert is clearly fond of the city that launched his career. "Brussels is a great city for dance," he says. "There is a lot of opportunity for working with other art forms. There is also an infrastructure here that is very supportive of dance, so I'm quite happy to call Brussels home – for me and for my company." Despite the transient nature of dance, Hauert appears to be here to stay.

Puzzled, 23 February, Kaaitheater, Brussels; *Cows in Space*, 6-7 March, STUK, Leuven; 15 March, Cultuurcentrum, Genk

online

www.zoo-thomashauert.be

FILM FREAK

European Youth Film Festival of Flanders

Flanders' "youngest" film event is not really so young – Antwerp's Jeugdfilm Festival, or Youth Film Festival, turns 20 this year and is celebrating with an extended programme of movies and workshops. Actually, there are two anniversaries – the festival also began programming in Bruges 10 years ago this year.

The festival specialises in European cinema for children and young people, helpfully assigning age categories to each film. Most of the films are enjoying their premières, including all 10 films in competition. A professional jury will decide the winner, which will be awarded a distribution deal in Flanders – an excellent opportunity for little-known films.

Among the best films in competition is *Kid Svensk*, the feature debut of Swedish director Nanna Huolman, which touches on

immigration and language issues as a Finnish girl grows up in 1980s Sweden. Another highlight is the award-winning *Achter de wolken* (*Behind the Clouds*), Portuguese director Jorge Queiroga's fantasy about a boy who goes in search of his grandfather. When he finds him, the two travel around in a car powered by the magic of their imaginations.

And you can't go wrong taking your kid (9+ according to the festival) to *Max Minsky*, a gem of a film from Germany in which 13-year-old Nelly desperately wants to play in a basketball tournament where she has a chance to meet the astronaut with whom she is so terribly in love. The only problem is, she can't play basketball at all. In steps neighbourhood tough guy Max Minsky to help her out.

There is also a children's jury at the festival (seems only fair),

which will decide its own winner. "We ask kids to write an essay on why they like movies and want to participate," explains the festival's Iris Verhoeven. "Then we choose from those and have them come in for a little talk. We need to make sure they can handle 10 movies in one week."

The Youth Film Festival programmes some unique categories in their quest to appeal to all ages of youth: the Cut the Crap series shows films for teenagers that, in keeping with its bold title, takes on sex, racism and street urchin thievery. Denmark's *Life Hits* looks at a teenage girl's revenge when her friends decide to ditch her, while UK director Shane Meadows' critically acclaimed *This is England* follows a boy's induction into the local skinhead crowd. At the other end of the spectrum is the *kleuterprogramma*, films for the really little kids. With an emphasis on animation, the highlight of the series is the "Mini en mini" screening, which features live dubbing of

several short films. If it's your little one's first-ever outing to a cinema, the festival will award him or her with a film diploma. (How cute is that?) There is also a special screening for moms and babies.

The festival features a number of workshops for young people of all ages, including how to frame a photo, make your own sci-fi film set or become a journalist and report live from the festival centres.

Lisa Bradshaw

2-10 February in FotoMuseum, Antwerp, 03.232.64.09;

3-9 February in Cinema Lumière, Bruges, 050.33.03.83.

All films are subtitled in Dutch except for the *kleuterprogramma*, which is dubbed

online

www.jeugdfilmfestival.be

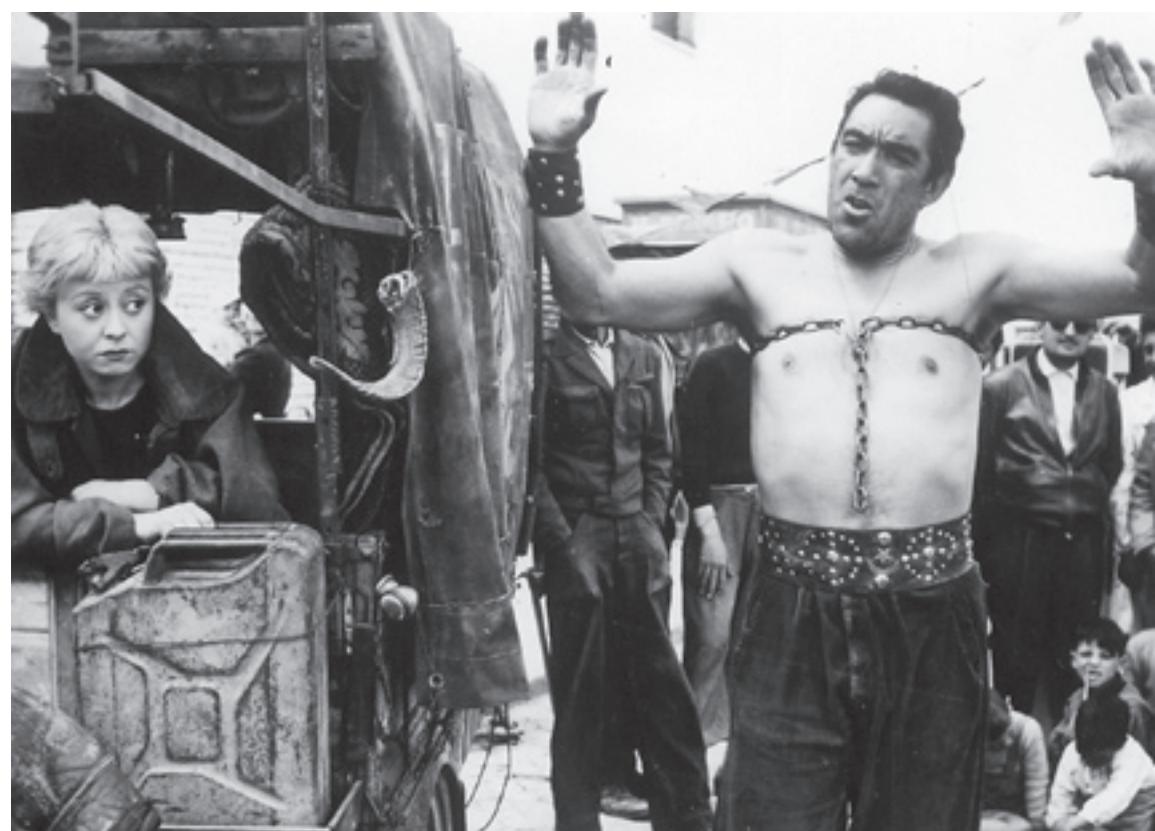


Anna Justice's award-winning *Max Minsky* is one to watch at the Youth Film Festival

CLASSICAL NOTES

The road less travelled

An Antwerp composer writes a new opera from an old film



La Strada resurrected: Vlaamse Opera stages Fellini's masterpiece

Filmed operas are nothing new: Ingmar Bergman, Joseph Losey and, more recently, Kenneth Branagh, have all had a go at them. But operas based on film – that was something virtually unheard of until the Vlaamse Opera decided to stage *La Strada*, a new opera based on Fellini's 1954 masterpiece by a contemporary composer from Antwerp, Luc Van Hove.

Not only is Van Hove's effort the first of its kind, it's also the compos-

er's very first opera and was motivated by his life-long passion for Fellini's film: a gritty black-and-white tale of three circus performers roaming the roads of post-war Italy. "I fell in love with the movie when I was 16 and have seen it many, many times since," he says. "There's something extremely genuine, moving and deeply human about it. So when I started to think of writing an opera, I thought 'why not *La Strada*?' "

The film includes some haunting music of its own by Nino Rota, which was later developed into a ballet and from then into an orchestral suite. Lyrical, energetic and circus-like, it is dominated by a wistful song – the signature tune for Gelsomina, a childlike girl who's sold by her mother to the brutal itinerant strongman Zampanò. Rather than allude to it, however, Van Hove has chosen to wipe the slate clean and write a

completely new score in that lively, direct style that is all his own. "My instinct was to stay away from the film [music] as much as possible because it's so perfect," he says.

The libretto, on the other hand, has Fellini's stamp all over it. The original script was simply cut and tweaked here and there by Flemish writer and film director Eric de Kuyper, who left it in the original Italian. He also made a few additions: Gelsomina gets a few extra lines, including a moving monologue in which she confides to a group of street urchins, and a heart-breaking song summarising recent events, which she delivers straight to the audience.

Fellini had a love-hate relationship with opera and only began to appreciate the genre late in his life. Several of his films include bits of opera music and share the genre's surreal, hyperbolic atmosphere. But while Fellini's world revolved around Verdi and Wagner, Van Hove's *La Strada* looks more to composers like Benjamin Britten – particularly to his unsettling mari-

time tale *Peter Grimes*. "I tried to be as transparent and natural as possible," Van Hove says. "The characters are such simple people, so I didn't want to make an opera that's difficult or too constructed. There's a clarity, a self-evidence in *Peter Grimes* that was exactly the direction I wanted to follow."

La Strada is staged by Waut Koeken and will be conducted by Koen Kessels. The three main characters will be sung by Swiss soprano Jeannette Fischer (Gelsomina), British baritone Richard Salter (Zampanò) and Belgian tenor Yves Saelens (Il Matto).

Marie Dumont

Vlaamse Opera Antwerp,
Frankrijklei 1,
29 January-9 February;
Vlaamse Opera Ghent,
Schouwburgstraat 3,
17-24 February.
Tickets from 070.22.02.02.

online
www.vlaamseopera.be

Flemish short nominated for Oscar

The Flemish short film *Tanghi Argentini* has been nominated for an Academy Award, which is no surprise to anyone who has seen it. Director Guy Thys' charming fairy-tale, which clocks in at 13 minutes, has already won 18 prizes around the world, including four at the Aspen Shortsfest and Best Belgian Short at the Flanders International Film Festival. *Tanghi Argentini* finds a middle-aged office worker trying to learn the tango from a colleague in advance of a blind date during the Christmas season. The Academy Awards will air live from Hollywood on 24 February.



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CHILDREN

Messing around in Mechelen

Two places to keep the kids amused (and off the Playstation)

Steven Tate

Keeping the kids entertained is the best way to stay sane for most adults over the Carnival holiday, especially as prolonged exposure to the little ones can unravel even the most even-keeled among us. Mechelen has two spots that will keep the underage crowd's minds active.

Technopolis has been the go-to spot for budding science fiends since it opened in 2000. "Interactive" is the operative word here, with a veritable playground of gadgets and installations to fascinate even technophobes.

A rotating globe showing weather systems welcomes visitors at the entrance, while geography puzzles test basic knowledge of what country goes where. Especially fun is the Aging Monitor, which takes video of the user's face, then shows what it will look like as time takes its toll. Results for this reporter showed that he'll have to lay off babysitting a few years to preserve his dewy glow.

More narcissism is encouraged by a funhouse mirror and a "write your name in hieroglyphics" exercise, followed by memory games and bridge-building with blocks to focus the mind. A stroll down a gangplank leads to the music room, where kids can play air piano: the keys have been mechanically inactivated, but tinkling your fingers in the air above the keys allows playing.

The cellar is where you find the most interesting activities and installations. In one room, a trilingual screen explains eating and digestion with illustrations and fun facts (the body takes six hours to digest a chip, and the colon has more bacteria in it than the body has cells). Also available are gadgets to check body mass, pulse, blood pressure and other signs. Various games make science a contact sport: a seesaw and a tilted labyrinth show gravity in action, and optical illusions are provoked by mirror tricks. The huge chutes and ladders appeals especially to



Dienst Toerisme Mechelen

Please touch: The Toy Museum offers a feast for the eyes and hands

the under-10 crowd because the user's actions put in motion balls travelling through funnels and slots – giving the wee ones a little taste of power.

But the major attraction downstairs is the Top Secret area, where artifacts from espionage are on display. A James Bond car has pride of place, but more interesting are mini-cameras hidden in the heels of shoes and a condom concealing a garotte from the East Germans. There are toothpick microphones from the Soviet Union, Eastern bloc mini-codebooks, a deadly Bulgarian umbrella and a church key that doubled as a silent-dart pistol. More old school spy gizmos like ribbon code (used as far back as the 7th century BC) are also on

display. Exhibited items for the most part have an English explanation, although most installations are self-explanatory.

For those looking for a present for that special sprog, the Technopolis gift shop near the entrance is worth a stop. Puzzles, spy games, lab kits and books about the body, animals and the elements are on offer in English and in Dutch. You never know: you could be inspiring the next Marie Curie.

online

www.technopolis.be

Speelgoed is Dutch for toy – and if ever there was a place where it seems like Christmas every day, it's Mechelen's Speelgoedmuseum. Playmobil, Lego and Mattel are well-represented here, as well as other not-so-obvious toymakers.

Older visitors can't help but feel a twinge of nostalgia seeing old-style fire engines, rocking horses and vintage robots on entering the three-floor building. Other features that feel like the ghost of Christmas Past include a gallery of marionettes and dolls dating back to the early 1900s, a jigsaw puzzle promenade explaining the history of the pastime (before 1925, only the elite played them, but mass production brought them to the



Learning masquerades as fun at Technopolis

Taking kids seriously

Mechelen likes to think of itself as a child-friendly place. Well, so does McDonald's. But the Flemish town has developed a policy that involves a bit more imagination than simply squeezing children into a crowded space filled with coloured balls. One of Mechelen's ideas is a children's city council elected by kids in their final year of primary school. They meet to discuss ways of improving the city from a child's point of view and then present their proposals to the grown-up city council. They have a mini mayor (who wears a mini sash) and a mini charter to guide the town in the right direction.

Now you might start to wonder if you genuinely want 11-year-olds deciding on things like education (a Playstation console at every desk) or road traffic management (one lane reserved for skateboards). But these kids from Mechelen have come up with some sharp ideas. One is a label for child-friendly restaurants in town. Some 14 places have passed the test so far, including (no surprise) McDonald's and Pizza Hut, but also the much-loved De Cirque and old-fashioned Den Beer on Grote Markt.

Derek Blyth

online

www.mechelenkinderstad.be

general public) and a room with View-Masters. The Meccano section is most impressive (although a few too many Eiffel Towers), and the top floor has a huge K'NEX area, complete with tables for visitors to assemble their own figures with the stick-building game.

Other interactive bits include mini-billiard and table football to help budding jocks channel their

competitive natures. Not to be missed: the life-sized R2D2 and C3PO figures made of Legos, and the 3D staging of Brueghel's painting "Children's Games" that one can walk through and see toys and games from 450 years ago.

online

www.speelgoedmuseum.be

SOCIETY

Right on, sister

The Flemish tradition of the *tante nonneke* is alive and well



From the past and into the future: Sister Amelie Janssens with Congolese girls in 1892 (above); Sister Suzy at work in Malie (below)



Monique Philips

Forty years ago every self-respecting Flemish family had a *nonkel pastor* (uncle pastor) who would drop in for a nice Sunday meal, or a *tante nonneke* (auntie nun) in some faraway cloister. Traditionally, the oldest son in said respectable family was destined to become a teacher, the second to become a priest.

In 1947 there was a record 50,000 nuns in Flanders. Schools and hospitals were their exclusive domain; sometimes elderly people still call a nurse *zuster* (sister). Now these jobs have mostly been taken over by secular organizations, so what are the sisters doing?

There are today about 9,000 nuns left in Flanders, and the average age is 70 years. But most of them aren't exactly enjoying the quite life; they're focusing on new ways to serve – some in Africa, some right here. Recently, I paid them a visit. (Being educated in a Catholic school, you can imagine my dread.)

Suzy of the Sisters of Charity has been living and working for about 30 years in Mali alongside Rwandan and Congolese nuns. They run a health-care centre and a maternity unit in the Muslim Bambarra area. They do excellent work in difficult circumstances. The 60-year-old Flemish sister fervently continues to follow her vocation, even if in the past she had to return to Belgium regularly for health reasons.

Suzy remembers the explosive outbreak of Aids in Western Africa. "At first we didn't know what was going on. It started with five inexplicable deaths, and at one point we had 300 new patients," she says. In the 1990s, she went to study the subject at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp. Fortunately, African bishops weren't born yesterday. "One of them told me: 'Don't ask me what to do, or I'd have to tell you about the guidelines from Rome.'" (On top of that, condoms clash with the Muslim belief of fatalism, *Insha'Allah*.)

Still, Suzy feels lucky to live far from Rome and to be able to live her life in Africa according to the gospel. "Africans aren't docile yes-nodders, and there are no holy white nuns," she says frankly. "In the West we could learn a lot from the African notion of hospitality."

When Sister Suzy visits Belgium, she stays with the Sisters of Charity, Fabiënne and Vincent, who live in their two-person community in Lovenjoel near Leuven. "We haven't had a free moment to realise that we are retired. And we've been retired now for 10 years!" exclaims Sister Fabiënne. After a lifelong career in nursing, the fierce-looking sister was allowed to start her own community. They started off

with five sisters, all mavericks, but the project they had in mind – offering shelter to the most needy – proved too difficult for some of the members, and they left.

Fabiënne and Vincent, though, were up for the challenge. "We felt that there was a lack of support and love in the larger communities. If you don't particularly get along with another sister, you take the other stairs. That isn't possible here," explains Fabiënne. "Also, to take secular people into a religious community, one needs to be extremely flexible and accept that your guests live very differently. There's no communal prayer, for

of Sunil soap," smiles Fabiënne. Their children still come over regularly to visit or study in one of the bedrooms. "We're like their grandparents."

Meanwhile, a mother and child from Cameroon have just moved out. Every morning little Sara called out the names at the breakfast table: "Fabi, Vincent, Wang-Wang." They have a broad diversity of guests, and they can stay as long as they need to. "Some outsiders feel we shouldn't help these youngsters. I don't care. And if I'm cheated once in a while, I don't care either. If you've never been cheated, you've never been good."

"If I'm cheated once in a while, I don't care. If you've never been cheated, you've never been good."

- Sister Fabiënne of Lovenjoel

instance. Love is the basis. We love and support our guests without mincing too many words about it."

When Fabiënne was 23 years old, all she wanted was to marry and start a big family. In the end, she followed a new calling. "When somebody asks why I'm not married, I'll explain – but it's difficult to explain a vocation," she says. Becoming a nun in the 1970s wasn't as common as it had been in the past, and lots of women struggled with families that objected. In addition, rules and regulations were changing drastically within religious life. Fabiënne laughingly remembers all the updates in regalia. "They'd asked me to model the new uniform, so I had to undress in front of all those sweet nuns." As large communities gave way to smaller ones, eventually the veil was shortened – and then dropped altogether.

During the 10 years of their retirement, Sisters Fabiënne and Vincent have taken in many guests. Fabiënne speaks Dutch and Vincent French (but they live in perfect harmony). "Sometimes Vincent closes a door that I've just opened. Then I'll say 'leave that open,' and she'll answer 'no,' but that's it." They work independently, assisting people in extreme and temporary need. "Once we got a call about a young mother and her baby who had been kicked out of her parents' house on Christmas Eve. So we drove off to pick her up," remembers Fabiënne.

Other guests, like a group of Vietnamese boat refugees, have become family. The director of the institution where they were being held at the time said: "You can take them with you right now." So they all crammed into the sisters' small car. "I remember they only had a scrubbing brush and a box

But they aren't allowed to settle permanently. After all, these two elderly ladies have a hectic schedule outside their home, too. Recently Sister Fabiënne was asked to be an "animator" in two other communities. "Spiritual animation," she specifies. The idea is to stimulate the elderly sisters by reading religious texts together and speaking their minds about it.

Though it would seem that social work aspects play a part, it's religion that remains the driving force for these people. Sisters see themselves as an instrument in God's hands. They claim it's the Holy Spirit that speaks and works through them. Fabiënne explains: "For me, God isn't a thing, but a person. He's someone who has put me into this world and who likes me. My life needs to reciprocate that love, through helping people."

More and more, religious life is dwindling. Churches are being converted, cloisters closing. "Yet I think more people believe than not," asserts Sister Fabiënne. "They just call it differently. When I see a little flower in the fields, I could sing for joy, knowing who has planted it. But most people don't see the loving connection between God and humans anymore."

According to Fabiënne, schools and parents play a part in this lack of insight. "Many people don't even know the Gospel anymore and certainly don't realise its depth. The Gospel is full of simple advice to make life more bearable."

But would they choose the same kind of lives now? All nod emphatically. "We love our lives, and we would do it all over again."

online

www.archief-museum.zvl.org

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Classical & new music**Brussels**

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be

FEB 1 20.00 José Van Dam, bass-baritone with Maciej Pukulski, piano: songs by Fauré, Duparc, Ibert, Debussy
FEB 3 11.00 Lorenzo Gatto, violin; Philippe Raskin, piano: Beethoven's Sonata for Violin and Piano No 1 op 12/1, Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin and Piano No 1 op 80, Janacek violin and piano sonata 15.00 Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional de Mexico conducted by Carlos Miguel Prieto with Jorge Federico Osorio, piano: Chavez, Ponce, Revueltas

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
FEB 4 20.00 Dietrich Henschel, baritone; Fritz Schwinghammer, piano: lieder by Brahms and Webern

Embassy of Japan

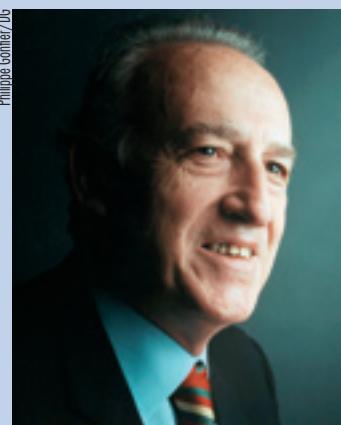
Kunstlaan 58; 02.511.23.07,
www.be.emb-japan.go.jp
FEB 4 19.00 Fumie Onda, piano: Chopin, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov

Kapel van de Miniemens

Miniemensstraat 62; 02.507.82.00,
www.minimes.net
JAN 31 20.00 Collegium Vocale Gent soloists, conducted by Philippe Herreweghe: Lassus' Lagrime di San Pietro

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
JAN 30 12.40-13.30 Guarneri Ensemble: Mendelsson, Schubert
FEB 6 12.40-13.30 Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by Theodor Guschlbauer, with Olga Pasichnyk,

Get your tickets now for...**Maurizio Pollini**

February 19, 20.00, Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels. Tickets from 02.507.82.00 or www.bozar.be

One of today's most famous pianists, whose career shot to fame when he won the formidable Chopin competition in Warsaw in 1960, Pollini gets mixed responses. Some praise his fabulous technique, broad repertoire and the elegant clarity of his sound. Others have no patience for his fondness of contemporary music and his cool, dispassionate playing. Now 66, he has cut back his schedule to a mere 30 to 40 concerts a year. The more reason not to miss the next one, which features the first book of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: 24 Preludes and Fugues of bewildering beauty and complexity. The steel-fingered Italian has been polishing them for more than two decades.

soprano: Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven (60th anniversary of Concerts de Midi)

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00
JAN 30 20.00 Lorenzo Ghielmi, fortepiano; Vittorio Ghielmi, viola da gamba: JS Bach, CPE Bach
JAN 31 20.00 Hungarian Day tribute to violinist André Gertler: Sebastian Strings, conducted by Katalin Sebestyén: Dohnányi, Kocsár, Weiner, Seiber, Bartók
FEB 2 20.00 BCO@conservatory: from classic to flamenco: Mozart, de Falla
FEB 7 20.00 Onverwachte Ontmoetingen: Prometheus Ensemble with Hubert Damen: Beethoven, Holliger (tickets 052.30.22.23)

Antwerp**Amuz**

Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
FEB 1 21.00 Tasto Solo, conducted by Guillermo Perez: anonymous tablatures from the Buxheimer Orgelbuch and the Lochamer Liederbuch (1440-1470)
FEB 3 15.00 La Risonanza, conducted by Fabio Bonizzoni: Handel cantatas

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Concerts at 20.00:
JAN 30 Tenebrae chamber choir, conducted by Nigel Short: Renaissance and contemporary music
FEB 7 The Monnaie Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Kazushi Ono, with Letizia Belmondo, harp; Béatrice Uria-Monzon, mezzo; Luk Nielandt, oboe: Berlioz' La Mort de Cléopâtre, Symphonie fantastique op 14, Schnittke's concerto for oboe, harp and string orchestra

Bruges**Concertgebouw**

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
JAN 30 Schönberg Ensemble, conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw: Kagel's Divertimento? - Farce für Ensemble, Goevaerts' Zum Wassermann, Abrahamsen's Schnee
FEB 1 20.00 Chanticleer vocal ensemble, conducted by Joseph Jennings: Byrd, Palestrina, Mahler, Poulenc, Barber, Ligeti, folk and jazz
FEB 3 15.00 Tasto Solo ensemble: Conrad Paumann and the 15th-century German Keyboard School
FEB 5 20.00 La Risonanza ensemble: Handel cantatas

Ghent

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01
JAN 30 20.00 Jean-Philippe Collard, piano: Ravel, Messiaen, Mussorgsky

Ninove

De Plomblom Cultuurcentrum
Graanmarkt 12; 054.34.10.01
FEB 7 20.30 Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by Theodor Guschlbauer, with Hendrickje Van Kerckhove, soprano: Mozart, Beethoven

Opera**Brussels****De Munt**

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Until FEB 7 Freiburger Baroque Orchestra in Giulio Cesare in Egitto, conducted by René Jacobs, with Lawrence Zazzo, counter-tenor; Marijana Mijanovic, alto
Until MAR 9 La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra & Choirs in Wozzeck by Alban Berg, conducted by Mark Wigglesworth, with Dietrich Henschel/Werner Van Mechelen, bass-baritones; Martina Serafin, soprano; Douglas Nasrawi, tenor

Antwerp**Vlaamse Opera**

Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
Until FEB 9 La Strada, adapted from the Fellini film, conducted by Koen Kessels, staged by Waut Koeken, with Jeannette Fischer, soprano; Richard Salter, baritone; Yves Saelens, tenor

Jazz & blues**Brussels**

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
FEB 1 20.00 Christian Scott

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortrstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
FEB 7 20.30 Määks Spirit with Kgafela + Samatha7

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
JAN 30 20.30 Musicazur

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
Concerts at 22.00:
JAN 30 Chamaquindo, salsa **JAN 31** The Singers Night **FEB 1** Nicola Andrioli Paris Quartet **FEB 2** Brussels Rhythm'n Blues **FEB 4** Master Session with Bart De Nolf, Michael Blass, Mimi Verderame **FEB 5** Jazz Big Band

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
JAN 30 Groovepact **JAN 31** Jean-Philippe Collard-Neven/Jean-Louis Rassinfosse Duo **FEB 1** Bart Quartier Quintet **FEB 2** Rachel Gould & The New Look Trio **FEB 6** Oliver Nelson Project **FEB 7** Fabrizio Graceffa Quartet

Strombeek

Cultural Centre
Gemeenteplein; 03.235.04.90
JAN 30 20.15 Rzewski-Fiorni Duo & Erik Vermeulen Trio

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

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
FEB 1 20.00 Reel Big Fish+Streetlight Manifesto
FEB 2 20.00 Plain White T's + The Spill Canvas + The Fold
FEB 7 20.00 Delavega

Atelier 210

Sint-Pieterssteenweg 210; 02.732.25.98,
www.atelier210.be
Concerts at 21.00:
JAN 30 Dan Miller
JAN 31 Two-Star Hotel + The Banshee + The Vismets
FEB 2 Jon Kennedy

Café Central

Borgval 14; 02.513.73.08
JAN 31 23.00 Central Electric: Trap-Roach with Harry Poppins & Roachbugincan

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
FEB 2 23.00 Ken Ishii, Dj Pierre

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
JAN 30 20.00 James Deano & band
FEB 1 20.00 Yoav

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
FEB 1 20.00 My American Heart + The Blackout

Borgerhout

Hof Ter Lo
Noordersingel 30; 03.543.90.30
FEB 2 20.30 Obituary

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28
FEB 7 20.30 The Go Find + Mintzkov

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44
FEB 2 20.00 Hong Kong Dong + ENON

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
FEB 6 20.00 Milow

World, folk**Brussels**

Au Stekerlapatte
Priesterstraat 4; 02.512.86.81
JAN 31 21.30 Zwiebel

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
FEB 2 20.30 Mísia and Maria de Medeiros, fado

Charliermuseum

Kunstlaan 16; 02.507.83.31,
www.charliermuseum.be
JAN 31 12.30 Roland Tchakounte (Cameroon)

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00,
www.muziekpubliek.be
FEB 1 20.00 Dancas Occultas (Portugal)

Antwerp

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00
FEB 7 20.30 Eneida Marta (Guinea-Bissau)

Ghent

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01
FEB 2 20.00 Steve Earle & Allison Moorer

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
FEB 7 20.30 Okkervil River + Sleeping Dog

Dance

Brussels
Kaaithéaterstudio's
Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59
Until FEB 2 20.30 Showtitle #63 Black Mark, choreography by Marc Vanrunxt

Les Riches-Claires
Rijke Klaarenstraat 24; 02.548.25.80,
www.lesrichesclaires.be
FEB 7-9 20.30 Compagnie Gilschamber & Cie Go in Rencontre, choreography by Gilles Schamber and Eric Mezino

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
JAN 31 20.00 Reportable Portraits/Notice Me!, choreography by Kattrin Deufert and Thomas Plischke (part of Amperdans 3)

Theater 't Eilandje

Kattendijkdok 3; 03.203.95.85
FEB 2 20.00 Royal Ballet of Flanders in Herman Schmerman, choreography by William Forsythe, music by Thom Willem; M/C, choreography by Cayetano Soto; Insiders, choreography by Matteo Moles; Lost by Last, choreography by Jorma Elo (part of Amperdans 3)

Turnhout

De Warande
Warandestraat 42; 014.41.69.91

FEB 5-6 20.15 Kretakor company in Blackland, staged by Arpad Schilling, theatre/circus/music (in Hungarian with French and Dutch surtitles, part of Europalia)

Visual arts

Brussels
Algemeen Rijksarchief
Ruisbroekstraat 8; 02.513.76.80
Until FEB 16 Congo S.A.N.V., documents and photographs about Belgian enterprises in the Congo in the 19th and 20th centuries

Arts en Marge
Hoogstraat 312; 02.511.04.11
Until FEB 16 Anarchitecte, constructions by outsider artist Richard Greaves pictured by Swiss photographer Mario del Curto (see also Brussels' CIVA)

Baronian-Francey Gallery
Isidore Verheydenstraat 2; 02.512.92.95
Until MAR 1 Landscape photography by Florian Maier-Aichen

Bozar
Koningsstraat 10; 070.22.52.29
Until FEB 2 Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the world in the 16th and 17th centuries, 180 art works, maps, navigational instruments and early printed books from the time of Portugal's trading empire and voyages of discovery

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
Until MAR 30 The Unreal Image: Emblems, Symbols and Metaphors, photographs by Charles Nègre, Achille Quinet, Julia Margaret Cameron, Henry Peach Robinson, James Craig Annan and many others
Until MAR 31 Image/Construction, photographs of architecture by Filip Dujardin

CIVA
Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.71, www.civa.be
Until FEB 16 Anarchitecte, installation by outsider artist Richard Greaves (see Art en Marge related listing)
Until MAR 9 MAXXI Museum Rome: Zaha Hadid Architects, models, photographs and video presenting Rome's future Museum of Art for the 21st century

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

De Markten
Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
Until FEB 17 Home, works by Marc De Blieck and Initia vzw

Dieleghem Abbey
Jan Tiebackxstraat 14; 02.428.71.03
Until FEB 17 Vikings! Les rois de la mer, reproductions and maquettes illustrating three centuries of the Vikings

Espace Architecture La Cambre
Flageyplein 19; 02.642.24.50
Until FEB 24 European Supermarket: 50 Years, from the opening of the first self-service store in Belgium in 1957 to the construction of supermarkets all over Europe

Espace Culturel ING
Koningsplein 6; 02.547.22.92
Until FEB 17 Brilliant Europe, 800 years of jewellery in Europe, with paintings, miniatures, engravings and 200 pieces of jewellery

Espace Photographique Contretype
Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until MAR 9 Les yeux dans les yeux, photographs by Andreas Weinand

Fondation pour l'Architecture
Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be
Until APR 20 Landscapes of Architecture: 150 years of Belgian architects' drawings, with work by Joseph Bascourt, Albert Bontridder, Victor Bourgeois, Renaat Braem, Gaston et Maxime Brufaut, Peter Callebaut, Alban Chambon and many others

Gallery Garden
Stevinstraat 206; 02.734.64.38, 0479.01.69.47, www.tonyclerkson.com
Until FEB 22 In the City, images of Brussels, Paris, London, Glasgow and Budapest by Scottish photographer Tony Clerkson

Husson Gallery Bookshop
Alsembergsesteenweg 142; 02.534.33.54
Until JAN 31 People in Motion, photographs by Michel Dusariez

Indigo Studios
Overwinningstraat 96; 02.534.75.72
Until JAN 31 Golden Years-Rock 70/80, photographs by Paul Coerten

ISELP
Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until MAR 22 Rue de la Comtesse de Flandre, paintings by Bernard Gaube
JAN 31-APR 5 Ceramics by Laurence Deweer and textiles by Delphine Grand'ry

JAN 31-APR 5 Serre les dents, works by François Jacob

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until FEB 24 Sarah and her Brothers, history through the eyes of the Kaliskis family of artists

Jonas Gallery
Vlaanderenstraat 35; 02.503.50.55
Until FEB 23 Photographs on canvas by Christian d'Hoir

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

La Cambre
Abdij Ter Kameren 14
FEB 1-13 Les Animaux de la ferme et une petite usine blanche, a selection of works by Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Dans, Jacques Lizène, Olof Nicolai and Andres Serrano

La Fonderie – Brussels Museum of Work and Industry
Ransfortstraat 27; 02.410.99.50
Until MAY 4 Tout feu, tout flamme! La révolution du chauffage, history and evolution of home heating

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until MAR 2 Un certain regard, works by artists from CRÉHAM (creativity and mental handicap)

Royal Army Museum
Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until NOV A Paintbrush in the Barrel, World War One paintings, drawings and etchings by soldiers

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 Museums of Art and History
Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until MAR 2 Beauty Singular-Plural, 5th Design Triennial, on the theme of beauty, its criteria, diversity and subjectivity

Until APR 20 Onder dak in China, 2,000 years of funeral architecture and furniture from China's Henan museum
Until APR 27 From Gilgamesh to Zenobia, highlights from the museum's collection of ancient art from the Middle East and Iran plus 12 masterpieces from the Louvre

Royal Museums of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
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 Golschmidt, curator and publisher

Sint-Gorikshallen
Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24
Until FEB 29 Photography & the Changing Cityscape: Brussels 1850-1880, urban development and the evolution of early photography in 19th-century Brussels

Tour & Taxis
Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until FEB 15 The Building of Europe, a Vision on Heritage, photographs of past winners of the Europa Nostra Award for restoration and preservation of cultural heritage (part of Europa)

Until MAR 23 It's our History!, multimedia exhibition on the development of the EU and the lives of Europeans citizens since 1945

Young Gallery/Hotel Conrad
Louisaalaan 75b; 02.374.07.04
Until FEB 16 A.N.A.T.O.L.E and Inside, photographs by Katya Legendre with texts by Yann Quéllec

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60
Until FEB 10 Collection presentation XXI, with works by Charif Benhelima, Suchan Kinoshita, Sergei Bratkov and many others

FEB 1-MAY 4 Santhal Family: Positions around an Indian Sculpture, contemporary art group show relating to a sculpture made in 1938 by Ramkinkar Baij, with works by Santanu Bose, Matti Braun, Calcutta Art Research, Ritwik Ghatak, Sheela Gowda, Boran Handsa, N.S. Harsha and many more

FEB 1-MAR 9 Lonely at the top: Seamus Harahan, video works by the contemporary Irish artist

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
Until MAR 30 Mimétisme, group show of contemporary art, with work by Paweł Althamer & Artur Zmijewski, Elisabetta Benassi, Charif Benhelima, Lieven de Boeck and many others
Fifty-One Fine Art Photography
Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58
Until MAR 8 Interiors, photographs evoking a love for places and interiors by James Casebere, Lucinda Devlin, Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Abelardo Morell, Matthew Pillsbury, Kate Schererhorn, Karl Hugo Schmölz, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Friederike von Rauch

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten/Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until MAR 2 Didactic show on the newly restored Rubens painting The Prodigal Son

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 mayor Nicolaas Rockox

Ghent

Maalbeekbrugkasteel
Kortrijksesteenweg 1023; 09.242.88.22
Until APR 27 Het DNA van de kunst (The DNA of Art), works by Tjok Dessaugave and Katy De Bock

Museum Dr Guislain

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be

Until APR 27 Sick: Between Body and Mind, multimedia exhibition showcasing the links between mental and physical pain, with work by Félicien Rops, Patrik Vermeulen, Dana Wyse, Léon Spilliaert and many others

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)
Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03
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

Pascal Polar Gallery
Zeedijk 811; 050.68.56.23
Until JAN 31 Photography & Photomontage, by Olivier Christinat, Godfried Donkor, Claude Fauville and others

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20

Don't miss this week



Carnaval

February 2-3, across Flanders. Check local tourist office websites, especially www.aalst.be

This weekend and throughout February you'll find Carnival celebrations all across Flanders. Many cities and towns have something going on, but Aalst is (in)famous for its weekend celebration of parades, theatre, masquerade, street parties, onion throwing and general cheeky behaviour. Carnival is the traditional time to go crazy before Lent, so don't hold back.

Until FEB 3 Video works by Keren Cypter

Until MAR 1 at venues across Belgium 04.342.00.00, www.theatredelaplace.be

Brussels

Brussels Holiday Show: international tourism
FEB 7-11 at Brussels Expo, Heysel 02.474.89.81, www.uwvakantie.be

Carnabruzelas: party-time with a Brazilian theme
FEB 2 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86C 02.549.60.49, www.carnabruzelas.com

Carnaval of the Witches of Tarkham: special tour in celebration of Carnival
FEB 2-5 at Musée d'Art Fantastique, Amerikastraat 7 0475.41.29.18, www.maisonbizarre.be

Dimanches de la danse: dance festival featuring short works by artists living and working in Brussels
Until FEB 24 at Halles de Schaerbeek, Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22 02.218.21.07, www.halles.be

Festival of poetry and French chanson: from the Middle Ages to the present day, includes exhibitions, workshops, concerts and a competition
Until APR 19 at La Maison du Livre, Romestraat 28, and other venues 02.543.12.20, www.lamaisonduivre.be

Miouzz.com: improve concert by the Extincteurs

Monthly until JUNE 24 at Espace Delvaux, Gratijsstraat 3; 02.663.85.50

US Presidential Elections Night: hosted by The Bulletin on America's big day of primary elections, Super Tuesday. With live music and debates between Belgian-based democrat and republican parties
FEB 5, 21.00, at the Conrad Hotel, Louizalaan 17 www.xpats.com

Other towns

Amperdans 3 International Dance Festival
Until FEB 2 at locations across Antwerp 03.203.95.85, www.amperdans.eu

Flanders Collection Car: fair for classic cars and vintage sports cars
FEB 2-3 at Ghent Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1 09.241.92.11, www.flandersexpo.be

International Vakantiesalon: holiday and caravanning fair
Until JAN 30 at Antwerp Expo, Jan Van Rijswijkstraat 191 03.260.81.22, www.antwerpexpo.be

Festivals & special events

Carnival celebrations: from parades and folklore traditions to the burning of giant bonfires, at locations across Belgium

02.504.03.00

Europalia: Festival of music, literature, dance, exhibitions and cinema celebrating the cultural diversity of the 27 EU countries

Until FEB 3 at venues across Belgium 02.507.85.94, www.europalia.eu

Festival Pays de Danses: new dance festival

MY FLANDERS

Colin Clapson

Colin Clapson is editor of VRT's English-language news service. He tells us about recent changes in the newsroom and the challenges of reporting on the news in Flanders

What brought you to Flanders?

Well, I didn't have much say in the matter. I was born in the UK, but when I was nine my parents decided to move to Belgium. My mum was originally from Ostend, but I learnt Dutch at school here. It is incredible how many Ostend people have an English parent, and it is a very nice place to live.

Can you tell us a bit about the VRT?

The VRT is the Flemish public broadcaster. It's a bit like the BBC but on a more modest scale. It's funded from the public purse and from advertising revenue but is independent of government. Every five years the VRT negotiates a contract with the Flemish government setting out what services it should provide in return for funding.

How long have you worked for the VRT English news service?

It's hard to imagine, but I've been working here for 23 years now. I started at RVI, our international broadcaster, and produced and presented "Brussels Calling" and its successor "Flanders Today" for over 20 years. Three years ago the English news team joined VRT's online division. Our site was relaunched at the beginning of January 2008. It means that we are now able to carry English language video reports from VRT television news – a definite improvement.

How many people work on the English news desk?

We're a very small team of just

five people. Deanne Lehman is from New York, and Mike Barlow comes from Manchester in the UK. Michael Torfs and Dominique Fiers work on both the English and Dutch websites. They are both great anglophiles. But thanks to our new integrated newsroom, we can draw on the work of all TV, radio and online journalists at the VRT, some 300 people in all.

Can you tell us about the recent changes in the newsroom?

Last year VRT integrated its three news divisions: TV, Radio and Online. Today we all work in one open landscape complex covering two floors of the VRT broadcasting centre in Schaerbeek. It means you can always go over to a colleague working on a story that you are interested in. Things move more quickly, and we can guarantee greater reliability. The BBC is currently planning a similar operation, but there it's more a cost-cutting measure. To put things into perspective, they hope to save 500 jobs, while staff numbers at VRT News are only around 400.

But you got there before the BBC?

Yes, it's a trend across Europe, and there has been an enormous interest in the project from foreign broadcasters.

The new VRT site has been criticised in the Flemish media. Do you think the comments are fair?

I was surprised by the criticism. A lot of people have been working day and night on the new site, and



we think it is a success. The aim of the site is to give users immediate access to as much video material as possible without having to go through any complicated navigation. Of course there have been a number of start-up problems, but we've been working hard to resolve these as soon as possible. The new site means that the international community now has easy access to Flemish news stories in an attractive video format in a language they can

understand. As well as English, the site is available in German at www.flanderinfo.be and in French at www.flandreinfo.be.

tionship between Flanders and the wider world, what Flemings are doing abroad and what the international community is doing here.

Interview by Derek Blyth

online
www.flandersnews.be

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

"The time is ripe to invest in the Congo"

Johan Swinnen
Belgian ambassador in the Congo, following the signing of a peace agreement to end conflict in the east of the country

"We have the safest food in the world"

Piet Vanthemsche
deputy-chairman of the Farmers' Union, in response to a report by consumer organisation Test-Aankoop that found high levels of pesticides in Belgian fruit and vegetables

"Thank you, Jan De Cock. You've brought this place to life for the first time"

Roxana Marcoci
MoMA curator, at the launch of the Flemish artist's New York show

The American issue Gazette Van Detro
it Flemish Beer Allochtoon MyAme
rica Flemish Immigrants Romantic
B&Bs Bl!ndman
next week in Flanders Today