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Reuters



Great expectations

The Belgian team heads off to Beijing with hopes of winning medals, but no one looks more likely to win gold than Tia Hellebaut

Leo Cendrowicz

For someone carrying the expectations of a nation on her very high shoulders, Tia Hellebaut appears astonish-

ingly unflustered. The current European high jump champion, possibly Flanders' and Belgium's best hope for a gold medal at the Beijing Olympics next month, is

almost blasé about the pressures of competing on the highest stage. "Of course, everyone feels the pressure – on the track, in the media," she says. "But I like pres-

sure. Some people don't like stress." Hellebaut, speaking in perfect English, is sitting in the offices of her sports agency in Paal-Beringen,

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Business

Pump it up. High oil prices are blamed for Belgium's 5.91% inflation rate, the worst in 24 years. But some economists are saying that the worst is over.

Arts

Who needs the Caribbean when you have the Kempen on your doorstep? Some of the best sounds this summer can be heard at the Antilles Festival in Hoogstraten.

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Active

Most people don't even realise you can play American football in Flanders, but it's a popular sport that produces some star players, argues Leader Schaerlaeckens in a new series on minority sports.

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Belgian mussels taken off the shelves

Food safety agency criticised over delays

Alan Hope

The Federal Food Safety Agency has called for an inquiry into delays in withdrawing unsafe mussels from the market. At the same time, the mussels' producer affected by the sales ban has blamed his competitor and threatened to take the agency to court.

Last week it was revealed that 7.5 tonnes of Belgica mussels, harvested off the Belgian coast at Nieuwpoort, had been contaminated by the diarrhetic shellfish poisoning toxin (DSP), a toxin produced by parasitic algae which can cause nausea

and stomach pains.

The tests were carried out on newly-harvested mussels on 22 July by an external laboratory, but it took until 1 August before the Food Agency was informed, preventing the affected mussels from being removed from the shelves. As a result, only 1.5 tonnes was withdrawn, as the other six tonnes had already been consumed.

While there have been no reports of mass outbreaks of food poisoning, the Food Agency is taking the problem of the delay very seriously. Although DSP

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Delvauxmuseum

We continue our series on the Flemish coast this week by dipping our toe in the water at Koksijde. Like other Belgian resorts, this is not just a place to go with buckets and spades, but also somewhere to search out serious art and culture. There are interesting museums and historic monuments just a few kilometres inland from the beach huts, perfect places to escape from the rain.

The most unexpected is the Paul Delvaux Museum, located in the hamlet of Sint Idesbald among the whitewashed coastal villas. Delvaux spent his final years here, working on surrealist paintings in which naked women wander in deserted buildings and small girls watch trains pass by. These strange, disturbing works have become embedded in the collective national consciousness, like the paintings of Magritte or the songs of Jacques Brel.

Delvaux's haunting themes are based on childhood memories of growing up in the streets of Brus-

sels' Louiza quarter close to the Palace of Justice, where his father worked as a lawyer. The first sight of a tram rumbling through the streets sparked off a lifelong fixation on trams. A visit to a travelling museum of medical curiosities at the Brussels Fair – which included a mechanical Venus that appeared to breath – triggered an obsession with sad nude women and skeletons.

But his biggest childhood passions, he once confessed, were the books of Jules Verne. "I was completely fascinated by the engraving showing Otto Lidenbrock, the wise geologist, in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. The scientist appears in many of his canvases, including his 1971 *Hommage to Jules Verne* (below), which is one of the highlights of the Delvaux museum.

Derek Blyth

online

www.delvauxmuseum.com



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FACE OF FLANDERS



Wim Vansevenant

When the Tour de France ended in Paris last week, it brought a triumphal end to the career of one Belgian cyclist, though you had to scour the sports pages even to find a mention. Wim Vansevenant, a member of the Silence Lotto team, was last in the rankings, 3h55:45 behind the winner Carlos Sastre. It was a record-breaking performance: no-one in the history of the Tour has ever been last three times, and three times in a row at that.

Vansevenant wins the unofficial Lanterne Rouge, an honour which refers back to the steam-train age, when a red lamp was hung on a train's last carriage to let stationmasters know none of the wagons had come uncoupled. He almost didn't make it: before time-trials on the last Saturday he was second-last with about 40 seconds disadvantage to Bernard Eisel. Somehow he managed to make good a full minute, and his crown was safe.

It would be easy to think, as the Tour operators did in 1980 when they withdrew their backing for the Lanterne Rouge classification, that such concentration on being last makes a mockery of the Tour. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Vansevenant is what's called a *domestique*, a foot-soldier of the team. His job in the *peloton* is to make things as easy as possible for his star team-mates – this year second-placed Cadel Evans. He carries water for the lead runner. If an accident happens he might give up his wheel to let the leader carry on with minimum delay.

Nancy Toby is a mother of three and a triathlete who, she admits, has come dead last in her share of events. She runs the highly popular Lanterne Rouge Blog which follows last-placed runners in agonising detail. "Wim Vansevenant is a survivor, and as he labours to support his team leader, Cadel Evans, every day of the Tour, he is perhaps the noblest representative of the self-effacing efforts of every *domestique* in the *peloton* who rides, unnoticed, in the essential support of every leader," she says. "We fans have nothing but respect for him and his fellows."

Her blog lists all those who have ever won the Lanterne Rouge. Two-time winners include Jimmy Casper, who narrowly missed the triple when he was pipped in 2006 by Vansevenant. There's Daniel Masson, another Belgian Lanterne in 1922 and 1923. She also lists the final-placings stage by stage, and shows how Vansevenant has got better at being last. In 2006 he was nowhere until stage 11, coming into his own on stage 15. In 2007 he took last place on stage 8 and couldn't be shifted for the rest of the race. This year he was last from stage 3, and dropped only two stages along the way.

Vansevenant commented last year, "Lanterne Rouge is not a position you go for. It comes for you". But it's not something that's handed to you on a plate. In the first place, you have to finish the Tour de France. All those who drop out because of injury or fatigue, are taken away in handcuffs because of doping, or who have to drop out in each stage because they didn't make the time-cut: those are the losers, and the also-rans. Vansevenant is one of only 145 runners who cycled up the Champs Elysées on that final stage, 3,600 km from the start, having kept up an average speed of about 26 km/h even in the Pyrenees and the Alps. There were 199 when the race started in Brest.

Vansevenant now plans to swap his lycra for a pair of overalls, and take over his parents' farm in Diksmuide.

Alan Hope

online

www.tdflr.blogspot.com

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



weervoorspelling

A few days of fresh air are in prospect and I'm off to the coast to join the summer throng. I'm heading for the seaside after work today and I've just had a look at the *weervoorspelling* – weather forecast in the paper. The headline could be better: *Later regenachtig* – Rainy later.

The weather was never something I used to bother much about. Come rain or shine was my motto. Perhaps spending your early years in the soggy north of Scotland makes most other weathers seem quite pleasant. Yet, time passes and your bones tell you otherwise. So what have I to look forward to? You might think that in such a small country the weather must be the same wherever you go, but the coast is usually different from the rest.

Vandaag zijn er opklaringen in de ochtend en is het droog – Today there are clear periods in the morning and it's dry. Well I can see that for myself. But what about later? *De bewaking neemt al vlug toe, gevolgd door perioden van regen in het zuidwesten*. Cloud will soon increase followed by periods of rain in the south west. I'm not sure where the south west is in Belgium but since the coast is in a westerly direction from here, it looks like a wet evening.

Perhaps this evening's rain is just passing through from *de Britse Eilanden* to points east. Let me read further: *donderdag is het zwaar bewolkt met hier en daar kans op een drupje regen*. Oh dear, on Thursday (tomorrow) it's very cloudy with here and there the chance of a drop of rain. Could be worse I suppose; at least we can still get out onto the promenade or *dijk* to take the sea air. Ah, but what's this? *Na de middag volgt er meer intense regen en er is kans op onweer*. In the afternoon there is more intense rain and the chance of thunder and lightning. *Maxima rond 21 of 22°C*, well, we won't freeze as we get soaked.

By the way, *onweer* – "un-weather" is a neat little word, isn't it. Many *on-* words correspond to *un-* words in English: *onbekend* – unknown, *onbetaald* – unpaid. Others don't: *ondiep* – "un-deep" (shallow), *onkruid* – "un-herb" (weed).

But what about Friday? *Bewolkte perioden en opklaringen wisselen elkaar af*. Cloudy periods are interspersed with clear spells. *In de loop van de dag kunnen lokaal wat buien vallen*. In the course of the day there could be local showers. Still not bucket-and-spade weather. But this looks better: *Aan zee blijft het overwegend droog* – at the seaside it'll remain predominantly dry.

And Saturday is a continuation: *Er zijn enkele opklaringen; later neemt de kans op een bui toe* – There are some clear periods; later the chance of a shower will increase.

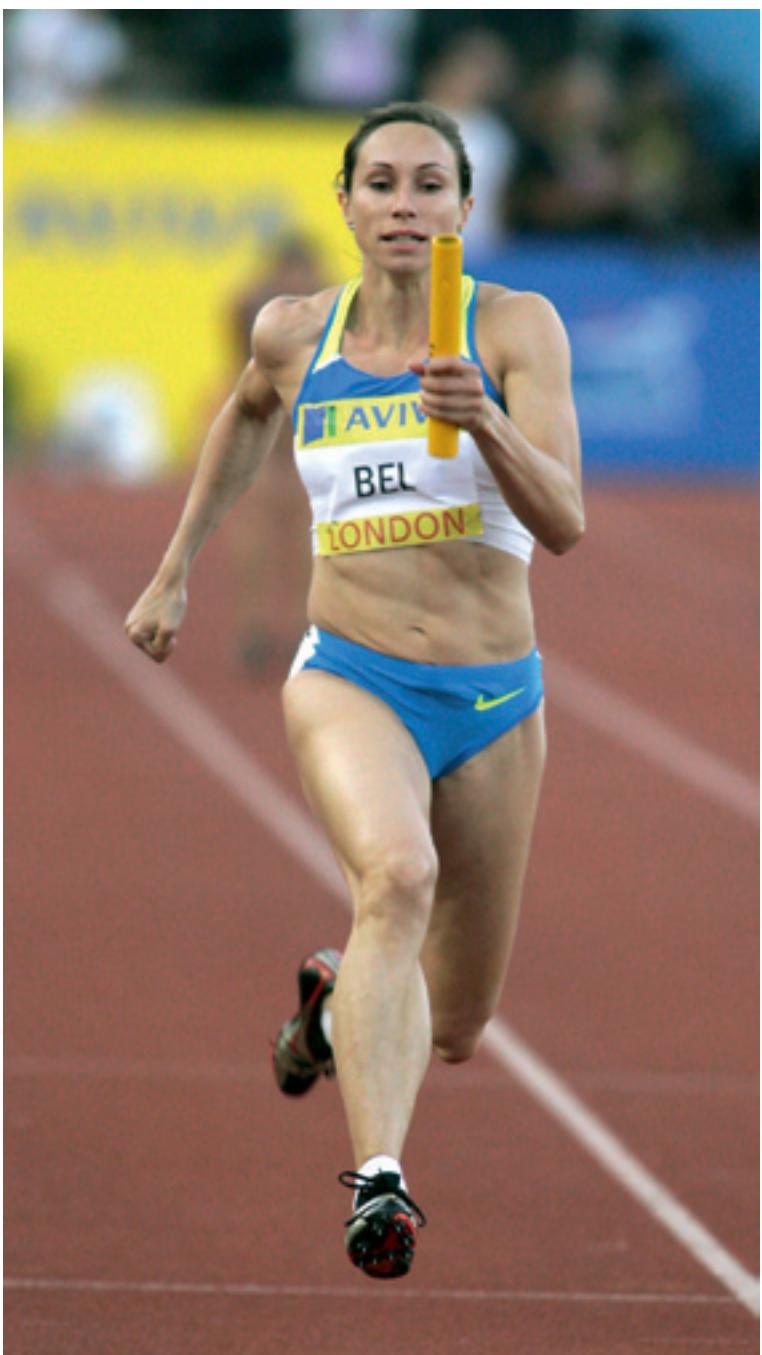
So it doesn't look good. But experience shows that the forecast for the coast is often way out. I'm sure it will be mostly sunny with the rain falling mainly on the plain. But I'm taking an umbrella just in case.

Alistair MacLean

online

kmi.be

FEATURE



Will Kim Gevaert sprint to a medal?

Going for gold

Continued from page 1

Limburg. Lithe and tanned, she is wearing an elegant Asics ensemble of sweater, sweatpants and shoes, as well as her trademark trendy glasses. The 30-year-old Antwerp-born Hellebaut is also, at 1.82m, strikingly tall, although for a high jumper this is an average height.

Despite being self-effacing and even so slightly shy, Hellebaut is immensely popular and recognisable in Belgium – even more so since big names like Pizza Hut, Ernst & Young, and Kia cars signed her up for advertisements.

"The hard work is done," she says. "I'm now down to one training session a day. These final few weeks are about less training but at a higher intensity and more targeted. And with more rest."

Her daily routine now starts with a wake-up call at 8.30, breakfast at 9.00 and training from 10.00 until 12.30. Her afternoon sessions have been culled in the run-up to Beijing, and that gives her more time for a snooze – an important element in many athlete's programs. "My routine is just sleeping, eating and training," she

says.

Her high jump training breaks the action into different parts. "It's very explosive, and it's over in a flash. So you really need good technique," she says. "A training regime can include sprints every day, but not actual high jumps, as you need too much time to recover. So I only actually high jump once a week. And, even on those days, a maximum of 25 jumps and no higher than 1.90m – in fact, usually 1.85m." It might seem as if she's setting the bar almost casually low: this is, after all, a woman whose personal best for outdoor events is 2.03m (although she managed 2.05m when she took the gold at the European Indoor Championships in Birmingham last year).

Hellebaut, who lives in Tessenderlo with her trainer and partner Wim Vandeven, is also blithe about her pre-Olympic diet. Despite the high-tech science that now goes into athletic diets – and her own body fat ratio of just 12% – she insists she does not have any specific nutritional plan. "Every two or three months, a nutrition coach will check in. But I choose my own food," she says. "My chem-

istry degree helps, and I check the nutritional content closely. It's mostly protein, along with carbohydrates if I'm training hard. There are almost no fats, and no cheese."

Hellebaut started at high-jumping at the relatively late age of 11 and did her first heptathlon at national championships at 15. At that time, she was still Tia Van Haver, using the surname of the father she never knew. She changed her name in 1995 when she decided to be officially adopted by Joris Hellebaut, the doctor who had married her mother six years earlier.

Although she has been on the international athletics circuit since she was 18, it took a relatively long time before Hellebaut mounted the podium at overseas events. Her 12th place at the Athens Olympics in 2004, when she was 26, did not promise much.

But two years ago, she claimed the high jump gold at the European Championships in Gothenburg, beating reigning European champion Kajsa Bergqvist on her Swedish rival's home turf. Also that year, she won the Golden Spike award for best Belgian Athlete in 2006. Hellebaut now holds the Belgian records for heptathlon, the indoor pentathlon (no longer an Olympic sport) and high jump.

But while she is firmly focused on her high jump target, she had to sacrifice her other sporting love, heptathlon, earlier this year. A shoulder injury has made it difficult for her to throw the javelin, and she is doubtful about ever contesting a heptathlon again.

Indeed, injury has also interrupted her training in recent months. In March and April, she could not run at all and could only train with weights. "But I'm quite confident that, despite seven weeks without running, I'll be able to compete just as well," she says. "Runners hate it if they don't run each day. But I can find other challenges. Sometimes, it's a blessing in disguise – you find you can work on other muscle groups and help build support for the areas that are injured."

Many top athletes find it hard just to remain calm and patient in the Olympic village as they count down to the heats and finals. But not Hellebaut. "I don't have a problem waiting," she says. "I don't make any plans for the time I'm there, apart from the most basic. Getting injured just the day before would be very stupid. Sleeping is very relaxing – I also read books and do Sudoku. And I listen to music – Toto is good for my motivation. I just go with the flow. If you think too much, you get nervous."

And what about on the field? "When I'm tired and need a boost, I remember why I started in athletics," she says. "I have a pep talk with myself – 'You can do it, you're ready.' A track is a track. And the Olympics are like any other competition: the same athletes, the same girls. What's the problem?"



Mountain biker Sven Nys is part of the 10-strong Belgian team

Tia's teammates

Tia Hellebaut will be flying the flag in Beijing with 94 other Belgians (71 men and 23 women), and the most likely medal hopes are Flemish

Tia Hellebaut's close friend Kim Gevaert is the most ambitious of the Olympic hopefuls. The European 100m and 200m champion will be contesting both those events, as well as the 4x100m relay with three picked from a list of five others: Olivia Borlée, Elisabeth Davin, Hanna Mariën, Elodie Ouedraogo and Frauke Penen.

Other names among the athletes include 3,000m runner Pieter Desmet, pole-vaulter Kevin Rans, 5,000m runner Monder Rizki, triathletes Peter Croes and Axel Zeebroek, and the beach volley duo of Liesbeth Mouha and Liesbet Van Breedam.

The country that produced Eddy Merckx has a 10-strong cycling team that includes mountain bikers Sven Nys and Sydney 2000 silver medalist Filip Meirhaeghe, as well as road racer Mario Aerts. The seven swimmers from Belgium include Tom Vangeneugden (1,500m freestyle), Brian Ryckeman (10 km marathon) and Glenn Surgeloose (200m freestyle). In judo, traditionally a strong Belgian sport, there are Athens 2004 bronze medalist Ilse Heylen and Dirk Van Tichelt.

Despite missing out on the 2006 World Cup and the last two European Championships, Belgium is one of just four European football sides competing in the Olympics. The 20-man team includes promising young players like Thomas Vermaelen, Jan Vertonghen, Maarten Martens, Jeroen Simaeys, Tom De Mul and Stijn De Smet. Another team event is hockey: Belgium is in pool A with Germany, Spain, South Korea, New Zealand and China.

Perhaps a dark horse as a medal contender is Evi Van Acker, from Zaffelare, two-time European champion in Laser Radial sailing and ranked second in the world last year. Others bidding for Olympic glory this year include gymnast Koen Van Damme, the canoe-kayak (K2 1,000m) twosome of Bob Maesen and Kevin De Bont, and eventing's Karin Donckers and Joris Vanspringe.



Evi Van Acker could sail to victory in Beijing, predicts IOC chairman Jacques Rogge

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Mussels recall could lead to legal action

Continued from page 1

symptoms appear within half an hour of eating infected shellfish, they only last about one day. The DSP is relatively mild compared to related shellfish toxins which can bring on respiratory distress and even amnesia, and no DSP-related fatalities have ever been recorded. However, lengthy delays in the case of more serious contamination could have catastrophic consequences.

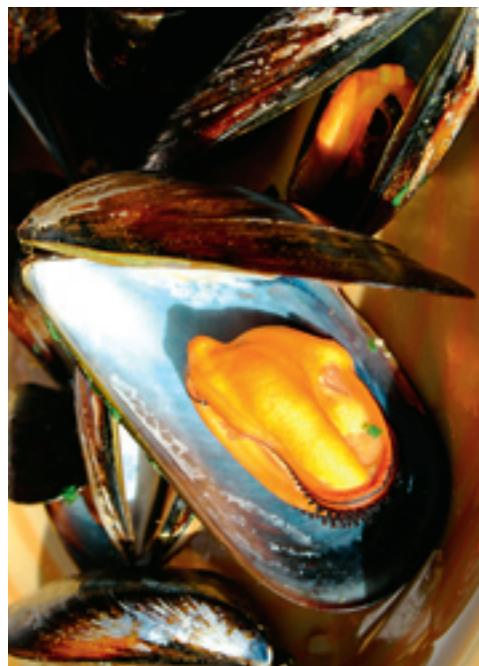
The mussels' producer, meanwhile, reckons the consequences for his business are catastrophic enough. Willy Versluys maintains that the contaminated mussels, which are the only mussels grown in Belgium, are not his. The Belgica is cultivated on ropes hanging in the open sea, while Zeeland mussels (which are not affected by the current recall) are grown on the sea-bed. In both cases, the mussel feeds by filtering hundreds of litres of sea-water a day to trap the plankton and other microscopic organisms in the water (which can include toxin-carrying algae).

Two producers farm mussels in the water off Nieuwpoort: Versluys-Reynaert and

the Ostend-based Foundation for Sustainable Fisheries Development (SDVO). The contaminated samples were taken at sea by the SDVO boat, and Versluys now claims that any infected mussels come from the SDVO buoys, which have not yet been harvested and are, therefore, not affected by the recall. Versluys has ordered independent analysis of his mussels from three private labs, which he says will prove they are clean. If that turns out to be the case, he intends to sue the Food Agency.

"This has kept me from sleeping for days," he said this week. "I don't know whether to laugh or cry. In just a couple of minutes, your dreams are shattered. Who is going to want to buy our mussels in the coming years? When people see me, they'll say, 'Here comes Willy Versluys, the man with the poisoned mussels.'"

The Food Agency, meanwhile, points out that the two producers had a prior agreement to sample each other's production. Both grow in the same water, and the infection of one is assumed also to affect the other. Both areas have been closed for the time being. "If Versluys had taken samples when SDVO



had harvested, the same thing would have happened," an agency spokesperson said.



The animal park Planckendael has achieved a European first with the release into the wild of two monk vulture chicks bred in captivity. The two birds, born in May, were transported to the Gorges du Verdon (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence) where they were released last week. The monk vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) is the subject of a difficult breeding programme coordinated at Planckendael, and the release of two healthy young is regarded as a major success.

Flanders still eating out, but spending less

Turnover in the restaurant and catering sector in Flanders fell by 8-10% in the first half of the year, according to the industry association Horeca Vlaanderen. While patrons continued to eat out in similar numbers to last year, they were spending less, said secretary-general Luc De Bauw.

The cost-cutting is due to a perceived loss of purchasing power coupled with inflation up to 5.9% and higher fuel prices. But this has not led to people staying at home, the figures show.

The urge to save money is having an impact throughout the industry. "Instead of a bottle of wine, the customer goes for a

carafe of house wine," De Bauw said. "A meal in a classic restaurant is replaced by one in a bistro."

The problem of penny-pinching customers is also hitting waiting staff hard, with tips down drastically, particularly at the end of the month.

Meanwhile, at the Flemish coast, businesses said they were "reasonably satisfied" with trade during the month of July, according to a report by the organisation for the self-employed Unizo. An influx of visitors in the last 10 days of the month helped make up for bad weather on the first two weekends, Unizo said.

FIFTH COLUMN



The Cartel

Cartels are odd things. In Flemish politics, the word "cartel" has a very specific meaning. It does not stand for price-fixing agreements between firms, or even crime syndicates. A cartel is a political partnership between two parties. They remain independent, but act as if they are one when it comes to elections. On the voting form they appear as one list, their names joined by a slash. Odd indeed. Cartels are not new, but they used to be typical only of small town politics, where they were a means of driving out a larger party that had been in power for years. When in 2003 a cartel was formed on a national level, between the Flemish socialist SPA and the Flemish nationalist Spirit, it caused mostly bewilderment. How could such a contraption ever work? What if a voter wanted to support one party, but not the other? And what if the parties' points of view differed?

All of these questions became irrelevant when the cartel SPA/Spirit hit a record high at the 2003 national election. The cartel gave the socialists, a rather old-fashioned bunch until then, a major image boost. Socialist party leader Steve Stevaert explained their success as follows: one plus one equals three.

The same "one plus one" formula worked again, not for SPA/Spirit, but for CD&V/N-VA, in 2004 and even more so in 2007. After weeks of secret negotiations following an earlier failed attempt, CD&V and N-VA declared their love on Valentine's Day 2004. Again, the marriage seemed peculiar. How would a small nationalist party with a rebel heart ever get along with a vast popular party that is at its best with a prime minister from within its ranks?

Well, The Cartel, as CD&V/N-VA is often referred to by now, managed. Of course there were hiccups, as when N-VA, at the request of CD&V, grudgingly ousted the popular but partyless Jean-Marie Dedecker only a few days after welcoming him.

Whenever the institutional talks fail to meet yet another deadline, the pressure mounts on The Cartel. Time and time again, there is speculation about it falling apart.

Never underestimate a cartel, however. They have their own dynamics, their own psyche, even and, though they are essentially only temporary agreements, they have a very strong sense of survival.

Anyone who wants to pull CD&V and N-VA apart has to take several things into account. One is the radicalisation of CD&V, which is now closer than ever before to N-VA on institutional matters. The second is Bart De Wever, the N-VA-leader who has strongly identified himself with the cartel and will not give up without a fight. And, finally, cartels are odd things. Maybe, just maybe, it is possible that they can stay in and out of government at the same time. You might find that odd, but the Cartel has been doing just that for the past few months.

Anja Otte

Anja Otte is a freelance Flemish journalist whose work regularly appears in *De Standaard*.

Brussels MPs oppose Ring plans

Several members of the Brussels parliament have spoken out against plans by the Flemish Region to widen the northerly section of the Brussels Ring between the E40 in the direction of Leuven and the E40 in the direction of Ghent (as reported in *Flanders Today* last week).

Representatives of four parties (Groen, Ecolo, PS and CdH) were this week due to lodge official objections to the plan, the first phase of which is open for public comment until 18 August.

The parties were critical of the lack of consultation between the Flemish Region and Brussels Capital. The plans would increase the number of lanes from six at present to 10, 12 and even 17 in places. This would have a major effect on the environment for Brussels' residents, as well as the mobility of people living in the city or commuting from the surrounding regions.

The MPs also called for the dossier to be made available for consultation in the 19 communes of Brussels, and not only in Flanders as is currently the case. That would almost certainly require an extension of the deadline for comment.



Army fails to pay its water bill



Controversy around spending on F-16s

The ministry of defence is to carry out an internal investigation into its payment systems after reports that a barracks in Brass-

chaat narrowly avoided having its water supply cut off for non-payment of a €5,000 bill. One officer, speaking to *De Morgen*, said:

“€5,000 is peanuts. The documents are piling up here.”

The bill was first sent in October last year, and repeated reminders were ignored, water company Pidpa said. “We treated the barracks as we would our other customers,” a Pidpa spokesman said. “If there’s no answer to the reminders, we send somebody in.”

According to a defence ministry spokesman, it is impossible for the service to pay bills within a 17-day deadline, because of the complex procedure involved. Many other invoices, some as high as €80,000, also remain unpaid. The army will now carry out an internal inventory to find out why the bills remain unpaid, how much money is actually involved, and what can be done to improve the situation to the satisfaction of the ministry’s suppliers.

Unions, however, reacted angrily, comparing the controversy to the recent decision by defence minister Pieter De Crem to send four F-16s to Afghanistan. “De Crem is sending F-16s to Afghanistan with great bravura,” one union representative said, “while barracks in Belgium are unable to supply soldiers with their most basic needs.”

NEWS FLASH



A prisoner who escaped from Ghent jail did so because he wanted a day at the beach, he told police. Rodney Stoops was serving time on charges of drugs trafficking and violence, and had served more than two-thirds of his sentence. Frustrated because his release was constantly delayed, he took matters into his own hands and escaped in a garbage truck.

A man in Blankenberge who took 100 €2 coins to his bank to put the money in his account was refused by the bank manager, who claimed the coins cost him too much to process. According to the banking industry federation, a bank may not refuse to accept legal tender on deposit.

A woman who went missing in woodland outside Mechelen was found by police, naked but well, after a search operation had been set off by her worried husband. The couple had gone to the Walem nature reserve to play a game of erotic hide-and-seek, they later explained, but the woman wandered off farther than she intended, and she lost track of her husband and her clothing. Police said they would not be charged as they appear to have done nothing illegal.

A court last week refused to grant an order requested by residents of Doel, the village on the left bank of the Schelde, to stop the demolition of a series of houses. The group Doel 2020 claims the demolition is a tactic intended to intimidate the remaining residents. The town is scheduled to disappear, ostensibly to allow the expansion of Antwerp port facilities, though for the moment there are no concrete plans in place. Seven villas were demolished in June and the latest decision leaves the way open for the demolition of 23 more.

International truckers are choosing more and more to fill up with diesel in Belgium, even though prices in Luxembourg remain cheaper. According to the Belgian Petroleum Federation, the long waiting-times at Luxembourg filling stations are making it more economical for many truckers to pay extra and fill up across the border in Belgium. As well as ensuring steady sales for Belgian service-station chains faced with falling internal demand, this also means more revenue for the Belgian exchequer. A large part of the pump-price of both petrol and diesel is made up of tax and excise duty.

A memorial mass for the late King Boudewijn held last week to mark the 15th anniversary of his death was attended by more than 1,800 people. The mass was held in the royal church at Laken, in the presence of King Albert II, Queen Paola and Boudewijn’s widow Fabiola, now 80. Hundreds of others gathered in the grounds outside the church to listen to a relay.

Concern over rail safety

The national rail authority NMBS last week tried to play down a leaked letter sent to all train-drivers in June which warned of record numbers of cases in which trains had passed through red signals.

In the confidential letter, leaked to *Le Soir Magazine*, the NMBS draw attention to the fact that the number of trains passing signals at red in the first four months of the year reached 26, a figure which the authority described as “troubling”. The last major rail accident in Belgium involving fatalities was at Pérot in 2001 when eight people died after a driver passed a signal at red. At the beginning of July, an accident at Hermalle-Sous-Huy saw 42 people injured due to the same cause.

Cases of passing signals at red have been increasing constantly over recent years, reaching 68 in 2007. At the current rate of increase, the

NMBS warning of 26 cases in four months could see the annual total rise to 78 cases.

The NMBS played down the figures, pointing out that the last fatal accident was seven years ago, and that the Belgian rail network is safer than many others in Europe. Unions, on the other hand, renewed calls for the entire network to be fitted with ECTS (European Train Control System) equipment, which automatically stops any train passing a signal at red. At present, ECTS is fitted only on TGV lines. “There’s nothing stopping me from taking a train from Arlon to Ostend, and running through every red light on the way,” one union representative, also a train driver, told the magazine. The ECTS will be spread to the rest of the system, he said, “but each time the management postpones the date”. The current deadline is 2012. “Sure, it costs a lot of money,” he said, “But passenger lives are at stake”.



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1,429

The number of stadium bans handed out last season to football hooligans. The bans last for between three months to four years. The figure is 47% higher than the previous year 2006-2007.

200

The number of pieces of luggage that go missing every day on average at Brussels National airport, as revealed by mobility minister Etienne Schouppe in a parliamentary answer. In total 76,264 bags were reported lost in 2007, compared to only 51,667 in 2004. Some 92% of bags are recovered within five days, according to Flightcare, one of the airport’s baggage handling contractors, while 2.3% of bags – a



total of 1,754 bags in 2007 – are never seen again.

€18,888

The bill received by a Proximus client living in Neder-Over-Heembeek, for three days spent surfing the Internet on a mobile phone while on holiday in Spain. The company later reduced the bill to €1,400 – the amount the same time online would have cost in Belgium.

20,000 litres

The quantity of water sprayed on a marquee in Aalter by firemen, after the temperature inside rose above 40 degrees during a music festival. Firefighters sprayed for three hours while the 2,500 visitors enjoyed performances from Jo Vally, Laura Lynn and Christoff.

2+2(+2)

The number of twins born to Antwerp mother Kelly Carrette and the two she is now carrying. Doctors estimate the chance of three sets of twins in one family at 64 in one billion, or one in 15,625,000.

52%

The percentage of Flemish men and women who consider themselves “romantic” in bed,

according to a poll by Zita.be. Only 4% of respondents described him/herself as “a tiger”.

102 million

The number of passengers carried by the rail authority NMBS in the first half of the year – 4.3% up on the same period last year, and higher than the 3.8% target set. The authority is looking forward to a record year with an annual total of 205 million passengers.

40

The number of Belgians calling for help from motoring organisation Touring after they were detained in a foreign prison cell following a road accident. The figure – more than one a day – is 10% higher than last year, and concerns mainly France, Switzerland and Germany.

€12,500

The fine handed down to TV station VT4 for showing too many ads during an episode of CSI Miami – limited by law to one ad-break every 20 minutes. The Flemish Media Regulator investigated the case after a complaint from a viewer – who just happens to be a former researcher for the regulator.

Inflation at 24-year high as growth plummets

But some economists say the worst is over

Belgium's year-on-year inflation rate rose in July to 5.91%, the highest in 24 years, the economy ministry announced. The monthly increase was 0.53%, while the consumer price index (set at 100 in 2004) rose slightly from 112.28 in June to 112.87.

The ministry blamed the rise on increases in energy prices, especially oil, which feed through to most goods and many services. Price increases were recorded for fruit, potatoes, gas, insurance and road taxes. The cost of mobile telephone calls and cut flowers fell slightly.

In some cases, the rises were far higher than the inflation rate might suggest: the price of natural gas rose by 52% in a year, while that of heating oil increased by 61%. Even a humble pack of spaghetti jumped a massive 42% as a result of increases in the price of both oil and wheat.

But some economists were cautiously optimistic that the worst might now be behind us. Since reaching a peak of \$147 a barrel on 11 July, oil prices have dropped back by 14%. Since the oil price rise was fuelling most other increases, inflation could be on the way down again. That will



Sharing our fate: National Bank governor Guy Quaden says Belgium is not alone

be good news for savers, whose bank accounts are currently with interest rates at 4-5%, a form of negative equity.

The high Belgian interest rate is now being viewed by the European Central Bank as a possible forewarning of the fate awaiting other countries in the Eurozone, warned Guy Quaden, the National Bank governor, in an interview with *Trends* magazine.

At the same time, economic growth in the country slowed down in the second quarter to June, with GDP rising 0.3% on the first-quarter figure, the National Bank said. That brings the annual

growth rate to 2%, a drop from the year-on-year rate of 2.2% as it stood in January.

The new figures show a slowing-down compared to the first quarter, when construction activity was up 0.9%, business investments up 2% and consumption by families up 0.5%. Exports were also 1.6% higher, while the employment market was buoyant, with the number of people in jobs up 1.9% on the previous year – taking about 82,600 people off the jobless total.

The National Bank has now revised its growth forecasts for 2008 downward, from 1.9% to 1.6%.

Belgacom attacked for unfair competition

Consumer organisation Test-Aankoop has attacked the decision by Belgacom to increase the monthly rental on its Discovery Line package by 45% to €9.95. According to Test-Aankoop, the increase is an attempt by Belgacom to make life harder for its rival Internet service providers (ISPs).

The Discovery Line is mainly used by clients who only want a land-line in order to go online – and most of them are customers of another ISP than Belgacom. The price increase, Test-Aankoop said, makes the cost of an internet contract with another ISP automatically more expensive, and therefore less attractive.

Belgacom has a monopoly on access to the tele-

phone lines in Belgium. An increasing number of households have abandoned the land-line and now use only mobile phones for phone calls. But the use of mobiles for internet access is still too expensive, slow and limited to make the land-line obsolete for surfers.

Test-Aankoop has now called on the telecoms regulator, the BIPT, to take steps to counter what it called Belgacom's "abuse of power".

Meanwhile Belgacom said it would appeal a €3.09 million fine imposed by the BIPT for the company's failure to reduce its tariffs for customers who made a call from a land-line to a mobile phone.

Wind-energy zone off coast is fully booked

The last sector of the planned wind-energy zone off the Belgian coast has now been taken up, after the Seal consortium last week applied for what it was describing as the largest wind-power project in Belgium.

The company, which includes Dutch power generator Nuon as well as C-Power, will install its generators north of the Noordhinder sandbank, 45 km from the shore and invisible from land.

C-Power already had already booked one spot in the zone, while partner Electrawinds has another out of the three definitively agreed. Another three are in competition and since the seventh, Seal, is the largest, it could be the subject of competition. The company is



therefore keeping the details of the plan secret for the time being. Consortium partner Nuon is involved in one of the other competing projects, and Electrawinds in two.

BUSINESS FLASH



Shutterstock

Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines has invited its own staff to come up with proposals for reducing fuel consumption to cope with rising prices. Already over 100 suggestions have been submitted, including a proposal to stop carrying stairs on planes when they are available at all airports, seats to be covered with lighter material and retiring four elderly aircraft (which consume more than newer models).

Agfa-Gevaert

Mortsel-based Agfa-Gevaert, industry leader in imaging technology, plans to cut its debt burden by €100 million in 2009-2010, with probable job cuts. The announcement came as the company revealed worse-than-expected figures for the second quarter. The savings are the second tranche of €100 million to be implemented. "This is pretty aggressive, but it can be done," commented CEO Jo Cornu.

Mobistar

The mobile phone operator should see sales this year increase by at least €17 million due to the recent deal that makes Mobistar the sole vendor of the new iPhone in Belgium. But the company will only be able to take €5 for each sale, according to financial daily *L'Echo*, despite the price in Belgium being the highest in the world, at €525 for the basic model.

E-Leven

Customers of the bust internet service provider E-Leven will be taken over by Destiny, a new Diegem-based telecoms company, formerly Belgian Network Solutions. Destiny will also take over E-Leven's ADSL-2 network, which provides faster internet connections. A number of E-Leven customers have already been taken over by Free Belgian Network, a company set up by one of E-Leven's founders.

Solvay

The Belgian chemicals giant last week sold its burns-treatment cream Flammazine to Britain's York Pharma for £22.6 million (€29 m). The deal gives York worldwide rights to commercialise the widely sold cream, as well as the prescription-only Flammacerium. Both products are sold in 21 countries, with combined annual sales of €10.8 million.

Deceuninck

The West-Flemish PVC window manufacturer is to cut 100 jobs in its US division, following on from 175 redundancies in Germany. Deceuninck recently posted its worst results for five years, with turnover down 2.6% and a net loss of €5.9 million, thanks to difficulties in the housing markets in Germany, the US and the UK, and to rising materials prices, particularly oil derivative PVC. Since 2004, 300 jobs in the US have been cut as the crisis in home financing bites.

Concordia-Van Dessel

Insurance companies Concordia and Van Dessel are to merge in a 50/50 enterprise based in Brussels and called Van Dessel-Concordia. "The merger is the logical consequence of cooperation that's been going on for 14 years," said Concordia CEO Tony Van Hoek, who will chair the newly-merged company's board.

Telenet

Cable operator Telenet took more than 10 million orders in the first half of 2008 for video-on-demand (VOD), which allows customers to book TV programmes or films on digital TV. Since the launch of the system in September 2005, the total take-up has been €26 million – more than half of them in the last six months. Telenet was due to release its first-half results as *Flanders Today* went to press.

Bekaert

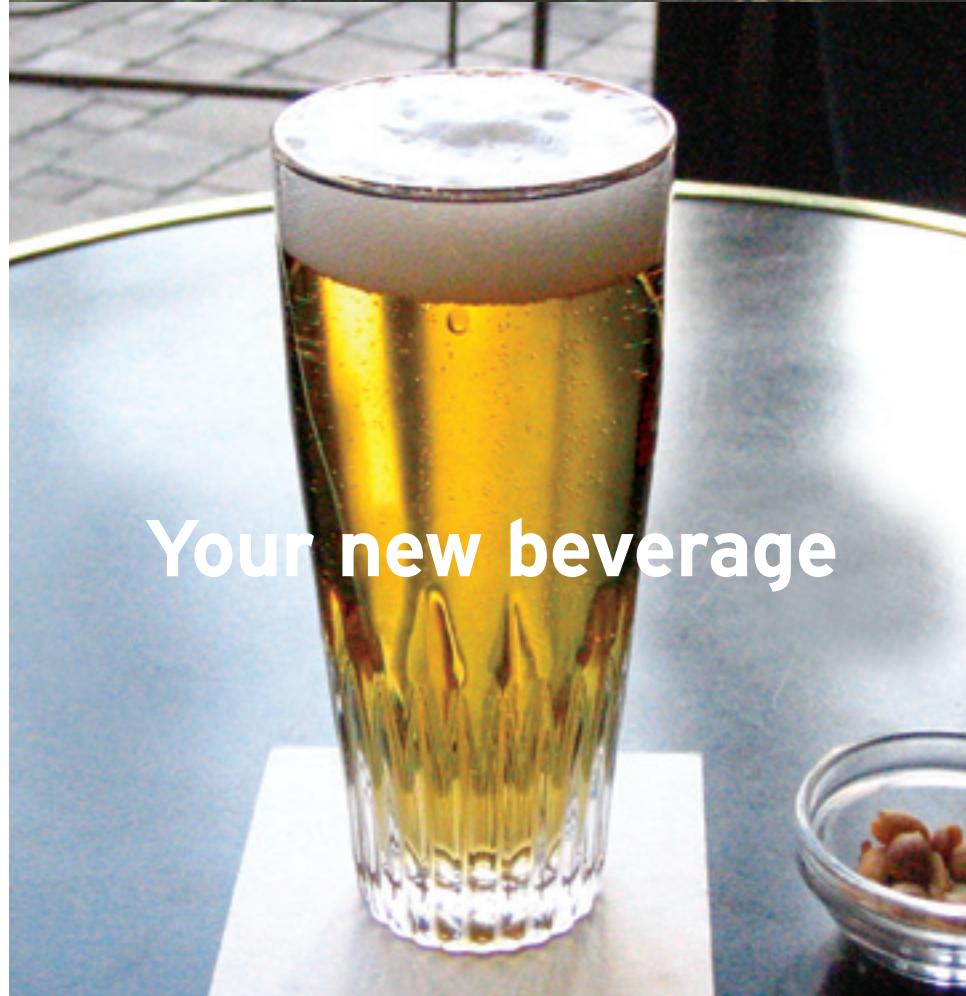
In a week of dismal half-year results announcements, the Kortrijk-based steel wire producer stole the show with a six-month profit increase of 73% to €126 million – 50% more than even optimistic forecasters had predicted. Sales were up 22%. Bekaert was able to pass on the rising costs of rolled wire – the basic component of its finished wires – to customers. It could also offset the lower economic climate in Western Europe against better performance in growth markets like China, where growth reached 57%, and South America (26%). Shares jumped more than 13% after the news broke.



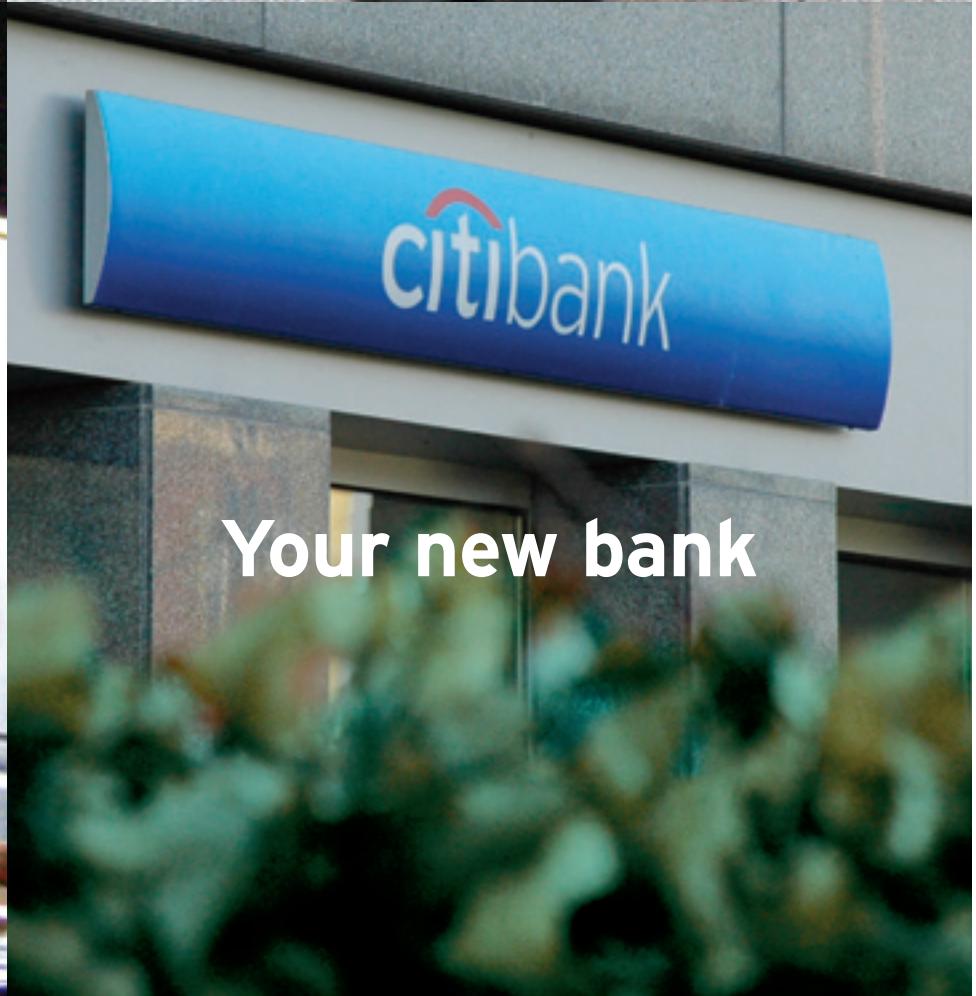
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Sounds of the Caribbean

Hoogstraten hosts a summer festival that brings sultry vibes to the Kempen



Marc Maes

There's no professional musician from the Caribbean, Central America or South America who doesn't know what we do in Hoogstraten," claims Lode Verschueren, organiser of the annual Antilliaanse Feesten in the small city in northern Antwerp

province.

Over the years, this event has grown from a garden party to a fully-fledged festival drawing crowds of 30,000. "Without a doubt, we attract the most diverse festival audiences in Western Europe," Verschueren says. "Our combination of top quality accom-

modation and exciting Caribbean music is unique."

The Antilles Festival started out 26 years ago as a modest Caribbean-style party organised by the youth café Cahier de Brouillon. "The great thing is that our old friends from the Cahier are still actively involved in the

organisation of the festival," says Verschueren. "The 'war veterans' still get together, which makes the job very pleasant."

After organising two parties in the centre of Hoogstraten, the event moved to its current site at the Blauwbossen. Over the years, Verschueren has deepened his appreciation of Caribbean music – "it wasn't easy in the 80s, when we had to go to Paris or London to get our information, but now we can find everything on the internet."

What makes the Antilliaanse Feesten special is the blend of different elements. Unlike other traditional music festivals that kick off around noon, the Feesten are held on Friday and Saturday from 19.00 to 6.00. Verschueren is convinced that this approach provides the best environment for enjoying Caribbean and South American styles.

"The average visitor to the festival is very difficult to describe," he maintains. "As well as people from the Caribbean, we have Europeans who are open to this specific kind of music and atmosphere. They come from all over Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France."

Another special element of the festival is that it attracts a large

female audience. Verschueren adds, "What strikes me is that we have been able to reach a younger public thanks to new Latin styles like Reggaeton and Soca. With artists like Machel Montano and Wisin y Yandel, we are appealing to young people."

Audience comfort is another crucial element in the organisation. The festival crew takes a lot of care to ensure that the site is up to standard. "Over 1,200 people take care of the visitors and logistics," Verschueren explains. "We have large tents, wooden floors covering most of the site, quality catering, a wide range of drinks (the festival bar lists 60), free cloakrooms, clean toilets and a tidy camp site with space for 6,000 tents."

And what if it rains? "We had heavy rain during three consecutive festivals in 2004, 2005 and 2006," Verschueren says. "We survived them and grew stronger as a team." Let's hope the sun shines down on Hoogstraten this year.

Antilliaanse Feesten, 8-9 August at the Blauwbossen festival site. The camping site opens on 7 August.

online
www.antilliaansefeesten.be

Out of Arabia

The El-Ran Cup in Hasselt showcases the most beautiful horses in the world

Denzil Walton

The El-Ran Cup for Arabian horses has been compared to a Miss World pageant and a Formula One grand prix. The reality is a mixture of both, as both beauty and performance are on display.

This annual event takes place on 16-17 August in the grounds of the Abdij van Herkenrode in Hasselt. It's a truly international event, with horses being flown in from all over the world to participate in a competition ranked as one of the world's top five events for Arabian horses.

The couple who organises the competition, Josy and Kristel Everars-van den Broek, run Nesj Arabians, a top breeding stable for Arabian horses in Tongeren, which has produced a number of European and World Champions. With up to 150 horses competing and an estimated 15,000 spectators attending, the event is a logistical challenge.

"Of course, a myriad of things need to be carefully planned and controlled," explains Josy Everars. "But this is the eighth event we have organised, so we are confident

everything will proceed smoothly."

The horses compete in a variety of classes – fillies, colts, mares, stallions – and in various age groups. Five international judges from Germany, Switzerland, Morocco, Italy and the United States assess the horses for type, head, neck, body, topline, legs and movement. The winning owners are awarded bronze trophies uniquely designed by a Dutch artist.

The Arabian horse evolved in the ancient deserts of the Middle East, where it developed characteristics such as a large lung capacity and incredible endurance. For thousands of years, it was bred by Bedouins for long treks and quick forays into enemy camps. The severe climate required the nomads to share food, water and even their tents with their horses. As a result, Arabian horses developed a close affinity to man.

Over the centuries, the Bedouin tribes zealously maintained the purity of the breed. Because of their limited resources, breeding practices were extremely selective, which eventually made the Arabian a prized possession throughout the world.

Bedouin tribes have zealously maintained the purity of the Arabian breed.

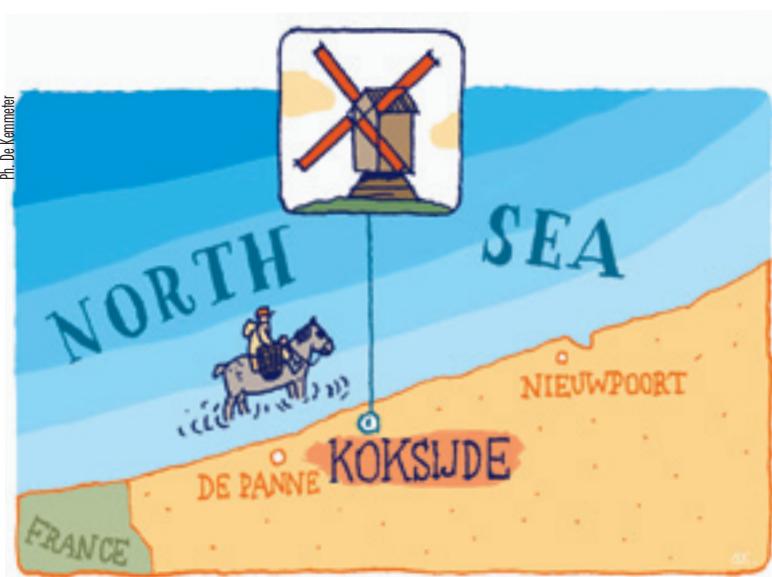
This led to the beautiful athletic breed we know today, marked by its distinctive profile of large, lustrous, wide-set eyes on a broad forehead; small, curved ears; and large, efficient nostrils.

In the 19th century, Arabian horses were given as gifts to European royal families and heads of state. This resulted in the creation of significant Arabian stud farms throughout Europe, particularly in Poland, Germany and England, but also in Belgium,

with the Everars-van den Broek stable enjoying an excellent reputation for breeding quality horses. It has led to an interesting role reversal. "Europe now breeds the best Arabian horses, and many of ours are now being sold back to the Middle East from where they originated," notes Everars.

online
www.elrancup.com





Lisa Bradshaw

Let's say you want to go on holiday locally, not too far from home, and your partner says "let's go to the coast". Let's say that you hate that idea: sunburn, sand in your shorts, kids yelling. This is not a vacation to you.

This probably means that you like things either peaceful or cultural or both. Koksijde is the place that could save your relationship. Kilometre per kilometre, it's hard to find more museums, churches and other heritage sites worth visiting than are available to you in the little town on the southern Flemish coast. Plus, Koksijde is rather adorable – neat as a pin, clean as a whistle, with some nice shopping and not too much junky coastal amusement. Koksijde is an adult's beach town.

You see the gleam right away in the new town hall, where the tourist office is housed, on Zeevlaan, Koksijde's main drag. Designed by Antwerp architectural firm Storme-Van Ranst and finished only last year, it's a monumental construction of steel and glass. (To reflect the transparency of the administration inside, says the tourist guide. Clever.) Outside is a huge public square but inside, best of all, is the *raadzaal*, a silver orb atop four criss-crossed steel legs that serves as a meeting hall and reception area. Constructed from silver panels with a huge window sliced into one side, it looks like a gigantic Martian with its mouth open. It's as if Koksijde is laughing off the fact that it's short of historical buildings. Who cares, it says, we are shiny and new.

But Koksijde is not short of cultural heritage, especially if you're willing to take a little walk or bring along your bike. I suggest you start by heading southward along the Zeedijk right next to the beach. Again appealing to visual sensibilities, Koksijde doesn't crowd its boardwalk with terraces linked to restaurants on the other side. You can actually see the beach and the water from the broad and open walkway.

The greater Koksijde area encompasses Oostduinkerke a few kilometres to the north and Sint-Idesbald, which juts up against Koksijde to the south. If you keep walking you'll soon be in Sint-Idesbald and then you follow your map for a nice 20-minute walk to the Paul Delvaux Museum. It's very out of the way, in the middle

of a beautiful neighbourhood of upscale housing. The world-famous Belgian painter bought the old hotel and restaurant and opened the museum himself in 1982.

Delvaux changed his style a couple of times in his long career

but is best known for his stylised dreamscapes in which naked or partially naked women interact in a variety of mostly outdoor scenes. Seeming to sleepwalk, they are often accompanied by nervous looking scientists or men in tails and top hats.

Delvaux is a pivotal figure in modernist art, but he's also a bit of an enigma. One wonders if his never-ending theme suggests women's bewilderment at trying to fit their natural bodies in the harshly-lit world around them or if he was simply obsessed with

naked women. The more of his work you see, the bigger the question becomes.

In any case, the grounds are beautiful, and the museum itself is excellent. The largest collection of his work in the world, it also contains a reconstruction of his studio and a number of personal belongings. The story of Delvaux finding a lost love after many years, leading him to resettle at the coast, is indeed moving.

Winding through pleasant residential areas back towards Koksijde, you'll find the Abdijmuseum Ten Duinen 1138, or the Abbey Museum of the Dunes, a gem of a museum as well as an intriguing archaeological site. Don't visit Koksijde without stopping here, where 700 years in the life of a monk is presented in lively multimedia displays. The year in the name of the museum refers to the date of the founding of the area's Cistercian Order. You'll find some striking similarities between the Middle Ages and today in the way that people worked, played, ate and loved.

Behind the museum are the well-preserved remains of the original abbey from the first half of the 13th century, the site of occasional archaeological digs. It's all enclosed in a park with walking trails, a nice place for a picnic or a rest.

A couple of kilometres inland on Ten Bogaerdelaan is the Abdijhoeve Ten Bogaerde, a sister establishment to the Abbey Museum. This is a farm where the monks moved to after the original abbey was sacked by Protestant groups in the 16th century. This abbey farm dates from the early 12th century, and some of the original buildings are still standing, including the one that was used as a chapel and another that now houses an excellent fish restaurant. The grounds of the Abbey Farm are open to the public, and exhibitions are often on offer inside.

Meanwhile, just west of the Abbey Museum is the Abbey Mill on the site of the monks' original mill. This one was actually pulled down in Veurne and reconstructed here. Dating from the 18th century, it still grinds flour, which some local bakeries use in their bread.

Heading back towards the beach-front on Jaak Van Buggenhoutlaan is the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Ter-Duinenkerk, another instalment in the story of Koksijde's modern



Koksijde's 18th-century windmill still grinds flour used by local bakers



Dirk van Hove/Gemeente Koksijde

architecture. Built between 1958 and 1965 by Bruges architect Jozef Lantsoght, it's the best example in Belgium of 1960s architectural ideas coming together – modernist with a hint of futurism and an emphasis on light.

The massive church, which seats nearly 1,300, is in fact referred to as "the Cathedral of the Light".

This is easiest to appreciate inside, when the soft colours of stained glass 30 metres high plays on your skin. Rejecting the typical religious scenes, the glass is purely psychedelic. Because the main area has been kept empty and free of clutter, the attention is focused firmly on the glass and the one religious icon: a spooky three-ton Jesus on

Pod's law – the striking new town hall where locals register and get married

the cross that hangs suspended in air above the altar. Dramatic opera music completes the scene. This is the church that West Flanders' hippies would have built had they had any money. Don't miss it.

Although Koksijde's city centre, connected to the beach part of the town by the Zeelaan, is small and largely uninteresting, it boasts a church worth seeing for entirely different reasons. Sint-Pieters Church (on Kerkstraat) is a gorgeous example of mid 19th-

century Neo-Gothic architecture. Inside are period trappings and a beautiful rib vaulted ceiling.

Back on the beach, perhaps you feel the need for some culture. Every Friday in August, Koksijde hosts street theatre on the Zeedijk in the late afternoon and early evenings. Afterwards you might think about dinner at the Vu sur l'O at Zeedijk 291. It's just one of dozens of restaurants along the seafront, but it's a solid choice with a good menu of fish and salads.

While the cultural heritage sinks in, consider spending some time on the sand itself. After all, being a man of letters didn't stop the famous Flemish author and poet Willem Elsschot from donning his 1950s black bodysuit and heading into the waves. Based in Antwerp, he was a regular visitor to Koksijde, and its sea was his muse.

online
www.koksijde.be

Oostduinkerke

A few kilometres north of Koksijde lies the tiny town of Oostduinkerke, which offers a couple of worthwhile attractions of its own, plus a less populated beach. The local fishing industry is Oostduinkerke's main attraction; they make it intriguing even to those who couldn't care less. First, this is the town with the horse fishers, who trawl up and down the coast on horseback in water up to the horses' haunches. Dragging a special hand-made net behind, they scoop up wriggling North Sea grey shrimps. It's the only place in the world where this traditional form of fishing is still practiced.

Oostuinkerke also celebrated the grand reopening of the National Fishery Museum last month, after a closure of four years. Those who've been before will hardly recognise the place, which has been completely renovated and now includes interactive exhibits, live seawater fish aquariums, a real fishing boat and black-and-white portraits of grizzled old fisherman by the brilliant Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren. Information is in four languages.

But the best reason to go to Oostuinkerke is 't Zoet Genot, which serves, hands down, the best desserts on the Flemish coast. Located at the northern end of the short seafront, for the last 10 years the family's home-made ice cream has caused a sensation among Flanders' food writers. But the waffles and pancakes are every bit as good, as is the coffee, which comes accompanied by their vanilla ice cream in a tiny chocolate cup. The only problem is trying to find a seat.

online
www.visserijmuseum.be



The call of the sea: the National Fishery Museum

The Ultimate Appointment



Something spooky: dance with death in Ter Duinen abbey

It takes a lot of guts for a beach town to designate "death" as its summer cultural theme. It's another reason why I love Koksijde. Rather than pandering to some perceived need of the summer tourist, they strive to provide something out of the ordinary. "De ultieme afspraak: Ars moriendi" includes exhibitions, concerts and lectures, much of it lasting well into the autumn.

The Abdijmuseum Ten Duinen and its sister site, the Abdijhoeve Ten Bogaerde, host the best shows: *On the Brink of Eternity* at the Abdijhoeve is a collection of rubbings of flat grave monuments

by Flemish historian Ronald Van Belle. Over at Ten Duinen, *Dancing with the Dead* is a multi-media exhibition that explores what society finds so fascinating about skulls and skeletons and the different ways in which these symbols have represented the notion of death over time.

Other highlights include *Graves Speak*, an interactive performance at the Koksijde-Dorp cemetery, a Halloween night spectacle on the waterfront and a "Night of the Soul" ceremony at Oostduinkerke's cemetery that is lit by exactly 2,008 candles.

MINORITY SPORTS

The great American football factory



Although football is played by no more than 500 people in Flanders, the league has already produced five professional players

Leander Schaeirlaeckens

As you listen to the ominous sounds of American football helmets crashing into each other, you can't quite believe what you're watching. Here in Sint-Agatha-Berchem, on a synthetic pitch on a drizzly Tuesday night of another abysmal summer, a dozen or so teenagers, from an eclectic mix of racial backgrounds, are practising the art of American football. Supervising them is Lesley Moreels, their 33-year old coach. Although this Brussels Bulls team just lost all eight of its games in its first full season, there is a tangible excitement and love for the game amongst the players.

Some of the players are wearing soccer boots and like most Belgian American football clubs they're using a soccer (European football) pitch. Only two of the 15 Belgian clubs have American-football specific fields. The others have to attach long poles to the goalposts to form the uprights. Never mind that the soccer fields are 10 meters too short.

Moreels is a sturdy man with a bushy red beard who takes his (American) football very seriously.

He has been involved in football since he was 14, like most of the coaches you'll meet in Belgian football. He accidentally tumbled into the sport in his teens and has been hooked ever since. At 14, he joined the now-defunct Brussels Saints and has played ever since. He founded the Bulls three years ago with a youth-first philosophy. The club's senior team has an average age of about 19 but they hope to be national champions within

few mavericks could gather some friends and enter a team. Most of them folded within the first year. That's why the league has now implemented a rigid structure. To join, teams have to follow a task list which requires them to play friendlies and practice for a year before they enter competition.

Flanders now counts eight clubs, to Wallonia's seven. Of those 15 clubs, 12 have a junior team for 16 to 19-year olds. Although the

forward to. The Flanders American Football League (FFL) hopes to attract more children to the sport and keep them involved for life – as players first, then as coaches, officials or board members. "The program is the most important thing," Moreels explains. "Getting young people to grow up with this sport is essential."

"We focus on 14 year olds now," explains Mo Jablonka, defensive coordinator for the Brussels Black

in the first team at 18."

Moreels even brought over an experienced American quarterback to help nurture his young players, becoming the first Belgian club to import a player. "We got Travis Brody to elevate our level and that of our youths," he says. "The Belgian level is one of the lowest in Europe and youth is the most important thing." By surrounding their young players with experienced coaches and good role-models the Flemish clubs hope to create a better environment than previous generations enjoyed. "When I was young I had to figure it all out on my own," Moreels says. "[Brody] can teach our young players the ropes."

Yet the number of Americans in the league is remarkable low. Most clubs have no more than one, according to Flanders Football League president John Van de Mergel. "We learned the hard way not to count on Americans," says Jablonka. "You can't build a club around them because they're always being deployed to Afghanistan or transferred to another office. They never stay longer than two or three years. We now have one American player and one

"We learned the hard way not to count on Americans. You can't build a club around them because they're always being deployed to Afghanistan or transferred to another office. They never stay longer than two or three years."

five years. Moreels thinks his batch of young players, coming out of the club's 13-and-up youth teams, will have matured enough by then.

This approach has become standard around the region. Flemish football has learnt the hard way that youth is the key to continuity. The league used to be disjointed. A

senior leagues are separated by region, the juniors play nationally. The Bulls even have a cadet team for 13 to 16-year olds. Since they're the only cadet team in the country they hold an annual international cadet tournament named the "Iris Bowl" to ensure that the children have some matches to look

Angels, the Belgian national team and the International School of Brussels. "With the Brussels Raiders [a Belgian powerhouse during the 1990s] we had nothing lined up for the next generation. We got married and quit and the club fell apart. So the Angels focus on the next generation and we put them





Heads down: players aged between 17 and 19 train at Sint Agatha Berchem

American coach [on the Black Angels]. That's it."

It used to be very different. The first few clubs were founded in 1986 and by the next year a league was up and running. In the early years, the league – at that point numbering about 160 players – was loaded with Americans. But players and teams came and went so quickly that it almost destroyed football in Flanders.

The sport has since rebounded to 15 clubs – with a 16th on its way. In 2000, five Flemish clubs had 250 members between them. That number has now doubled. "Things are getting more serious and people know what they're doing," Jablonka says.

The FFL now runs its own coaching school and recently started an officials association. Games are still only played with five officials – as opposed to the ideal seven – because of a shortage. But their numbers are quickly growing, particularly with dis-

they are big enough to buy proper equipment and even loan or rent out equipment to new players trying out the sport. Much of the budget goes to insurance and ambulances, since league regulations stipulate that an ambulance should be present at every match.

Van de Mergel compares the FFL level of play with that of high-schools in the U.S. They've

come a long way though. In 1988, the Brussels Saints lost their first ever game against a team of 15-year olds from the International School of Brussels by 78-0. Since then the league has produced an astonishing number of players who have joined the professional

"People are astonished to learn that American football exists in Belgium."

chanted soccer referees sick of the abuse they get. "There's respect for officials here," says Van de Mergel. "The soccer referees who have joined say the difference is enormous."

Although club budgets are tight (between €5,000 and €7,000),

The FFL now runs its own coaching school and recently started an officials association. Games are still only played with five officials – as opposed to the ideal seven – because of a shortage. But their numbers are quickly growing, particularly with dis-

ranks in America.

In 1989 Jablonka took Eric Yuma, a college friend of his who competed in track and field, to a Raiders practice. Within six months Yuma signed a professional contract with the New York/New Jersey Knights of the old World League of American Football. Yuma has been a pro-player or coach ever since.

In 1999, three cousins, all beginners, joined the Black Angels (then simply the Angels). After just one season, Loliki and Willy Bongo-Wanga were recruited to play for Hartnell College in California. They were joined by the third cousin, Patrice Majondo-Mwamba the following year. The three went on to play for major universities in the ultra-competitive Division I in Texas after which Patrice was signed by NFL team Denver Broncos. He is now with

Michigan in the new All American Football League.

"It doesn't take someone who knows football to make a great player," explains Jablonka. "It takes a great athlete. There are more and more athletes from other sports joining us. They come from rugby, track and field, and so on. Statistically, Belgium sends the most players to the pros of any European country but people still seem astonished to learn that American football exists in Belgium.

Despite the ignorance, about 2,000 people showed up when the Bulls hosted the Belgium Bowl, the pinnacle of the season, at their field in Sint-Agatha-Berchem last year. The attendance was especially remarkable when you consider that only 500 or so people play football in Flanders. It seems that American football is no longer a secret in Flanders. The word is out.

Get started

Brussels Bulls

www.brusselsbulls.be

Brussels Black Angels

www.brusselsangels.com

Flanders American Football League

www.americanfootball.be

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Great expectations

The Belgian team heads off to Beijing with hopes of winning medals, but no one looks more likely to win gold than Tia Hellebaut



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Classical & New Music**Brussels**

Atelier de la Dolce Vita
Liefdadigheidstraat 37a; 02.223.46.75,
www.atelierdolcevita.be
AUG 9 17.00 & 19.00 Sarah Dupriez,
cello

Miniemerk

Miniemerstraat 62; 02.511.93.84,
www.minimes.net
AUG 6 Osmosis: Beethoven, Mayr,
Devienne
AUG 11 Aki Sato, koto and shamisen;
Nozomi Kanda, shinobue and nakan;
traditional Japanese music
AUG 12 Il Ballo: Frescobaldi,
Falconieri, Buonamente, D'India,
Merula
AUG 13 Marina Eckhardt, mandolin;
Ad van Sleuwen, piano: Beethoven,
Hummel

Royal Music Conservatory
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
AUG 7 Paul De Clerck, viola; Jean-
Philippe Collard-Neven, piano:
Schumann's Märchenbilder op 113
AUG 8 Law3on: Saint-Saëns, Massenet,
Offenbach, Tosti
AUG 14 Jean-Louis Maton:
percussions: Volans, Taira, Gobert

Antwerp

Rubenshuis
Wapper 9-11; 03.201.15.55,
www.rubenshuis.be
AUG 10 15.30 The Cathedralsingers,
Oxford, conducted by John Padley:
baroque music by Byrd, Gibbons, Tallis
(free with Rubenshuis entrance ticket)

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
AUG 8 20.00 B'Rock orchestra and
Stile Antico choir conducted by Gary
Cooper: John Blow's opera Venus &
Adonis (part of Musica Antiqua)
AUG 8 22.30 Claire Chevallier, piano;
Paul De Clercq, viola: Benjamin
Britten's Lachrymae (part of Musica
Antiqua)
AUG 9 18.00 Final of the International
Competitions of Musica Antiqua, with
La Risonanza conducted by Fabio
Bonizzoni: John Blow's opera Venus &
Adonis
Sint-Jacobskerk
Sint-Jacobstraat
AUG 6 20.00 il Gardellino: solo work
for the viola da gamba, plus quartets
and quintets from the 18th-century
Bach/Abel concerts (part of Musica
Antiqua)
AUG 7 20.00 La Risonanza conducted
by Fabio Bonizzoni: Handel Italian
cantatas

Jazz & blues**Brussels**

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Until AUG 9 20.30 Bernard Guyot
Quartet
AUG 12-16 20.30 The Zhulus New
Orleans Band

Antwerp

Cafe Mambo
Vlaamsestraat 3
Wednesdays until AUG 27 21.00
Marcelo Moncada Quartet

Get your tickets now for...**Middelheim Jazz Festival**

14-17 August, Park den Brant, Beukenland.
Tickets from www.jazzmiddelheim.be

Given the bad weather we're being having this summer, you might think twice about trusting your luck to a jazz festival held in an open meadow outside Antwerp. Maybe you're thinking you should play it safe this year and wait for your favourite bands to turn up at Ancienne Belgique. But then you would miss out on the lazy, laid-back atmosphere of this sublimely cool late summer event. So drag up a chair, pack a picnic and take along anyone you can find to hear some of the best jazz sounds that Belgium can produce. You'll find Toots Thielemans, Jef Neve, and David Linx and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, while trumpeter Wynton Marsalis (photo) is coming all the way from the United States to show us how they do things over there.

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

Deurne
Openluchttheater Rivierenhof
Turnhoutsebaan 232; 070.222.192,
www.openluchttheater.be
Concerts at 20.30:
AUG 6 Eva De Roovere-Isabelle A.
AUG 7 Sarah Bettens + Mint **AUG 9** Contrabando **AUG 14** Hannelore Bedert + De Nieuwe Snaar

World, folk

Brussels
Live Music Café
Anspachlaan 90-92;
www.live-music-cafe.be
Until AUG 21 22.00 Dju-Bebe
Until AUG 27 22.00 Puchu (Cuba)
Until AUG 30 22.00 Kalema and K-Tribe

Dance

Brussels
Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
AUG 6 20.00 Abhinava Dance
Company presents Sampradaya

Visual arts

Brussels
Atomium
Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72,
www.atomium.be
Until OCT 19 Expo 58: Between
Utopia and Reality, documents, plans,
objects, films, photographs and scale
models of Expo 58
Until OCT 19 Lucien De Roeck's Star,
design of the famous symbol of Expo 58
Until OCT 19 The Pavilion of
Temporary Happiness, built from
33,000 drink crates to house screenings
and exhibitions about World Fairs (near
the Atomium on Louis Steensplein)

Belgian Comic Strip Centre
Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80,
www.stripmuseum.be
Until NOV 16 Smurf for All, All
for Smurf, original drawings and
documents celebrating the famous
characters created 50 years ago by
Belgian comic strip artist Pierre
Culliford, known as Peyo

Belvue Museum
Paleizenplein 7; 02.511.44.25,
www.belvue.be
Until AUG 31 Today's China,
contemporary Chinese art (free
entrance)
Until SEP 14 Magritte and Mariën, My
Accomplices: sketches photographs
and correspondence between Jacqueline
Nonkels, Marcel Mariën, René and
Georgette Magritte, as well as an
accompanying collection of Surrealist
works, including poetry and literature

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

Until AUG 8 Sony World Photography
Awards, a selection from 70,000
photographs from 178 countries (part
of Summer of Photography)

Until AUG 24 Architecture in the
Pictures/Flanders Architectural
Yearbook, photographs of 37 projects
offering an overview of architectural
developments in Flanders in 2006 and
2007

Until SEP 14 It's Not Only Rock 'n'
Roll, Baby!, art works by musicians,
including Alan Vega, Brian Eno, Laurie
Anderson, Patti Smith, Pete Doherty
and Yoko Ono

Until SEP 21 Sioux in Paradise,
sculptures, installations, video, models
and drawings by Johan Muyle

Until SEP 21 Mapas abiertos (Opening
maps), overview of contemporary
Caribbean, Central and South-
American photography (part
of Summer of Photography)

CIVA

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.71,
www.civa.be
Until SEP 19 Documents on the
gardens designed by René Pechère and
Jacques Boulanger-François for Expo 58

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until SEP 30 Profiel, textile creations
by Isabelle Marquet
Until DEC 30 Van New Look tot
Expo 58, women's fashion from the
time of Belgium's 1958 World's Fair,
with evening gowns, wedding dresses,
cocktail dresses, suits, coats and
accessories

De Elektriciteitscentrale European

Centre for Contemporary Art
Sint-Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.31
Until SEP 28 Fables, photographs by
Karen Knorr

De Loge Architecturmuseum

Kluisstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until SEP 28 Belgie/Belgique 58,
architectural and decorative forms at
the time of Belgium's 1958 World's Fair,
with drawings, photographs, models,
posters and furniture

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until AUG 17 De Nieuwe Oogst (The
New Harvest), contemporary Flemish
design

Erasmus House

Kapittelstraat 31; 02.521.13.83
Until SEP 16 Anatomie van de
Ijdelheden (Anatomy of the Vanities),
the museum's 75th anniversary show,
with works by Hieronymus Bosch,
Jan Fabre, Hans Holbein, Marie-Jo
Lafontaine, Aida Kazarian and Quinten
Metsys

Espace Photographique Contretype
Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until SEP 21 Voyage Out, photographs
by Chantal Maes

Fondation pour l'Architecture

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80,
www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be
Until AUG 17 Gevers Design:
Inventaris van een uitvinder (Inventory
of an inventor), retrospective of work
by Belgian designer Christophe Gevers
(1928-2007)

Huis der Hertogen van Brabant

Grote Markt 19; 02.540.85.10
Until AUG 31 An exhibition of over
200 works by Salvador Dali, to mark the
20th anniversary of his death

ING Cultural Centre

Koningsplein 6; 02.547.22.92
Until AUG 8 21st-Century Portraiture
and Landscape, recent work by 15
contemporary French photographers

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until AUG 16 N'oublie pas (Do Not
Forget), drawings by Virginie de
Limbourg

Until AUG 16 Ceramics by Pilar
Zurimendi

AUG 8-SEP 26 White Noise, ceramics
by Caroline Andrin and 10 guest artists

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre

Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until AUG 24 Mer: agitée à peu agitée,
photographs by Jacques Debacker (part
of the Summer of Photography)

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until OCT 5 One Family, photographs
by Vardi Kahana

La Maison de la Bande Dessinée

Keizerinlaan 1; 02.502.94.68
Until SEP 7 Over 150 original drawings
published in the Belgian weekly Spirou
(founded in 1938), by Jijé, Franquin,
Morris, Will, Tillieux, Peyo and Roba,
among others

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until AUG 24 Les enfants d'Abraham
(Abraham's children), photographs
on Christians, Muslims and Jews by
Magnum photographer Abbas (part of
Summer of Photography)

Museum van Elsene

Jean Van Volsemstraat 71; 02.515.64.22
Until AUG 31 The Belle Epoque,
sculpture by Alexandre Charpentier
and the museum's collection of posters
by Toulouse-Lautrec, among other fin-
de-siècle works

Royal Army Museum

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until NOV 30 A Paintbrush in the
Barrel, World War One paintings,
drawings and etchings by soldiers

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until AUG 23 Eugène Ysaÿe, exhibition
on the Belgian violinist and composer,
with photographs, letters and
instruments
Until AUG 24 In de ban van boeken
(Under the Spell of Books), Belgian
book collectors, 1750 to 1850

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until SEP 30 België op opticaprenten
(Belgium on Optical Prints), some 400
views of Belgian cities dating from the
17th and 18th centuries
Until SEP 14 Jeanne d'Arc: the Myth
and the Image, visual representation
of Joan of Arc in France from the early
days of photography (part of Summer
of Photography)
Until SEP 14 Vudoptik, young
photographers' views of their favourite
Brussels' monument (part of Summer
of Photography)
Until SEP 21 Expo '58 through the lens
of Gérard Castello-Lopes, photographs
of the World's Fair (part of Summer of
Photography)

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11,
www.fine-arts-museum.be
Until AUG 31 Plecnik Project, life and
professional achievements of Slovene
architect Joze Plecnik (1872-1957)
Until SEP 21 The British Royal
Collection: From Bruegel to Rubens,
more than 50 paintings from the Queen
Elizabeth II's collection, with major
works by Hans Memling, Pieter Bruegel
the Elder, Peter Paul Rubens and others,
shown alongside masterpieces from the
museum's collection
Until SEP 21 Expo '58: Contemporary
Art at the World Fair, revisiting the
1958 exhibition entitled 50 Years of
Modern Art
Until OCT 5 Art and Finance in
Europe: 15th century masterworks in
a new light, highlighting the social and
historical representation of money in
major works by Rogier van der Weyden
and Hans Memling, among others

Royal Museum for Central Africa

Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11
Until AUG 31 Knock on Wood!
Forest and Wood in Africa, thematic
exhibition on African trees and
forests and their need for sustainable
management
Until SEP 28 Naabas Traditional Chiefs
of Burkina Faso, outdoor exhibition
of large-scale photographs by Jean-
Dominique Burton (part of Summer of
Photography)
Until OCT 19 Expo 58, films and
photographs, ethnographic objects,
plants, artwork and animals that
were displayed in the seven pavilions
dedicated to the Belgian Congo at
Brussels' World's Fair in 1958

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50
Until SEP 28 Oriental Fascination,
Japanese etchings from the Feliks
Jasienski collection in Krakow, shown
alongside works by 19th and 20th-
century Belgian artists influenced by
Japanese graphic art, including Fernand
Khnopff, Théo Van Rysselberghe, Rik

Wouters, Leon Spillaert and Henry Van de Velde

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60

Until AUG 17 Die Lucky Bush, contemporary art show curated by Imogen Stidworthy, questioning the physical and social impact of language, with works by John Cage, Jimmie Durham, Gary Hill, Aglaia Konrad and Michelangelo Pistoletto, among others

Until AUG 31 Visual art and sound installations by British artist and composer Cornelius Cardew

Until SEP 9 Fantasy, intervention by Koen van den Broek

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaaï 47; 03.242.93.00

Until SEP 14 Focus on sports, a selection of the best sports photographs from the Belga agency (part of Summer of Photography)

Until SEP 14 Guy Bourdin, retrospective of work by the French photographer (1928-1991), famous for his contributions to fashion and advertising (part of Summer of Photography)

Until SEP 14 Summertime, photographs by Verne

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34

Until AUG 17 Fireworks, open-air installations by Leo Copers

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70

Until AUG 17 Moi, Véronique. Branquinho TOUte NUe, retrospective of the Belgian designer marking the 10th anniversary of her fashion label

Bruges

Groeningemuseum

Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43

Until DEC 31 Leuven loans, 15th- and 16th-century paintings and woodcarvings from Leuven's Van der Kelen-Mertens museum

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23

Until SEP 21 The Joy of Looking, painting biennale with works by Philip Akkerman, Georg Baselitz, Jean Brusselmans, Francis Picabia and Roger Raveel, among others (see also Roger Raveel Museum in Machelen-Zulte)

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10

Until SEP 14 Disappearing Worlds, photographs of indigenous peoples in Australia, New Guinea and South Africa by Danish anthropologist Jens Bjerre

Until SEP 14 Eighty-four: in pek op papier (in Pitch on Paper), large-format drawings by Flemish artist Richard Simoens

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99

Until OCT 12 Design from the 1950s and 1960s

Until OCT 12 Design with a smile, designs with a surrealist touch

Until OCT 12 Hommage to Hans Wegner, exhibition in recognition of the contributions of the famous Danish designer

Until OCT 12 Helena Schepens: Perpetuum Mobile, designs by the Flemish silver- and goldsmith

Dr Guislain Museum

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95,

www.museumdrguislain.be

Until SEP 7 Circus or Science: The Roca Collection, anatomical wax models from the late 19th and early 20th centuries

Until SEP 7 Jean Rustin, retrospective of work by the French painter

Until SEP 7 I live in the painting, work by the late Flemish artist Marc Maet

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03,

www.smak.be

Until SEP 21 Electrified, installations combining visual, sound and electronic arts, by Ronald Kuivila and Edwin van der Heide

Hasselt

Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21

Until AUG 31 Looks: Mode 1750-1958, Two-hundred years of fashion history

National Jenever Museum

Witte Nonnenstraat 19; 011.23.98.60

Until AUG 31 The Orange Bulb Alambleurics, olfactory installation by Flemish artist Peter De Cupere

Z33

Zuivelmarkt (Beguinage) 33; 011.29.59.60

Until AUG 17 Bridge, installation by Michael Cross

Until SEP 29 1% Water, art and design relating to global water issues

Kemzeke

Verbeke Foundation, Westakker

Hulsterstraat Noord;

www.verbekefoundation.com

Until NOV 16 Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision, new exhibition of moving art

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum

Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00

Until SEP 21 The Joy of Looking, painting biennale with works by Georg Baselitz, Jean Dubuffet, Asger Jorn, Constant Permeke, Robert Rauschenberg and Roger Raveel, among others (see also Dhondt-Dhaenens Museum in Deurle)

Mechelen

Congres en Erfgoedcentrum Lamot

Van Beethovenstraat 8-10; 015.29.49.00

Until SEP 14 Van Pijl tot paviljoen, 20 models of the pavilions at Brussels' 1958 World's Fair

Cultuurcentrum

Minderbroedersgang 5; 015.29.40.00,

www.cultuurcentrummechelen.be

Until SEP 14 Happy Days, collector's items and music of the 1950s recreating the atmosphere of Brussels' 1958 World's Fair

Ostend

Modern Art Museum

Romestraat 11; 059.50.81.18

Until AUG 31 Georges Vantongerloo: Pionier van de moderne beeldhouwkunst (Pioneer of Modern Sculpture), retrospective of work by the Flemish artist (1886-1965)

Ypres

In Flanders Fields Museum

Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75

Until SEP 7 Man, Culture, War: Multicultural Aspects of the First World War, a panorama of the diverse origins of those who fought in Belgium during WWI

Until NOV 12 Off the record, work by artist-in-residence Wendy Morris

Festivals & special events

Belgium Roller Parade

Until SEP 29 Weekly rollerskating parades in Brussels and other towns

www.belgiumrollers.com

Summer of Photography:

Contemporary photography festival

Until SEP 14 in venues across Belgium 02.507.82.00,

www.summerofphotography.be

Brussels

Brussels Beach: Beach on the banks of the canal, with sand, palm trees, deckchairs for hire, beach sports and entertainment for all the family

Until AUG 17 at Saintelettesquare 02.279.50.49, www.bruxelleslesbains.be

Ca rebondit sur cour Festival:

Festival of string and Baroque ranging from world and jazz to French chanson, classical and traditional, all on the theme of water

Until AUG 30 at Domaine de Rouge-Cloître (Oudergem) 02.223.46.75, www.atelierdolcevita.be

Drive-In Movies: Outdoor festival of music, barbecue and films projected on a giant screen on Friday and Saturday evenings

AUG 8-SEP 13 20.00 at Jubelpark www.driveinmovies.be

Ecran Total: Festival showing a wide variety of films, including classics, reprises, documentaries, Japanese Nouvelle Vague and animation

Until SEP 9 at Cinema Arenberg, Koninginngalerij 26 02.512.80.63, www.arenberg.be

Festival Bruxellons: Theatre festival including musical improvisation, children's theatre, cabaret and parties. Performances are preceded by a buffet

Until SEP 11 19.00 at Château du Karreveld, Jean de la Hoeselaan 3 02.724.24.24, www.bruxellons.net

Meyboom 2008: 700th celebration of the traditional tree-planting ceremony marking a medieval victory by the Bruxellois over the Louvainistes.

Procession leaves the Belgian Comic Strip Centre, Zandstraat 20, at 14.00 and passes through the Grote Markt before returning to Zandstraat, where tradition demands that the tree be planted before 17.00. Other festivities include a Giants' ballet and a sound and light show

AUG 9 14.00-21.00 www.meyboom.be

Midi Fun Fair: Annual fair stretching from Hallepoort to the end of Zuidlaan

Until AUG 24 02.279.25.31, www.fete-foraine.be

Midis/Minimes 08: Series of weekday lunchtime concerts, exploring classical and new music rarely performed and new Belgian and international artists

Until AUG 29 12.15 at Kapel van de Miniem, Miniemstraat 62, and the Royal Music Conservatory, Regentschapsstraat 30

02.512.30.79, www.midis-minimes.be

Mini-Europe by Night: Sound and light show with fireworks

Until AUG 16 at Mini-Europe, Brupark, at the foot of the Atomium www.minieurope.com

PleinOpenAir: Free festival of outdoor concerts, film screenings, workshops, walks and children's entertainment with an urban theme, staged in areas earmarked for redevelopment and run by volunteers from the Nova Cinema

Until AUG 16 at sites across Brussels

www.cinema-nova.org

Rock the City Festival: Outdoor music festival includes Family Jammin, Les Héritiers, Bikinians, Las Buenas Ondas, Pixelrace, Nestor!, Mint, The DIPLOMAT, Puggy, Poney Express, Joshua, Freaky Age and Arid

AUG 9 13.00 at Woluwe Park

www.rockrherity.be

Tour of the Royal Palace: The Royal Palace is open to the public every summer following the National Day celebrations

Until SEP 7 at Koninklijk Paleis, Brederodestraat 16

02.551.20.20, www.monarchie.be

Festivals & special events

Belgium Roller Parade

Until SEP 29 Weekly rollerskating

parades in Brussels and other towns

www.belgiumrollers.com

Summer of Photography:

Contemporary photography festival

Until SEP 14 in venues across Belgium

02.507.82.00,

www.summerofphotography.be

Brussels Beach:

Beach on the banks of the canal, with sand, palm trees,

deckchairs for hire, beach sports and

entertainment for all the family

Until AUG 17 at Saintelettesquare

02.279.50.49, www.bruxelleslesbains.be

Zomer van Antwerpen (Summer of Antwerp):

arts festival including avant-garde theatre, concerts in neighbourhood squares, circus performances, outdoor film screenings and a live "sunset show" every night

Until AUG 24 in venues and public spaces across the city

03.224.85.28,

www.zomervanantwerpen.be

Bruges

Klinkers 2008: Global festival of music, dance

INTERVIEW

Alon Sariel



Alon Sariel began studying mandolin, a stringed instrument related to the lute, at the age of eight at the Samuel Rubin Municipal Conservatory in Beersheva. The city's mandolin phenomenon began in the 1970s with the arrival of violinist Simcha Nathanson from the then-USSR.

Nathanson presented himself at the Beersheva Municipal Music School and offered to teach violin, but they asked if he couldn't teach something more exotic – like mandolin. Nearly 40 years later, Beersheva boasts a mandolin orchestra of 40 players, currently run by Nathanson's successor, Lev Khaimovich.

After playing with the Beersheva Mandolin Orchestra, Sariel transferred to the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance to work on a Masters in Early Music. Part of that program brought him to Brussels to study lute. For the past

six months he has been working under Professor Philippe Malfait at the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel, or Royal Conservatory of Brussels.

Sariel's interests extend to modern music, including jazz and

tain in the north of Israel called Miron where people came to see a Rabbi in the second century. "For many years after that, people would converge on the site from Europe and the Maghreb countries – each with their local instru-

"Serving in the war with Lebanon was a very intense experience, performing on battlefields while wearing helmets and protective gear. It was a tough time."

Jewish folk (or klezmer) but his current focus is on music reaching back to the 14th century. He is particularly excited by the way that music evolves in local communities.

The 22-year-old talks, for instance, about particular moun-

ments – and a particular type of music developed," he says. "And that's just one mountain. There are so many melting points of Jewish music to explore from the 14th century to today."

But Sariel is far from being someone living in the past. Being

Alon Sariel is one of the many international musicians studying at the Brussels Conservatory. He was raised in the southern Israeli city of Beersheva – an unlikely hotbed of mandolin talent – and is touring this summer with West-Eastern Divan, the symphony orchestra that promotes understanding between Israelis and Arabs

an Israeli, it is virtually impossible to forget the present day. He had to complete the mandatory three years of army service before beginning his Master's degree. But Sariel's army service was unique: he was selected by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as one of 20 "extraordinary musicians". Each year, these 20 soldiers complete their army service by performing as a musical ensemble for troops across the country.

Although still required to endure a month of combat training, as well as occasional follow-up training, this opportunity allowed the young mandolin player to start his career much earlier than most Israelis, who usually must finish their army service before entering university.

"I served two years ago in the war with Lebanon," he remembers. "It was a very intense experience, performing on battlefields while wearing helmets and protective gear. It was a tough time. But I have no complaints. I know the combat soldiers had a harder time."

Most of his army performances were more relaxed, taking place when the soldiers come up to Tel Aviv for "cultural Sundays". The band played popular music, world and Israeli folk songs, giving some explanation and background on the compositions. But do the soldiers go for it? "Let's start with the fact that they were required to be there," Sariel smiles, "but most were very curious, very happy to have the programme."

His fellow army musicians were all his age – 18 at the time – and came from homes across the country. There was a democratic division of labour in terms of directing the group, which was a particularly good experience for him, tying in nicely with his growing interest in conducting. In Brussels, Sariel has been able to study conducting formally for the first time, extending his musical experience beyond the mandolin, lute

and guitar (which he does not play professionally but did play in the army).

When it comes to conducting, Sariel has some excellent role models close at hand. He is currently on tour with Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan for the second year in a row. Founded 10 years ago by Barenboim and the late Palestinian-American academic Edward Said, the orchestra aims to promote communication and understanding between Arabs and Israelis.

This summer, the orchestra brings together musicians from Arab countries, Israel and Spain to perform classical music in cities across Europe. They will also venture beyond Europe into Jordan. "Everybody knows this is not the best time for this conflict," notes Sariel. "I want to think that both sides are hoping for peace. What I'm sure of is that there's no other way of getting there than through communication. West-Eastern Divan works because we have a common language of music."

Sariel is aware that not all reactions to the initiative have been positive. "Some say it only works because we're musicians, and musicians are left-wing – not the most radical sides of either party. But I prefer to look at the hopeful side. I think it is a huge opportunity."

In addition to the political aspects, the ensemble gives Sariel the opportunity to observe Barenboim – one of the most prominent conductors working today – in action. West-Eastern Divan is an incredible learning opportunity, one which may help Sariel to make the difficult decision between performing and conducting. He hopes to combine both by studying for a PhD, but he knows performing will always remain a part of his work. "I can't ever stop performing, even if I wanted to."

Sharon Light

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

New Orleans, East Flanders

"When I played recently at a jazz festival in Ghent, it came across as a warm-blooded city with the streets full of exuberant people. Sort of like New Orleans, only better organised."

Randy Newman
songwriting legend
interviewed in *De Standaard*

Minority rules

"French-speakers who go to live in Flanders are migrants who have to fit in, just as we ask Moroccans and Turks to do. We don't say that Arabic should become an official language just because we are multilingual in Flanders. That would be crazy."

Bart De Wever
Chairman of the Flemish
Nationalist party NV-A speaking
(in French) on RTBF radio

No magic solution

"I'm a negotiator, not a magician."
Karl-Heinz Lambertz
one of the three negotiators
appointed by the King
to solve the political crisis

**AntwerpZoo DePanne Baseball
inFlanders Vluchtmisdrijf Museum
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