



One Family, p.2



An inventive Jewish man in Antwerp during a typical Flemish autumn

Jimmy Kats

## An enduring history

### How Orthodox Jews arrived and survived in Antwerp

Sharon Light

They are an inextricable part of central Antwerp. Step out of Central Station, count to 10, and you're sure to have seen a man in a black coat, black hat and long sidelocks bike past.

Members of the ultra-orthodox Jewish community of Antwerp make their home just a stone's throw from the station, where you'll find synagogues and *yeshivot* (houses of Jewish study) aplenty.

But like any community, Judaism in Antwerp has not always looked like this. The earliest indications of Jews in the Antwerp area reach back to the 13th century, before the advent of ultra-Orthodoxy. However, due to the high level of persecution at the time, the Jewish community was small and not very visible to the greater Flemish population.

By the early part of the 19th century, the community was still a small but a present one, largely of Dutch and German origin. The end of the century brought the arrival of Eastern European Jews and a change in the profile of Antwerp Jewry – as the city became the centre of the diamond industry, in which the Jews were and remain very involved to this day.

For the next 50 years, Jewish life was both socially and economically

diverse and, religiously, followed traditional orthodoxy. But with the arrival of the Second World War, the community disappeared. Local police went so far as to round up the Jews of Antwerp without the help of the Germans. (In 2007, the mayor of Antwerp publicly apologised for these actions.)

When the war ended, approximately 800 Jews came out of hiding in the city, but the community had been decimated. Into this vacuum moved the ultra-Orthodox – “the presence of every Chassidic group you've ever heard of, and those you've never heard of,” states Dr Julian Klener, president of the Consistoire, the umbrella of state-funded Orthodox synagogues in Belgium.

Chassidism originated in Eastern Europe as a more spiritual approach to Judaism. Chassidic sects first formed in the 18th century around different charismatic Rabbis; a great many are represented in Antwerp, as the city now boasts more than 50 houses of prayer, ranging from great synagogues to small *shteiblach* (informal settings found in schools or homes) where Jews, primarily men, gather daily to pray.

Among those who emerged

Continued on page 3

### Belgian health care quality declines

Report puts country in 12th place

Alan Hope

Belgium is no longer the European leader in any aspect of health care, according to the latest annual Euro Health Consumer Index compiled by the Swedish study bureau Health Consumer Powerhouse.

Belgium used to lead Europe with its short waiting times, but that distinction has been lost because of increased delays for MRI scans. The country still scores highly on accessibility of the system, taking second place. But in most of the other 34 criteria, Belgium scores badly, ending in

12th place overall, compared with a previous high of sixth.

“Belgium is still remarkably slow at offering its health-care consumers access to new medicines,” said Dr Arne Björnberg, Research Director for the Euro Health Consumer Index. This systematic delay, often longer than a year, seems to affect the quality of care and has an impact on the survival of Belgian patients. “It is also remarkable that the reporting of Belgian health-care data to international bodies lags behind by almost a decade.”

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#### Business

A club in Antwerp is staging the country's first dance party job fair. Put on your glam rags and don't forget that CV.

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#### Active

Belgian draft horses were once the engine of the rural economy. They were replaced by tractors in the 1920s, but an intriguing museum in Flanders recalls their heyday.

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#### Living

Axel Vervoordt is a world-renowned art collector and dealer who lives in a rambling Flemish castle. But he's no recluse. So step inside to admire the riches.

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

## One Family

A small photo exhibition appears to have slipped under the radar this month. The FotoMuseum in Antwerp is hosting the Israeli portrait photographer Vardi Kahana, but the national press seem to have missed it.

Kahana has been taking photographs of her extended family for the past decade. She began with her mother when she was still at art college and went on to document a scattered family of uncles, aunts, cousins and assorted children, who are pulled together in a show titled *One Family*. "The aim is to show a cross-section of Israeli society with all its hues and contrasts," she says.

Being a documentary of Israeli families, there is inevitable sadness in some of these photographs. One of the most striking, "Three Sisters", shows Kahana's mother and her two sisters with their left arms bared to show the tattoos applied at Auschwitz: the three consecutive numbers – A-7760, A-7761 and A-7762 – a

reminder of the day when they lined up to enter the concentration camp.

There are also documents of more recent suffering, such as the photograph of Cousin Libi and her husband holding a photo of their first born son, Yair, who was killed fighting in Lebanon in 1995.

One by one, you meet the family members, some of them struggling to live in harsh conflict zones like the West Bank, others settled in peaceful Copenhagen. You gradually feel connected to these cousins and uncles, nephews and sisters, one family that could be any family.

The exhibition *One Family* kicks off Antwerp's Jewish Culture Festival, a three-month long celebration of music, theatre, exhibition and film.

Derek Blyth

online

[www.joodscultuurfestival.be](http://www.joodscultuurfestival.be)



"The Grandchildren of Cousin Shmuel", taken in Denmark, 2004

Vardi Kahana's photograph on the cover, top right, is titled "Mother and Father". It was taken in Tel Aviv in 1995 just before her father went into hospital for an operation from which he did not recover.

## FACE OF FLANDERS



## Frank Vercruyssen

Frank Vercruyssen's filmography is like a dream team of Flemish movies: *Daens*, *Manneken Pis*, *Alles moet weg*, *Rosie*, *Villa des roses*, *Any Way the Wind Blows*. Certainly there are more prolific film actors, but none more recognisable than Vercruyssen – because if you're checking out the best of Flemish cinema, you'll see him over and over.

"It's true," admits the 43-year-old actor. "When I see the movies that I've done, I think that the quality is consistent and that they are really interesting features." Part of this has been good luck and part knowing which projects to choose. Both *Villa* and *Manneken Pis*, which won awards the world over, including three at Cannes, were directed by Frank Van Passel. *Rosie* and Vercruyssen's new film, *(N)iemand*, were both directed by Patricia Toye. "I have a very personal relationship with those directors, and we are all loyal people," he says. "We follow each other's work very closely, so we know each other really well."

Also, Vercruyssen has the luxury of being a bit choosy about his film roles because most of his work is done on stage with the theatre company STAN, which he founded in 1989 with three other graduates of the Antwerp Conservatory. "You can't survive on the Flemish film industry," he says. "It's not like I'm inundated with scripts every week."

When you do see Vercruyssen in one of his films or, say, the TV series *De Smaak van de Keyser*, which begins next month, you might not always recognise him because of the chameleon-like character of the top of his head. He created a signature look in the 1990s with a perfectly smooth scalp, which he sported in *Manneken Pis* (where it practically has a role of its own). In *(N)iemand*, which opens in cinemas across Flanders next week, he has a full head of hair. In other films, it's anywhere in between. In real life? "On the top of my head, there is nothing. But the sides are still playing along."

In *(N)iemand* (*Nobody*), Vercruyssen plays Tomas, who, apparently convinced that his wife doesn't really love him, fakes his own death and runs off to live on a tropical island. A romantic idea, but Tomas soon finds that paradise is not all it's cracked up to be. "I find it escapist and cruel, especially to his wife," says Vercruyssen, who doesn't relate to the character. "Maybe I want an extra life, but not another one," he smiles. "But what's so beautiful about the film is that you are never able to pinpoint what the hell is going on with him." Tomas is like a maverick character, "like in a western," says Vercruyssen. "He's not very sympathetic, not very likeable."

His character in *De Smaak van de Keyser* (*The Emperor of Taste*), on the other hand, starts out being unsympathetic and then turns into a noble hero. He's a soft-spoken manager of a family-owned jenever distillery in Hasselt, circa 1940. It's also co-directed by Frank Van Passel, who Vercruyssen loved working with again, but he found his character a bit too low key. "On stage, I'm talking all the time, and in movies, they always want me to shut up! Couldn't my characters be a little less discreet?"

Lisa Bradshaw

## TALKING DUTCH

## notes on language



## aan

They say the best place to begin is at the beginning, though few do so when they pick up a dictionary. But you don't have to be a linguaphile to make a good stab at what the first noun is in an English dictionary. I'll give you a few seconds and some hints: it's a nocturnal African anteater, and it begins with aa. In fact, it's a South African Dutch word, *aardvark*.

In my Dutch dictionary I had some page turning before I reached *aardvarken* ("earth pig"). The first noun in my Van Dale *woordenboek* ("words book") is the beautiful sounding *aai*, meaning a stroke or caress. You can almost hear the caress in *zij aaide over zijn bol* – she caressed his head.

Most of the pages between *aai* and *aardvarken* are taken up with *aan* words. The word *aan* simply means "on" and sounds to my ears like how an American would pronounce "on". So the encouragement *kom aan* sounds much like a New Yorker's come on!

Sometimes it corresponds to the English "on", though often not: *de kachel is aan* – the stove is on; *van nu af aan* – from now on; *een tekort aan kennis* – a lack of knowledge; *er is geen beginnen aan* – it's impossible ("there is no beginning on"); *hij woont aan de kust* – he lives at the coast; *hij is aan het strijken* – he's ironing. This is the usual way of expressing activities that are in progress: *zij is aan het lezen* – she's reading ("she is at the reading").

When used with verbs, the *aan* is sometimes at the front of the verb, sometimes detached as in English: *aankomen* means to arrive; *de trein kan elk ogenblik aankomen* – the train is due any moment; but the *aan* comes at the end in *alles komt op hem aan* – everything depends on him. The verb *aanraden* – to recommend splits in *de dokter raadde hem een andere specialist aan* – the doctor recommended another specialist to him. (Spelling rules kick in to turn *raden* into the past form *raadde*; it's not a typo, I promise). The pages are peppered with non-verbs.

*Aangenaam* means pleasant: *zijn komst was een aangenaam verrassing* – his arrival was a pleasant surprise; *aangenaam* – pleased to meet you. Another is *aandacht* – attention: *dank u voor u aandacht* – thank you for your attention; *aandacht aandacht* – your attention please; *aandachtig luisteren* – listen carefully.

Some *aan* verbs give us other words. So *aanstaan* – to be on (*de radio staat aan* – the radio is on) leads to *aanstaande*: *aanstaande maandag* – next Monday; *aanstaande moeders* – expectant mothers; *onze aanstaande schoonzoon* – our future son-in-law.

So get a *woordenboek* to flick through; when you get past *aardvarken*, that's when it really gets interesting.

Alistair MacLean

online

[www.vandale.nl](http://www.vandale.nl)

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"The Belgian people don't think of us as real Belgians, even if we have a Belgian passport": FORUM member Regina Suchowolski-Sluszny

## Separate but Belgian

Continued from page 1

from hiding after the war was Regina Suchowolski-Sluszny. Born in 1939, the young *Antwerpenaar* was hidden with a family throughout the war. Her parents and two brothers also survived in hiding, and the family was reunited after the war. She now identifies with more modern Orthodoxy, but, having spent her formative years in a non-Jewish setting, she sees the Jewish community both from the inside and the outside.

Given her unusual upbringing, Suchowolski-Sluszny speaks Dutch and continues to have non-Jewish friends. "The Jews of Antwerp don't mix with non-Jews; they are a separate entity," she explains. "Most don't speak Flemish, and, if they do, it's very poor and

with a strong accent. That didn't exist before the war. The Belgian people don't think of us as real Belgians, even if we have a Belgian passport. They see the long black coats and fur hats, and it's difficult for them to see real equals."

Suchowolski-Sluszny also sits on FORUM, the umbrella organisation for Jewish Flanders and the go-to point for the government on Jewish affairs. "Sometimes people are attacked in the street, which is never written in the papers. But we have good contact with the Antwerp mayor and others through FORUM and don't have problems with the extreme right."

Jacques Wenger, the director of Shomre Hadas, the modern Orthodox community in Antwerp, says that the government "collaborates 1,000% to make sure our schools, synagogues and events have adequate

protection. It is an example of good relations between a Jewish and non-Jewish community."

The group's presence near Central Station mirrors many other cities where Jews, forever fleeing persecution, would stumble off the trains and establish their communities close by. In many cities, as Jews became better established and wealthier, they left these enclaves and moved to more suburban regions. In Antwerp, due to the strict level of observance and the establishment of the synagogues, restaurants and shops in that area, the ultra-Orthodox have largely stayed put.

Antwerp's Jewish community is hardly uniform, and more modern persuasions of Orthodoxy also exist: a group in nearby Edegem, for instance, is growing and will soon build a synagogue. Back in the 1980s, there was even an effort to establish a non-Orthodox community, featuring an egalitarian approach to prayer and practice. Although two such groups now exist in Brussels, Antwerp did not provide the right atmosphere to support such an initiative.

The ultra-Orthodox community has experienced significant growth in the last decades, and the social welfare needs have escalated as well. Machsike Hadas, the ultra-Orthodox community, has recently founded a new organisation to fill this void – the Joodse Welzijn en Ziekzorg (Jewish Welfare and Health Care). This group's programmes pair people with volunteer positions. Volunteers frequently carry out multiple roles in social support for both the house-bound and hospitalised.

Joodse Welzijn has also played an important role in tailoring secular institutions to better serve the unique needs of its community. "We have set up a couple of rooms in hospitals in Antwerp and Leuven where Jewish patients can find a corner to relax, pray, read, find a fridge stocked with kosher food," explains Meylech Binder, coordinator of the organisation. "These patients don't socialise in the same manner as a standard patient – they won't sit in the cafeteria, won't watch television – so these rooms give them a chance to get out of their room and into a relaxed environment."

Binder himself is a member of one particular Chassidic group, the Pshevorskers, and he notes that, while everyone used to know each other in the Chassidic world of Antwerp, the community has grown enough that this is no longer the case. Yet Antwerp remains unique in the ultra-Orthodox world. "Situated in the heart of the city, we are very intertwined with the greater community geographically," he says, "and yet the Jewish community has retained its own character."

An important facet of this is language. Antwerp's ultra-Orthodox community is one of the last remaining Yiddish-speaking communities in the world. While children learn Dutch in school, and secular studies are held in Dutch, only a small sector speaks between themselves in Dutch. Among the modern Orthodox, French is generally the prominent language.

Wenger explains that before the Second World War, there was a strong sense of Flemish identity amongst Jews. Nowadays, there are Flemish influences; "But to say we have a strong Flemish identity, this will take more time," he says. "The Flemish identify as Flemish, the French-speakers are Walloon. When we want to make a joke, we say we are the last 'Belgian' people in Belgium."

online  
www.fjo.be

## A Taste of Jewish Antwerp

What better way to learn about a culture than through its food. Antwerp has no shortage of eateries subscribing to the laws of *kashrut*. Deriving from the *torah*, or Jewish book of law, and then laboriously interpreted by Rabbis over the centuries, some of these rules are fairly well known (no pork and bacon under any circumstances).

Others extend to the mixing of foods – for example, milk and meat may not be eaten together. So restaurants are either entirely dairy or completely dairy-free. Some foods, called *pareve*, fall in between and can be eaten with meat or milk. These include breads, vegetables, eggs and fish.

Note that all kosher restaurants are closed on Friday nights and Saturdays in honour of the Jewish Sabbath. Of the many kosher restaurants in Antwerp, don't miss:

**Hoffy's • meat** The best-known kosher restaurant in Antwerp, Hoffy's has a dining room and caters events. You'll find every

*ashkenazic* (Eastern European Jewish) treat under the sun, including many incarnations of meat and fish. If you've never had *gefilte* fish (ground fish patties), that's the tried and true test of whether you can hack it in Jewish cuisine. At Hoffy's, you won't find just salt and pepper on your table, but pickles and *chrain* – shredded horseradish. The ideal accompaniment to *gefilte* fish, but it may knock your socks off.

Lange Kievitstraat 52 • [www.resto.be/hoffy](http://www.resto.be/hoffy)

**Kleinblatt • dairy & pareve** Antwerp's famous kosher bakery, and rightly so: bagels, *challot* (braided breads traditionally blessed during Sabbath meals), cheesecake, sachertorte, pralines, ice cream and sorbets (the latter are *pareve*).

Provinciestraat 206 • [www.kleinblatt.be](http://www.kleinblatt.be)

**Lamalo • meat** An upscale addition to the Antwerp kosher scene, Lamalo (Hebrew for "Why not?") features Mediterranean cuisine with Moroccan influences. Beyond both the *Sephardic* (Western European)

and even *Ashkenazic* meat dishes, you will find a variety of *mezze*, including familiar Mediterranean territory: hummus, olives, aubergines, tomatoes, bulgar, fennel and

more. A special night out for anyone looking for kosher food – or just a good meal.

Appelmansstraat 21 • [www.lamalo.com](http://www.lamalo.com)



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## GOSSELIN moving

BELGIUM - MEMBER GOSSELIN GROUP





**PHOTO OF THE WEEK** ● The monumental street artist Arne Quinze has constructed a new wooden sculpture on the Leuvenseweg in Brussels. The work, entitled "The Sequence", forms a sort of bridge between the Flemish parliament and the House of Representatives opposite, where members have their offices. Like the Cityscape structure he built on the Guldenvieslaan, Quinze's latest work is made of wooden slats arranged into a quasi-organic, branch-like matrix. The structure was opened officially at last weekend's Festival of Politics,

which included an open day at the parliament. The work is expected to stand for about five years and cost €387,000 — a bill that drew protests from opposition parties. "The Flemish parliament hasn't invested in art in recent years," said parliament chairwoman Marleen Vanderpoorten. "This collaboration with Quinze allows us to work with an internationally renowned artist."

## THE WEEK IN FLANDERS

### Wednesday 12 November

● The public broadcaster VRT was criticised for putting its main coverage of the 90th anniversary of the Armistice in Ypres on its digital TV service, available only to subscribers. Meanwhile, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, speaking at the ceremony, called for large-scale remembrance celebrations in the years 2014 to 2018 to mark the centenary of the First World War. ● Foreign minister Karel De Gucht defended himself in front of a parliamentary committee on charges of insider trading of shares in Fortis. De Gucht is accused of using his knowledge of Fortis' problems to help his wife sell shares before the price dropped. ● An Ostend man was issued a new electronic identity card, which states that he is 320 years old. The card claims Yves Viérin was born in April 1688 — the same year as Alexander Pope and composer Jean Baptiste Loeillet de Gant. ● The mayor of Sint-Truiden is to look into the possibility of imposing a lifetime ban on owners of dangerous dogs, after a pitbull killed an elderly couple's pet Maltese.

### Thursday 13 November

● Masculine ways of thinking and an excess of testosterone leading to risky decision making are to blame for the crisis in the financial sector, according to Herman Van den Broek, professor of management behaviour at the Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School. "Typical male managers have to be able to say that they want to grow bigger, make more profits. Anyone who doesn't play along is dismissed as a loser," he said. ● Film-

makers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne won the annual Human Rights Prize awarded by the Flemish League for Human Rights. The award marked their commitment to social and economic rights in films like *Rosetta* and *Le silence de Lorna*. ● Nieuwpoort has won two international prizes for its living conditions. The coastal town won a gold medal at the Liveable Communities awards in Dongguan, China, for landscape improvements and a silver medal in the general category. A total of 42 towns and cities took part, with winning towns taking home a prize of £10,000 (€11,600).

### Friday 14 November

● Unions and management at the Carrefour supermarket chain reached an agreement that appeared to bring to an end weeks of industrial action which saw the closure of many of the chain's hypermarkets. Unions were protesting at pay and conditions for workers at the new hypermarket in Bruges. ● A bike-hire scheme run by advertising company JC Decaux will be extended to all 19 Brussels municipalities, the city's mobility minister Pascal Smet said. The scheme, currently only operating within the inner ring, will involve 2,500 bicycles, available for €1.50 a day or €30 a year. ● Affligem Blond, brewed by Opwijk-based brewer Affligem, was voted best high-fermentation beer at the European Beer Star Awards in Nuremberg. Best Belgian double was the Gouden Carolus Classic from Het Anker in Mechelen, while best triple was Malheur 10° from Buggenhout. ● Dries Van Noten, one of the original Antwerp Six fashion

designers, has been awarded the annual Prix de la Mode by *Marie Claire* magazine, presented in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum last week by EU Commissioner Neelie Kroes.

### Weekend 15 and 16 November

● A train collision at Diegem station caused seven people to be taken to hospital with minor injuries. The cause of the accident, which disrupted traffic between Brussels and Leuven, is being investigated. ● The royal family is to receive an average increase of 6% in the money they receive out of public funds. Prince Laurent does best, with a 9.7% rise to €350,000 for 2009. The average employee in business received a payrise of 3.4% this year. ● An elderly couple from Mol were charged €11,335 for a blocked toilet because of an accounting error, the company's boss claimed. But officials of the finance ministry said the case was the latest in a line of serious complaints against Clean Express Service. ● Dredgers working on the leper-IJzer canal are finding an average of 10 pieces of munitions every day, mainly from the First World War. Works were forced to stop in June when explosives were discovered, and two munitions experts now accompany the dredging vessels at all times. ● The Pellenberg campus of Leuven University Hospital has been ranked in the top 10 of orthopaedic clinics worldwide by the speciality's international society. The poll praised Pellenberg's revalidation centre and radiological facilities, as well as the quantity and quality of research carried out by personnel.

### Monday 17 November

● The Foundation Against Cancer became the first official organisation to raise concerns about the safety of mobile phone radiation by placing a notice on its website ([www.cancer.be](http://www.cancer.be)) warning that radiation could be linked to cancer. ● Some 35,000 party-goers made their way to Ghent Expo at the weekend for the latest edition of I Love Techno. But the event was marred by an accident on the E19 after the event when three Dutch girls who had been attending were killed in a car crash. Investigators believe that the driver fell asleep at the wheel. ● Sports minister Bert Anciaux will make €2.5 million a year available for sport for seniors, he announced — a 500% increase on the usual budget. Half of all older people up to the age of 64 do not exercise enough, while the figure for the over-75s rises to 80%. "Sport is also a way for people to come in contact with each other and be involved in society. And a lot of older people are lonely," Anciaux said. ● Sinterklaas made his entry into Belgium last weekend, arriving at the port of Antwerp to be welcomed by mayor Patrick Janssens and thousands of cheering children. In recognition of the importance of the event, Janssens broke with a lifetime's habit and wore a tie.

### Breaking news

for breaking news, see  
[www.flanderstoday.eu](http://www.flanderstoday.eu)  
under "press room"

## FIFTH COLUMN



### Snakes and ladders

With Noël Slangen's departure, the first man ever to be called a spin doctor in Flanders has left politics. Slangen's company, Groep C, no longer works for BAM, the agency that is to construct the Oosterweelverbinding in Antwerp. The man himself also handed in his resignation as strategic director of Open VLD, the party of former prime minister Guy Verhofstadt. Slangen, a communications expert from Hasselt, has always been controversial. First, there is the business aspect: his companies have always worked for governments and authorities of one sort or another. Over the years, there have been rumours surrounding these contracts involving conflicts of interest. Slangen has spent a good deal of time in court because of this, but he has yet to be convicted. This sleazy reputation finally did him in two weeks ago with BAM. Following relentless attacks from opposition politician Jan Peumans (N-VA), he finally threw in the towel.

And then there's politics: Slangen started out in the 1980s as a campaigner for the then-insignificant socialist Steve Stevaert. He moved on to the Christian Democrats, where he was responsible for branding Jean-Luc Dehaene as "the experienced guide". From 1999 on, Slangen was to be found with Verhofstadt's party.

Slangen convinced the liberals to stop their negative campaigning. It worked and brought (Open) VLD to power, transforming Verhofstadt into the positive thinker he is today. When Verhofstadt entered government, Slangen came too. He coined the term "open debate culture" to explain away the babbling and bickering of the multi-party cabinet.

From this era stems his reputation as spin doctor — in the case of Slangen, this was never a term of endearment. The opposition held him responsible for making perception more important than performance. The ring of his name ("Slangen" is the plural of "slang", the Dutch word for "snake") and his self-confidence bordering on arrogance made him the ideal figure to revile.

Slangen often advised politicians not to speak out, yet he found it very hard to keep quiet himself. In a parliamentary commission, he once refused to answer a question asked by Gerolf Annemans because he did not consider his party, Vlaams Belang, to be democratic. For all of this, journalists loved Slangen. He either gave them juicy quotes or he made a perfect target for attacks. And now this has all ended. Or has it? In a popular political cartoon, Verhofstadt is always accompanied by his alter ego, a snake (Slangen). It is widely assumed that the former prime minister is preparing a comeback in the European elections of 2009, and it is hard to imagine him not dialing Slangen's number every now and then.

Anja Otte



THE WEEK  
IN FIGURES

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**1,028**

Number of cases of tuberculosis (TB) registered in 2007, the first year the rate has dropped below 10 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.

**€70,000**

Final cost of a publicity stunt that proved to be too successful for Turnhout restaurant *Largo Dox*. The restaurant's owner Wouter Bollansée sent an email to 200 customers offering a voucher worth €20 if they forwarded the mail to 10 contacts. The scheme worked so well that 35,000 people had claimed their prize before the promotion was stopped.

**84%**

Increase in earnings in the first nine months of the year for Alfacam, the TV technical production services company. Sales were up to €30.8 million, largely as a result of Alfacam's coverage of the Beijing Olympics.

**103,000**

Number of patients every year who contract a nosocomial infection in a Belgian hospital or clinic. Hospital infections are the cause of 900,000 lost work-days every year.

**28**

Belgium's ranking in the league table of equal rights for men and women, drawn up by the World Economic Forum. The country fell back in the Global Gender Gap Index by nine places on its 2007 ranking.

**500,000**

Number of people who viewed the new Eric Van Looy film *Loft* only three weeks after its release. Van Looy's previous hit *De Zaak Alzheimer* sold 750,000 tickets, still a long way behind the all-time top-selling Flemish film *Koko Flanel*, starring Urbanus and directed by Stijn Coninx.

**€20,000**

Losses suffered by prime minister Yves Leterme from investments with Citibank. The investments were guaranteed by the US bank Lehmann Brothers, which is now bankrupt. Leterme revealed the personal cost of the banking crisis during a debate in parliament.

**5.9%**

Average increase in train prices approved last week by federal minister Inge Vervotte. The increase will come into effect on 1 February 2009.

Failing women's organisations leave  
"vacuum" for radicals, report warns

A lack of subsidies for organisations which help put migrant women to work has meant many have had to close their doors, leaving the way open for more informal, and sometimes much more radical, groups to take their place. That's the conclusion of a report compiled by the Centre for Migrant Studies (CeMIS) for Flemish equal opportunities minister Kathleen Van Brempt.

Up until recently, such organisations, usually run within the immigrant communities of Turks, Moroccans or Russians, were financed by the government as part of a policy of minority aid. Their work consisted of finding employment for immigrant women. But that policy changed, and organisations were expected to become more independent and self-financing. As a result, the report says, many had to close, since they were unable to finance their activities – either through the women, who were usually low-education and unskilled, or through their client companies, which were mainly offering low-skill and low-wage jobs.

"Small-scale local organisations working with poorly-educated women are not in a position to submit complicated subsidy dossiers, or carry out rigorous book-keeping," said Petra Heyse of CeMIS.

As a consequence, the vacuum is filled by informal networks of women centred on religious links or cultural associations. The report also raises the possibility that some groups with a less empowering mission for women might take advantage of the lacunae in the system. "We are starting to see the arrival of more radical Islamic groups who target women and young girls," Heyse said.

Van Brempt, meanwhile, admitted the problem, but pointed out that it is not limited to the world of women and work: "Other associations who work with Muslims have remarked on the attraction exercised by more radical groups," she said. "We are also supporting Muslim women who are involved in more woman-friendly interpretations of the Koran," she said.

## Prison guards to be trained to spot suicidal prisoners

Prison guards are to undergo training in recognising the signals of suicidal behaviour, following concern over the number of prisoners who take their own lives every year.

In fact, the number of suicides in prison has come down sharply in recent years, from 29 in 1998 to about ten now. But the justice ministry is keen to being that total down even further – or at least to stop it rising again.

The prison officers' training, which will form part of their basic training, is based on experience in Ghent prison. Ghent has seen 17 suicides in the period from 1998 to 2007, the highest total in the country, ahead of Lantin (15) and Vorst (13). But that black mark hides a more recent record of success: in 2001 there were four suicides, in 2002 only one, and in 2003 none at all.

The reason given is a regime of vigilance which includes weekly reports from each wing of the prison on possible suicidal expressions by prisoners – which might range from statements to self-harm. Prisoners under special surveillance are watched for depressive behaviour, and care-squads are available to intervene if the situation appears critical.

The training for other officers will include instruction on the danger signs, and the most vulnerable periods. Most suicides take place at the beginning of the sentence, when the reality of the imprisonment, and in some cases the true enormity of the crimes committed, first hit home. Holiday periods like Christmas are another potential danger-time. In addition, overcrowding is an aggravating factor in suicides: in every case where action has been taken to tackle overcrowding, the number of suicides has come down.

Finally, special attention will be given to suicides among remand prisoners, none of whom has been convicted, and many of whom turn out to be innocent.

## Belgium's healthcare ranking disappointing, and getting worse

*Continued from page 1*

At the top of the list, meanwhile, is the Netherlands, which might come as a surprise considering the large numbers of Dutch patients who make their way to Belgium for treatment. However, they are attracted here by a variety of aspects such as shorter waiting lists, easy access to specialists, quality of hospital accommodation (not measured in the index) and the fact that Belgium – in particular Flanders – has an overcapacity of beds compared to areas of the Netherlands near the border.

"The Netherlands has been at the top of the lists since we began measuring health care in Europe," Dr Björnberg said. "This year, it has won with an unprecedented margin over second place."

Belgium's 12th place is largely a result of poor access to new medicines, disappointing medical outcomes (fatal heart attacks, survival



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The city of Ghent has been voted the world's third most authentic historic tourist destination in the world by National Geographic Traveler Magazine. Austria's Wachau region and Melk Abbey came first, followed by the Rideau Canal corridor in Ontario, Canada. The magazine described Ghent as "A gloriously eclectic city, with an excellent mix of old and new buildings," but said Ghent needs to improve information in other languages and signposting. "Unlike its neighbor Bruges, Ghent has retained the character of a functioning city rather than an open-air museum." The city's tourism alderman Lieven Decaluwe described the award as "absolutely deserved". "Ghent still gets only half the tourists of Antwerp or Bruges, but this ranking shows that we don't need to take second place to our sister cities," he said.

## Bard of Antwerp dies

A memorial ceremony took place at the weekend in the Roma theatre in Antwerp for Wannes Van de Velde, the unofficial bard of the port city, who died last week at the age of 71. Van de Velde, a poet, singer, painter and writer, was credited with a revival of Flemish folk music, and with introducing dialect lyrics into popular music. He was born and brought up in a popular inner-city area between the Grote Markt and the Schipperskwartier, and studied art at the Fine Arts Academy, as well as classical guitar with Ilse Alfonso. But it was as a spokesman of the common man, speaking the language of the city, that he made his reputation from 1960 onward. The ceremony, which unusually was open to the public, was addressed by Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens, and included a screening of a TV documentary made in 1977.

rates of cancer patients, etc), high resistance to antibiotics (a result of over-prescribing) and limited success in diabetic care and suicide prevention. On the other hand, Belgium does well as regards waiting lists (in fourth place after Switzerland, Luxemburg and Germany) and on specific treatments such as transplants, cataract operations, childhood vaccinations and dental care. Just below Belgium in the table comes the United Kingdom, followed by Hungary.

"We see a downward trend for countries like Belgium, France and Sweden. These health systems do not keep up with the improvement rate found in countries like Denmark, Ireland, the Czech Republic and Hungary," the report concludes. "The Netherlands is the really stable top performer in all our indexes, and we find that its health-care system truly is Europe's best! The Netherlands has worked long on patient empowerment, which now clearly pays off in many areas."



## Wind-power park could be financed by nuclear premium

The development of the Thorntonbank wind-power park off the Belgian coast is under threat from the financial crisis affecting the banks, according to the man in charge of the project.

According to Filip Martens, CEO of C-Power, the banks are no longer willing to advance credit for the financing of the North Sea energy park. The first six wind turbines were built with financing from Dexia, which is now one of the Belgian banks hit by the global crisis.

The 30 turbine project was to have cost €850 million. Some €152 million has already been spent on the first six turbines, but the continued development of the project could be brought to a standstill if further financing is not arranged by April, Martens warns.

C-Power is now setting its sights on the Synatom Fund, set up in 2003 to finance the break-up of

Belgium's nuclear power stations and the storage of nuclear material. The fund is fed by payments from household and business electricity bills. At present the fund stands at €5.2 billion, after the federal government recently removed €250 million to help balance the budget.

C-Power will now make an appeal to the government to use Synatom funds to help finance Thorntonbank. "It's not a question of subsidies or gifts," Martens told Flanders Today. "We're looking for straightforward loans, with all the necessary guarantees," he said. At present, Synatom funds are only available to generating companies Electrabel and SPE.

Last week in the parliament, prime minister Yves Leterme expressed enthusiasm for the idea. A legal basis for such a move already exists, the prime minister said, and it would now be up to a committee to work out the details.



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## Shoplifting costs on the rise in Belgium

The amount of income lost to shoplifting in 2007 rose by 3.9% in Belgium and Luxembourg, going against the worldwide reduction of 1.5%. Shoplifters stole goods worth €770 million last year. That means every shopper spends about €84 just to cover the losses caused by shoplifting, according to the new edition of the Retail Theft Barometer produced by the Centre for Retail Research, based in Nottingham, England.

Retailers in most countries describe shoplifting as their biggest problem. However the figures show that more than half of all "wastage" – goods lost to theft or waste – is caused by the store's own staff and partners, with a total of 58% lost due to staff theft, supplier theft and administrative errors. Nevertheless, shoplifting still accounted for 1.33% of sales, the equivalent of a whole week's takings, and an increase on the 2006 percentage of 1.28%. Another 0.33% is spent on measures to prevent and detect theft.

Total shop theft in Europe came to €31.5 billion, with the largest volumes in the UK, Germany and France. The UK, France and Greece also lost more as a percentage of all sales. The most popular stolen goods are branded cosmetics and skincare products, alcohol, women's wear and perfumes. Small electrical appliances and razor blades are also popular targets of the thieves.

The Christmas period, running from mid-November to end-December, is the peak time of the year for shoplifting, the report says, with some €4.8 billion expected to be pilfered in Western Europe as a whole at this time. The recession, says the report, could even push that figure up by as much as 9%, as people suffering dwindling purchasing power turn to theft or, more importantly, are more open to buying stolen goods at bargain prices.

## Flanders takes measures to stimulate economy

The Flemish government remains committed to investment, minister-president Kris Peeters pledged last week. Peeters was announcing a package of new and reworked measures intended to stimulate the economy, worth a total of €842 million.

Among the measures announced was an increase in the premium paid to workers over the age of 50 who start a new job, as well as a €500 increase in the premium for companies who employ them. The government anticipates that older workers will be hard-hit when the financial crisis forces companies to cut staff. Current premiums have helped to provide jobs for over 5,000 older people.

The government will put €300 million into a fund intended to guarantee credit for small businesses that are currently having trouble finding loans on the open market because of the financial crisis. The government has already announced that another fund will be available later to provide risk capital for larger



companies to finance innovations.

"In the short term we will also be spending €45 million more on noise screens, waterways and innovation in business," Peeters said. The government will also work to cut funding delays in approving innovation projects, with the introduction of a new task force. "We are still an investment government. Flanders will be debt-free. We will not take part in deficit spending. We will keep the budget in balance in 2009," he said.

Elsewhere, Peeters promised the announcement of a new partner in two weeks for the housing insurance system, which guarantees mortgage payments should a homeowner find it impossible to keep up because of illness or unemployment. The previous system with Ethias was cancelled when costs became too high.

## Diamonds are forever, but not for the present

Representatives of the Antwerp diamond industry met in sober circumstances this week to consider the problem of a worldwide fall in demand for the precious stones. This should have been the week of the industry's annual congress, a gala affair held in the sumptuous Waagantie, which this year was to have been addressed by flamboyant billionaire Richard Branson. Instead, the Antwerp World Diamond Center (AWDC) decided, in the light of the global financial crisis, to play down the event.

"We have taken the decision to postpone the conference, despite the positive response," explained Freddy J. Hanard, the AWDC CEO. "The conference has traditionally served as a roadmap for the world diamond community, and as such has come to be regarded as a must-attend event on the industry calendar. With the turmoil now taking place in the financial markets, we felt that it was essential to allow the dust to settle first. We therefore thought it prudent to postpone the conference".

Delegates to the lower-key meeting in the Provinciehuis are confronted with the

problem of falling demand. Diamonds are sensitive to the economy and people tend not to spend money on expensive stones when times are hard. In the current circumstances, the situation in the US is giving the greatest cause for concern. The US accounts for 48% of all sales of diamonds passing through Antwerp, and early figures suggest that year-on-year figures could be down by as much as 14%, much of the loss sustained at the peak crisis time of October.

"At this stage it is not clear how the diamond market is likely to react to the current crisis," Hanard adds. "On the one hand, if there is a marked fall in global consumer demand, all luxury products are going to experience a slowdown. On the other hand, with the lack of confidence that the public is currently displaying for stocks, bonds and other financial instruments, diamonds and diamond jewellery may be considered a safe haven. This is on top of the emotional focus on personal relationships that diamonds have come to symbolise, which become front-of-mind in times of crises".

Diamond dealers are also suffering, the



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In hard times, customers cut back on jewels

AWDC says, from the new practice of the Antwerp prosecutor's office of seizing large quantities of diamonds whenever a fraud investigation is launched. The seizures,

which the industry claims are indiscriminate and vindictive, affect not only dealers but also suppliers and clients.



## BUSINESS FLASH

**Air • Brussels Airlines**

Brussels Airlines has scrapped its code share agreement with British Airways following the carrier's acquisition by Germany's Lufthansa. As a result, Brussels Airlines has joined the Star Alliance network. The Belgian airline recently agreed to work with another Star carrier, British Midland (BMI).

**Banking • Dexia**

The Franco-Belgian financial institution Dexia, which specialises in the financing of local authorities, has sold its US-based FSA affiliate to Assured Guaranty for \$722 million, including a 24.7% equity stake. The move marks the end of Dexia's ill-fated entry into the US bond insurance market and coincided with the announcement of a loss of €1.5 billion in the third quarter.

**Banking • KBC**

KBC Bank, Flanders' largest financial institution, has signed an agreement with the Mumbai-based UBI bank to create a joint asset management affiliate in India. The move paves the way for KBC to distribute its funds to UBI's 20 million customers through the bank's 2,518 branches. Meanwhile, KBC has held back the development of its Russian Absolut Bank affiliate in the wake of the worldwide credit crisis.

**Brewing • InBev**

The Leuven-based beer group InBev is considering selling its German affiliates Beck's, Franziskaner and Hasseröder to the Oetker food group to help finance its acquisition of the US Anheuser-Busch beer group.

**Building • Wienerberger**

The Austrian building materials group Wienerberger will close its Westmalle and Steendorp production units as part of a worldwide restructuring of its operations.

**Energy • Essent**

The Dutch energy group Essent will invest over €100 million to build a 400 megawatt "combined cycle gas turbine" (CCGT) power plant in Genk.

**Film • Barco**

The Kortrijk-based Barco, which designs and develops TV and cinema screens, has signed a €150 million agreement with the US AccessIT company to supply digital film projection equipment to some 5,000 cinemas in the US and Canada.

**Food • Quick**

The Brussels-based fast food chain Quick will open three franchise outlets in French New Caledonia. The move follows the group's fast-growing development in France and on the Indian ocean island of La Reunion, where it already operates seven restaurants.

**Port • Zeebrugge**

The Port of Zeebrugge has signed an agreement with the Chennai port authorities in India to supply technical assistance in the handling of containers and new cars.

# Will party for job

## Jump start your career at Antwerp's disco job fair

Stéphanie Duval

On 22 November, it won't just be party as usual at Antwerp's über-cool club Industria. Because guests might walk away with more than just a lively night out. They might hold a brand new job, too.

Publigroup and music channel JimTV are organising the first ever Elevate, a party-job fair combo aimed at fresh graduates or other 20-somethings in need of a career path. "We want to create a great atmosphere, where everyone is at ease and not dressed in business suits," says Gianni Van Dort of Publigroup, a design and printing company based in Ghent.

Local businesses invited to participate in Elevate are diverse – from banks and consulting companies to petrochemical and pharmaceutical corporations. Big industry names like Fortis, Deloitte and ExxonMobil will also be there, along with ICT group Uptime.

"Instead of letting companies build their own stalls – like at a traditional job fair, we're putting them all in the same room, filled with comfortable lounge chairs," says Van Dort. "That way, students and graduates can roam the area and stop for informal talks without inhibitions."

Uptime spokesperson Fredric Vanvinckenroye compares the initiative to the concept of the after-work party: "It's a formula that also didn't exist before, and it has proven to be very successful. I expect the same for this unconventional job fair because it's a casual and fun way of networking."

To ensure the fun, organisers have booked musicians: Sweet Coffee, Buscemi and Sven Van Hees will be responsible for getting the party started. Guests will also receive a free glass of champagne, and participating companies can also offer a drink to job-seekers who come to introduce themselves in the lounge.

No one appears to be worried that the Saturday night club atmosphere will intrude on the professional goals of the event. "I think the night will have a certain chronological process," says Jeroen Fossaert of Netlog, an online

social networking site. "Guests will probably first visit the lounge to make contacts and hear what the companies have to say and afterwards head to the party."

Yet it is undeniably in the guests' best interest to be on their best behaviour that night, even during the party. "Obviously, if we see a potential candidate ending up blind drunk, that could seriously damage their chances of getting a job," laughs Vanvinckenroye. The unique advantage of Elevate to employers is the opportunity to get to know the person behind the CV very quickly. The actual piece of paper doesn't even come into play until later.

Entrance to Elevate is free, and guests can register in advance and upload their CVs if they want. Companies can then download the profiles directly so that visitors don't need to bring a stack of paper.

"We also like the fact that neither company nor candidate are a 'number' at this event," says Vanvinckenroye. "Normally, we're just one of hundreds of companies presenting themselves, and now we're one of less than 20. There will also be fewer students than at a traditional fair, which means we'll be able to spend more time with each candidate."

Companies are not only targeting a very specific audience at Elevate; they are also profiling themselves as close to that audience. "Recruiting in a different environment lowers the threshold, providing an informal and fun way of getting in touch with young people," says Eveline De Munck of Start People. An interim agency, they decided to participate because they are constantly searching for better ways to contact candidates, and they think Elevate will have an effect on their own image.

Fossaert agrees: "Netlog is a young company itself, and our concept of social networking is largely based on fun, so you could say that this event truly is a perfect match for us."

To facilitate contact between companies and potential applicants, a team will guide visitors



They're looking for jobs right now. Really.

to the companies most of interest to them. To up the motivation ante, participants increase their chance of walking out with a €1,200 cash prize with each new company they approach.

This is the first Elevate, but upcoming evenings are already in the pipeline. While the 22 November event will focus mainly on white-collar jobs, the next one will be geared towards industry. "We will also have to think about expanding because already this event has grown beyond what we ever imagined," notes Van Dort.

online  
[www.elevate08.be](http://www.elevate08.be)



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## THEATRE

# Figures of speech

A heritage group in Mechelen breathes new life into an old art



Photos: Rudy Godeyne

**Lisa Bradshaw**

In the centre of Mechelen, figures hang from walls and lie in drawers. They are young and old, happy and sad, human and animal. Maybe one is riding a unicycle on a wire above your head, maybe one is towering grim-faced over you, maybe another is only 25 centimetres tall and grabbing onto your leg.

Het Firmament is the “home for puppet theatre” in Flanders, and between its walls is a whole new world – several worlds, in fact. In a space inside the Hof van Busleyden museum, these figures made of wood, cloth, paint and paper-mâché come alive in such an enchanting variety of forms, the word “puppet” seems too simple to describe them.

But the Dutch word does them more justice. *Figuur* suggests all kinds of figures that maybe have a little bit of a life of their own. “When you think of puppetry, you think of old guys playing with wooden dolls on strings,” laments Marnix Rummens of Het Firmament’s Education and Communication department. “One of the main goals of Firmament is to create a shift in the image of puppetry. What most people don’t realise is that puppetry is really alive.”

Meaning it’s diverse: marionettes and those recognisable little puppet theatres are certainly part of what Firmament calls “figure theatre”. But it’s also performers donning costumes or interacting with puppet figures or working with objects to tell a story. One of Firmament’s members, for instance, put together a show for a reception using salt and pepper shakers in his hand. He walked around and did a little performance for small groups of people, who were surprised and delighted by everyday objects becoming something more.

“Some people call that ‘object theatre’ because it’s not really creating a puppet – instead you use a ready-made object. But it’s very much related to puppet theatre,” explains Simon Smessaert, an expert in puppetry heritage and research.

Flanders has a long tradition of figure

theatre, with records of travelling shows dating back to the middle ages. Belgium took on its own traditions from the moment it was formed. “Theatre Toone in Brussels is as old as the country,” notes Smessaert. The heritage here shows a major

adherence to rod puppetry – large figures (50 to 70 centimetres) manipulated from above with metal rods. It’s a tradition that originated in Sicily. “We’re not sure how it made the trip,” admits Smessaert, “but we also have taken up Commedia dell’arte, which is another tradition in Italy. It’s based in improvisation, so there’s no written text. You’ll never see the same show twice.”

Because Firmament is a heritage organisation and not actually a theatre, there are few public performances. “Firmament is more about the history of puppeteering in Flanders and Belgium – to maintain the tradition and make sure that new people, new talent can be trained properly by experienced puppeteers,” explains Rummens. “Then they can, in turn, hand their knowledge down to the next generation.”

Because they’ve been around since 1970, the organisation has seen that happen first hand. In terms of your ability to see performances, both amateurs and professionals attend intensive workshops offered year round and often arrange performances themselves.

Workshops are specific – from Figures and Objects to Street Puppet Theatre – and are often in the form of classes that last several months. They are on offer all over



Flanders, and there are differing levels – from those with a passing interest to those who are professional puppeteers. Firmament also has workshops for children and arranges special projects with certain social groups. This year, they worked with a group of young people serving time in a juvenile detention centre. They made puppets, wrote music and built scenery using graffiti and other art forms to make an entire hip hop video. Next, Firmament will work with adult prisoners.

There is an opportunity this month, though, for the public to see a Firmament project in performance. They are taking part in In-Fusion, a project that is currently travelling between hospitals in Flemish cities. It consists of an exhibition and site-specific projects by local groups around the subject of sickness and health, life and death.

In keeping with a theme of intercultural communications, Firmament will visit patients in their hospital rooms in both Mechelen and Antwerp to present little shows. “People with different nationalities are telling their life stories with puppetry or with images or objects,” explains Rummens. “It’s meant to create an atmosphere so you can get to know someone from another culture.”

If you are fortunate enough to not be a



hospital patient, on 23 November, Firmament will present an intimate public performance in the reception of the AZ Sint-Maarten in Mechelen.

Right now, Firmament is thinking of the future because the Hof van Busleyden plans to renovate, and the organisation will need to find a new home. They would like something permanent of their own and are drawing up concrete plans for a puppetry heritage site and education centre in Flanders, complete with workshop and rehearsal rooms, exhibition space, a documentation centre and accommodations for international visiting artists.

*Firmament will perform at 15.00 on 23 November in AZ Sint-Maarten, Zwartezustersvest 47, Mechelen*

**online**  
[www.hetfirmament.be](http://www.hetfirmament.be)



## MUSEUM



# Horse tales

A practically unknown museum recalls a remarkable period when a tiny Flemish village was renowned worldwide for draft horses

**Denzil Walton**

These days, the village of Vollezele, which lies between Halle and Gerardsbergen, is so small it's hardly noticeable. Yet, from the 1880s until the 1930s, this Flemish Brabant town was a bustling hub of activity and played an indispensable role in the nation's economic success.

The origins of this remarkable story can be traced back to the 1850s and one man's vision. Realising that the industrialisation of Europe would require stronger horses to pull increasingly heavier machinery, horse breeder Remi Vander Schueren began to interbreed the three types of draft horses found in Belgium. The result was a single breed, which he named the Belgian draft horse.

His work soon paid dividends with the arrival of the magnificent stallion named Brillant. Between 1878 and 1884, Brillant was crowned champion at major draft horse competitions in Brussels, Amsterdam, London, Paris and Hanover. Belgian draft horses – particularly those sired by Brillant – were suddenly in demand throughout Europe.

For good reason. Powerfully built and standing between 16 and 17 hands, these Belgian horses were incredibly strong, able to pull up to two tons. Yet they were docile and would willingly let themselves

be attached to wagons or machinery. They eventually became indispensable in a variety of industries such as agriculture, forestry, mining, shipping and brewing.

Vollezele became a magnet for horse dealers, initially from western Europe and then, as word spread, from Eastern Europe and Russia. They would travel by train to Brussels and then by horse-drawn coach to Vander Schueren's farm in Vollezele. By this time, other local farmers had jumped on the bandwagon and eventually no fewer than four renowned breeders of Belgian draft horses lay within the boundaries of the village. Often more than 100 buyers would pass through Vollezele every day. At any one time, there might be 160 stallions for sale.

Records from 1891 show that Belgium exported draft horse stallions to the government stables of Russia, Italy, Germany, France and the old Austria-Hungary empire. The Belgian government was quick to see a potential goldmine across the Atlantic and, in 1903, sent Belgian draft horses to the St Louis World Fair and the International Livestock Exhibition in Chicago.

As expected, demand followed and by the next year 1,600 Belgian draft horses were exported to the US. By 1912, the export of these horses was bringing 50 million Belgian francs a year into the

nation's coffers. King Leopold II publicly congratulated the Vollezele breeders, and Prince Albert (later King Albert I) visited the village to express his appreciation.

However, the success was short-lived. During the First World War, draft horses from all over Belgium were requisitioned by the German and Allied armies to transport ammunition, artillery and supplies to the front line. Most of them didn't survive the experience. Then, in 1917, Henry Ford developed the first mass-produced tractor. With almost embarrassing haste, natural horse power was replaced by mechanical horse power.

Although they continued to be used in forestry, especially where narrow hillside tracks were inaccessible to the early tractors, the

golden age of the Belgian draft horse had abruptly come to an end. Nowadays they are still bred but mainly for show.

Philippe van Dixhoorn, who just died this year, grew up on his grandfather's draft horse breeding farm in Vollezele and opened the Belgian Draft Horse Museum in 2000. One of his five daughters, Hilde, is now the museum's coordinator. "After retiring, my father spent over 10 years collecting documents and photographs and liaising with the local authorities," she explains. "Finally, the museum was opened, and in great style too. A magnificent procession of more than 100 draft horses from all over Belgium pulled ancient farm wagons and machinery around the village. Outside the museum, a bronze statue of Brillant was unveiled."

For anyone interested in horses or simply fascinated by the past, the museum is well worth a visit. The walls are covered with black-and-white photographs of these magnificent animals in action. Upstairs is a huge ornamental harness that would have been worn by a draft horse in a championship. Documents describe the vast numbers of horses sold and chart the rising prices as their popularity increased.

The museum is open by appointment only, and Uldrik Dehandchutter, one of Philippe van Dixhoorn's grandchildren, gives tours when he job as a pilot allows. He suggests to visit in a group and will "gladly give a presentation of the history of the Belgian draft horse in English, Dutch or French," he says.

In a strange turn of events, Vollezele is once more attracting international visitors. They may not be flocking in the same numbers, but horse lovers from Denmark, America, Germany, Canada, New Zealand and Australia have passed through and signed the guest book. Who knows, maybe their ancestors once visited Vollezele and signed a contract for a Belgian draft horse?

**online**  
www.museumvanhetbelgisch  
trekpaard.be

## Once upon a time in America

(As told by Uldrik Dehandschutter)

"Last year a Flemish lady visited the museum. She had just returned from the US. While sitting in a train in Ohio, she got into conversation with an Amish farmer. The train passed a field full of horses, which both of them recognised as Belgian draft horses. The lady told the farmer that she was from Belgium. 'I've never been to Belgium; I've never even been outside of Ohio,' said the farmer. 'The only place in Belgium I've heard about is Vollezele, where America's Belgian draft horses came from.'"



## ANTIQUES

# The eclectic collector

Art collectors who live in castles give the impression of being a bit loony. Not so with Axel Vervoordt of Antwerp

Denzil Walton

**A**xel Vervoordt burst onto the art scene in Belgium in spectacular fashion. When he was 21, he bought and renovated 11 dilapidated mediaeval town houses in the centre of his native Antwerp, an area known as the Vlaeykensgang. But then he went one step further and furnished them from his own collection of antiques, authentic indigenous art objects and furniture that he had been collecting since he was 14.

News of the wonderful transformation of the Vlaeykensgang spread, and clients queued up to ask Vervoordt to furnish their houses. He started to work on castles, country houses and town houses in Belgium and beyond. His wife, May, took responsibility for the fabrics and soft furnishings, and an impressive client list was born that included Rudolf Nureyev, Hubert de Givenchy and several leading decorators.

Vervoordt then began to take the best pieces from his collection around the world to international art and antique fairs, where major collectors and curators gather. In 1982, he exhibited at the Biennale des Antiquaires in Paris. Visitors were amazed at his extraordinarily eclectic combination of art and antiques from just about every part of the world in various styles and periods.

"I firmly believe in mixing art; too frequently, art is categorised," says Vervoordt. "I believe that the juxtaposition of objects from vastly different eras and cultures makes a strong and impressive statement on present and future interior design."

He collected more as his client list grew, so, naturally, he needed more space. In 1985, he bought 's-Gravenwezel Castle outside Antwerp. The couple lovingly restored the entire interior to create 50 different rooms, each furnished with its own style and character. Egyptian stone vessels look perfectly at ease alongside Italian Renaissance bronzes. Contemporary paintings can be viewed while sitting in 18th-century English chairs. The castle is an exhibition centre and the Vervoordt family home in one.

By now, Vervoordt's company had expanded to include five departments: art-historical, restoration, architectural consulting, home furnishing and real estate. All five are interwoven to attain the same goal – to offer clients an exclusive and comprehensive service based on beauty and quality.

Soon, even a 50-room castle was not large enough to house Vervoordt's inventory. His eyes



Clockwise from top: Axel Vervoordt renovated his first townhouse at 21; the Kanaal showroom doubles as a space for artists to work; the reception room at 's-Gravenwezel Castle; details from the castle library



fell on an old malting complex in Wijnegem. With several warehouses and eight grain silos located only a short trip from the castle on the banks of the Albert Canal, it was ideal for his purposes. It opened in 1999 under the name Kanaal and now contains showrooms and facilities for a range of artistic activities. A museum is planned for 2010.

Between the castle and Kanaal, Vervoordt has 16,000 pieces in stock, all fully inventoried with detailed descriptions, measurements and prices. The collection is in a constant state of flux; every

month some 300 pieces might enter or leave. At any one time, about 2,000 pieces are on display. The rest are in stockrooms, but the whole collection is accessible online to Vervoordt's clients.

The clients range from museums and art galleries to individuals wanting to fill their home with works of art. "I try as much as possible to achieve an effect of harmony between the architectural environment, the furnishings and the works of art and antiques that I put into buildings. In the end, the people living in the house must be able to find more of themselves than of my intervention."

Vervoordt achieves that by working closely with the client over a number of months or even years. He describes this as "creating a portrait" of the client – getting to know their tastes, styles, likes and dislikes. Based on this portrait, he suggests how their property could be decorated and furnished.

As antique furniture often lacks real comfort, Vervoordt has created his own line of sofas, chairs, tables and lamps. It's now the fastest-growing area in his company. "Their unpretentious design and outstanding craftsmanship endow these furnishings with that timeless quality that we always aim for," says Vervoordt.

Vervoordt also finds it challenging to work on smaller projects, such as transforming apartments, summer or resorts and country cottages. Whatever the building, the objective is the same. The owners should be able to make a tour in their own home and enjoy every single room.

The Axel Vervoordt company now numbers nearly 100 people, many of them specialised craftsmen. Vervoordt's two sons work alongside him: Boris runs Kanaal, while Dick manages the real estate department. Five art historians spend their time touring international art fairs and acquiring almost 250 works of art each month.

Around 80% of business is conducted outside Belgium. Vervoordt watched the evolution of the recent financial crisis with a certain amount of trepidation but was pleased to see that it has not affected business: "On the contrary; in the last two months, a number of major projects have come in, including a palace in St Petersburg. I think there will always be people who prefer to invest in beautiful art-filled homes rather than keeping their money locked up in banks."

online  
[www.axel-vervoordt.com](http://www.axel-vervoordt.com)

## See for yourself

**G**ravenwezel Castle and the showroom Kanaal are open to the public during the Axel Vervoordt company's annual Winter Exhibition. "A castle like 's-Gravenwezel is not meant to be hidden away, nor are our works of art," says Vervoordt. "Both my wife and I thoroughly enjoy seeing people wandering around our family home, delighting in the art and enjoying the atmosphere: the candlelit rooms,

the raging fires, the smell of fresh coffee and cookies. Children in particular are always so excited to be inside a real castle that is still lived in."

*The Winter Exhibition takes place on 28-30 November and 5-7 December. Each day the two buildings are open from 14.00 to 19.00. Entrance to the castle is €10; entrance to Kanaal is free.*



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## BREWERY SERIES

# Survival of the fittest

Two world wars knocked them down, but never out. Het Anker has earned its label from Belgian Family Brewers

Robyn Boyle

Brewery Het Anker pulls out documents verifying that a man by the name of "Jan in den Anker" was a paying member of the Brewer's Guild as far back as 1369. It is likely that he operated a brewery at the current site of Het Anker, an impressive riverside estate near downtown Mechelen.

By the 15th century, the brewery and buildings were under full control of the old Beguinage of Mechelen, a semi-religious community of women, which at that time covered two-thirds of the city. It was the Beguines who brewed there for over 400 years, serving the beer to patients at their *Crankenhuis*, or hospital. A healthy alternative to the then-polluted water, beer was considered a nutritious drink containing wholesome grains and sugars.

The Beguinage flourished under Spanish rule until the French Revolution when Napoleon attempted to repress religious activities. The Beguinage went into decline and eventually up for sale. That's when, in 1872, the buildings were sold to Louis Van Bredam, forefather of the current brewer family at Het Anker. The brewery still stands before the impressive church of the Beguines, but Louis Van Bredam transformed it into one of the first modern steam breweries in Europe.

In the hands of the Van Bredam Family, Het Anker experienced a period of prosperity until the First World War, when it underwent the same lot as many breweries – seeing its kettles dismantled by German soldiers, who used the copper to make ammunition. The installations were rebuilt and, during the Second World War, Het Anker was allowed to continue brewing, albeit in a very restricted manner. The brewery found new vigour following the war, but it wasn't

long before time started to take its toll on the ancient buildings.

Charles Leclef, fifth generation of the Van Bredam Family, is responsible for the brewery's most recent revival and subsequent worldwide success. "This place," he says, waving his hand around a decidedly stylish office, "was basically in ruins when I took over the family business in 1990, and the brewing activity was minimal. We had to modernise everything, but the brewing hall remains, and the copper kettles are still used in production."

Het Anker is now a beautifully restored group of buildings that have retained their historic charm, including a pub, restaurant and hotel. Hotel Carolus is in fact the first hotel in Belgium to be established on the site of a functioning brewery.

Leclef also began creating new beers with an eye for export. "The Belgian market is already so saturated, I knew that the best way for a small brewery like ours to draw significant attention would be to look abroad," he explains. Now, almost 65% of Het Anker's beers are exported to some 30 countries around the world, from Japan and Australia to Mexico and the United States. "The US is our top importer right now," Leclef adds.

Sander Gennep



Fifth-generation family brewer Charles Leclef has brought Het Anker into the 21st century with a flourish

"There's a growing appreciation there for quality Belgian beer."

The brewery is best known for its Gouden Carolus assortment, of which there are six very different versions: Classic, Tripel, Ambrio, Hopsinjoor and specialty Christmas and Easter brews. The name Gouden Carolus is a reference to the golden coins from the time of Emperor Charles the Fifth, when Mechelen was the almighty capital of The Burgundian Netherlands.

Gouden Carolus Classic, or the "Emperor's Beer" as locals refer to it, was traditionally consumed before fox hunts to "stir up enthusiasm". It has a dark, ruby-red colour and flavour enhanced by coriander and dried orange peels. Like the bulk of Het Anker's beers, it is top-fermented, re-fermented in the bottle and of very high alco-

hol content (8.5%).

Gouden Carolus Tripel is a refined golden beer. Belgian hops and pale malts combine for a pure and rich taste that has been awarded numerous prizes at beer competitions the world over. Ambrio is essentially a new version of Mechelen's trademark brown beer from the 15th century. The light brown Ambrio of today is spicier, heavier and more hoppy.

Hopsinjoor's name makes a link to "opsinjoor", a folkloric figure in Mechelen's history, and uses no less than four different sorts of hop. As one would expect, this strong blonde brew is pleasantly bitter and highly aromatic.

In addition to the Gouden Carolus series, Het Anker produces two Cuvée

beers annually in limited supply. Cuvée van de Keizer Blauw is brewed in honour of the birthday of Emperor Charles the Fifth. The strongest of the brewery's assortment at 11%, it is an exclusive, reddish brew with a fine palate of anise, brown sugar and fig flavours that get better in the bottle over time. Cuvée van de Keizer Rood is the blonde version, for those who prefer a refreshing, yeasty beer, intensified with three herbs.

Finally, Anker Herfstbok, based on a traditional Mechelen recipe, has begun being brewed again after 30 years down time. A reflection of the autumn, both in colour and taste, it's a warming, spicy beer for connoisseurs.

Het Anker has more on offer, but the above-mentioned beers proudly carry the Belgian Family Brewers quality label, something that Leclef considers a valuable means of protecting Belgium's long brewing tradition. "Sometimes countries that import Belgian beers like to try their hand at brewing themselves, which is fine to the extent that they don't use – or misuse – our name in the process," Leclef notes. "I think it's only right to inform the consumer about the authenticity of what they drink, and that is why the BFB label is so essential."

online

[www.hetanker.be](http://www.hetanker.be)

Check next week for the last in our Belgian Family Brewers series

## EVENT

### 10 jaar het beschrijf

In a world where sound bites get shorter, images get faster and average folk feel faint amid a dizzying array of ever-obsolete technology, it's nice to know that in Flanders you can still get respect for settling down with a good book. And certainly for writing one.

The region is home to hundreds of novelists, poets and essayists, who can pack in audiences at readings, debates and special events. Right now, Tom Lanoye

is selling out theatres with more than 20 performances of his new one-man show. Antwerp's annual Book Fair, which finished its 12-day run last week, has all the buzz of a rock festival. One July day last summer during Gentse Feesten, when most were outside revelling in sunshine and music, dozens of the devoted sat in a stifling, colourless room to listen to Kristien Hemmerechts, Chokri Ben Chikha and a host of others debate the freedom of the press.



Golden Owl winner Peter Verhelst

Pieter de Spinghore

Along with this love of the written word – and of those who use it to expand ideas and horizons – come numerous organisations to harness it all. This Friday, Het Beschrijf, which hosts numerous literary events, celebrates 10 years with 10 authors at KVS in Brussels.

The gala event invites both Belgian and international writers, who all have some kind of relationship with Brussels, to take part in a multi-media adventure utilising film, music and Google Earth to address contemporary hybrid identities. From what position do writers tell their stories in an increasingly global world?

Guests include Kader Abdolah,

an Iranian poet who fled to the Netherlands in the 1980s and now writes in Dutch; Richard Powers, the American author of *The Gold Bug Variations* and *The Echo Maker*, who comes to KVS via satellite; and Peter Verhelst, who, in true Flemish fashion, is a novelist, poet, playwright and actor.

Lisa Bradshaw

21 November, 20.00, KVS, Arduinkaai 7, Brussels

online

[www.beschrijf.be](http://www.beschrijf.be)



## Classical &amp; New Music

## Antwerp

## Amuz

Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28

**NOV 23** 15.00 Ensemble Explorations: Brahms String Sextets Nos 1 & 2

## deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,

www.desingel.be

**NOV 19** 20.00 Irwin Gage tribute:

Caroline Melzer, soprano; Annette

Fischer-Lichdi, piano: lieder by

Prokofiev, Schumann, Heucke and

songs by Roussel

**NOV 21-23** 10.00-18.00 Irwin Gage

tribute: public masterclasses for lieder

duos

**NOV 26** 20.00 Irwin Gage tribute:

Richard Burkhard, baritone; Edward

Rushton, piano: lieder by Butterworth,

Debussy, Martin, Rushton, Finzi, Ravel

## Bruges

## Concertgebouw

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02,

www.concertgebouw.be

**NOV 20** 20.00 Ensemble Explorations:

Brahms' String Sextets Nos 1 & 2

**NOV 23** 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic

conducted by Michel Tabachnik,

with Eliso Virssaladze, piano:

Brahms' Piano Concerto No 1, op 15,

Stravinsky's Petrushka

## Brussels

## Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,

www.bozar.be

Concerts at 20.00:

**NOV 19** Leon Fleisher, piano: Bach,

Debussy, Brahms, Albeniz, Chopin

**NOV 20** Bach Collegium Japan,

conducted by Masaaki Suzuki: Bach's

Mass BWV 232 **NOV 21** Brussels

Philharmonic conducted by Michel

Tabachnik, with Eliso Wirssaladze,

piano: Brahms Concerto No 1, op

15, Stravinsky's Petroushka **NOV 22**

Symphonieorkest van Vlaanderen

Ensemble conducted by Jonas

Alber, with Vitaly Samoshko, piano:

Goeyvaerts, Rachmaninov, Schumann

## De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39,

www.demunt.be

**NOV 21** 12.30 La Monnaie Brass

Quintet: Dvorak

**NOV 24** 20.00 Simon Keenlyside,

baritone; Malcolm Martineau, piano:

Schumann, Ravel, Fauré

## Espace Senghor

Waverseesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40,

www.senghor.be

**NOV 20** 20.30 Tribute to composer

Giacinto Scelsi

## Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,

www.flagey.be

**NOV 21** 12.30 Kimiko Nishi,

harpsichord: Couperin, Froberger

(Piknikmusik)

**NOV 23** 11.00 Musiq' Académies (free

concert)

## Miniemenkerk

Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84,

www.minimes.net

**NOV 23** 10.30 Chapelle des Minimes

Orchestra and Choir conducted by Jan

Caals: Bach's mass BWV 236, Sanctus

BWV 240

**NOV 25** 20.00 Oltremontano

conducted by Wim Bécu, with

Dorothee Mields, soprano: Monteverdi,

Gallerano, Martino, Grandi, Legrenzi,

Marini, Castello, Carissimi, Ferro

(www.bozar.be)

## Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 0900.28.877

**NOV 23** 12.30 Jo Alfdi, piano:

Schubert, Fontijn, Chopin

## Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37

Concerts at 20.00:

**NOV 21** Sergio Tiempo and Karin

Lechner, piano: Debussy, Fauré, Dukas,

Milhaud, Ravel, Piazzolla **NOV 23**

VUB-Symfonisch Orkest conducted

by Jurgen Wayenberg: Sibelius,

Vaughan Williams, Lindberg, Van der

Roost, Grainger, Kamen, Andriessen

**NOV 24** Tokyo String Quartet with

Markus Groh, piano: Haydn, Ravel,

Schumann **NOV 25** Brussels Chamber

Choir conducted by Helen Cassano:

In stiller Nacht, music by Schubert,

Brahms, Mendelssohn, Bruckner, Grieg,

Howells, Britten, Lauridsen

## Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30,

www.wolubilis.be

**NOV 25** 20.00 Quartet d'Israël: Mozart,

Bach, Schubert, Khachaturian, world

music

## Opera

## Ghent

## Vlaamse Opera

Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02,

www.vlaamseopera.be

**NOV 23-30** 20.00 The Rape of Lucretia

by Benjamin Britten, libretto by Ronald

Duncan; a new co-production with

Operastudio Vlaanderen, conducted

by Elgar Howarth, staged by Carlos

Wagner

## Jazz &amp; blues

## Ardoois

## Cultuurkapel De Schaduw

Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82,

www.deschaduw.net

**NOV 22** 20.30 Filip de Fleurquin +

group

**NOV 23** 16.00 intojazztic #15 + jam

session

## Antwerp

## deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,

www.desingel.be

**NOV 20** 20.00 Brussels Jazz Orchestra

with Richard Galliano, accordion

## Bruges

## De Werf

Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29

**NOV 19** 20.30 Andrew d'Angelo Trio

(US)

**NOV 22** 20.30 Joe Fiedler Trio (US)

**NOV 26** 20.30 Fes

## Brussels

## Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

**NOV 21** 20.00 Teun Verbruggen +

Andrew d'Angelo

## Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,

www.bozar.be

**NOV 23** 20.00 Chucho Valdes

## Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,

www.flagey.be

**NOV 21** 20.15 Brussels

Jazz Orchestra &

Richard Galliano

**NOV 22** 20.15 Garrett

List Ensemble

**Jazz Station**

Leuvensesteenweg

193-195; 02.733.13.78

**NOV 19** 20.30 Sabin

Todorov Trio **NOV 20**

20.30 Sandyland **NOV 22**

18.00 Qu4tre **NOV 26** 20.30

Original Cosy

## Le Grain d'Orge

Waverseesteenweg 142; 02.511.26.47

**NOV 21** 21.30 Soulbeek

## Sass'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; www.sazznjazz.be

**NOV 19** 20.30 SM's Steady Wednesdays

**NOV 20** 20.30 Greg Faravel Trio + Jam

Session

**NOV 22** 20.30 Panopticon, improvised

jam session

## Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,

www.soundsjazzclub.be

Concerts at 22.00:

**NOV 21** Anne Wolf Trio **NOV 22** A

24 (It) + Andy Gravish (US) **NOV 24**

Master Session **NOV 25** Da Romeo &

The Crazy Moondog Band

## The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

**NOV 19** 20.30 Flavia Dell'Isola

**NOV 20** 20.30 Alexandre Tripodi & Bal

Tabarin

## Ostend

## Kursaal (Casino)

Monacoplein; 0900.69.900,

www.kursaalostende.be

**NOV 20** 20.00 Buscemi & Michel

Bisceglia Ensemble

## Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

## Antwerp

## Lotto Arena

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060

**NOV 26** 20.00 The Kooks

## Borgerhout

## Luchtbal Cultuurcentrum

Columbiastraat 8; 03.543.90.30,

www.ccluchtbal.org

**NOV 13** 14.30 Freddy Sunder Big Band

+ special guest Sofie

## Hof Ter Lo

Noordersingel 30; 03.543.90.30

**NOV 19** 20.30 Rahzel

**NOV 20** 20.00 Sonata Arctica + Pagan's

Mind + Vanishing Point

**NOV 27** 20.00 Satyricon

## Brussels

## Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

**NOV 19** 18.00 Bleeding Through +

Black Tide + Bullet for My Valentine

+ special guest Lacuna Coil **NOV 22**

19.00 Blue Flamingo + Cheval Blanc

+ Rodaan Al Galidi + Prima Donkey

+ The Golden Glows + Stef Kamil

Carlens plays Bob Dylan **NOV 23** 18.00

Blue Flamingo + Rudy Trouvé Septet

+ De Kift + Stef Kamil Carlens solo

+ Claire Chevalier + B'Rock **NOV 24**

20.00 Mercury Rev **NOV 25** 20.00 Bob

Brozman. Danko Jones + Motörhead

**NOV 26** 20.00 Opeth

## Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

**NOV 22** 23.00 Darko

## Halles de Schaerbeek

Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22;

02.218.21.07

**NOV 20** 20.00 The Streets

**NOV 22** 20.00 Death Cab for Cutie

## Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

**NOV 23** 20.00 The Uglysuit

**NOV 25** 20.00 Tahiti 80, evening

dedicated to the novel and music

## Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25;

02.502.57.34,

www.recyclart.be

**NOV 22** 20.30

Spank Me

More records

release party

with Autistic

Daughters,

Pentark, Code

314, Icu + DJ

Snooba

## Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,

www.stekerlapatte.be

**NOV 20** 21.30 Dans Dans



Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15  
NOV 19 20.30 Otango, tango dance/ performance

Theatre Saint Michel

Pater Eudore Devroyestraat 2; 02.732.70.73  
NOV 26 20.30 Looking for Mr Castang by Edouard Baer, staged by Baer

Théâtre Varia

Scepterstraat 78; 02.640.82.58  
NOV 25-29 20.30 Standing Wave by Bud Blumenthal, with live music

Theatre

Antwerp

Antwerpen X

Berchem, Antwerpse Ring; 070.344.555, www.daens.be  
Until DEC 28 Daens: The Musical (in Dutch with French surtitles)

Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be  
NOV 26 20.30 Terug op de plaats die ik nooit heb verlaten (Back to the place that I never left) (in Dutch, part of Jewish Culture Festival)

Brussels

Auderghem Cultural Centre

Vorstlaan 183; 02.660.03.03  
NOV 20-23 Brussels Light Opera Company in Fiddler on the Roof, music by David Miller (in English)

Ekeren

Ekerse Theaterzaal

Oorderseweg 8; 03.541.14.18  
NOV 24-25 20.30 Terug op de plaats die ik nooit heb verlaten (Back to the place that I never left) (In Dutch)

Ghent

Theater Tinnenpot

Tinnenpotstraat 21; 09.225.18.60, www.tinnenpot.be  
Until NOV 21 20.00 Ik sta hier en jij ligt daar Jotie (I'm Standing Here and You're Lying There, Jotie) (In Dutch)

Leopoldsborg

CC Leopoldsborg

Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.ccleopoldsborg.be  
NOV 20 20.15 Angel Ramos Sanchez + Luc Apers

Visual arts

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.260.99.99, www.muhka.be  
Until DEC 7 Broodthaers & friends, works by Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers shown with works by Panamarenko, Robert Filliou, Bernd Lohaus, Guy Rombouts and Walter Swennen  
Until JAN 4 The Order of Things, group show questioning the use of archival images

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00  
Until DEC 7 Chris Marker: Staring Back, photography by French filmmaker Chris Marker  
Until JAN 4 Gérard Dauphin, retrospective of work by the Antwerp photographer (1938-2007)  
Until JAN 4 Een wereld zonder einde (A World Without End), retrospective of work by Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart

Zilvermuseum Sterckshof

Cornelissenlaan; 03.360.52.52  
Until JAN 18 Fifties Silver, Belgian civil and religious silver design from 1950 to 1970

Bilzen

Landcommanderij Alden Biesen

Kasteelstraat 6; 089.51.93.42  
Until DEC 14 Limburg in 't geweer, 300 years of military history in Limburg

province, with paintings, drawings, weapons and models

Bruges

Arentshuis

Dijver 16; 050.44.87.11  
Until DEC 7 Günter Brus, retrospective of the avant-garde Austrian on his 70th birthday

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  
Until JAN 4 Stradanus: Artist at the Medici Court, retrospective of Bruges-born artist Johannes Stradanus, with paintings, drawings, prints and tapestries

Brussels

Argos Centre for Art and Media

Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03, www.argosarts.org  
Until JAN 3 Interstitial Zones, 15 artists offer a critical alternative to the mass media's coverage of modern history

deBuren

Leopoldstraat 6; 02.212.19.30, www.deburen.eu  
Until DEC 12 World One Minutes Brussels, the best one-minute videos from 90 countries

De Elektriciteitscentrale European

Centre for Contemporary Art

Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.35  
Until JAN 11 Réfléchir le monde (Reflecting the World), photographs, video and installations by contemporary French artists on the occasion of the European Union's French Presidency

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25  
Until DEC 21 Ware Liefde! (True Love!), group show

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60  
Until DEC 31 Design Verpakt, jewellery and miscellaneous objects by contemporary Flemish designers

Flemish Parliament

IJzerenkruisstraat 299; 02.552.40.43  
Until DEC 20 Screenworlds, contemporary Flemish photography, with work by Carl De Keyzer, Caroline Van Poucke, Jimmy Kets, Stephan Vanfleteren, Tim Dirven and Tony Leduc, among many others

ING Cultural Centre

Koningsplein 6; 02.547.22.92  
Until MAR 15 Oceania: Signs of Ritual, Symbols of Authority, sculptures, masks, artefacts, weapons and utilitarian objects from Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63  
Until DEC 28 Inedit, Idel Ianchelevici's sculptures photographed by Stephen Sack

La Fonderie – Brussels Museum of Labour and Industry

Ransfortstraat 27; 02.410.99.50  
Until DEC 7 Sous les palmiers: la mine (Under the Palm Trees: The Mine) photographs of miners in Morocco during the 1960s by Charles Henneghien

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.226.12.57  
Until NOV 30 Habeas Corpus, group show on the theme of the body, with contemporary paintings, drawings, videos and sculpture

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11  
Until MAR 8 Continental Superstar, mechanical organs from the Ghysels collection, with recreated dance floor, bar and lighting

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11, www.fine-arts-museum.be  
Until JAN 4 Meunier in Séville, 80 paintings made in Spain by 19th-century Belgian artist Constantin Meunier  
Until JAN 18 Landscapes and portraits by Belgian artist Lismonde  
Until JAN 25 Breuk en erfenis (Separation and Heritage), show marking the European Union's French Presidency, with 1970s works by French artists  
Until FEB 15 CoBrA, major retrospective on the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Cobra movement

Saint Michael and St Gudula Cathedral

Sinter-Goedeleplein; 02.217.83.45  
Until NOV 24 Septiformis, paintings, photographs, installations and video work by several artists

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49  
Until MAR 31 That's Opera: 200 Years of Italian Music, a look behind the scenes of the making of an opera, travelling exhibition by music publishers Ricordi

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23, www.museumdd.be  
Until NOV 23 CAP.MAX, installation in the museum's garden by Emilio López-Menchero  
Until NOV 30 Projections and shadow puppetry by American artist Kara Walker  
Until NOV 30 Photography and sculpture by Belgian artist Kris Martin

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10  
Until DEC 21 Glans en duister (Glossy and Dark), photographs by Eric Standaert  
Until DEC 21 Harold Lloyd, tribute to the famous American actor and director (1893-1971)

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99  
Until JAN 26 100 years Demeyere, stylish cooking utensils by the Belgian manufacturer.  
Until JAN 26 Retrospective of German Jewellery designer Hermann Jünger (1928-2005)

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be  
Until JAN 18 Giambattista Piranesi, prints by the Italian architect and artist (1720-1778)

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.be  
Until JAN 3 Faux Jumeaux (False Twins), carte blanche to Belgian artist Michel François  
Until JAN 18 Anyth\_=\_ , paintings by Werner Mannaers

Witte Zaal

Posteernestraat 64; 09.267.96.77, www.francekunststart.be  
Until DEC 6 Moments in Time, show exploring the relationship between time, image and the surrounding space

Hasselt

Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21  
Until JAN 4 Ten dans gevraagd (Invitation to Dance), dance costumes by fashion designers and artists from 1920 to the present day

Z33

Zuivelmarkt (Beguinaige) 33; 011.29.59.60  
Until JAN 4 The Great Exhibition Part 1: Europe, a project by Ives Maes linking world exhibitions to science fiction

Maaseik

Maaseik Museum

Lekkerstraat 5; 089.81.92.99  
Until MAR 31 The Terracotta Army of Xi'an: Treasures of the First Emperors of China, 14 life-size sculptures of warriors from the world-famous Terracotta Army shown with 200 artefacts from the Qin and Western Han dynasties

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum

Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00  
Until FEB 22 Ensor & Raveel: Kindred Spirits, drawings and paintings by the Belgian artists

Mechelen

Cultuurcentrum

Minderbroedersgang 5; 015.29.40.00, www.cultuurcentrummechelen.be  
Until NOV 23 Honorons Honoré, tribute to 19th-century French caricaturist Honoré Daumier, with works by contemporary Belgian artists

Meise

Kasteel van Bouchout, Meise

Botanical Garden  
Nieuwelaan 38; 02.260.09. 20  
Until FEB 1 Plantenportretten (Plant Portraits), watercolours by the garden's illustrators

Ostend

Kunstmuseum Aan Zee

Romestraat 11; 059.50.81.18, www.pmmk.be  
Until DEC 15 In the Cherished Company of Others, drawings, sculpture, paintings and installations by Marc Camille Chaimowicz, shown with works by international artists

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa

Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11  
Until AUG 31 Omo: People & Design, Hans Silvester's photographs of south-western Ethiopia's nomadic tribes and objects from the museum's collection

Festivals & special events

Week van de Smaak (Week of Flavour): Annual week that celebrates all things food through tastings, tours, music, theatre, literature and other special events for all ages  
Until NOV 23 across Flanders  
www.weekvandesmaak.be

Antwerp

Jewish Culture Festival: Exhibitions, theatre, music and film exploring local and international Jewish life  
Until DEC 2009 across Antwerp  
www.joodscultuurfestival.be

Bruges

Snow & Ice Sculpture Festival: A glacial fantasy world created by 40 international ice sculptors, with refreshments available from the ice bar  
NOV 21-JAN 11 at the Bruges train station square  
www.icesculpture.be

The Messenger: Multidisciplinary festival on immigration and international culture with exhibitions, theatre, dance, film, debates and readings  
Until DEC 10 across Bruges  
www.cultuurcentrumbrugge.be

Brussels

Finnish Tango Gala: Cultural event with Finland-based tango singer Reijo Taipale  
NOV 26 19.30 at Paleis der Academiën, Hertogstraat 1  
www.southfinland.org

Japan Week: Workshops, exhibition, seminar and screenings  
Until NOV 21 at the Japanese Embassy's Cultural and Information Centre, Kunstlaan 58  
02.511.23.07, www.be.emb-japan.go.jp

Planet Attitude Salon: Sustainable development fair

Don't miss this week



Fiddler on the Roof

20-23 November, Auderghem Cultural Centre, Brussels.  
Tickets from 0487.371.643 or tickets@bloc-brussels.com

Tradition versus modernity. Young versus old. A sheltered community succumbing to the outside world. These are the conflicts that Brussels Light Opera Company will take on this week in the beloved musical by Joseph Stein, Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock that premiered on Broadway in 1964 and has travelled world stages ever since. Based on the Yiddish stories by Sholem Aleichem, the musical introduces us to Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman, his long-suffering wife Golde and their five adventurous daughters. With classics like “Matchmaker, Matchmaker” and “If I Were a Rich Man”, who could go wrong? So, nu, buy your tickets already! **Sharon Light**

NOV 21-23 10.00-19.00 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86C  
02.420.60.69, www.planetattitude.eu

Radioboeken: Thomas Guzig and Josee De Pauw are the guests in this installment of the series in which Flemish writers and performers tell a new story they've written themselves, which is recorded for the radio and for download from the internet.  
NOV 20 20.00 at Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein  
www.radioboeken.eu

Smartival: Multidisciplinary arts festival celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Belgian artist association SMart. Music, film, dance, theatre, circus, installations and a cabaret  
NOV 20-29 at Pathé Palace, Anspachlaan 85  
www.smartival.be

Ghent

Het Grote Ongeduld!: Short film festival with final projects from all the Belgian film schools  
NOV 26 19.00 at Film-Plateau Universiteit Gent, Paddenhoek 3  
09.264.82.75, www.hetgroteongeduld.be

Hasselt

Het Grote Ongeduld!: Short film festival with final projects from all the Belgian film schools  
NOV 21-22 20.00 at Kunstencentrum België, Burgemeester Bollenstraat 56  
011.22.73.90, www.hetgroteongeduld.be

Tervuren

Speakers' Corner: Reading by Luc Van den Brande on The Future of The European Union; registration required  
NOV 27 20.00 at Koloniënpaleis,



## INTERVIEW

# Gorcha Davydova

**Gorcha Davydova fled an oppressive life in Kazakhstan eight years ago. Now she's a stand-up comedian, guest on talk shows and, most recently, the author of her first book.**

As she fled the Kazakhstan Steppes eight years ago in search of a better life for herself and her young son, Gorcha Davydova could never have imagined what lay ahead. Her success as a stand-up comedian has made her a welcome guest on talk shows, and she was included last year in TV één's documentary series *0032* about interesting immigrants.

Next spring will find Davydova roaming Flanders with a new cabaret show, but, in the meantime, her just-published autobiography was being applauded by press and public alike last week at the huge annual Boekenbeurs (Book Fair) in Antwerp.

**The title of your book is *Eindelijk mezelf (Finally Myself)*. Would you say your personality fits in better with Flemish culture?**

With western culture, yes. I grew up as a Kurd in a culture in which women have many obligations but very few rights. Girls are raised knowing they'll be married off at 15, so they don't feel the need to study or do well at school. By the time they're 33, like I am now, they'll be grannies – and they'll look like grannies.

Early on, I knew that this wasn't the life for me. I've always been a rebel. I was married off within a small, rural community, had a baby and a second one, which I lost. Slowly the awareness grew that this could never be my way of life. But you can't change people, you can't change the society. You can, however, choose for your own happiness and go for it, and that's what I did. And now I am happy and finally myself.

**What did you expect when you came to Belgium?**

I had always lived with a clear-cut idea of the future. When I came to Belgium in 2000, I knew exactly what my future would be. I'd meet the man of my dreams, have lots of children and lead a settled, happy family life. In reality, my life took a completely different course, and now I'm doing things I would never have dreamt. It sort of just happened. First there was the documentary, *0032* [in which Davydova returns to Kazakhstan to visit her family and her baby's grave], now there are my book and shows. I'm still hoping fervently for that special man and those kids. I'm not made to be alone. But at this point, I'm promoting my book, preparing my new show and taking care of my son. For now, I live in the moment. I used to know what my future looked like, but not anymore.

**You are a successful stand-up comedian. Have you always been funny?**

Oh no! That only started here. I was telling my Flemish friends about my incredible adventures in this new and crazy world of theirs, and they found my stories extremely funny. I was talking seriously, but they laughed their heads off. So, one thing lead to another, and, in 2006, I did my first performance in the Antwerp comedy club The Joker. I just wanted to try it. I wanted something new in my life, after overcoming the difficult months of my divorce. And the audience laughed.

**Audiences seem to appreciate the way you interact with them.**

That's why I don't call myself a



stand-up comedian but a cabaret performer. Some stand-ups come on stage and tell a joke, a joke, a joke. I'm prepared to do that, but I also try to radiate a lot of warmth. I don't just want to do my thing from behind a mic. I want to put on a big show, with more music, more interaction, more cabaret. Those are the components that you'll see in my new show next year.

**Where do you find your material?**

My life is my material. But humour isn't easy. What I find funny, you might not. And an act doesn't work well with every audience. I didn't make it to the preliminary round of the Comedy Casino Cup this year, for example, whereas I was their big hit two years ago. Humour is fickle.

**You live in Turnhout and even manage the dialect.**

**Wouldn't you rather live in a bigger city?**

Sure, but for my 11-year-old son, this is home. And I've finally found a nice job here. It seems more difficult to move 60 kilometres now than to resettle from Kazakhstan!

**Your book relates your initial surprises when you arrived here. For instance, discovering that the Kurd radio you listened to broadcasts from Dendermonde. I guess you know Flanders pretty well by now?**

There are still so many surprises. Recently I was asked to perform for an all-lesbian crowd. My first reaction was: "Pardon me? I'm straight." Plus, women are much more sensitive about humour, you know? But I overcame my worries, and it was great. All those women scream-

ing and hooting [laughs]. It was a big ego boost. And it generated new material for me, too. Coming from a culture where homosexuality is totally taboo, and gays aren't even supposed to exist, it's still new to me. Only through my life here have I realised that homosexuality is normal. I've never slept with a woman myself, so I don't know if it could happen to me. I appreciate a pretty woman, of course. I'm looking for a decent bloke, though, with a great personality. Unfortunately not easy to find, I'm telling you.

**What did you think of the Borat movie?**

Splendid! And thanks to him everyone knows where Kazakhstan is now. I don't have to explain anymore.

**Is it more difficult for a woman to be a stand-up comedian than it is for a man?**

Male comedians make jokes about women, female comedians about men. That's easy. But my humour is different. I make fun of my life here and my search for Mr Right.

**Do you try out your material on friends before you take it on stage?**

No, I perform straight in front of an audience. Then you know if it works. My friends aren't into that sort of scene anyway. They're married, have kids and don't go out all that much. I'm a bit of a *buitenbeentje*, a maverick.

**Monique Philips**

*Gorcha Davydova performs at 20.00 on 26 December as part of the Humorkerstavond at JOC Kortrijk, Filips Van Den Elzaslaan 35, Kortrijk*

**online**  
[www.123comedyclub.be](http://www.123comedyclub.be)

## THE LAST WORD what they're saying in Flanders

### Looking for love

"I'm not looking for a title. I just find it a terrible pity that my two children can't see their grandfather."

**Delphine Boël**  
daughter of King Albert

### Turning point

"It could be that 2008 becomes a historic date, like 1815, where the face of Europe is changed. The United States, thanks to the financial crisis, is no longer the dominant world power."

**Guy Verhofstadt**  
Former Belgian prime minister, in a new essay titled "The Financial Crisis and the New Age of Empires"

### Art arms itself

"The ultimate weapon of the performing artist against stupidity, injustice and cowardice is creativity."

**Wannes Van de Velde**  
Flemish singer who died last week

**SmaakvandeKeyser** **JefVermassen**

**ZwartePanter**

**DixieDansercoer**

**Fashionista**

**Diamondcomputer**

**game**

**next week in Flanders Today**