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Throw your onions

Why Aalst is the only place to be as Mardi Gras approaches

Emma Davis

Since mediaeval times, the citizens of Aalst have taken to the streets once a year, dressed in colourful disguises, to poke fun at their politicians, party like crazy and show the rest of us how to celebrate Carnival.

On the last weekend before the sombre Christian period of Lent, this modest Flemish city, just northwest of Brussels, puts on a show to rival Mardi Gras festivities in Rio de Janeiro (even if the weather is not quite so exotic).

The earliest record of carnival in Aalst is from 1443 when cities and towns all over the Low Countries staged processions and partied like wild things. This tradition has sadly faded in cities like Brussels and Antwerp but survives in full-blooded form in Aalst.

Carnival is thought to have developed as a pagan festival to celebrate the end of winter and the forthcoming spring and later became part of the Christian feast before the fast. It was – and is – a time of year for citizens to really let their hair down. “If the authorities let them do what they liked one day of the year,” says Luc Geeroms of the Aalst Carnival Museum, “they could be sure they would stay in line the rest of the time.”

It’s also an opportunity for *Aalstenaars* to let their fellow citizens know what they really think, without, hopefully, too many repercussions. “A court jester could tell the truth but did so in disguise. That’s where the spirit

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Fortis deal hanging by a thread

Chinese to vote “no” at decisive meeting

Alan Hope

The Belgian government’s proposed sale of bank-insurer Fortis to the French BNP Paribas hung in the balance this week as Fortis’ main private shareholder switched its vote to oppose the deal.

Following a landmark court case last December, Fortis shareholders will meet on 11 February to vote on the proposed sale. Ping An, the Chinese insurance group, holds 5% of Fortis, making it the biggest single shareholder. Last week, it made clear it would vote against the sale. “Since September 2008, decisions on the

sale of parts of Fortis have been directed by the Belgian government, and these have not only wrecked the value of Fortis but have also in general caused great harm for shareholders,” the company said in a statement.

The decision to oppose the sale puts Ping An on the side of a host of small shareholders and could be enough to swing the vote and block the sale. This outcome would be the latest upheaval in a saga that has already seen the bank decimated and led to the resignations of Belgian prime

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Beauty is a train station

Thanks to a massive renovation that ended in 2007, Antwerp’s Central Station was voted the fourth most beautiful train station in the world by *Newsweek* magazine.

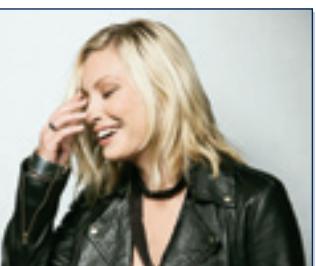
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Europe goes Mental

Finland’s top stage director is finally collaborating with Flemish theatre KVS after several years of cajoling. If you thought David Cerny’s controversial art installation at the Justus Lipsius was a send-up of Europe, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet.

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Break-up songs

TV personality and singer Roos Van Acker is on tour with Flemish rock musicians crooning songs of lost love and broken hearts – mostly in English and tweaked to perfection.

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FACES OF FLANDERS

The Flemish Culture Awards

The prestigious Culture Awards from the Flemish Community were announced last week in Hasselt by culture minister Bert Anciaux. The 13 awards to Flemish artists cover a wide range of activities, from cartoon strips to Baroque music. Each winner, one of three nominees in each category, takes home €12,500 and a bronze statuette specially commissioned from sculptor Johan Tahon.

And the winners are:

Fien Troch • **Film** • The director's second film, *Unspoken*, tells the story of a couple torn apart by the disappearance of their daughter several years before. The film opens in Belgium later this month but has already featured at film festivals in San Sebastian, Ghent and Toronto. The Culture Awards jury, which included filmmakers Robbe De Hert and Marc Didden, described Troch as "a genre unto herself: no-one makes film like Fien Troch, and Fien Troch makes films like no-one else."

Willy Linthout • **Comic strips** • He draws the comic strip that comedian/actor Urbanus writes (and stars in). What the jury called Linthout's "atypical drawing technique" is a riot of big noses, fat women, bare arses and fart sounds, fitting perfectly with the strip's bawdy, scatological humour. This is art beloved of small boys and detested by parents and teachers – which is as it should be. He also recently published the seventh and eighth parts of the serial graphic novel *The Year of the Elephant*, about a man putting his life together again after the suicide of his son.

Anne Provoost • **Prose** • The Antwerp author began as a writer of novels for young people (she herself began writing and illustrating her own work at the age of four) before moving on to adult fiction. Her latest novel is *In de zon kijken* (*Looking Into the Sun*), which the jury said is "of a fine sensitivity and extraordinarily poetic". The prose award is only given every three years and this year reads: "Anne Provoost belongs definitively to the list of our great prose writers."

Ina Rilke • **Translation** • Born in Mozambique, Rilke has translated 18 works by Dutch-language authors into English, including Erwin Mortier's *Shutterspeed*, which last year made the long-list of the *Independent* newspaper's Foreign Fiction Prize.

Peter Scholliers • **Culinary arts** • Known as the first academic in Flanders (he is a history PhD) to turn his attention to culinary matters and food history, Scholliers teaches at the Free University of Brussels (VUB).

Flip Kowlier • **Music** • According to the jury, singer-songwriter Kowlier is "as single-minded as he is multi-faceted". His Dutch-language music ranges from pop to reggae to *chanson*.

Randi De Vlieghe • **Youth theatre** • The dancer, choreographer and theatre director works in pure dance as well as youth theatre. He is described as "a nomad in the landscape of stagecraft, who stops off at places that interest him."

Wouter Steenhaut • **Heritage** • A historian who helped set up the Socialist workers' movement archive and museum in Antwerp and Ghent, Steenhaut is described as "a pioneer in the cultural heritage field."

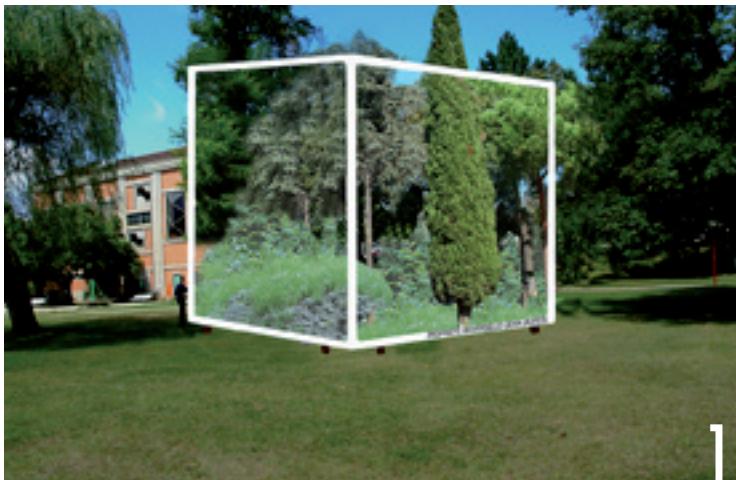
Joëlle Tuerlinckx • **Visual arts** • Conceptual artist Tuerlinckx uses a minimum of materials and treatments in her installations to "create a dialogue with the space in which she finds herself." The jury noted her enormous influence on young artists and curators alike.

Meg Stuart • **Stage** • The only non-Flemish prize-winner this year, this American choreographer and founder of the Damaged Goods dance company has been working in Brussels for the last 17 years. Her work, the judges said, "explores the uncertain boundaries between ourselves and our environment."

Nedda El-Asmar • **Design** • This silversmith was also voted Belgian Designer of the Year in 2007 and enjoyed a huge show last year at the Design Museum Gent. She was nominated for a Culture Award in 2006, but this is her first win. Her work, according to the jury, "radiates tenderness and poetry, as well as humour and fantasy."

The Last Post • **Volunteer organisation** • The only collective prize-winner this year is this West Flemish group of buglers that plays the Last Post every day at the First World War memorial Menin Gate, a ceremony that has taken place since 1928. The members also serve in the volunteer fire brigade.

Sigiswald Kuijken • **General cultural achievement** • Violinist, violinist and conductor, Kuijken is the first classical musician to win a



Courtesy/Artist and Galerie Stedelijk



Don Harms



Foto: B. Buijzer

Patrick De Smedt

Culture Award. He formed the Baroque orchestra La Petite Bande in 1972 and since then has worked to promote the cause of authentic period performance. He formed the Kuijken String Quartet in 1986 and teaches at the conservatories in The Hague and Brussels. He "ensures the necessary artistic oxygen in a sector labouring under the weight of outdated constructs and traditions," the jury said.

However Kuijken had no sooner received his award from the minister than news emerged that a committee advising minister Anciaux had recommended cutting off subsidies to La Petite Bande for the period 2010-2012. While Anciaux was praising the ensemble as "ambassadors for the best of Flemish art", his music committee was describing them as "relying on the successes of yesteryear" and "not doing enough to renovate themselves".

Alan Hope

online

www.cultuurprijzen.be

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A Joëlle Tuerlinckx illusion

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Randi De Vlieghe's Gender Blender

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Choreographer Meg Stuart

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A Cultural Award first: classical musician Sigiswald Kuijken

TALKING DUTCH
notes on language

Stijn Steyaert

bescheidenheid

On a shelf is a stylish piece of glass with some Japanese engraved into it. It's proudly displayed by a colleague whose office I was in some days ago. Another colleague enters, sees the award, reads the hiragana and, after translating it, says, "I only know a little Japanese."

He is of course Flemish and speaks half a dozen languages, including conversational Japanese. I say "of course" because **bescheidenheid** – modesty is apparently added to the milk formula in Flanders. Examples abound. The recent departure of Geike Arnaert from the pop group Hooverphonic had music journalists rummaging in their jotters for past interviews. For one hack this was *niet zo evident* – not as easy as you might think. The grande dame of Belgian pop music is not one to blow her own trumpet. In fact Geike's *bescheidenheid en stilzwijgen zijn legendarisch* – her modesty and silence are legendary. But now that the singer is going solo, she has to speak for herself. And when she does, *ze spreekt bedachtzaam en wikt haar woorden* – she speaks thoughtfully and weighs her words.

For someone who sang in front of mega audiences, Geike isn't someone who likes to be at the centre of attention. She describes herself as an introvert: *ik heb meer tijd nodig om iets uit te leggen en ik denk langer over de dingen* – I need more time to explain something, and I think longer about things. She then refers to the way in which she uses her hands when speaking: *ik probeer mijn zinnen uit te beelden* – I try to form my sentences. It's, she confesses, as if she's groping for her words, *bijna letterlijk* – almost literally. She seems to need an art form to come into her own.

How to explain this? Is it in the language itself? Well, just cross into the Netherlands, and you will soon hear the difference. *De Vlaming is bescheiden, de Nederlander luidruchtig* – The Fleming is modest, the Dutch loud. A bit of a generalisation, but spend a week at a Spanish holiday resort, and you will soon know who the Dutch are, but probably not the Flemings. Yet the Flemish enjoy the directness of their northern neighbours for its honesty and even envy to a certain extent Dutch verbosity. You mustn't get the idea that Flemings are all quiet little mice; they have their fair share of *dikke nekken* – boasters ("thick necks"). But those who are not in that group often hide their light under a bushel. Some people, of course, have a lot to be modest about, but, at a society level, the achievements of Flanders both past and present should be sung louder from the highest hill. Perhaps that's the problem: hills are something Flanders has in modest supply.

Look out in February for Geike singing Kurt Weill at a muziekcentrum near you.

Alistair MacLean



PHOTO OF THE WEEK • The University of Ghent will seek planning permission to build student accommodation using containers, in an effort to cope with soaring demand. University entrances this year topped 32,000, with further growth expected in the years to come. But the market for private rented accommodation in the city is saturated. Plans are already underway for the construction of permanent student halls of residence on campus,

but those could take four years to be completed. In the meantime, the university could install container apartments: studios containing all mod cons in prefabricated units stacked three high, to provide lodgings for 250 students. The photo shows similar units installed on the Utrecht University campus.

THE WEEK IN FLANDERS

Fresh start

Star cyclist Tom Boonen was found guilty of possession of cocaine by a court in Turnhout, but the judge decided not to pronounce sentence since Boonen "had been punished enough", he said. The cyclist was suspended by the sport's ruling authorities after testing positive and missed the Tour de France among other major events. "I'm glad my winter is now really over," Boonen said in a statement from the Qatar Tour, which he won last week. "The season can begin."

Security "a joke"

A woman who admitted repeatedly entering the nuclear power station at Doel (see *Flanders Today*, 4 February) faces a prison sentence of two years – the toughest sentence the correctional court can deliver. Prosecutors asked for the maximum sentence after Anja Hermans, 29, freely admitted using various means to enter the facility on a dozen occasions in order to highlight the lack of adequate security. "I wanted to be arrested as proof that I had been inside," she said. "Security is just a joke."

On track

Antwerp's Central Station has been voted the world's fourth most beautiful railway station by the magazine *Newsweek*. Construction started in 1899 under architect Louis de la Censerie, who was said to have been inspired by the



Antwerp's Central Station

Pantheon in Rome and the station in Luzern, Switzerland. Following renovations completed in 2007, it now has 14 platforms on three levels. It was beaten by St Pancras in London, Grand Central in New York City and Chhatrapati Shivaji in Mumbai.

Cutting pollution

Environment minister Hilde Crevits last week announced a subsidy of up to €400 for motorists who retro-fit soot filters to Euro-3 diesel cars, built in 2000-2005. The subsidy – 80% of the price up to a maximum of €400 – will cost the region's budget €6 million, Crevits said. Cars of that period emit twice as many fine particulates as more recent models. Details at <http://roet-filters.lne.be> or free phone line 1700.

Crèche attack

The last of the children injured in the attack on a crèche in Dendermonde was released from hospital

tal in Ghent. The victim, a girl of five months, has been in intensive care since the attack. Meanwhile, the Flemish government is to pay €6.6 million to reinforce entry controls at daycare facilities.

Read all about it

Flanders' quality newspapers last year bucked the worldwide trend by selling more copies than the previous year. *De Morgen* did best, with sales up by 2.8% for the whole year and 2% in the last quarter alone. *De Standaard* sold 0.7% more in the fourth quarter and 0.3% over the whole year, rising to 87,644 copies a day.

Bruges apology

Bruges is not a "shithole," according to filmmaker Martin McDonagh, whose script for the film *In Bruges* won a Bafta at the weekend. In the film, the character played by Colin Farrell constantly complains about the medieval city. McDonagh sent his apologies to the people of Bruges through *In Bruges* actor Brendan Gleeson, who picked up the Bafta on his behalf.

Award auction

Pop group Clouseau are going to auction off one of the MIA Awards they won at the weekend to the highest bidder. Clouseau was voted Best Group and Best Live Act by the listeners of VRT radio stations. The award, in the form of a loudspeaker, went on sale this week at www.spotter.be/mia, where bids will be accepted

until Friday at noon. The winner will be invited to a Clouseau concert in May, where the prize will be presented.

Bird census

Gardens in Flanders are habitat to an average of 45 birds each, according to the results of a regional census of feeding places carried out last weekend. The figures will be examined carefully, as the current winter has been the harshest since the last census was taken nine years ago.

Ticket troubles

The company running ticket sales for the Belgian debut of Madonna has apologised for a system crash caused by demand at the weekend. Tele Ticket Service, based in Merksem near Antwerp, claimed new encryption software offering higher credit card protection was to blame for crashing the site. A total of 65,000 tickets were expected to be sold out by noon, but in fact they were not sold until 22.00.

FIFTH COLUMN



Commission time

The Fortis Commission in the federal parliament attracts a lot of attention. Commissions of inquiry always do, of course, because they deal with important issues, but also because they have a theatrical aspect. Commissions of this kind unfold in a unity of time, place and action, with a fixed set of characters and plenty of drama, as people's positions and careers are at stake. In most cases, commissions also lead to some form of catharsis: in the end, the issues have been resolved and lessons have been learned. This does not mean that these commissions are not taken seriously. They are the climax of parliamentary proceedings. The Dutroux Commission painfully revealed serious malfunctions in our judiciary and police systems. The Rwanda Commission, in the wake of the genocide in 1994, shaped Belgium's Africa policy for years. Sofie Staelraeve, a member of the federal parliament, who as a political scientist dug into these commissions, sees them as conflict management. With the commissions, parliament truly represents the people, as they ask the same questions as the general public. This way, they boost confidence in politics, which is traditionally quite low in this country.

Parliamentary commissions are also a way of detecting – or even shaping – political talent. Marc Verwilghen, who presided over the Dutroux Commission, went on to become the next minister for Justice (although his talent was never undebated, especially within his own liberal party).

So what will become of the Fortis Commission? *De Standaard* has called its members "B-actors in a bad production". Its task is particularly difficult. Officially it has to look into the government handling of the financial group Fortis during the bank crisis. It has a more specific task, too: it has to find out whether there was a breach of the separation of powers under the previous government (the impression that there was one led to the resignation of Yves Leterme (CD&V) as prime minister).

The political context makes it harder still. Leterme, who now calls himself "prime party militant", is eager to appear before the commission, as he wants to see his name cleared as soon as possible. Finance minister Didier Reynders, who was also named in the crisis but did not quit, wants to stay out, as his appearance might stain his reputation. The government parties want to contain the debate, while the opposition parties want to exploit it.

This puts a lot of pressure on the shoulders of commission president Bart Tommelein, known as "the Kennedy of Ostend". The question he should ask himself is, of course, what he can do for the Fortis commission. But then again, what the Fortis commission can do for him must have crossed his mind as well.

Anja Otte

Breaking news
for breaking news, see
www.flanderstoday.eu
under "press room"

Continued from page 1

of carnival comes from," explains Geeroms. Some 2,500 people march in Aalst's main Carnival parade every February, cheered on by about 80,000 spectators. The tradition has stayed very much alive, thanks to a group of local merchants who saw a very big commercial opportunity.

In 1923, these merchants formed a carnival committee and ever since (apart from during the German occupation, when festivities were held undercover) celebrations have become increasingly elaborate, with the highlight being the Sunday parade.

Aalst even has a bid in for its carnival to become a UNESCO heritage event. "Aalst is very proud of the carnival," says Karolien Van Der Hulst of the city's marketing department. Though apparently, not everyone enjoys all the attention. The people of Aalst, she says, fall into two categories: those who love the carnival and those who get as far away as possible during it. "Most people stay, though," she smiles. "What is typical Aalst is that you have a carnival gene – you have to be part of it."

Not politics as usual

Aalstenaars slave away for nearly the entire year to put together fancy floats and costumes for Carnival. The city in fact has specially dedicated halls on the quay where people work at night and on weekends to complete their masterpieces.

The carnival committee accepts applications from groups that want to participate in the parade, although city rules state that two-thirds of the groups must be from Aalst. You have to be prepared to do it out of love for Carnival. "They are amateurs who do it



One of the biggest Carnival celebrations in Europe: Last year, Aalst had fun with then-Prime Minister Yves Leterme and N-VA chairman Bart De Wever (top), while 2,500 frolicked through the parade, and the Gilles did their broom dance (right)



for free and to have fun," said Geeroms.

Though some of the floats look anything but amateurish, *Aalstenaars* certainly do have their fun. Many floats sport satirical themes, particularly taking a swipe at politics: local politics in their city, on a national scale or even in a wider, international context. Previous parades have seen effigies of George W Bush and Saddam Hussein.

"Every year they satirise the politicians,"

says Van Der Hulst. "This year we expect to see lots of carts about the rise and fall of the Belgian government." A few Barack Obamas could well find their way in there, too.

This year's list of floats includes one with French president Nicolas Sarkozy and another depicting the banking crisis (which will inevitably lampoon the ailing Belgian banking groups Fortis, Dexia and KBC).

Parodies of local figures also come into

Women's Day...sort of

If Carnival parades are not quite your thing, there's an alternative spectacle on the Tuesday that is certainly an eye-catcher. This is the day when the men of Aalst get to release their inner woman.

Stockings and suspenders, hot lipstick shades and mini skirts are out in full force as the men stroll through the city, blowing kisses at the crowd and flashing a bit of leg to the squealing onlookers.

If their sexy get-ups aren't enough entertainment in themselves, the men also carry a range of curious objects, including a dried herring, a bird cage, a chamber pot (together with what is, hopefully, fake poo) and some stinky cheese. They sport lampshades in garish colours for hats and some cheeky fellows have been known to flash a thong.

No one quite knows the origins of carrying such accessories, but it's generally thought that the tradition, known as *Voil Jeanetten* (or "Dirty Jennies") and dating back to the 19th century, was a cheap way for poor citizens to participate in the festivities, while provoking the *bourgeoisie*.

"Myself, I usually go as a *Voil Jeanet*," Aalstenaar Pieter de Maeght tells me. "Basically, you dress up like a filthy woman, with all the wrong combinations and showing a lot of skin, wearing lipstick and mascara."

Not all Aalst men enter into it with quite such gusto. One man confesses that he once got himself decked out as *Voil Jeanet* but found the only good thing about it was the obligatory child's pram. "It's a good place to put your beer," he mutters.

Be careful about throwing around the word *Jeanet*, though. Like much else, outside of Carnival, it's just the wrong side of acceptable.

play. The parade sometimes includes a horse known as Ros Beiaard, a mythical creature that was impossible to master until a young knight from neighbouring Dendermonde came along. The impish *Aalstenaars* occasionally include such a horse in their own parade to thumb their noses at *Dendermondaars* with whom they have a rivalry dating back to the Middle Ages.

Three days of debauchery

The parade is a key festivity, but there's plenty of action aside from that during Carnival. This is a time when *Aalstenaars* indulge in some heavy partying along with a few traditions, both local and borrowed. Although activities begin the week before, most of the action happens from 22 to 24 February.

After the Sunday parade, a fair is held in the town's main square (Grote Markt) with attractions such as pony rides and haunted houses. All the bars and cafés blare out Carnival music. They might sound like familiar tunes, but listen more closely and you notice that the locals have made up new lyrics in their regional dialect and set them to the music of popular songs from the preceding year.

Café owners also join in with the satirical theme, painting caricatures of politicians' antics and current affairs on their windows. Again, *Fortis* (or *Foertis* as it is in Aalst dialect) features prominently, with one backstreet café depicting

a cartoon man throwing bills out of his pocket onto the street.

"There are almost no limits as to what can be done," says Pieter de Maeght. "The whole point is that everything gets subjected to satire and criticism. The dialect of our city is also unique, and so it creates a bond between all the people of Oijs" (that's Aalst in dialect).

"You can visit all the bars, talk to everybody and do what you want," continues De Maeght. "People are excited about these three days, and they want to party, be a little crazy be free. You literally don't go home for three days – people sleep in the bars and on the streets. And everybody is dancing!"

Got your onion?

The second day, Monday, sees a repeat of the Sunday parade and, more importantly, the onion throwing. *Aalstenaars* are nicknamed *Ajuinen*, or Onions, by their fellow Belgians because of the large number of onion farms that once dotted the region.

In the Grote Markt, the Carnival Prince, a local elected because of his engagement in social affairs of the city, stands on the balcony of the City Hall and throws onions into the crowd. One hundred of these have a number on them, which is linked to a small prize. There is only one golden onion, though, whose gleeful recipient gets a valuable piece of jewellery – in the shape of an onion.

Monday also sees a tradition borrowed from Binche in



the French-speaking region of Belgium, which also celebrates Carnival every year. Masked characters known as *Gilles* perform a broom dance in the Grote Markt. For the Brits out there, this is something akin to Morris dancing.

The final day of the festival sees the parade of the *Voil Jeanetten*, where men dress up in women's

clothing, much to the delight of the crowds and, finally, the ritual that ends Carnival: the burning of the doll.

This is an effigy of Carnival itself dressed in a parade costume, which is set on fire by the prince. The tradition is thought to be a throwback to pagan times, representing the burning of the spirit of winter.

Afterwards, everyone sings the city's anthem "Aalst: stad van mijn dromen" ("Aalst: City of My Dreams"). *Aalstenaars* then typically fall about in sobs as their revelling is over for another year.

online
www.aalst.be

Carnival Museum

One of the most intriguing sides of Carnival is its history, the quirky details of which can be found in the city museum, where everything you ever wanted to know and more is laid out in a colourful exhibition.

It starts with a series of documents and sketches of carnival past, with mediaeval line drawings illustrating the antics of the day and town records dating back to the 1400s. Moving forward in time, there are displays of the first *Gilles*, a tradition borrowed from the Binche carnival in the French-speaking region, a kaleidoscope of masks used in former parades and pictures showing how the parade carts are put together.

There's an old-fashioned bar (but no beer, I'm afraid), depicting on its windows early satirical cartoons that mocked the politicians of the day. This is a trend that has endured, giving cheeky Aalst residents a channel for their grievances.

I'm led through a dark ghost-like tent and greeted by glowing skeleton figures. Such scary garb was *de rigueur* in the 1950s and 60s. It was certainly a way for over-excited revellers to avoid recognition by their superiors.

Last, but not by any means least, is an exhibition of the parade of the *Voil Jeanetten* (Dirty Jennies). Here you will find some examples of the somewhat curious paraphernalia carried by the men of Aalst as they put on women's clothing for the day.

The museum is closed during Carnival but is normally open Tuesdays to Sundays. A "must see" if you're in Aalst and want to delve deeper into the stories of Carnival.

*Stedelijk Museum Aalst,
Oude Vismarkt 13*



The crowds wait more-or-less patiently to catch an onion

What to see and when

Sunday 22 Feb

13.00 Kickoff of the parade from the Pierre Corneliskaai. It makes its way to the Grote Markt by 15.00 and ends at about 19.00.

19.00 Have fun at the fair in the evening with pony rides and scare yourself silly in the ghost house.

24.00 Party all night in the Aalst's packed bars.

2.00 Slug a few beers, gorge yourself on smoutebollen (doughy, deep-fried Belgian specialty) and laugh at the cartoon satire café owners paint on their windows.

Monday 23 Feb

14.00 Watch the *Gilles* perform their broom dance in the Grote Markt

14.00 Coo at the cute kids in the Kindercarnaval (Children's Carnival) in Sint-Annazaal

14.30 Try to catch an onion on Grote Markt. The carnival prince throws these pungent vegetables into the crowd, and 100 of them have a number. If you catch one of these, you win a prize. Watch out especially for the golden onion.

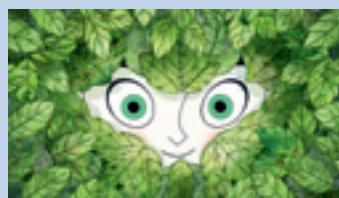
20.30 Cheer the winners of the parade

Tuesday 24 February

15.00 Wolf whistle at the lads dressed as lasses in the *Voil Jeanetten* parade in Grote Markt

20.00 Cry with the locals as the doll, an effigy of carnival, is burnt to symbolise the end of the festivities, and sing your heart out if you can learn enough Aalst dialect by then

CULTURE NEWS



Two Flemish-made films will be featured in this year's Generation Kplus programme at the Berlin Film Festival. *Brendan, the Secret of Kells* is an animation about a 12-year-old boy's efforts to help protect a monastery against Viking invaders. The film was partially financed by the Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF) and produced by Viviane Vanfleteren, who co-produced *Les Triplettes de Belleville*, which was nominated for an Oscar in 2004. *Brendan* will be widely released in Flanders on 11 February. The other film is *Double Take*, a documentary by Johan Grimonprez, also financed by the VAF, which was produced by Emmy Oost.

This year's *De Slimste mens ter wereld* quiz was won by VRT news anchor Freek Braeckman, who narrowly defeated N-VA party chairman Bart De Wever and Terzake presenter Lieven Verstraeten. The programme this year filled more column inches in the Flemish press than ever before, and the contest came down to the final second, in a clash between De Wever and Braeckman, who won with a question about Studio Brussel DJ Tomas De Soete.

All pupils in fifth and sixth years of Flemish secondary schools will this year receive lessons in cultural heritage, announced heritage minister Dirk Van Mechelen last week. The minister, a historian by training, started the campaign, the brainchild of Europa Nostra Belgium and Open Monumentendag Vlaanderen, by giving the first lesson to a class in a school in Ranst.

A 16-year-old from Antwerp last week won two prestigious prizes for young dancers in Lausanne in Switzerland. Edo Wijnen took special honours in the Prix de Lausanne for contemporary dance and fourth place in general classical, where he was the only male finalist. The prize consists of a scholarship worth €10,000 to study at a dance school of his choice.

The Sportpaleis in Antwerp was the world's second most-visited events venue after Madison Square Garden in New York City, according to a survey by *Billboard* magazine. In the period November 2007 to November 2008, a total of 1,239,436 people attended events at the Antwerp venue, which includes sports such as basketball and volleyball as well as concerts. Management said its success was due to a combination of top international acts and local favourites.

The success of the VRT miniseries *Van vlees en bloed*, which features a family of butchers, is attracting more young people to the profession, according to industry representatives. Enquiries to training schools in Bruges, Antwerp and Anderlecht have increased, though the industry remains in dire need of skilled butchers. The series, made by production house Woestijnvis, ends this week.

Sale plans for Fortis could be wrecked by shareholder anger

Continued from page 1

minister Yves Leterme and justice minister Jo Vandeurzen.

At the root of the problem lies Fortis' hostile acquisition in 2007 of the Dutch bank ABN Amro. Fortis joined a consortium with Banco Santander and Royal Bank of Scotland, with its share of the sale being €24 billion.

The board of Fortis was caught by surprise by the global crisis in the banking sector, and when it instituted a capital increase of €1.5 billion and the suspension of the dividend, its shareholders revolted. CEO Jean-Paul Votron had to step down, followed quickly by CFO Gilbert Mittler. There followed a run on both savings accounts and the share price.

Last September, the governments of the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium stepped in to bail Fortis out, taking a 49% stake in return for a cash injection of €11.2 billion. Only days later, Dutch finance minister Wouter Bos announced that he was nationalising all Dutch holdings of Fortis, for a price of €16.8 billion. The Belgian government followed suit, but then sold 75% of the bank and 100% of the



Louis Cheung, second-in-command at Ping An, whose vote could embarrass the government

insurance business to BNP Paribas, in return for an 11.2% equity stake in the French bank. All that was left of Fortis in Belgium was a portfolio of dubious credit investment paper.

Small shareholders, for whom Fortis (formerly Société Générale de Banque) had long been

began a series of legal actions. In the first case in November, a Brussels court said the fact that shareholders had not been consulted about the sale was not grounds to suspend the deal. Then in December, shortly after shareholders had rejected the candidacy of Etienne Davignon to take over as chairman, the appeal court put a block on the sale to BNP Paribas and ordered that shareholders must be consulted and their approval sought.

Shareholders claim the government sold off Fortis at a knock-down price, especially since the bank had just had €17.5 billion in cash (from the Belgian government in September and from the Dutch in the nationalisation of ABN) pumped into it. Yet BNP Paribas values the bank at only €11 billion. What is more, the shares in which it intends to pay for Fortis have lost €4 billion in value since the deal was initialled in October.

Ping An on Monday told *De Standaard* it was ready to negotiate with the government to find a way to avoid a "no" vote this week. Asked if the desire was mutual, a government spokesman told the paper: "Nothing is planned, but a lot can happen in 24 hours."

Youth unemployment sees biggest rise in decade

The number of young people under 25 out of work rose in January to 39,591, an increase of 22.7% over the same time a year ago, and the biggest rise in the last 10 years. "Young people always feel the full effect of an economic downturn," said a spokesperson for the government's training agency VDAB. When things are going well, they are taken on readily, but when the economy starts to bite, they are the first to be let go.

The rise in youth unemployment hasn't been so marked in a decade. In fact, the figures have been coming down steadily since 2005,

thanks in part to targeted plans in 13 cities and communes to tackle the problem – the so-called "Ostend model".

The news comes as Flemish labour minister Frank Vandenbroucke prepares next week to publish the results of his department's evaluation of the youth action plan. The plan is expected to forecast positive effects from the region's recently approved relaunch plan, which is intended to give an investment boost to businesses, with a knock-on effect on jobs.

Unemployment as a whole rose 10% compared to January last year and included

an increase in jobless women (2.2%) for the first time. Male unemployment was up 18.3%. Increases in unemployment would continue, predicted the VDAB, pointing out that a number of collective redundancy packages were currently being negotiated. "Unemployment will certainly continue going up for several months," the organisation said.

online

www.vdab.be

Sentences in dioxin case

A court in Ghent last week sentenced two businessmen – a father and son – to two years suspended for their role in the dioxin crisis that hit the Belgian food industry in 1999. Lucien Verkest and his son Jan were tried along with five other men in relation to the contamination of animal fat for the manufacture of animal feed. The fat was found to contain machine oil mixed with toxic products.

The Verkests were facing charges of forgery and using false documents. The prosecution argued that this showed they knew the fat was contaminated and tried to hide the fact from their clients. "The defendants were driven purely by lust for profit," the prosecutor told the court. "They made huge profits through unfair competition with companies who play by the rules."

The dioxin crisis caused major damage to the food processing and distribution sectors, when first poultry and then pork were suspected of being contaminated. Public demand for chicken plummeted, and it was revealed

that the health and agriculture ministers had been informed of the problem a month before the story broke, but took no action. Coincidentally, federal elections took place less than three weeks later, in which ecologist party Agalev made significant gains, allowing them to enter the government for the first time.

Among the other accused were brother and sister Jacques and Jacqueline Thill of the rendering company Fogra in Bertrix (now called Protelux) in the Ardennes. They delivered fat gathered from deep-fryers which was contaminated with PCBs, motor oil and melted plastic. They each were sentenced to one year suspended.

The court will now take time to consider the case of the civil parties, including the government, which is demanding €400 million compensation. Joining them is a group of some 60 farmers and animal feed manufacturers affected by the contaminated products.



Lucien Verkest, pictured outside his factory in Deinze

Court criticises government over service cheques

The government is overestimating the success of service cheques, the system that allows members of the public to pay for cleaning and ironing work while avoiding the black economy. Last year 600,000 people paid for services with 73 million service cheques, one-third more than in 2007. At the same time, the system provided work for 90,000 people, predominantly women without higher education or other marketable job skills.

But the system is not a cause for unqualified congratulations, according to a report by the Court of Auditors, the body that oversees government spending. In many cases, the court said, the jobs created are low-quality, part time and with contracts that involve few working hours.

In addition, the government has understood the cost of this form of "social employment," the report says. In 2005, the system cost €239 million. Last year, by contrast, the cost was €880 million. Despite the fact that part of that comes back to the treasury in the form of tax and social security contributions, the rise is significant.

Elsewhere, the report criticised the lack of control by the authorities over the businesses that actually operate the system – companies that are supposed to be authorised by the government agency RVA, but which in practice are often involved in activities for which



An ironing atelier is one of the new businesses created since the introduction of service cheques

the cheques are not intended, with little or no scrutiny by the authorities.

Labour minister Joelle Milquet, reacting to the report, said her department had already taken or was in the process of taking measures to strengthen controls on the system. They include better cooperation between inspec-

tion services, tougher requirements for authorised businesses and tighter scrutiny of the financing of the system to be carried out by the National Bank.

online

www.crek.be

BUSINESS FLASH



Shutterstock

Aerospace • Verhaert Space

The Kruibeke-based aerospace equipment company Verhaert Space is to build a Proba V micro satellite for the European Space Agency. The satellite is expected to be launched in 2011 at the earliest to study the development of vegetation and plants in Europe.

Consultancy • SD Worx

The Antwerp-based human resources consultancy SD Worx is expanding its activities in Wallonia with the opening of an office in Louvain-la-Neuve.

Packaging • VPK

Aalst-based corrugated board and packaging products manufacturer VPK Packaging has acquired the Mondi cardboard producer in Saint Quentin, northern France, for some €20 million. The move is part of the company's expansion in Europe, which continues despite the sector's overcapacity. VPK, however, has decided to shelve an ambitious €200 million investment programme that included building a production plant in eastern Germany.

Retail • AS Adventure

The outdoor equipment and clothing retailer AS Adventure is considering the launch of several bicycles stores later this year. The new venture will seek to encourage a cycling culture by selling equipment, clothes and supplies in addition to a full range of bicycles.

Shipping • Bocimar

Bocimar, the bulk transport affiliate of the Antwerp-based CMB shipping group, has signed a joint venture agreement with the Australian FMG group to charter three bulk carriers for 10 years. Bocimar will receive FMG shares worth some \$28 million for its part in the venture. An additional deal including a payment of \$22 million in shares also settles an earlier dispute between the two companies.

Shipping • Flanders Ports

The Flemish ports handled some 267 million tonnes of cargo in 2008, a 3.4% increase on the previous year despite a poor fourth quarter. The ports are still hiring staff, with Antwerp seeking over 100 additional workers.

Toys • Baby Art

Baby Art, the Dessel-based nursery products and infant toys manufacturer, has been acquired by the Canadian Dorel company for some €4 million. The deal opens the doors of the European market to the Montreal-based firm and helps Baby Art broaden its products range.

Energy • Electrabel

The country's leading energy supplier is to invest up to €160 million in its Doel nuclear plant to renovate its steam generators and related equipments. The facility, slated to close by 2015, may get a new lease of life as the debate over extending the life cycle of the country's nuclear facilities continues.

Post Office shares up for sale

The federal government said last week it was "investigating" the possible sale of a share in the De Post to the private equity fund CVC Capital Partners, based in Luxembourg. The sale would involve shares currently owned by the Danish Post Office, which it wants to sell. The two foreign investors together paid €300 million for a holding of 50% minus one share, all of which would pass to CVC under the deal.

But the statute that opened up De Post to outside investors in 2006 requires the agreement of the government before any shareholder can sell out. The minister in question, former Flemish health minister Steven Vanac-

kere, said a decision could be taken within a matter of weeks.

Post Danmark is currently involved in preparing a merger with Posten, its Swedish counterpart, in preparation for the planned liberalisation of the postal market in Europe from 2011. Because it wants to concentrate on that important development, Post Danmark said, it is ready to sell its 25% share in the Belgian Post Office. CVC, meanwhile, was reported to be ready to pay €373 million for the Danish-held shares – twice the amount it paid three years ago for its own quarter share. The price is seen as an encouraging sign of confidence in the Belgian post's financial and business health.

The exact terms of the deal that brought in the new investors in 2006 are not known, but it has been reported that the government has a right to first refusal on any shares put up for sale – allowing it to jump the queue on the Post Danmark sale.

The sale would alter the character of the Post Office's ownership radically. While CVC has promised that the strategic plan would remain unchanged and that planned modernisations would go ahead, the worry inside the organisation is that a sister organisation like Post Danmark, with an interest in the health of the postal industry, would be replaced by a shareholder driven only by financial concerns.



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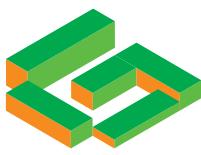
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Frozen memory

The mesmerising beauty of ruins is brought to light



Alan Hope

Ruined buildings are generally thought of as being of interest to tourists, historians and archaeologists. But there is a long tradition of ruins in art, dating back to the Renaissance, when interest in antique Roman and Greek architecture and statuary revived, and the vestiges of the past came to be regarded as relics of a better, purer age.

Later, ruins attracted the attention of Romantic artists like Caspar David Friedrich in Germany and JMW Turner in England, as well as poets like Shelley, whose *Ozymandias* speaks of a ruined monument ("two vast and trunkless legs of stone... half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies"), symbolising the ephemeral nature of earthly power and of man in general.

Those aspects of the depiction of ruins are all represented in a new exhibition at Bozar in Brussels.

In collaboration with Antwerp's Photo Museum, Bozar has selected a small sample of photographs fitting under the title *The Reality as a Ruin* as the latest part of its ongoing Archives of the Imagination series. In fact, "exhibition" is putting it a bit above itself: the photos hang in the hallway outside the Henri Leboeuf concert hall and on the walls of the passage leading to the *loges*. This is not so much curatorship as décor.

It's a pity the selection is so limited because the exhibit contains good ideas. First, it stretches our conception of what a ruin might be. As well as standard views of the Acropolis (see photo), the Sun Temple of Baalbek in Lebanon and the Temple of Neptune at Pesto in Italy (formerly known as Paestum – nothing to do with the sauce), there are also photos of the flooded foundations of an unbuilt house (by American photographer Richard Misrach) and a crum-

pling slum from an area of Brussels affected by the covering-over of the river Zenne in the 19th century (by Louis-Joseph Ghémar in 1867).

Also displayed are a variety of man-made ruins caused by war – the bombardment in Paris in the Franco-Prussian War (by Willy Ronis), the destruction of Stuttgart by the Royal Air Force in World War Two (by German photographer Willi Moegle) and the levelling of Sarajevo by Serbs in more recent times (by Flemisch photographer Jan Kempenaars). There is also a triptych of photos by Flemisch photographer Patrick Poels of concentration camp buildings at Majdanek, Birkenau and Auschwitz – modern-day equivalents ("wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command") of the ruins of the statue of Ozymandias.

Second, and somewhat related to that, the exhibition toys with the very idea of the ruin. The

display has very little explanation or documentary material, but it does emphasise that a photograph is a frozen memory, so a photo of a ruin is a memory of a moment that no longer exists, of a building that no longer exists. That's true of all photos, of course, and of all images of reality, not only ruins. A portrait is a snapshot of a person who no longer exists, whether it's a Kodak moment or a painting by Gainsborough.

One thing which is particular to depictions of ruins, though, is that the ruin is frozen in the act of becoming. And that can work both ways, as shown by the playful inclusion of two photos of Brussels ruins. In one, taken by Joseph Mascré in 1867, we see the ground being prepared for the construction of the Justice Palace of Joseph Poelaert. That's what the caption tells us, at least: to the naked eye, it could just as easily be the site of some long-lost antique temple or

palace.

The other, taken by Gilbert Fastenaekens for his collection *Site*, created in 1990-97, shows a construction site in some densely built-up part of the city (no precise location is indicated) at a moment when the workers are absent. In the background, we see the shabby rears of the buildings in the same block. In the foreground, exposed concrete, scattered building elements, rubble everywhere.

Could you tell, just by looking, whether the building was going up or coming down? In essence, the picture seems to be saying, it doesn't make much difference either way.

Until 8 March, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels

online
www.bozar.be

THEATRE

States of mind

Finland's top director presents all of Europe in 14 acts

Lisa Bradshaw

It was in 2002 that Ivo Kyul of KVS theatre first saw a production by director Kristian Smeds in Finland. Though Smeds then brought several performances to KVS, it took the Flemish theatre company seven years to get him to collaborate on a project in Brussels. It's because he hates Brussels, he has no trouble telling a number of journalists who recently gathered to meet him and watch a scene from *Mental Finland*, which premieres at KVS on 11 February. In fact, he says, all of Finland hates Brussels.

Or, rather, they hate what Brussels represents – the European Union, a mass of infrastructure that makes decisions many individual countries feel powerless to influence. Also, Smeds, Finland's most famous theatre maker, didn't feel comfortable here when his company put on productions. Too many people, too many languages, too many colours.

Finally, KVS convinced him that it was just those tensions that might make some very interesting theatre. Judging from the scene on show, this certainly appears to be the case.

Mental Finland, performed by Finnish and Estonian actors and an international group of dancers, has 14 distinct pieces that look at Europe from a number of different angles. "The production does not offer opinions or answers about the future of Europe," Smeds explained. "It's playing with and looking at European themes."

The piece on view was, appropriately enough for Brussels, about language. A man dances with a number of others, speaking

a language they (though not the audience) understand. Then tragedy strikes, and they can no longer understand him. He is alone in the world – the only surviving speaker of his language.

A clear message about the homogeneity of language, but the piece goes on to show what many of us are completely familiar with in Brussels – the panic in people's faces when they cannot understand you. And then the joy that can follow when connections are made without words. The scene is in fact, a metaphor for theatre itself: a man talking nonsense, with an audience that becomes more nervous the closer he comes to addressing them directly.

Smeds addressed his audience of journalists sitting on stage, looking every bit the quirky Finn of popular imagination: short and squat, shaggy hair, bearded, wrapped up in a long scarf and wool hat, as if he's at that very moment directing his people out in a field of Finnish snow. He titled the play based on his own nationality, "but it's not really about Finland," he explained. "The same issues are happening all over Europe – it could be called *Mental Belgium*. It's a construct of a nation – how we feel about ourselves."

The play's scenes follow a crew of people taking on different issues in each piece, often within the confines of what looks like a caravan – and turns out to be a Finnish sauna. From here they take on, among other topics, immigration, the value of heritage, the media and the possibility of war. The play's style "is realism but also inner poetry," said Smeds, with topics "that only theatre



It's all in your head: Finns in Brussels

and art can address."

Although Smeds firmly refuses to comment on his own view of the machinations of the European Union because he is "an artist, not a politician", he admits that the play "is not saying that everything will be fine if we stay on the road on which we're now headed."

The piece on view, meanwhile, has two interesting messages. One is explained by the actor who spoke the non-existent language. He made it up himself, he said. "It's my own language, the one that comes from inside." Individuality determines his fate.

But when he dances onstage with others,

they all take hands and twist and turn, going around and through each other without breaking the chain. There is a tenuous feeling that the dance will continue as long as they don't let go. In this case, individuality would destroy the future.

Until 22 February, KVS, Arduinkaai 7, Brussels. Performed in Finnish, surtitles in English, Dutch and French

online
www.kvs.be

Cutting-edge ballet

Matthew Bourne's *Edward Scissorhands* comes to Antwerp

Sharon Light

You name the award, and at some point Matthew Bourne has probably won it.

Over the last two decades, Bourne has become the most popular (and some might argue populist) choreographer working in dance today. Most notably, his reinterpretation of *Swan Lake*, including a corps of male swans, has taken audiences by storm, becoming the world's longest-running dance production. Along the way, he's picked up everything from Tony Awards to Olivier Awards – five times in the case of the latter.

In 2005, Bourne, 49, introduced his theatrical ballet version of the famed Tim Burton film *Edward Scissorhands*. It took him many years to get the rights, and, once granted, Bourne worked hard to keep the staging true to the 1990 film that tumbled Johnny Depp into international stardom. The musical comes to Antwerp's Stadsschouwburg the week of 17 February.

"Edward is the ultimate 'outsider', expressing himself through movement rather than words, with much of his appeal being physical and emotional," says Bourne in a statement. "He is not unlike a silent movie actor, and this lends itself beautifully to our production." A further parallel between the two is Danny Elfman's haunting music, arranged for the ballet by Terry Davies. And fans of the film will see many of their favourite movie moments.

Bourne aims for a broad audience, to the detriment, some ballet aficionados feel, of the choreography. Yet there is something to be said for introducing non-dance audiences to an art form that has always struggled to fill houses and



Edward Scissorhands is credited with introducing ballet to a whole new audience

make ends meet. The success of *Edward Scissorhands* is a testament to the accessibility of his choreography and to the universality of the story.

With some minor variations, the production follows the film's plot, where a boy with scissors in place of hands integrates into classic suburbia. His talents for topiary and hairstyling make him a success with the townsfolk, particularly the women, one of whom tries to seduce him. But Edward falls for Kim, a young lady more his own age and temperament. Following a series of mishaps, the town slowly but surely turns against him, leading to the tragic but beautiful ending.

In transferring from screen to stage, no detail is spared on the technical side, with Lez Brotherston's costumes and set nicely illustrating Edward's haunted mansion, the cookie-cutter suburban homes, snowstorms and, of course, Edward's scissor hands.

Both fanatical followers of the film and purists from the dance world may find in different ways that this production is not what they would hope, but for the vast majority of us, *Edward Scissorhands* speaks to our own outsider status, the difficulties of fitting in, the thrills of finding love and the many strangely beautiful things that make up the world around us.

17 to 22 February, Stadsschouwburg, Theaterplein 1, Antwerp

online
www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

The alternative Valentine

Our Top 10 picks for a very different 14 February

Most people hate Valentine's Day. It's not because they hate love or romance, oh no. It's just that they hate it when it's forced.

We agree. That's why we've found 10 good reasons why you should stop the insanity and do something else this Saturday. After all, romance comes naturally when you're actually having fun.

1 Amphibian walk Did you know that the Vlaktedreef in Tervuren is home to Flanders' biggest population of amphibians? Neither did we, but this walk, dubbed "Amphibians at Large", will introduce you to the cute, little salamanders and such, plus explain to you why today's traffic is killing them off. The following day, Tervuren is sponsoring a "Valentine's Walk", but we have no comment about that.

www.tervuren.be

2 Buzzcocks An "alternative" Valentine's Day? Musically speaking, before "alternative" there was punk, a movement which, in Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen, had its very own Romeo and Juliet. Manchester punk pioneers Buzzcocks, meanwhile, are still going strong and will play their first two albums back-to-back this Saturday at Het Depot in Leuven. A golden opportunity to woo your significant other by singing along to "Just Lust", "Ever Fallen In Love (With Someone You Shouldn't've)", "Love Is Lies" and "Orgasm Addict".

www.hetdepot.be

3 Roee Rosen The Israeli artist comes to Extra City in Antwerp to talk about his show *Justine Franck: A Retrospective*,



Save the Turveren amphibians!

in which his Jewish, feminist, Belgian alter ego shows off a bit of her pornographic work and is the subject of a documentary that talks about Rosen's 1997 installation on the closed-door intimacies of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun.

www.extracity.be

4 Snowdrop Show The Kalmthout Arboretum in northern Antwerp province hosts a show of this cute, little white flower, known as *sneeuwklokje* in Dutch. You'll find a dizzying array of cultivars and advice on how to grow them in your own garden – plus you can buy them on the spot from local farmers.

www.arboretumkalmthout.be

5 Matrimonio all'italiana The newly re-opened cinema museum in Brussels screens this Vittorio De Sica film, in which Sophia Loren plays prostitute-turned-mistress to the philandering Marcello Mastroianni. She



Matrimonio made in heaven: De Sica at Cinematek

eventually tricks him into marrying her by pretending to be dying and then reveals that she's had three children in secret – one is his, but she won't tell him which one. Happy Valentine's Day!

www.cinematek.be

6 Day of the DKO This fantastic organisation, Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs (Part-time Arts Education), or simply the DKO, offers music, dance, theatre and visual arts classes to kids across Flanders. On Saturday, it opens its doors to the public for a variety of performances by children.

www.deeltijdskunstonderwijs.be

7 Rare Vogels The town of Herentals in Antwerp province stages theatre acts good for the whole family in public places on Saturday. Called Rare Vogels (Rare Birds), it includes "Artistic Housewives", in which a housewife

this, but it's part of a programme with the very un-alternative name Brussels in Love, which also includes a free tour of the Heart Museum at the Royal Museum of Art and History. Whatever.

www.kmkg.be

9 Saint-Amour You never need a reason to enjoy a good lit evening, and this is one of the best Flanders has to offer. Combining prose, poetry and music, it boasts some of the finest names in word-art today. Hosted by Behoud de Begeerte (Sustain the Desire), a literary organisation that celebrates 25 years of existence on 14 February, the event in both Antwerp and Brussels features Benelux-based authors, plus American/German Irene Dische, French author Claire Castillon and the prestigious Huelgas Ensemble.

www.toneelhuis.be

10 Whisper Music This concert of ultra-cool, minimalist music presented by the Netherlands' Nieuw Ensemble is part of the Bruges Concertgebouw's intriguing Shhh!!! Festival. Classical music has always flirted with silence, and the attraction has never been greater than in the last few decades, when Salvatore Sciarrino and Helmut Lachenmann, to name but two, have produced works of stupendous depth and beauty that often verge on the inaudible. Both composers are featured here, alongside others. If the titles on the programme are anything to go by ("Motionless Water", "Luminescenza", "Unsounds for Ensemble"), you're in for an evening of extraordinarily quiet seduction.

www.concertgebouw.be

**Penned by Lisa Bradshaw,
PM Doutreligne, Marie Dumont,
Marc Maes**



Get your Buzzcock on for V-Day



DKO kids play their hearts out during Open Door Day

DISCOVERING SMALL CITIES

A devil of a town

Tielt has some of the coolest local legends this side of England

Denzil Walton

Located slap bang in the middle of the triangle formed by Bruges, Ghent and Kortrijk, it's inevitable that the town of Tielt struggled to make a mark on the West Flanders scene. Skilled craftsmen were – and still are – attracted to the three nearby cities in search of more or better work. Today's tourists frequently do something similar, bypassing the burg of about 20,000 on their way to visit its more famous neighbours.

They should re-think their itinerary and plan at least half a day in this quiet but surprising market town.

The origins of its name can't be pinned down with any certainty. The oldest spelling, Tiletum, might refer to the presence of lime trees (*Tilia*). Another possibility is that it's named after the Latin word for a tile, *tigellum*, as remains of third century Roman tiled floors have been found in the area.

The first major settlement probably occurred in the ninth century, but another four hundred years passed until any significant building started. The credit for putting Tielt on the map goes to two women. In 1245, Margaret of

Constantinople, Countess of Flanders, built a hospital here. Thirty years later, Beatrix of Brabant authorised the construction of a cloth hall in the market square, to make the most of the burgeoning flax industry. The town was up and running – but to make further progress, it had to leap several hurdles in the form of a series of natural disasters.

In 1579, a large number of the population succumbed to an epidemic. Six years later, a fire destroyed the town centre. An outbreak of pestilence occurred in 1631, followed by yet another fire in 1645, which reduced the church and 60 houses to ashes.

Just when its inhabitants were beginning to think their town was cursed, a group of Franciscan friars arrived, believed otherwise, and put their faith into action. In 1686, they opened a Latin school. It was another new beginning, and the town never looked back. Its population grew steadily, and Tielt became an important trade centre based on agriculture and local industries, particularly textiles.

In the First World War, the German army chose Tielt as its Belgian headquarters, which afforded some degree of protection. No such safeguards were possi-



Romy Neirinck/Tielt



Romy Neirinck/Tielt

Grist for the mill

In 1846, a census was made of the windmills in West Flanders, and the total figure was a remarkable 1,035. By 1965, only 65 remained, of which a mere 10 were operational. One of these is located a few kilometres southeast of Tielt.

The Poelberg Mill dates back to 1668 and amazingly managed to remain functional until 1970. In the 1990s, it was fully restored. It has a grinding loft with an oat crusher and a millstone loft with two millstones. Driving or cycling to the mill affords wonderful views of the West Flemish countryside.

Other notable windmills in the area are the Delmerens mill in Aarzelle, the Mevrouw mill in Kanegem and the Capelle mill in Schuiferskapelle. A cycle route that takes in these and other windmills is available from the Tielt tourist office.

ble during the Second World War, when Tielt was heavily bombarded. A key date in the town's history is 8 September 1944, when it was liberated from German occupation by the 1st Polish Armoured Division. In 1994, a statue of commanding general Stanislaw Maczek was unveiled on the Polenplein.

Don't think that the recognition came too late. The town had already commemorated the Poles in 1948, when the passage from the market place to St Peter's Church was transformed into the Stanislas Gate. The statue of St Stanislas, patron saint of Poland, was made by local artist Maurice Vander Meeren, who was inspired by a stained glass window in a monastery in Krakow. The names of the eight Polish soldiers who were killed while liberating the town are etched in stone.

Jef Claerhout's name – and his sculptures – pop up frequently in and around Tielt. The general is one of his works, as are two more on the market square: Olivier the Devil and Tanneken Sconyncx the Witch.

Olivier De Neckere (*necker* is an old Flemish word for devil), meanwhile, was born in 1434 in his father's barber's shop on Tielt market square. In 1458, the French Dauphin Louis (later King Louis XI) passed through the town on a journey from Oudenaarde to Bruges. He met Olivier, and an instant friendship arose. Olivier remained not only the king's barber but his private counsellor for the next 25 years.

After King Louis died in 1483, Olivier was hanged on the famous gallows of Montfaucon. The antlers on his statue refer to his noble title, fallow deer; the rope to the way he died; and the scissors and razor to his profession.

The other Claerhout sculpture on the square is that of local girl Anna De Coninck, better known as Tanneken Sconyncx. Accused of being a witch, she endured

months of torture until she died in the town prison in 1603. Claerhout's sculpture portrays her not as a witch, but as an angel, escaping from the pain and false accusations by ascending into heaven.

The centrepiece of the market square is the belfry, which is the only remnant of the cloth hall. Its carillon was built by the du Mery brothers from Bruges in 1773. The 36 bells make up the only complete du Mery carillon in Flanders.

A short walk from the market square is St Peter's Church, the history of which parallels that of the town. Repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, the current building is mainly from the 17th and 18th centuries. The showpiece is the huge pulpit, carved out of Danish oak by the brothers Frans and Lodewijk Deboschere. Climb up the winding stairs and experience the view – and the sense of power! The brothers also built the communion rail and organ loft of the nearby Franciscan church in Minderbroedersplein.

The town's tourist office is located in the Huis Mulle de Terschueren, a restored 19th century mansion, which stands on the edge of the town park. It includes a visitors' centre with in-depth multilingual audio guides to Tielt. Numerous walking and cycling maps are available, making the town an excellent base from which to explore the region. If you want to stay overnight, the Huis Mulle de Terschueren also functions as a small hotel. A double room for two people comes in at €60 per night, breakfast included.

There are numerous cafés and restaurants. A recommendation is Restaurant De Wildeman, Markt 37, for its friendly atmosphere and good value *dagschotel* (dish of the day).

online
www.tielt.be



The clothmaker's hall and belfry, with newly restored carillon that sounds the same as it did 200 years ago (opposite page); the Huis Mulle de Terschueren doubles as a tourist office and hotel (above); the 18th-century Baroque Franciscan Church (left)

TYRE TRACKS



TOURING THE TRAPPIST MONASTERIES

Westvleteren

The name Westvleteren probably means very little to anyone who is not a beer lover, but this is one of Flanders' finest Trappist ales. Voted "Best Beer in the

World" in 2005 on RateBeer.com, it is still brewed by Cistercian monks at the Abbey of Sint Sixtus in West Flanders (and only sold in the monastery). So this trip is an opportunity for some peaceful Flemish countryside biking combined with some serious beer research. The ride begins in Ypres, on the Grote Markt below the restored mediaeval Cloth Hall. Take Diksmuidestraat north and turn left at the intersection, following the road as it curves to the right. You come to the IJzerleijzer canal, where a bike path continues on the left bank.

After passing occasional memorials and reminders of the battle of Ypres, the path quickly leaves the city and takes you into beautiful rural scenery. The canal wends its way to the right, with beech trees lining the path and horses and cows basking in the pastures. Stay on the canal past the small town of Boezinge. The path dips below the level of the road, and the trees touch the water's edge to form a secluded stretch of

riding, free from wind. A few kilometers from Boezinge, fishermen line a lock, and, shortly afterwards, the path leaves the canal to reach a busy road. Turn left here, following signs for bike route 52 and then take the first right onto Grenadierstraat, following the small red bike signs for the IJzerbroekenroute. You soon pass the monument that gives Grenadierstraat its name – a small obelisk commemorating the "unshakeable resistance" of the Grenadiers regiment during the first German gas attack in 1915. Following the signs, bear right at the farm and then left past the De Pypegale café. This takes you into increasingly isolated farmland. At the intersection of Woestenstraat and Nieuwstraat, leave the IJzerbroekenroute and continue straight onto Nieuwstraat and bike path 71. This path follows winding country lanes where on a good day there can be hardly a car in sight. Two kilometers further, the first signs for the Sint Sixtus

abbey appear. A kilometer later is the 't Vleterhof restaurant (advertised by a sign with a giant pig). Now follow bike route 68, taking a quick left and right onto Zwijnlandstraat. After a short distance, signs point to the Sint Sixtus Abbey, a religious community since the ninth century and expert brewers since the 19th. Bike parking is on the left, while the entrance to the abbey and its popular café is on the right. Time for a beer.

Distance:
19 kilometres

Difficulty:
Moderate. Some bike paths, but mostly country lanes. Remember, you have to cycle home after trying the beers!

Time:
90 min

Classical & New Music

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
FEB 13 21.00 Vlaams Radio Koor & Polyfoon Ensemble conducted by Lieven Deroo: Renaissance and contemporary polyphony

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
FEB 14 20.00 Orchestre des Champs-Elysées wind ensemble: Mozart, Beethoven
FEB 19 20.00 Cédric Pescia, piano: Couperin, Debussy, Messiaen, Bach

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
FEB 12 20.00 Liège Philharmonic conducted by Edward Gardner: Haydn, Vieuxtemps, Rachmaninov FEB 13-15 15.00/20.00 Belgian National Orchestra conducted by Walter Weller: Schubert Symphonies No 8 & 9 FEB 14 20.00 András Schiff, piano: Haydn FEB 17 20.00 Nelson Freire, piano: Schumann,

Get your tickets now for...



International Lute Festival

20-22 February, Amuz, 81
Kammenstraat, Antwerp.
Tickets from 03.229.18.80 or www.amuz.be

Bach, Dowland and many others penned some of their most extraordinarily expressive music for it. Stravinsky never used it, but that didn't stop him from considering it "perhaps the most perfect and certainly the most personal instrument of all." Long relegated to quaint costume dramas, the lute is coming back with a vengeance: it's taught across Europe, new CDs come out every month, and Amuz, Antwerp's snazzy new early music centre, is about to celebrate its unique sound and repertoire in a three-day festival. Some of the world's finest players of the delicate stringed instrument will be there: Frenchman Eric Bellocq (pictured), who will share the stage with a juggler; Dutchman Mike Fentross and his ensemble La Sfera Armoniosa, who will present sprightly music by the German-named but very Italian Johann Kapsberger, and celebrated Spaniard José Miguel Moreno in exquisite pieces by John Dowland, a contemporary of Shakespeare and a man of such gloomy disposition that he was known to his peers as "Semper Dolens" - the Ever Mournful. **Marie Dumont**

Brahms, Chopin, Debussy, Villa-Lobos
FEB 19 Berliner Philharmoniker conducted by Sir Simon Rattle: Messiaen's Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, Bruckner

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
FEB 13 12.30 Contrabass Quartet

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
FEB 14 11.00 Belgian National Orchestra: wind instrument trio (five years and up)

Miniemenkerk
Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84, www.minimes.net
FEB 15 10.30 Miniemenkerk Orchestra and Choir conducted by Julius Stenzel: Bach, Telemann

Musical Instruments Museum
Hofberg 2; 0475.76.23.32, astoriaconcerts@skynet.be
FEB 15 11.00 Elise Caluwaerts, voice; Kim Van den Brempt, piano: Debussy, Granados, W Hendrickx, Satie, Lecuona

Royal Conservatory of Brussels
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
Concerts at 20.00:
FEB 12 Brussels Wind Ensemble conducted by Koen Dries: Jongen, Ravel, Debussy, Milhaud FEB 13 Jean-Michel Damase Day: 12.15 Concert by piano and chamber music students 20.00 Damase et la musique française du XXème siècle FEB 14 Brussels Chamber Orchestra conducted by Michael Guttmann Hindemith, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Martinu FEB 16 Steven Isserlis, cello; Olli Mustonen, piano: Britten, Mustonen, Sibelius, Stravinsky, Martinu FEB 19 Trobadors with Luc Bergé, horn: Flemish romantic horn music

Hoeilaart

Maison de la Musique
Edgar Sohiestraat 33; 02.657.96.52, maisondelamusique@skynet.be
FEB 19 20.00 Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel soloists

Leuven

30CC-Wagehuys
Brusselsestraat 63; 016.20.30.20
www.30CC.be
FEB 15 11.00 Lucas Blondeel, piano: Debussy, Kurtág, Durlet, Prokofiev, Bartok

Opera

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
Until FEB 21 Mazeppa by Tchaikovsky, with the Vlaamse Opera Symphony Orchestra

Brussels

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
FEB 17-MAR 1 15.00/19.00 Le Calisto by Francesco Cavalli, with De Munt Symphony Orchestra and Choirs

Jazz & blues

Bergerhout

Rataplan
Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
FEB 12 20.30 Jef Neve & Piet Van Bockstal

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
FEB 14 20.30 Vijay Iyer

Brussels

Archiduc
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52, www.archiduc.net
FEB 14 17.00 Ewout Pierreux, Nicolas Thys, Jakob Warmenbol

FEB 15 17.00 Veyrian Weston/Audrey Lauro Duo
FEB 16 22.00 Fris Dane

Charliermuseum
Kunstlaan 16; 02.218.53.82, www.charliermuseum.be
FEB 17 12.30 Frankinet/Hermans Duo

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
FEB 12 20.15 Octurn
FEB 13 12.30 Lidjboy

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78
Concerts at 20.30:
FEB 11 Jacques Pirotton Quartet FEB 14 18.00 Sullivan Street Group FEB 18 Manuel Hermia Trio FEB 19 Buster and the Swing

Le Grain d'Orge
Waversesteenweg 142; 02.511.26.47
FEB 13 21.30 Boogie Woogie Jumpers

Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
FEB 11 22.00 Caribe Con K - Los Soneros del Barrio FEB 12 21.00 The Singers Night FEB 13-14 22.00 Marc Lelangue & The Heavy Muffulettas FEB 16 22.00 Master Session FEB 17 22.00 Da Romeo & The Crazy Moondog Band FEB 18 22.00 Chamaquiando, salsa

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
FEB 11 Winchovski Trio FEB 12 Greg Houben/Manu Hermia Quintet FEB 13-14 Judy Niemack FEB 16 Marie sings Henri Salvador FEB 17 Cada Loco Su Tema FEB 18 Cocktail Dress

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersniewstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
FEB 18 21.30 Rat Records label night: Gowk / Han Bennink trio

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44, www.dekreun.be
FEB 12 20.00 Kurt Overbergh

Leopoldsburg
CC Leopoldsburg
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.cleopoldsburg.be
FEB 13 20.15 Les DeSAXes: homage to Ray Charles

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20, www.stuk.be
FEB 15 21.00 Jazz op Zondag: Ballroomquartet

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

Bergerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be
FEB 13 20.30 The Dutch Eagles: Welcome Back to Hotel California, video and Eagles music
FEB 14 20.30 Leah Thys: tribute to Marlene Dietrich

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be
Concerts at 20.00:
FEB 12 22.00 Confuse The Cat FEB 13 Buurman FEB 15 The Haunted + All That Remains FEB 18 Amadou & Mariam. Philippe François + The Bony King of Nowhere

Art Base

Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20, www.art-base.be
FEB 14 21.00 Les Yeux d'la Tête

Fuse
Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
FEB 13 23.00 Sven Vath, Level Jay - Benoît
FEB 14 23.00 Lessizmore.26 presents Stock 5, Daniell Bell, Bruno Pronstato, Kasper&Papal

Koninklijk Circus
Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15
FEB 15 20.00 Patricia Kaas

Le Botanique
Koningsstraat 236; 02.226.12.57
Concerts at 20.00:
FEB 11 Pigalle, Samamidon FEB 12 Nneka, Pornorama FEB 15 Woodpigeon FEB 17 O Death. Metronomy FEB 18-21 Boutik Rock Festival

Recyclart
Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34, www.recycleart.be
FEB 15 20.00 Martiensgohome + DJ YP

Stekerlapatte
Priesterstraat 4; 02.512.86.81, www.stekerlapatte.be
FEB 12 21.30 Wakas, Ben au Banjo FEB 14 21.30 St Valentine's evening: Colpo di sole

VK Club
Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07, www.vkconcerts.be
FEB 13 21.30 Dead Prez FEB 14 20.00 Gappa Songwriter + Daniele Silvestri

Vorst-Nationaal
Victor Roussealaan 208; 0900.00.991
FEB 13 20.00 Lady Gaga + The Pussycat Dolls

Ghent

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01, www.handelsbeurs.be
FEB 14 20.00 Kraakpand #3.1

Minnemeers
Minnemeers 8; 09.223.22.27
FEB 13 20.00 Lalalover + Barbie Bangkok FEB 14 20.00 Helmet + The Sedan Vault FEB 15 20.00 The Buzzcocks FEB 19 19.30 The Next Big Thing

Vooruit
St Pietersniewstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
FEB 11 22.00 I love Sarah FEB 14 23.00 Retro Acid party

Hasselt
Muziekodroom
Bootstraat 9; www.muziekodroom.be
FEB 12 20.30 The Rhythm Bombs FEB 13 20.00 Jasper Erkens, Spinvis Solo

Kortrijk
De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44, www.dekreun.be
FEB 13 20.00 AB@De Kreun: Nostalgia 77 Sessions with Lizzie Parks FEB 18 20.00 DIY Promo: Tijs Vastesaeger

Den Trap
Burgemeester Reynaertstraat 19; 056.20.49.24
FEB 19 20.00 WOMEN + White Circle Crime Club

Leopoldsburg
CC Leopoldsburg
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.cleopoldsburg.be
FEB 12 20.15 Bakelietjes: songs from the 1930s, 40s and 50s

Leuven
Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
FEB 12 20.30 Luomo + Thom Hagen FEB 14 20.30 Headhunter + The Bug with Flowdan + DJ Haze & Smiles Davis. Wolfgang Voigt

World, Folk

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
FEB 15 15.00 Rossi Piceno: Spanish music

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be
FEB 12 20.30 Homayoun Sakhi (Afghanistan)
FEB 13 20.30 Arte y Pureza, flamenco music and dance

Ardooie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82, www.deschaduw.be
FEB 13 20.30 Cores Do Mondo (bossa nova, samba)

Bruges

Stadsschouwburg
Vlamingstraat 29; 050.44.30.60, www.cultuurcentrumbrugge.be
FEB 14 20.00 Dos Trovadores: Raymond van het Groenewoud & Fernando Lameirinhas FEB 15 15.00 Op golfengte, music from the 1930s-50s

Brussels

Espace Senghor
Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be
FEB 11 20.30 Homayoun Sakhi (Afghanistan)

La Soupape
A De Wittestraat; 02.649.58.88
FEB 14 21.00 Ursoluso, Portuguese and world music

St Andrew's Church Hall
Vleurgatsesteenweg 181; 02.734.46.01
FEB 13 19.30 Folk night with bluegrass bands, guitars and accordion (musicians and singers welcome)

Leopoldsburg

CC Leopoldsburg
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.cleopoldsburg.be
FEB 14 20.15 Galata Mevlvi Music & Sema ensemble (Turkey)
FEB 15 20.15 Danù (Ireland)

Roeselare

Cultureel Centrum De Spil
Spilleboudtstraat 1; 051.26.57.00, www.despil.be
FEB 12 20.00 Danù (Ireland)

Dance

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
FEB 19-22 15.00/20.00 Sutra, choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

Brussels

Halles de Schaerbeek
Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22; 02.218.21.07
FEB 12-14 21.00 Flowers, choreographed by Pierre Droulers
FEB 19-21 20.00 Test,

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060,
www.vooruit.be
FEB 18-19 20.00 Andros Zins-Browne

Theatre

Antwerp

Luchtbal Cultuurcentrum
Columbiestraat 8; 03.543.90.30,
www.ccluchtbal.org
FEB 11 20.00 Goed kiezen geeft kracht
(Making good choices is empowering):
reading by Gisele Cuyvers (in Dutch)

Troubleyn Laboratorium
Pastorijstraat 23; 03.248.48.48
FEB 12-21 20.00 Troubleyn in De
orgie van de tolerantie (The Orgy of
Tolerance), new work by Jan Fabre (in
Dutch and English)

Stadsschouwburg
Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900,
www.sherpa.be
FEB 11 20.00 Piaf de musical, based on
the life of Edith Piaf (in Dutch)

Toneelhuis/Bourla
Komedieplaats 18; 03.224.88.44,
www.toneelhuis.be
FEB 12 20.00 MartHa!tentatief in
SOLO (in Dutch)
FEB 17 20.00 De Tijd in Ziek van
dood zijn (To Be Sick of Death) by
Marguerite Duras 22.00 De Tijd in
Wittgenstein with Lucas Vandervost (in
Dutch)

Brussels

Bozar
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
FEB 17 12.40 Isaac and All the Things
He Doesn't Understand, written and
staged by Pieter De Buysser (in Dutch
and English)

KVS Bol
Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00,
www.kvs.be
Until FEB 22 15.00/20.00 Mental
Finland, directed by Kristian Smeds
(in Finnish, with Dutch, French and
English surtitles)

Kaaitheater
Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vlaekstraat 81;
02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be
Until FEB 11 20.30 Wintervögelchen,
written and staged by Jan Decorte (in
Dutch)

Scarabaeus Theatre
Hollestraat 19-27; 02.649.79.16
Until FEB 21 15.00/20.00 Brussels
Shakespeare Society in Othello by
Shakespeare (in English)

Ghent

La Barraca
Muinkaa 16A; 09.222.31.64,
www.labarraca.be
Until FEB 14 20.00 Bloedbruiloft
(Blood Wedding) (in Dutch)

Theater Tinnenpot
Tinnenpotstraat 21; 09.225.18.60,
www.tinnenpot.be
Until FEB 12 20.00 Liefdesbriefen
(Love Letters) (in Dutch)

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060,
www.vooruit.be
FEB 12 20.00 Saint Amour Special:
Poetry, readings and music by various
artists
FEB 17 20.00 Niets tegen de liefde
(Nothing Against Love): readings from
three novels on love by Jos Geysels,
Anna Luyten, Wine Dierickx and
Bart Moyaert, with music by Lady Linn
(in Dutch)

Roeselare

Cultureel Centrum De Spil
Spilleboudtplein 1; 051.26.57.00,
www.despil.be
FEB 13 20.00 Kamagurka, comedy (in
Dutch)
FEB 18 15.00 De Maan, De jongen (The
Moon, The Boy) (in Dutch, ages 4 and

up) 20.00 Saint Amour Special: Poetry,
readings and music by various artists

Visual arts

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum
(MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60,
www.muhka.be
Until MAR 27 Le[s] moi[s] de Lizène,
works by Liège artist Jacques Lizène
Until MAR 29 Lonely at the Top:
Klankeffecten # 5, works by Juan Pérez
Agirrekoika
Until MAR 29 Insert the Passing of a
Perfect Day (Revisited), installations by
Katleen Vermeir

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
Until MAR 8 Justine Frank: a
retrospective, work by the 20th-century
Jewish-Belgian Surrealist, who is the
alter ego of contemporary American
artist Roeke Rosen

Bruges

Arentshuis
Dijver 16; 050.44.87.11
Until SEP 27 The Museum of Museums
2009, imaginary show by contemporary
artist Johan van Geluwe

Brussels

Algemeen Rijksarchief
Ruisbroekstraat 8; 02.513.76.80
Until FEB 28 1918: De kanonnen
zwijgen: opnieuw vrede? (The Canons
Are Still: Peace Again?), the aftermath
of the First World War in Belgium

Argos Centre for Art and Media

Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03,
www.argoarts.org
Until APR 11 Language Works: Video,
Audio and Poetry, works by Vito
Acconci
Until APR 11 I'm With You in
Rockland, video work by Karl
Holmqvist

Belgian Comic Strip Centre

Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80,
www.stripmuseum.be
Until MAR 8 The New Children's
Comic Strips, works by young comic
strip artists

Bibliotheca Wittockiana

Bemelstraat 23; 02.770.53.33
Until FEB 28 25 Years of Passion
Shared, hand-crafted bookbindings
since the Renaissance

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
Until MAR 8 Reality as a Ruin,
photographs from Antwerp's photo
museum
Until MAR 15 Image/Construction 3
Cities, Brussels, Bruges and Liège seen
in monumental photographic montages
FEB 13-APR 19 Robbrecht & Daem:
Pacing through Architecture, works by
the Ghent-based architects

Czech Centre

Troonstraat 60; 02.213.94.30
Until MAR 6 The Life and Times
of Karel Čapek, photographs and
documents on the Czech writer and
journalist (1890-1938) on the occasion
of the European Union's Czech
Presidency

De Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art

Sint-Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.35
Until MAR 29 Moet elke wredeheid
wel gezegd? (Should Every Cruelty be
Said?), work by 102 artists on the theme
of Belgium today

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until MAR 8 Austrian Design,
innovation and technology

Flemish Parliament - De Loketten

IJzerenstraat 299; 02.552.40.43
Until FEB 21 Creations by winners of

the Henry van de Velde Awards&Labels
2008 design competition

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until APR 19 Robert Capa,
retrospective of the work of the Jewish-
Hungarian photo reporter (1913-1954)
and founder of the Magnum agency

Kelders van Cureghem

Ropsy Chaudronstraat 24; 070.25.20.20,
www.cavesdecureghem.be
Until MAR 1 Body Worlds 4,
anatomical exhibition of human bodies
by German scientist Gunther von
Hagens

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.226.12.57
Until FEB 22 Dark Pool, photographs
and video by Belgian artist Marie-Jo
Lafontaine (also shown in the Gesù
church, in front of Le Botanique)
Until FEB 22 Angel, photographs by
Marie Le Mounier

Natural History Museum

Vautierstraat; 02.627.42.38
Until AUG 30 X-treme, surviving
in the most extreme climates and
environments

Prague House

Palmerstonlaan 16; 02.230.94.91
FEB 16-19 The Crown Jewels, replicas
of precious symbols of Czech history

Royal Army Museum

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until MAY 3 Tribute to Pierre de
Caters, first Belgian aviator who flew
over Belgium 100 years ago

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

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24
Until APR 5 Archeologie om de hoek
(Archeology around the corner), 20
years of archaeological finds in Brussels

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50
Until MAY 10 DeKadence: The
Bohemian Lands 1880-1914, paintings,
drawings, sculptures and photographs

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until MAR 31 That's Opera: 200 Years
of Italian Music, a look behind the
scenes at the making of an opera

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33,
www.wiels.org
Until FEB 22 Un-Scene, works by
young Belgian artists

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens
Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23
Until MAR 1 Large format paintings by
Dirk Skreber
Until MAR 1 Paintings by Albert
Savers
Until MAR 1 Picture this!, drawings by
Benoit van Innis

Ghent

Dr Guislain Museum
Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95,
www.museumdrguislain.be
Until APR 12 The Game of Madness:
On Lunacy in Film and Theatre

Kunsthal Sint-Pietersabdij

Sint-Pietersplein 9; 09.243.97.30,
www.gent.be/spa
Until MAR 29 Flemish wall tapestries
from the 15th and 16th centuries

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03,
www.smak.be
Until FEB 22 The Absence of
Mark Manders, installation by the
contemporary Dutch artist

Don't miss this week



Jan-Pieter Spon

The Orgy of Tolerance

12-21 February, Troubleyn Laboratorium, Pastorijstraat 23, Antwerp.
Tickets from 03.248.28.28 or www.desingel.be

Although you'll find plenty of nudity, the orgy in question is firmly rooted in the ecstasy of consumption. Multi-disciplinary artist Jan Fabre is back with another surreal and visceral theatre piece about a society that is at once bloated and starving, rich on nothing but a pack of zeros. Whether you think of Fabre as a curious genius or a mere shock hound, the work by his theatre group Troubleyn never fails to get all of Flanders talking. All the performances for this run are sold out, but there is a waiting list for each one, and often a seat or two can be found for those who call the morning of the show. Plus, Orgy plays at the end of April at the Vooruit in Ghent. **Lisa Bradshaw**

Until FEB 22 Pluto, installations by
contemporary German artist Max
Sudhues

Minderbroedersstraat 22
03.222.93.20, www.amvc.be

Bruges

Shh!!!: Festival with music by
contemporary composers
FEB 13-15 at Concertgebouw, 't Zand
34, and other venues
070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be

Brussels

Affordable Art Fair: Paintings, prints,
photography and sculpture from €100
to €5,000, plus free workshops and
children's area
FEB 12-15 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan
86C
02.549.60.49, www.affordableartfair.be

Brussels in Love: Celebration of St
Valentine's day with events for singles
and couples. Free Callebaut chocolate
elixirs, heart-shaped sculpture in
Koninginnekajerij, a love balloon
launch and a Love Bugs car parade, plus
Love Disco Night
FEB 14 across the capital
www.brusselsinlove.com

Made in Korea Festival: Panoramic
view of Korean culture, with
exhibitions, concerts, theatre and
children's workshops
Until FEB 28 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat
23
02.507.82.00 or www.bozar.be

Ghent

Belgian Boat Show: Fair for
watersports and recreation
Until FEB 15 at Flanders Expo,
Maalstouter 1
09.241.92.11, www.belgianboatshow.be

Dikke Truiendag (Thick sweater day):
Pull on your warmest woolly for a day
of music and activities with the heating
turned off to save energy and the
environment
FEB 13 11.00 at Cafe Vooruit, St
Pietersnieuwstraat 23
0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be

International Malt Whisky Festival:
Everything on whisky, including a
Scottish whisky fair and Irish corner
FEB 13-15 at International Congress
Centre, Citadelpark
www.whiskyfestival.be

Festivals & special events

Antwerp

Antwerpse Kleppers: Theatre festival
showcasing Antwerp talent, including
premieres from tg Stan, De Koe,
De Tijd and Berlin companies, plus
screenings, comedy and music
Until FEB 21 in Het Toneelhuis/Bourla,
Komedieplaats 18
03.224.88.44, www.toneelhuis.be
In Wonen: Home and decoration fair
FEB 14-22 at Antwerp Expo, J Van
Rijswijkstraat 191
03.260.81.22, www.antwerpexpo.be
Radioboeken: Nadia Dala and Stijn
Vranken are the guests for this series in
which Dutch and Flemish authors read
original stories aloud in a live public
recording for the radio and internet
FEB 12 20.00-21.30 at Letterenhuis,

INTERVIEW

“One day I’ll be gone, and what then?”

Roos Van Acker is a TV presenter, a Studio Brussel DJ, *Humo* magazine’s favourite cover-girl, and the 185th choice for Greatest Belgian of all time.

Before breaking into every form of media you can think of, Roos Van Acker, 32, sang for the 1990s pop group Eden. Now she’s gone back to her roots on a tour of Flanders with an *ad hoc* band, performing songs about broken hearts. We caught up with her between tour dates, radio programmes and meetings about her future with television station VT4.

I hear the songs in your new tour *En wat dan? (And What Then?)* are all about failed romance.

It’s all songs about separating and breaking up. People are a little worried that it’s all sad songs, but that’s absolutely not the case. There’s even one song written by [Flemish comedian] Urbanus. It’s called “Vaarwel Theo”, and it’s about suicide. Theo is a boy who’s about to jump off a bridge and end it all. He has a wooden block tied round his neck, and along comes Urbanus to tell him he’s getting it all wrong and how to do it right. It’s really funny. The lyrics are beautiful.

What else is on the programme?

We’re performing a whole range of songs by Bruce Springsteen, George Michael, Living Color, Pink Floyd. Not that they’re all immediately recognisable. We wanted to give them a spin of our own, so they’re not just a bunch of covers. Most of the songs are in English, but we had a huge range of choice. At least half of all pop songs are about leaving, breaking up, losing a loved one. We all brought our favourites to the table, and then we had to sort out which ones we could do and which ones people would want to hear.

I stopped performing with the band Eden about eight years ago. We were about to bring out our third CD, and I had the feeling I wanted to do something different, but the others weren’t so open to changes, like bringing in other people or trying different things. Then I got the chance to work on the music channel TMF, and that led to Studio Brussel. So I left.

And how was that break up?

We split up on friendly terms. But I miss it from time to time. Making TV programmes is different. As a singer you bring your own songs onstage for the audience, but as a

presenter you have a role that’s more fixed for you by other people. I think you can express yourself much better as a singer.

Since moving to TV, you have worked on reality shows like *Expeditie Robinson* and *Peking Express*, which last year completed its sixth season. That’s a long way from dragging PA amps in and out of cultural centres in places like Beringen and Waregem.

This is the first year for a long time that I haven’t done one of those adventure shows, and I miss it! I miss having my eyes opened up to foreign lands. That’s a great experience, and I’m constantly amazed that I’m doing it. And to think I get paid for it as well! Right now it’s not certain another series of *Peking Express* will be made. We always do that together with Dutch TV because Flanders doesn’t have enough audience on its own. And the Dutch are not very keen on continuing.

Tell us about those cultural centres.

The cultural centres in Flanders are a strange phenomenon to an outsider. There’s this network of small, local venues in out-of-the-way places that serve up a diet of everything cultural. It’s not an audience like the Sportpaleis or Bozar. And there are artists who do nothing but tour around the cultural centres. A lot of the audience is made up of older people, who turn up weekly, whatever may be going on. They think nothing at all of getting up and walking out if things get a little bit loud, as we can do. On the other hand, it’s also a nice surprise to find the people there, young and old, joining in and singing along.

The group put together by Savalas keyboard player David Poltrack includes you, him and the band Triggerfinger. So is this show Roos Van Acker with backing musicians or are you a band all together?

In fact, there are four singers among us who all take turns, though we also sometimes sing together. The tour – of the cultural centres! – will be over at the end of March, but we’ve



had requests to do it at the summer festivals, which would be great. There’s also a chance of a DVD release.

We started the tour in January and, in the beginning, I was just happy to be singing in tune. Then as we went on, and the stress lightened a bit, I started really enjoying it. So there I am, standing on stage with a big smile on my face, and the words I was singing were all about loved ones leaving and people who would never be happy again. I forgot it was all about that.

The papers all suggested that this tour came about after you broke up with your boyfriend.

The whole idea came from David, who’s kind of the leader of the band. He had the

idea of doing a tour with nothing but songs about breaking up, and we were all for it. We’re all big fans of the poet Jotie ‘t Hooft, who wrote all about death and eventually committed suicide. And that’s where the name for the tour came from “En wat dan?” is the title of one of his poems. [The poem begins: “One day I’ll be gone, and what then?”]

So how is your love-life these days?

Oh, you know. Things are quiet. I’m just going along from day to day. [laughs]

Interview by Alan Hope

En wat dan? continues until 28 March. Schedule at www.kras.be

THE LAST WORD

what they’re saying in Flanders

Stupid me

“It would be really stupid for the Cleverest Person in the World to really think he was the cleverest person in the world.”

Freek Braeckman
this year’s winner of *De Slimste mens* (Cleverest Person)

French rules

“A kitchen is like an army. There is a general – me – a colonel, a captain and the foot-soldiers. Here it was like the Foreign Legion.”

Matthieu Pacaud
French chef, who sacked all Flemish staff and replaced them with French workers when he took over a restaurant in Brasschaat

Not out

“Even if they have to roll me in or carry me, I’ll be there; I’ll do my job and I’ll make a speech. Wearing a wig, a scarf, a hat or a skinhead-look.”

Marie-Rose Morel
Vlaams Belang deputy, who is being treated for advanced cancer but will speak at the party’s congress in March

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