



FLANDERS TODAY

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NEWS ♦ BUSINESS ♦ ARTS ♦ ACTIVE ♦ LIVING ♦ AGENDA ♦ INTERVIEW

Howzat! 6

Cricket has always been seen as the quintessential English sport, played by men in white who stop for tea in the afternoon. But new research from Australia suggests that the game could have originated in the boggy fields of Flanders. The English are bowled out at the news.



Going Dutch 7

The Flemish Persgroep has taken over a clutch of major newspapers in the Netherlands. Some Dutch journalists are fuming as they see their industry fall into the hands of a businessman who has been compared to Italy's Silvio Berlusconi.



Master class 8

The Dukes of Savoy were avid collectors of Flemish masterpieces. Now the paintings by Bruegel and Jordaens can be seen back in their native land as 100 masterpieces from the royal collection begins a world tour at Bozar.



The age crunch

Who's going to be left to do the work in Flanders in 2050?

LEANDER SCHAEERLAECKENS

Flanders' modern demographics are a ticking time bomb. We've known that for awhile now. Populations are dwindling as young couples become increasingly disinterested in having large families, and not having children at all is more common.

It's also become a trend to retire at the earliest opportunity. As a result, future Flemings will be charged with supporting the social benefits of an outsized generation of senior citizens. They'll pay more taxes and have to work longer than anyone ever has before.

So how bad does it look? That depends on what steps are taken – and when.

The Flemish workforce as it stands

isn't efficiently staffed. That isn't necessarily for lack of manpower, but rather because the right people don't always find their way to the right jobs and because employees aren't sufficiently encouraged to prolong their careers.

"Flanders, like most industrialised regions, will lose population in the coming years," says Donna Murphy, author of a study on the health of the Belgian workforce by the Adecco Institute, a think-tank on global workforce trends. "What's most dramatic is the shift in the demographic population. Just over 37% of Belgians will be older than 55 by 2050."

→ Continued on page 5

Lange Wapper bridge plan collapses under weight of protestors

But no consensus yet on alternative

ALAN HOPE

The fate of a controversial viaduct which would pass only metres above houses in central Antwerp was thrown into doubt last week when a report on the plan strongly supported alternatives. Critics greeted the report as a victory, and one minister in the Flemish government pushed for a quick decision and for alternative plans to be scrapped.

The Oosterweel Link is intended to join the left bank of the Scheldt with the Antwerp Ring, making it easier for harbour traffic to reach motorways to the north, south

and east of Antwerp. The favoured link, advocated by the former provincial governor and supported by the Antwerp Mobility Agency (BAM), involves a bridge over the river and over several populated areas of the inner city. The bridge, nicknamed the Lange Wapper after a character from local folklore, has been accused by critics of being a pollution hazard for the areas under its span.

Alternatives have been put forward, including one by local interest group StRaten-generaal

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Hermans goes to jail for "misbehaviour"

The former ALF activist broke into nuclear plant and made faces at guards



Anja Hermans has been sentenced to eight months in prison, a €1,100 fine and an exclusion order to keep her from the vicinity of the Doel nuclear power plant after she breached security about a dozen times to draw attention to the fact that security at

the facility was so inadequate.

At no time did Hermans, a former animal rights activist, approach the crucial security perimeter behind which nuclear material is kept. But the court found her actions, which included pulling faces at a security camera to provoke guards to come and get her, "a malicious form of misbehaviour", following the public prosecutor's description of her as "stubborn and deviant".

De Morgen commentator Yves De Smet wondered when childish

misbehaviour became a crime and concluded that Hermans was being used to make an example. In the 1990s, Hermans was responsible, together with other members of the Animal Liberation Front, for several fires in fast-food restaurants in Flanders. She went to prison for those crimes in 2002. Since then, she has expressed regret for her actions and studied to be a care-worker. She said she considers being called "deviant" a compliment. "It means I don't fit into the sausage machine that society demands," she said. ♦

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News in brief

The national railway authority NMBS has demanded the repayment of €37 million from electricity provider Electrabel. The utility is alleged to have charged NMBS for CO2 pollution rights, despite the fact that these were obtained free from the electricity regulator.

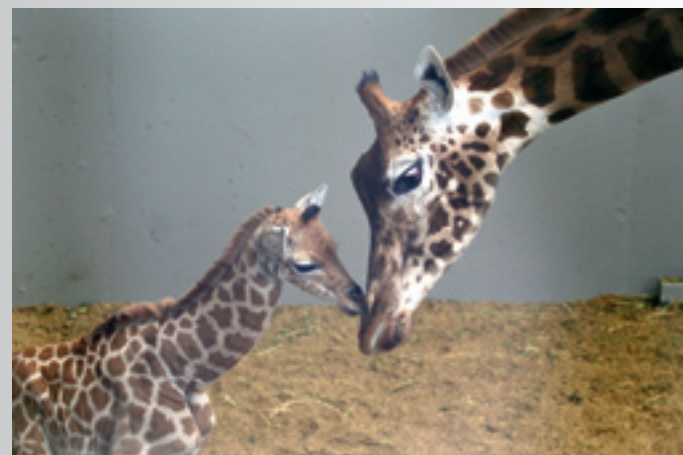
Young people up to the age of 18 will be eligible for **free dental treatment** from May this year. Previously free treatment – classified as “maintenance” but including all normal cavity and nerve work – was limited to the under-15s. At present, 15- to 18-year-olds have to pay a small fee for treatment.

A court in Dendermonde fined **internet giant Yahoo!** €55,000 for failing to cooperate with judicial authorities who sought personal data on customers in an investigation into internet fraud. The internet company will also have to pay €10,000 a day if it continues to refuse. Yahoo claims only an American court has jurisdiction and plans to appeal.

Inspectors for the Flemish **public transport authority De Lijn** now have the power to carry out personal searches, detain passengers and order them out of vehicles. In the past their powers were limited to writing a report and requesting identity details. The authority recently trained 250 new security personnel in an effort to combat rising violence.

Murder suspect Kim De Gelder, accused of the stabbing to death of two babies and a child-care worker in a crèche in Dendermonde last month, has admitted killing an elderly woman at her farmhouse a week earlier, his lawyer said. Police investigating the crèche murders found photographs of the farm on De Gelder's computer.

A Ghent University professor helped a 31-year-old woman **give birth on board a flight** to Orlando last week. Gert De Meeler, who works as a radiologist at the university hospital, responded to a call for help from cabin crew. Luckily, he had previously done a student rotation in the maternity unit of a hospital in Birmingham, England. The plane turned back, and mother and baby Joshua were treated at Saint Luc hospital in Brussels.



Planckendaal animal park near Mechelen last week welcomed the new arrival of not one but two baby giraffes. Mother Barbie was supposed to give birth in two weeks, but perhaps under the influence of mother Diamant, who three days earlier gave birth to a baby boy 1m80 tall, went into labour and had her own baby, whose sex has not yet been announced. Giraffes give birth standing up, so the babies' first experience of the outside world is a 2m fall to the ground. The giraffes moved from Antwerp Zoo last year to a new African savannah enclosure at Planckendaal. “The fact that the giraffe family has got bigger all of a sudden is a wonderful thing,” said park spokeswoman Ilse Segers. Visitors to the park website can take part in a competition to name the two babies.

➔ www.planckendaal.be

From 2010, all teenage girls will be entitled to a **free vaccination against cervical cancer** in Flanders. The Human Papilloma Virus vaccine will be administered via the medical service of schools. Parents in the French-speaking part of Belgium will continue to pay for the time being, after health minister Cathérine Fonck said that she had “no faith” in the vaccine's effectiveness.

Supermarket giant Delhaize has reached an agreement with consumer-goods multinational Unilever that brings to an end a weeks-long dispute that saw about 50 Unilever products cleared from the supermarket's shelves. Delhaize claimed Unilever had applied excessive price increases. The content of the agreement has not been revealed by either side, but a Unilever spokesman said it was “a positive outcome for both parties”.

Taxman demands payments for 11,000 “mistakes”

As many as 11,000 unemployed and retired people face a new tax bill of between €120 and €600 in the next few weeks because the tax authorities miscalculated how much they owe.

Tax bills sent out in December and January contained calculation mistakes, the director general of the tax administration admitted last week. The errors arose out of a misinterpretation of a change in the law introduced last year, which gives an extra tax allowance to the retired and to people living on benefits. But when it was introduced into the tax system's new computer programme, the calculations came out wrong, Carlos Six said. The people concerned were granted too much allowance, and so paid too little tax.

Last year 3,000 taxpayers had to repay up to €5,000 after the software used by the tax system had miscalculated their tax bills. This year's mistake is the fault of a different system altogether – because of the number of changes to tax regulations over the years, a new system was introduced, ostensibly to simplify matters.

Elsewhere it was revealed that every tax computer in the country crashed and stayed down for two days last week, making it impossible for inspectors to work on data from 2008. The database, which includes declarations made online or scanned in from paper documents, refused to function on Wednesday afternoon, unions said, and was only restored by IBM engineers on Friday morning. The breakdown was the fifth in a month. ♦



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Derek Blyth

Controversial road-link sees support evaporate

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and one by technical study bureau ARUP, which was given the task of evaluating the alternative options. The StRaten-generaal plan involves a tunnel under the river and a short viaduct. ARUP also replaces the whole link with a tunnel that would connect to the Ring at a different place.

The Flemish government has asked all of the groups involved – Antwerp city, BAM, the harbour authorities and the protest group StRaten-generaal – to set out their ideas by this Friday, 13 March, after which it intends to take the final decision before the elections in June.

Town planning minister Dirk Van Mechelen greeted the report as a vindication of his support for the BAM plan. The other plans should be rejected, he argued, because they involved putting a toll on the use of the Kennedy tunnel, which would force ordinary people

coming to work in Antwerp to pay a month's salary in tolls every year, he said.

"Evidently some people had decided the conclusions of the study in advance," said Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens. Antwerp city council has long remained silent on the link, mainly, Janssens said, because it was convinced that the Lange Wapper option was the only one viable. The new report questions that view, making it worth taking the time to study it carefully, he said.

Van Mechelen's own ministerial colleagues kept their distance. "This is an especially complex dossier, and Van Mechelen's jumping to conclusions only makes it more difficult to reach a decision," commented mobility minister Kathleen Van Brempt.

The city appears to favour ARUP's plan, which the bureau admitted was still in a conceptual phase. ARUP gave a high score to the StRaten-generaal plan, on which



the Lange Wapper bridge looks doomed

its own is based. "We have to point out that it took a four-year struggle to get to this point," said StRaten-generaal representative Manu Claeys about the devalued BAM plan. "Nearly €80 million in study

and design costs and 10 years of procedure resulted in a project that got a less positive report than ours from the first serious, independent analysis carried out." ♦

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

The cleverest person

Money down the drain. That is what the journalists at *De Standaard* and VRT sometimes say whenever a new opinion poll is published in which everything has stayed the same. Now and then, however, these polls do show new trends, sometimes so surprising that people find them hard to believe.

In 2007, opinion polls showed that the new party Lijst Dedecker might stand a chance at the ballot box. This was deemed unrealistic, but, in the end, the party scored much better than the pundits had predicted.

Last weekend's opinion poll by *De Standaard* and VRT was definitely not money down the drain. It showed another party emerging. The small nationalist N-VA is not entirely new, but it has recently regained its independence after it split from the cartel with the Christian Democrats (CD&V). The future seemed uncertain for N-VA, but this poll shows that there is life after the cartel: if elections were held now, N-VA would get the vote of 10% of the electorate.

What has changed? The cartel has ended, obviously, and CD&V finds it impossible to deliver on the cartel's election promises. But there is more to the rising popularity. N-VA party-president Bart De Wever, though quite well known, was never very popular before. His tongue was too sharp and his humour too biting for that. All of that changed when he was invited to appear on the popular TV quiz show *De Slimste mens ter wereld*, or The Cleverest Person in the World.

For over a week, De Wever got the chance to show off his wit (as well as his knowledge of the Abba back catalogue). People got to know the other, less bitter, side of De Wever. On TV, the N-VA party president did not win and become "De slimste mens", but he didn't seem too bothered.

No need to be – the quiz propelled him into the position of fifth most popular Flemish politician. Only prime ministers (Guy Verhofstadt, Herman Van Rompuy, Jean-Luc Dehaene) and Flanders minister-president Kris Peeters now do better than him in the polls.

Moreover, the combined result of former partners N-VA and CD&V is 30% – more than they ever attained as a cartel. Bart De Wever may not be the Cleverest Person in the World, but he does seem to have made some very clever moves.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1 in 7

students leave without a secondary school diploma, according to research by Leuven University

0.5%

Inflation this year, according to government forecasts. Last year's average monthly inflation was 4.49%, with a peak of 5.91% in July. Between May and November of 2009, the government expects negative inflation – which means falling prices.

65,000

roofs insulated per year, the target set by energy minister Hilde Crevits. The Flemish region is giving a €500 premium to encourage homeowners.

33 hours 4 min

of sunshine in February, says the Royal Meteorological Institute, the lowest figure since measurements began. Normally February should see 75 hours of sunshine. There were also 20 days of rain, making it wetter than normal, too.

253 million

Illegal cigarettes nabbed by customs authorities in 2008, compared to 148 million the year before. Customs note that smugglers no longer concentrate on counterfeit packs of known brands, but now bring in more real packs of little-known brands.

5,699

more places in child care in Flanders in 2008, bringing the total to 109,920. Lack of child care is one of the main reasons young families move out of the cities.

380 kg

of cocaine seized by Ghent police in Antwerp harbour, in a container filled with wood and banana leaves. Three people have been arrested.

1 in 8

women in Belgium is the victim of domestic violence, with 140 complaints filed every day, according to Oxfam-Solidariteit. Worldwide the figure is one in three.

12 years

Growth in shares wiped out by the current economic crisis and its effects on stock markets. And since inflation over the period has cut spending power, your shares are actually worth 28% less now than they were then.



Ghent police chief suspended over forgery and lies

The chief of Ghent's police, Peter De Wolf, has been suspended from his post after allegations that he falsified a declaration regarding a road accident in which he was involved.

De Wolf is alleged to have driven under the influence of alcohol after attending an event marking the retirement of his predecessor. He was driving his service vehicle, which later was involved in an accident. No-one was injured. He then declared he had given the keys to another police inspector and that she was driving at the time of the accident.

The Ghent prosecutor investigated and has concluded that there are "strong indications" of forgery in the drafting of the incident report. In addition, two other members of the Ghent police, commissioner Sonja Corryn, who took the keys from De Wolf, and internal affairs chief Olivier Speeckaert, were suspended.

The three people concerned have been suspended for four months and could face up to 10 years for falsifying evidence should the charges come to court. Later at the weekend, Ghent city council member Anne Schiettekatte, who was present at the retirement event, resigned after admitting she had lied about who was driving the car in question. "I behaved the way I thought I should behave for a good friend," she said. She allegedly told police she had driven De Wolf to his home.

Now opposition parties Groen! and CD&V have called on Ghent mayor Daniel Termont, a socialist party colleague of Schiettekatte, for a full explanation. ♦





All you need to know about banking services on arriving in Belgium

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The age crunch

Changing demographics means Flanders must act now

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"Companies really need to change the way they look at their workforces," Murphy adds. "Just because employees are 55-plus, doesn't mean they have a crisis. Today people that age are expected to leave the workforce even though their life expectancy is 80. They're expected to do nothing for 25 years."

This thinking, says Murphy, has got to change. "There will be plenty of people to work, but not if employers think that the only people who can work are between 24 and 55. Somebody who is 65 or even 70 can easily contribute to the workforce. The only way industrialised nations will be able to continue to compete is if they change their attitudes towards age."

According to Murphy's study, only a third of Flemish companies manage to fill job vacancies appropriately, and the biggest shortfall comes in technical and language skills. Yet when one juxtaposes that with the fact that most companies are very satisfied with their 50-plus employees but still only 11% expect to hire more of them (down from 18% last year), the problem becomes apparent.

Workers in their 50s are hypothetically in the prime of their careers, yet they struggle to get hired. Technical and language skills are for the most part a product of experience and practice. It would be fair to assume that those in their 50s possess those assets. But if nobody will hire them, it's no wonder that companies struggle to find enough technical and language skills.

Not an easy transition

Still, this necessary change in attitude and approach won't be easy to come by. Although the Adecco survey shows that most companies are at least as satisfied with their 50-plus employees as any other age category, those more senior workers tend to command higher salaries. That isn't easy to accommodate in the current economic climate, which is why government assistance with those hires is crucial.

But for the moment, companies are best off convincing current employees not to retire as early as they would like. "We need regula-

tions that will encourage companies to hire older workers and that encourage people to work longer, without punishing them from a pension or flexibility point of view," says Murphy.

In this way, the demographic problem will be alleviated. "It won't be a burden on youth but rather an incentive for everyone to participate," explains Murphy. "This problem can be avoided with an attitude change, but that has to change everywhere. It isn't enough for a company to say 'OK, I'm gonna hire older workers' because the worker has to be convinced, too."

All three parties – employer, worker and government – have to cooperate, argues Murphy, to make this happen "for the benefit of the country". If you allow people to work on a flexible basis, "it will foster creativity and encourage older people who don't want to work 40 hours a week."

Shortages coming soon

"For Belgium, like other European coun-

tries, the ageing of the population is a fact," says Erwin van Iersel, the CEO of Adecco Benelux. "There will be a shortage of available labour in the near future, not only because of the ageing but also because there will be fewer people coming into the labour market. Some companies see the demographic challenge as still in the remote future. But, sooner or later, they will be forced to appreciate the potential and real contribution made by older employees."

Aside from a leakage of 50-plussers, the other end of the labour spectrum is also whittling down. "Most of the businesses surveyed – 86% – believe that the skills shortage can be addressed by improving the transition from school to work," the Adecco report says. "While this is an important factor in any social context, it is however clear that improving this transition will not generate sufficient talent to meet the shortage of skilled workers in Belgium. School leavers will also comprise a shrinking proportion of the employment market."

School dropouts and those ending up in jobs for which they're unsuitable (or who would be more effective in another role) is a parallel issue. It will need resolving if Flanders is to remain competitive in the international market. "Competition is expected to emerge in India, which is likely to become one of the most competitive nations," says Murphy. "China actually has its own demographic problem, but Flanders will be able to compete in terms of innovation and creativity."

More than half of Belgian companies state

that they cannot find the right people. According to the Adecco Institute, they'd be better off reaching out to potential employees as early as secondary school to foster interest in their field and make teenagers aware of the opportunities at their disposal.

"Demographics is not rocket science," the Adecco report concludes. "All the measures companies can take in the areas of career management, lifelong learning, health management, knowledge management and age diversity are simple to develop and implement, as well as relatively affordable."

Whether those necessary changes will be made, however, remains highly contentious. A separate survey by Adecco notes that three-quarters of Belgian companies polled reckon they have no problem with the ageing of the population.

→ www.adecco.be



© Reporters



In some countries, companies specifically hire older workers who need supplemental income, finding them reliable employees. US cosmetics manufacturer Bonne Bell has a "senior section" on the packaging line. "Seniors are as productive as any other worker," says company owner Jess Bell.

© Belga

The big blue

A little cheese-maker in Limburg walks away with a big prize from France

ALAN HOPE

A blue cheese from Limburg won first prize for Best Original Cheese at the prestigious Caseus Awards competition in France. The Achelse Blauwe, or Achel Blue, cheese was chosen from among more than a dozen entrants for its “soft, creamy texture” and “unaggressive taste” – and none of it would have been possible without interfering EU bureaucrats.

Peter Boonen runs the Catharinadal farm in Hamont-Achel, Limburg province, where he makes the cheese with his brother, Bert, together with their wives. The brothers took over from their father, who still works on the farm, and who was more of a butter producer in his day. The farm produces 140 different cheeses, as well as 70 or so other dairy products.

“I made my first cheese when I was 13,” says Boonen. “That’s 30 years ago now.” He made his first blue cheese more than 20 years ago, “but I never expected to win any prizes.”

Boonen himself couldn’t be present in Lyon, where the prize was awarded a few weeks ago. “I should have been there, but in the end I couldn’t go. But it feels great. It’s a real vindication of everything we’ve done here.”

The Achelse Blauwe, or Grevenbroecker to give it its Sunday name, is a deeply veined blue cheese with a most particular appearance, which looks like marble when it’s cut. “It dresses up any cheeseboard,” Boonen says. “A lot of people don’t like blue cheese because they find it too pikant. It has a sort

of dulling effect on the tongue, as if your tongue has been anaesthetised.”

But the Achelse Blauwe doesn’t produce that effect. “It has the full depth of taste of a blue cheese, but it’s milder,” explains Boonen. It’s also low in salt and spreads at room temperature.

The apotheosis of the Achelse Blauwe came about not by accident but because of the great bogey-man of all farmers: EU regulations. The Boonens were told by inspectors from the Federal Food Safety Agency that they would have to renovate their cheese workshop to meet hygiene regulations.

“Renovations like that cost a lot of money,” Boonen says. “Up until then we had been selling the cheese to people in town, but to make more money we decided to go outside the borders of the commune. I suppose that’s what eventually brought us to the attention of people outside.”

The effect was immediate. Last year he took part in a competition against 15 or so other producers, and the cheese’s performance there assured it of a place representing Belgium at the Caseus Awards in Lyon at the end of January. The awards as a whole were won by France, but in one of the sections, where the 12 participating countries present an original cheese, Boonen’s blue won with an impressive 18.3 points out of a total 20.

It’s not likely success will go to Boonen’s head. “I can barely make 16 cheeses a week,”



© Bob Moors

Originals: Cheese-maker Peter Boonen and the winning Achelse Blauwe

he says. “It’s very labour intensive. Other blue cheeses use the technique of piercing the cheese with holes to let the air in.” This carries the bacteria that create the mould that shows up as blue veins. The Achelse Blauwe is instead made of layers of stacked curds.

“We let it remain open to the air for six to eight weeks, until the mould is created and the cheese becomes soft, and then we close it up,” explains Boonen. “Then I have to clean and disinfect the whole workshop here – everything from top to bottom – before I’m allowed to go on making all the other cheeses we produce.”

I suggest he might find himself in the same

position as the monks from the abbey of Westvleteren, who every year have to cope with a tsunami of beer lovers desperate to get their hands on some of the rigidly controlled, limited quantity of Westvleteren beer.

“I’m sure demand will increase,” he admits. “We’ve already had enquiries about wholesale. But there’s no way we could keep up if it goes further. Production will always be limited. We haven’t even started rebuilding. The plans have only just been approved, and the work itself has maybe another year to go.”

➔ www.catharinadal.be

Cricket on Flanders Fields

DENZIL WALTON

New findings suggest that the quintessentially English game came from right here

Think cricket and you probably think of rural England. Village greens, spotless whites, the thwack of willow and polite applause. But cricket might not be so quintessentially English after all. In fact, the news of late suggests it originated in...can you guess? Flanders.

Paul Campbell from the Australian National University in Canberra has uncovered a reference to the sport in a poem written in 1533, in which cricket is linked to Flemish weavers working in England.

The poem is attributed to John Skelton, a popular poet and playwright of the day. In “The Image of Ipocrisie”, Skelton appears to describe the Flemish weavers who settled in southern and eastern England from the 14th century as “kings of creakettes”:

O lorde of Ipocrites

Nowe shut vpp your wickettes

And clape to your clickettes!

A! Farewell, kings of creakettes!

The reference to “wickettes” gives further credence to the claim that “crekettes” refers to cricket (the modern game involving two sets of wooden wickets). If such a claim were true, then it bowls over the traditional theory that the sport evolved from children’s games played in England since Anglo-Saxon times. Instead, Flemish weavers might have been playing a rudimentary game of cricket on the fields of Flanders, taking it with them when they emigrated to England in search of work.



Batsman Alastair Cook may play for the English, but he has Flanders to thank for his game

“I’m pleased but not totally surprised,” says Charles Brommaert from local league Cricket Vlaanderen. “If you look closely at some of Pieter Brueghel’s paintings you see his characters playing a game that could have been cricket. This discovery will certainly put the sport in a new light in Flanders and will help to convince the Flemish that cricket isn’t an alien sport.”

The poem was uncovered by Campbell while working with Heiner Gillmeister of the Department of English at the University of Bonn, who suggests that the term “cricket” has its roots in the Flemish phrase “met de krik ketsen”, or “to chase with a curved stick”.

Before Campbell’s discovery, the first written reference to cricket was believed to be that of John Derick in 1589. During a court case in Guildford, England, he recalled that, as a young man at the Royal Grammar School, “he and diverse of his fellowes did runne and play there at creakett and other plaies”. But the new finding from an earlier source suggests that the sport – as well as the word itself – is Flemish in origin.

Weavers from Flanders are certainly known to have settled in rural areas around Kent and Surrey, where it is generally believed that the English game of cricket originated. What’s more, the historical spread of the game across the southern counties could also match the movement of Flemish weavers.

All we need now is to find reference to the game of “crekettes” in early Medieval Flemish literature, and the image of cricket being a particularly English invention would be hit for six.

De Persgroep takes over PCM

Publisher of *De Morgen* scoops up major Dutch newspapers

Flemish media company De Persgroep, publisher of daily newspapers *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, among other properties, has bought a 51% share in PCM, which publishes major Dutch titles such as *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw* and major sellers *De Volkskrant* and *Algemeen Dagblad*.

The cost of the acquisition was €100 million and comes at a time when staff at *De Morgen* are protesting at restructuring plans that will mean the loss of one-quarter of editorial jobs, a total of 26 journalists. The news of De Persgroep's interest in PCM led to some hostility in the Netherlands, with De Persgroep's CEO Christian Van Thillo described as "the Flemish Berlusconi".

This is not the company's first foray over the border. In 2003 De Persgroep bought the failing Amsterdam daily *Het Parool* and has since turned it around. It also owns Q Music Nederland, formerly Radio Noordzee, which has also been transformed into a profitable enterprise.

De Persgroep will now be look-

ing to do the same for *Algemeen Dagblad*, the Netherlands' second biggest-selling paper after *De Telegraaf*, with 460,000 sales a day but mounting losses.

"This is an important step for our company," said Van Thillo. "PCM has an impressive portfolio of titles, which will allow us to build a unique media group." As well as newspapers, PCM also owns *Standaard Uitgeverij*, the Flemish publisher, as well as Dutch retailer *Bruna* and publisher *Meulenhoff*.

The decision to expand into more newspapers might seem odd, coming at a time of universal malaise in the industry and job losses within Van Thillo's flagship paper in particular. "If titles are having it difficult today, it's because they can't find a public or because they're being badly managed," Van Thillo said. Newspapers are not an old medium. On the contrary, strong newspapers need not fear for their future.

The deal still has to receive the approval of the Dutch competition authorities, which is likely to be a formality. Dutch law does not allow



Persgroep CEO Christian Van Thillo

one company to control more than one-third of the market, but PCM and De Persgroep fall comfortably below the limit. In any case, De Persgroep intends to sell off one of the PCM titles, though it is not yet clear which one.

The editorial staffs of both *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant* are already preparing a list of re-

quirements, including guarantees of their status as independent, quality newspapers. "*De Volkskrant* needs to be given every possible chance, whether that's within PCM, within another company or on an independent basis," said *Volkskrant* editor Pieter Broertjes. "We have more questions than anything," commented Bianca Rootsart, secretary general of the Dutch

Spain gets on board with GM rescue

Spain would be willing to work with Germany and Flanders to support the creation of a self-sufficient European wing of car manufacturer General Motors, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters was told last week. Peeters was in Madrid for the opening of a new Flanders House in the Spanish capital.

Flanders is currently preparing for talks with four German *Länder* (political regions) which, like Flanders, are affected by plans announced by the US parent company GM to cut jobs worldwide. GM's plans threaten the future of Opel Antwerp.

GM has already said it would be willing to float off GM Europe into a partly independent concern, but only with the injection of €3.3 billion of aid. Germany, which has five plants in four regions, has from the start been a strong supporter of an independent GM Europe. Flanders was quick to show it was keen to go along with the plan, for fear of losing Opel Antwerp to competition from the *Länder*.

Last week Peeters heard from Spain's minister for European affairs, Diego Lopez Garrido, that his government would also support a European solution for GM. Spain has one Opel plant in Zaragoza, which employs 7,000. He stressed that the plan should form part of a new strategy for the European car industry as a whole.

Peeters welcomed the additional support. "To have real talks with the bosses of Ford or GM, you need to be able to throw a similar weight in the scale," he said. "That can only come about with a coordinated European approach."

Both sides said they would work hard on the issue during their successive presidencies of the EU in 2010. Hungary, which also has GM on its territory and which follows Belgium in the chair of the EU in 2011, will figure heavily in this cooperation.

Peeters was due this week to have talks with representatives of the German *Länder*, which, like Flanders, are semi-autonomous regions within the federal state.

Youth jobs hit hard by crisis

The number of unemployed people in Flanders rose in February to 189,226, an increase of 15% on the same time last year. Unemployment has been rising steadily since November last year, when the annual increase was only 0.2%.

Men are the main victims, with just over 97,000 out of work, according to the Flemish training and employment agency VDAB. The agency also confirmed earlier reports that young people are having it particularly hard in this economic crisis: in tough times, companies tend not to employ them, and they are often the first to be let go when cuts come.

Compared with a year ago, there are now 31% more young people under 25 without a job – including school leavers who have never been in full-time work, and graduates with a new degree in their pockets. Unemployment among young people with a secondary education rose over the last year by 13%, while for new graduates the increase was 21%.

Business services suffer trickle-down cuts

Companies in the business-to-business (B2B) services sector are suffering a trickle-down effect from cost-cutting by their corporate clients, according to unions. It was revealed last week that the severe difficulties in the banking sector are leading to the loss of benefits and perks for employees, such as subsidised holidays, sports facilities and culture cheques.

Also hard hit are companies providing services such as catering and cleaning. In the office cleaning business, one union representative said that 25% of staff are without work as companies cut back by switching, for instance, from daily cleaning to once or twice a week.

The cuts are affecting some businesses even more severely, such as event planners who are now no longer called upon to organise corporate hospitality, executive team-building weekends or even just a simple office party. In some cases, companies cancel events simply because they don't want to be seen indulging in conspicuous spending.

Last week representatives of the executive union BBTK handed out free croissants to staff at ING Bank in protest at cost-cutting measures, including the cancellation of sports and culture facilities, and the reduction of benefits for the long-term sick from two years to one. "Nobody will die because of these measures," union spokesperson Miranda Ulens said. "But on the other hand they won't save any jobs either. The bank is using the crisis as an excuse to scrap a series of benefits."

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air • Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines is reintroducing its Business Class following its acquisition by Germany's Lufthansa last year. The decision comes two years after the airline decided to scrap the Business Class concept and to replace it with its B-flex and B-light programmes.

Air • Capital Aircraft

Capital Aircraft Group, the Kortrijk-based business and medical flights operator, is transferring its operations to Ostend airport.

Banking • Fortis

The federal government and BNP Paribas have reached a new agreement over the terms of the sale of Fortis. The deal includes the sale of 75% of the bank and 25% of the insurance business, with the government providing additional guarantees. Shares in the troubled bank rose above €1 as stock markets opened on Monday.

Energy • Publigas

Publigas, the holding company owned by Belgium's local authorities, has sold its 31% stake in Distrigas, the country's gas supplier, to Italian energy concern Eni for €1.5 billion. The move follows the recent sale by Suez-Gaz de France of its 57.25% share in the company. The cash will shore up the municipalities' finances now that they are deprived of the dividend stream from ailing Dexia bank.



Hotels • Sheraton

The Brussels Sheraton, the city's largest hotel with some 500 rooms, has been sold by Starwood Hotel group, to the London-based International Real Estate company, owned by Rolf Nordström, the Swedish property tycoon. The hotel is expected to be renovated and the number of rooms reduced to about 300, while the remaining space is transformed into service apartments. The hotel is expected to continue operating under a management contract.

Hotels • AC Motel

AC Motel, located in Drogenbos, is to be demolished and rebuilt. The 85-room motel occupies a motorway service area just south of Brussels.

Investment • GIMV

GIMV, the Flemish investment company, plans to invest up to €10 million in the French CTR Leyton cost-control consultancy.

Manufacturing • ASCO/BMT

ASCO and BMT, based respectively in Zaventem and Oostkamp, are to share the bulk of a €1 billion contract to supply leading edges for the wings of the future A350 Airbus. The eight-year contract is the largest ever won by the Belgian aerospace industry, which has been involved with Airbus since 1979.



Family photographs

Flemish and Italian masters reunite in outstanding exhibition

SAFFINA RANA



"The Vanity of Human Life", one of a number of collaborations between Jan Breughel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens

The only thing missing from the Baroque atmosphere of Bozar's latest exhibition is a string quartet lurking in the shadows. The walls have been painted in ruby reds and emerald greens, and the galleries are dimly lit, creating a heavy reverential atmosphere that suggests a palace chapel, or the bedroom of a particularly decadent pope.

From Van Dyck to Bellotto: *Splendor at the Court of Savoy* is the centrepiece of the Brussels' art centre's Turin Festival. The exhibition contains paintings by Flemish and Italian masters and tapestries and manuscripts that once adorned the palaces of the court of Savoy between the 15th and 18th centuries.

Savoy started out as a small mediaeval state below Lake Geneva and west of the river Rhone but grew in power and territory throughout the centuries, with its ruling princes swapping kingdoms and making strategic marriages to increase their political power. The state was instrumental in the unification of Italy, providing the new country's first ruler and its first capital, Turin.

Most of the art from the Savoy palaces was given over by the family to be housed in the Sabauda gallery in Turin in the 19th century, but some of the works ended up in museums across Europe. With the Sabauda now closed for renovation and the pieces expect-

ing to be re-housed in a new museum complex based in the Savoy palaces in 2011, the 100 or so works have been reunited and are on tour, with Brussels welcoming them ahead of New York and Shanghai.

The Savoy princes certainly liked Flemish art, but it is hard to tell whether they were deeply interested in the scenes of Flemish life depicted in the paintings or if it was the signature that mattered. By the end of the 16th century, owning work by a Flemish master such as Jan Breughel or commissioning a portrait by Van Dyck was a significant status symbol, a way of keeping up with the Royal Joneses across Europe, and especially in the English court.

It's difficult to put yourself in the position of a Savoy courtier, roaming palace corridors and suddenly confronted by a scene of young women parading in front of the stepped gables of Grote Zavel in Brussels. Would they have seen Antoine Sallaert's painting "Procession of the Pucelles of the Sablon" as a scene from a half-understood world far away, or simply a subtle variation on the religious processions familiar in their own culture?

Our long-gone courtier would have had less trouble with what are known as vanitas paintings, which were produced by artists on both sides of the Alps. These works symbolise the transience of

life and the passing of youth, often through detailed still lives featuring decaying fruit and flowers.

One of the most impressive in the collection is by Jan Davidsz De Heem and his son Cornelius, originally from Utrecht but established citizens of Antwerp in the 17th century. Entitled "Fruit, Flowers, Mushrooms, Insects, Snails and Reptiles", it shows ripe and gleaming fruit, piled in what seems to be a clearing near a young oak tree. The skins of mouth-watering pomegranates and white peaches are ripped to reveal tender flesh. Reptiles hide in the undergrowth and ants crawl over the fruit, a reminder that it will soon be eaten away.

De Heem was a staunch Catholic, and the work also makes symbolic references to spiritual salvation. Butterflies, often associated with the resurrection of Christ, alight on vegetation, while stalks of grain allude to the bread of the Eucharist.

It's not the only picture in the show that might leave you feeling peckish. The hyper-real attention to detail and play of light in Pieter Binoit's "Cakes and Shellfish" has quite a strong effect, and I could almost smell the olives and capers.

Antoon Van Dyck was all the rage in the English and European courts of the 1620s and '30s, and the collection contains several specially commissioned works.

One is a rather sweet portrait of the children of Charles I of England dating from 1635. The English regent's wife, Henrietta Maria, was the sister of Christine of France, the wife of the Savoy regent Amadeus I. Sending her sister in Turin a portrait of their children would have been something like emailing a family photo to distant relations today.

Although a large number of Flemish works were catalogued in the Savoy court inventories, the existence of many others was only known because of the correspondence between the sisters or from overseas travellers waxing lyrical about the paintings they had seen.

The collection has its fair share of figurative paintings with religious themes. Of all of these, the most captivating is Andrea Mantegna's "Madonna and child surrounded by St John the Baptist, St Catherine of Alexandria and Other Saints". It's also almost like a family photograph, taken at a moment when no one is looking at the camera.

The Madonna and child are flanked by several saints, look-

ing up, looking away or reading a book. The baby Jesus' chubby hand alights on the forehead of another child – John the Baptist. It's difficult to tell whether John's expression is one of agony or ecstasy, but through his slightly open mouth you can see two milk teeth pushing through the pink gums. It's quite surreal and immediately endearing.

Apart from the family tree and lineage of the Savoy princes on display on large panels in the halls, the show sadly contains little information on their lives. However, the Italian paintings on show make up for the lack. Bernardo Bellotto's "View of Turin from the Royal Garden" is a stunning landscape from an old bridge on the River Po that contrasts scenes of everyday life with meticulous architectural details of the palace and city receding in the distance. To the left, workmen balanced on planks are busy enlarging the palace walls while to the right of the moat, men dig drains and women hang out washing. The buzz of activity and movement offer a glimpse of everyday life in a bygone age. ♦

Bozar

Ravensteinstraat 23
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Until 24 May

→ www.bozar.be



“Private is private”

A new film revives the sensational scandal that gripped Flanders 12 years ago

LISA BRADSHAW

Koen and Magda learn the ropes in *SM Rechter*

At the beginning of 1997, Koen Auroousseau was a respected judge at the court of first instance in Mechelen. By the end of that same year, he was accused of physical assault and incitement to prostitution, whipping up a scandal that was splashed across the newspapers.

Koen was soon convicted, removed from the bench and plunged into a financial and emotional depression that saw him lose his house and attempt suicide. Always by his side was his wife, Magda, the woman who felt responsible for getting him into this

mess.

Because it was Magda who asked Koen five years earlier to explore sexual boundaries with her and visit an SM club. Sado-Masochism between consenting adults is not illegal, but, when the couple's private life unexpectedly became public, the prosecuting attorney came calling.

Sex, politics, revenge and secrets combine to make this story rich for the telling. Flemish director Erik Lamens is making his feature film debut this week with *SM Rechter*

(or *SM Judge*). “I thought for a long time about doing it, but it was hard to find the right angle,” Lamens says. “It’s a dangerous project, and I couldn’t find the right perspective.”

He might never have found it had the former judge himself not called Lamens up. The night before they met, Koen’s appeal had been dismissed by the European Court of Human Rights, and Lamens had decided to abandon the project. But Koen convinced him otherwise. “It was a personal angle that I needed,” says Lamens. “What we saw in the newspapers and on television 12 years ago was from the outside, and I wanted to go to the inside.”

Back when the story broke, Magda took a backseat to all the attention her husband was getting. He gave the interviews, she kept quiet. In *SM Rechter*, Lamens puts the focus more on her. “Everything started with a crisis in the marriage. Because of her depression, they were on the edge of divorce, and at that moment, she told him something that she had been hiding for 30 years. And he said, ‘if that can help you, let’s try it.’”

Lamens sees this as the heart of the story. “It touched me on a personal level – that the state interfered with love.”

The film is destined for controversy, just like the court case it is based on. “I heard on TV the other day that this is ‘the most controversial film of the year’, but I didn’t make it to be controversial,” says Lamens. “I just wanted to show people what they don’t already know – why a woman asks this after 15 years of marriage, and why he says yes.”

But perhaps the most unsettling for audiences is the concept of Sado-Masochism itself. The film does not shy away from illustrating the couple’s practices, from simple early bondage and whipping to hardcore experiences little known outside the SM community. “I wanted to give people a frame of reference because there is so much about SM that I myself didn’t know,” says

REVIEW

SM Rechter

After 15 years of marriage, Koen and Magda are in crisis. She is in a deep depression, neglecting their daughter and herself. Finally she has a full-blown nervous breakdown that puts her in hospital.

When she comes home, Koen asks Magda what he can do for her. “I’ll do anything,” he says. “Anything?” she responds. “Yes, anything.”

So Magda confesses a secret she has been keeping for 30 years. She has masochistic fantasies, and she wants her husband to inflict pain on her. Koen is confused and nervous, but, more than that, he is in love with his wife.

The couple visit an SM club and begin on a journey of physical and sexual discovery. Magda feels a great sense of relief, followed by the kind of happiness she never knew existed.

Koen (Gene Bervoets) is a judge in Mechelen, and when he explains to his boss and good friend what he and Magda (Veerle Dobbelaere – excellent) are embarking upon, his boss is immediately wary. But what could it hurt? says Koen. “Private is private”.

And that is the question at the heart of *SM*

Rechter (*SM Judge*), the feature film debut from Flemish director Erik Lamens. When the sex lives of Koen and Magda accidentally become public, and a prosecutor (who, it is suggested, has it in for Koen) investigates, the family is thrown into the spotlight of public debate on privacy and the law.

The movie does a commendable job opening up its cans of worms, particularly towards the end, when confiscated videos are shown to the court of just how far the couple’s SM practice has progressed over five years. The question begins to form: Do you want a sadist handing out punishments to the citizens of your community?

This is actually an area the film fails to address: never do we find out if Koen has become a sadist or if he is simply playing a role for the happiness of his wife. Because of this, the film never gives itself the chance to address his ability to separate his private feelings and public performance as a magistrate.

Despite very good performances all around, *SM Rechter* technically never reaches a level above TV drama. But its psychological and emotional levels deliver from beginning to end. LB



CULTURE NEWS

Huis van de Vlaamse Film, or The Flemish Film House, was formally opened last week in Brussels by culture minister Bert Anciaux. Housed in a former bank on Bischoffsheimlaan, it brings together four bodies responsible for supporting the local film and TV industry: the Flemish Audiovisual Fund, which subsidises production and training; promotional body Flanders Image; Location Flanders; and Media Desk Flanders, which helps local directors access EU funds. Offices have been integrated into the Art Nouveau architecture inherited from the bank, and behind the heavy vault doors in the cellar there are a cosy bar and a 30-seat cinema for events and screenings.

Dimitri Verhulst and Erwin Mortier were two surprise omissions from this year’s long-list for the *Gouden Uil* (Golden Owl) Dutch-language literary prize, announced last week. In fact, only two Flemish authors made the 18-name list: David Van Reybrouck with his polemical *Pleidooi voor populisme* (*Plea in Favour of Populism*) and Jan Van Loy with the novel *De Heining*, named after an area of Zwanenburg in North-Holland province.

The new Flemish series *Wolven*, which will eventually air on TV één, has started shooting in Curaçao. *Wolven* is set in the anti-fraud office of the federal police in Antwerp and is directed by Stef Desmyter (*Katarakt*) and Rik Daniëls (*Flikken*).

Original Suske & Wiske drawings for 18 volumes of the popular comic strip by Willy Vandersteen will be auctioned off on 15 March in Antwerp’s Bernaerts saleroom. The sale will also include a lot of 55 drawings by Vandersteen from the album *De Dulle griet*. Each drawing will be auctioned separately, then after the bidding, the whole package will go to anyone offering more than the cumulative total. Each drawing is expected to fetch up to €900.

Fans of heavy metal veterans AC/DC who had tickets for the concert in Antwerp’s Sportpaleis last week, which was cancelled, can now exchange their tickets for the concert in Amsterdam on 23 June. Bus travel to the Dutch capital will also be organised. Details at www.sportpaleis.be.

Lamens. “Most people are not familiar with that kind of sexuality.”

Still, the question isn’t whether audiences approve of SM but whether private sexual practices have anything to do with a magistrate’s ability to perform his job. Lamens is clear about what he thinks: “Real criminals are released through errors, but consenting adults who are not hurting anybody are prosecuted. The system spent a lot of time and money on this one person when there are a lot of cases that have not received the attention they needed.”

➔ www.smrechterthemovie.be

Smoke signals

Trace the history of smoking, sniffing and chewing in Wervik

DENZIL WALTON

If you recently kicked the habit and have just stubbed out your last Marlboro Light, then the National Tobacco Museum is probably not for you at the moment. But for anyone else, it's highly recommended as it offers an insightful look back at the history of tobacco over the last four centuries.

Tobacco has been cultivated in Flanders since 1650, with the fields around Wervik in West Flanders being the industry's centre of productivity. The golden age was immediately after the Second World War and then again between 1970 and 1985. However, in the '90s the tobacco industry declined rapidly. By 2000, only 450 hectares were planted, and last year the figure was down to around 100 hectares.

The reason is obvious. Awareness of the health hazards of smoking has increased, so demand has fallen, particularly for the heavy variety of pipe tobacco grown around Wervik. In parallel has come the gradual reduction in EC subsidies given to Belgian tobacco farmers. "By 2010 no more subsidies will be available, and tobacco production in Flanders will completely cease," says the mu-

seum's non-smoking curator, Vincent Verbrugge.

Photographs in the entrance lobby show Flemish tobacco farmers in their heyday: sowing seeds under glass, planting seedlings in the spring, harvesting in the summer, hanging the leaves in drying sheds. All of these operations have always been conducted manually in Flanders. Contrast this approach with the vast tobacco plantations of Maryland and Virginia, where giant harvesters cruise through the fields and scythe down whole tobacco plants.

The museum houses a huge collection of pipes, including the earliest made of white clay, some of them with incredibly long stems of over half a metre. Meerschaum, a type of Mediterranean clay, was also commonly used. Easily carved, it heralded the appearance of the pipe as an art form. Check out the museum's meerschaum pipes in the form of famous politicians and heads of state. Look out too for the musketeer's pipe. Its tiny built-in mirror might have enabled d'Artagnan to spot an enemy creeping up behind him while he was enjoying a relaxing puff.

And you certainly won't want to miss the collection of 19th-century erotic pipes, which you lean down and glimpse through peep holes. Priests in particular were apparently renowned for being avid collectors of the most vulgar examples. Perhaps sucking on a pipe in the shape of a curvaceous naked woman helped them resist the temptations of the flesh.

By the 1700s, snuff – ground tobacco snorted up the nose – was the tobacco product of choice, and the museum has an interesting collection of antique snuff boxes. Napoleon was an avid snuffer, as was Pope Benedict XIII. He clearly disagreed with one of his predecessors, Pope Urban VIII, who had earlier threatened to excommunicate Catholics caught using snuff.

The museum also records the popularity of cigars in the 19th century, and the explosive growth in cigarettes in Flanders during and after the First World War. Not to be forgotten is chewing tobacco, which was particularly popular in places where a naked flame was not tolerated, such as coal mines or in local flax factories.

The museum also has an excellent



reconstruction of a tobacconist's shop from the 1920s, with all the necessary tools of the trade. Wervik is virtually on the French border, and when tobacco was cheaper there than in France, there was a thriving but illicit cross-border trade. "The tobacconist used a special press to squash a customer's newly purchased packet of tobacco," explains Verbrugge. "The customer could then stuff the flat packet down his trousers and smuggle it across the border."

A further interesting tool is the cigar slicer. A customer in search of a cigar would light one up, have a few puffs and, if he liked it, would slice off the burning top and purchase it.

In another authentic reconstruction – a tobacco farmer's living room – pride of place is given to a smoker's chair. At the end of a busy day in the fields, the farmer would sit "the wrong way" on it, resting his arms and, therefore, his pipe on the back of the

chair. The upholstered hinged top lifts up to reveal a space where pipes and tobacco could be stored.

Other rooms in this extremely spacious museum focus on themes such as tobacco in art, in advertising and in the movies. The children's activity room is used to educate school groups on the health risks of smoking. If the weather is fine, you can stroll around the museum garden, where different varieties of tobacco are grown.

It has nothing to do with tobacco, but within the museum's premises is a working windmill. On Sundays from May to September, if the wind is good, it whirrs into action to grind flour, which you can take home with you. It brings your tour of a rather unhealthy product to a wholesome end. ♦

➡ www.nationaaltabaks-museum.be

restaurant

DUSTIN BENNER



Présence

At a time when good food is not enough for success, Présence has found the perfect combination that turns one-time diners into regular customers. Just northeast of Antwerp in Schoten, it was previously known as De Uilenpiegel but was bought by the Van Nederkassel family (well known local entrepreneurs) and transformed last year from an outdated dining room into an elegant French restaurant.

The interior is all cream-coloured chairs and beige tints, French oak flooring and a Zen-like fireplace. Nooks and crannies contain simple vases that are decorative but not cluttering. Near the entrance are two round booths with darker tones and intimate lighting. A separate but visible lounge bar adds to the social buzz of the dining area.

The new owners kept the same chef, who brought a contemporary feel to the menu. While focusing on French cuisine, there are cosmopolitan accents such as sashimi alongside family-friendly classics like cheese croquettes and steak. The list of suggestions is worth watching as it is updated every 10 days with brand new dishes.

The cooking delivers everything the menu promises. Shrimp in a light curry sauce – normally a dullish offer – is pleasantly memorable at Présence. The shrimp is cooked to perfection, and the sauce is given a light peppering to add some zest. The *filet pur "Rossini"* is beautifully arranged with a grouping of seasonal vegetables.

The wine list is impressively long, with one 124 mostly French bottles on offer, including a number of recommendations. The after-dinner drink list has an above-average selection of single malt whiskies, catering to the Flemish love affair with the Scottish drink.

The restaurant staff also deserve a mention. Polite and friendly service but also a passionate and experienced restaurateur who clearly enjoys telling diners about the daily suggestions. Visitors are treated like old friends, even if they've never been before.

Come the summer, the restaurant has outdoor seating, both in front and behind. It's best to reserve, especially on Saturdays when all the tables are booked long in advance.

➡ Brechtsebaan 277, Schoten

🕒 Open: Wed-Sun, except for Saturday afternoon

€ Lunch € 35, dinner € 63

➡ www.restopresence.be



Something brewing in East Flanders

A brand new concept that combines a cafe and brewery in the heart of Ghent

ROBYN BOYLE

A Belgian beer on tap in the United States that we in Belgium have not yet seen or tasted? Sounds absurd, right? It's a reality that is about to change with the opening of Gentse Stadsbrouwerij, or Ghent City Brewery, next week.

Apparently, you sometimes have the recipe for a beer before you have the place to make it. This was the case for Annick De Splenter, a brewer's daughter who has been searching high and low for the perfect building to finally centralise the production of her Gruut beer assortment.

Until last week, Gruut has been brewed by a nearby supplier for bottling and export to the US. But from 21 March, the Belgian public will also be able to drink Gruut, and from inside its very own brewery.

Fortunately for Ghent locals, De Splenter settled on a historical building with a prime location in the centre of the city, complete with a stunning view of the cathedral tower and a calm nook of the river Leie. The building, once a textile mill, was most recently known as the trendy yet unsuccessful Café Igor. De Splenter has completely gutted the place in order to reflect more of its industrial past. "I'm making a city brewery out of it," she asserts.

What is most unique about De Splenter's con-

cept is that it really puts the brewing process in the spotlight. "Here is one place you'll be able to sit down and have a drink," she says motioning towards a platform suspended above the brewing tanks. Next to this area stands modern brewing equipment in beautiful red copper, and the staff will describe the brewing process to interested customers.

Behind a long counter, they will also be serving up soup with bread and other small snacks. The location also boasts an outdoor terrace, ensuring packed tables at least all summer long.

There are currently three types of Gruut beer – blonde, white and amber – with a brown one expected by the end of this year. All owe their name to gruut, a blend of herbs and spices that has long been used to give certain flavours and aromas to beer, well before the use of hops. Hundreds of years ago, brewers who put a lot of gruut in their beer were generally the most successful, so landlords held a monopoly on this special commodity. Brewers then had to pay a tax according to the amount of gruut added to their beers.

Gruut was also the name of the coin used during the reign of Emperor Charles V (born in Ghent). Hence, the coin on the labels of the brew. There are even mysterious images hid-



Ghent's new (and currently only) brewery, home to Annick De Splenter's (right) Gruut beer

den in each label. A lot of signature marketing behind the beer, in other words, but how does it taste?

Just like me, you'll have to be patient to find out how these new beers stand up to all the excitement surrounding the grand opening. Or, if you truly can't wait, catch the next flight out: destination New York City. ♦

➡ www.gruut.be



Antiques of the future

Craftsmen to the stars strut their stuff at exceptional festival

DENZIL WALTON

Interior architect Yves Michiels is an extremely persuasive man. When he's expounding his vision of craftsmanship, he's passionate: "You can see craftsmanship. You can touch it. It's the result of years and years of experience, passed down through generations. Such craftsmanship should not be lost. It should be cherished."

These ideas are at the heart of The Embassy of Craftsmanship, a four-day exhibition in Westmalle, Antwerp province (yes, where the beer is brewed). Organised by Michiels, he describes it as a platform for Flemish cultural heritage. From 20 to 23 March, some of Flanders' most brilliant craftsmen and women will show off their skills and virtuoso creations.

Among the crowds will be nine Flemish artisans. Jan Poelmans has made furniture for the royal families of Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, as well as for Mick Jagger and Ralph Lauren. Each item of Anja Meeusen's pottery is handmade and is in great demand in top restaurants in Flanders and beyond.

Patrick Bosmans, meanwhile, originally studied to be a saddle-maker before



moving into authentic leather upholstery of furniture and walls. Peter Van Cronenburg runs his own foundry producing hand-made architectural hardware. Patrick Damiaens is the only full-time ornamental wood carver in Flanders and specializes in Liège-style furniture.

Geert Geeraerts is another furniture maker, specialising in custom-made, solid oak items. Bert Declerck's specialty is marquetry, the ancient art of furniture decoration. Kobe De Peuter is a painter and art photographer currently exhibiting in Barcelona, while JP Boucquet creates exquisite chandeliers for mansions, churches and castles.

"All the exhibitors are top-quality professionals," adds Michiels. "It is a golden opportunity not only to see their exceptional work but also to support it."

Michiels himself practices what he preaches. His approach as an interior architect encompasses a deep respect for traditional materials such as wood, leather, bronze and natural stone. Wherever possible, he works side-by-side with traditional artisans, although he admits they are an endangered breed.

"It grieves me when I hear of a stonemason's business closing down or a college stopping a wood-carving course due to

lack of students," he says. "I don't think our government is doing enough to encourage or support traditional artisans. We have to cherish our cultural heritage. Otherwise it will be lost, forever."

Michiels is equally convincing on the ecological arguments of craftsmanship. He points out an oak washstand at the exhibition that incorporates the combined work of four of the craftsmen. It is locally made, with locally sourced materials, so its carbon footprint is minimal. It's made entirely from natural materials, with not even a whiff of a fossil-fuel based plastic. And it is built to last, to be passed down from generation to generation.

In other words, it's definitely an antique of the future.

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Berckhovenstraat 11, Westmalle

20-23 March

➡ www.craftsman.be

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The Broken Circle Breakdown

LISA BRADSHAW

One does not often associate Flanders with cowboys, but a show that premiered to hoots and hollers in Ghent last summer is riding out across the land, bringing a bit of twang, tears and Stetsons to a theatre near you.

Ghent's Compagnie Cecilia, led by long-time theatre maker Arne Sierens, presents quirky, often darkly comic original work, with a pool of young actors taking chances with experimental concepts. Music can figure heavily on a Compagnie stage, and this time it's pure country & western, performed live.

The Broken Circle Breakdown Featuring the Cover Ups of Alabama is part concert, part tale of sorrow and broken dreams. The lives of the two leads, Monroe and Alabama, are recounted between musical numbers, but close your eyes, and it's hard to tell which is which. Alabama in particular has lived a hard life full of trailer-trash men and an ever-pregnant mother, which actress and singer Mieke Dobbels delivers to the audience in her best Flemish drawl.

Monroe, meanwhile, used to be a happy-go-lucky sort, and when he and Alabama fell in love and got pregnant themselves, the pair excitedly sped off to Las Vegas to get hitched. But then something

terrible happened. And Monroe cannot deal with his grief.

Alabama leaves him to wallow in his anger. She has had enough crosses to bear. Previously tattooed with the name of every man she's ever been with, she covers them up, save the one next to her heart.

Johan Heldenbergh (one of the stars of the film *Aanrijding in Moscou*) sports a handlebar moustache and a fiery temper as his Monroe focuses his rage against the more conservative aspects of America, injecting a political element that may not be quite as spot-on as it was during the Bush administration but still touches on long-time American social contradictions.

The couple play their own guitar, and their Cover Ups band, meanwhile, delivers a melting pot of Deep South country and roots influences: pedal steel guitar, banjo, washboard, fiddle and mandolin.

The Broken Circle Breakdown is on tour until 6 June across Flanders. Visit website for dates and places

→ www.compagnie-cecilia.be



Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
MAR 15 15.00 Xacona baroque ensemble: Bach, Handel, Telemann

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 13 WDR Rundfunkorchester Köln conducted by Niklas Willén, with Gunilla Süssmann, piano: Nielsen, Stravinsky, Bernstein, Gershwin
MAR 14 St Lawrence String Quartet and John Adams' new string quartet: Haydn, Beethoven MAR 14-15 10.00-18.00 International workshops for young composers with the Prometheus Ensemble conducted by Etienne Siebens MAR 19 Arditti Quartet & Alban Berg Quartet: Brahms, Schoenberg, Rihm

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be
MAR 14 20.00 Handel in Rome: London Baroque ensemble with Emma Kirkby, soprano: Kerll, Handel, Corelli
MAR 18 20.00 LOD in Judaspassie, world première written by Pieter De Buysser, staged by Inne Goris, with music by Dominique Pauwels performed by B'Rock conducted by Frank Agsteribbe

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
MAR 15 11.00 Jonas Cambien, piano: Schumann, Scelsi, Defoort
MAR 16 20.00 annual concert for The Belgian League of Multiple Sclerosis: Orchestre Symphonique d'Aix-la-Chapelle conducted by Marcus Bosch: Chopin MAR 18 20.00 Le Concert des Nations conducted by Jordi Savall: Bach's Brandenburg concertos, Purcell's suites MAR 19 12.30 Belgian National Orchestra soloists: Beethoven, Mozart. 20.00 Rotterdams Philharmonisch Orkest conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin: Verbey, Brahms, Bartók

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
MAR 13 12.30 La Monnaie brass quintet
MAR 20 12.30 Z Kowalski and Femke Sonnen, violin; Yves Cortvint and Tony Nys, viola; C Lardin and K Lievens, cello: Korngold, Zemlinsky

Espace Senghor

Waverssesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be
MAR 14 20.30 Film concert: documentary and short films by Chris Marker and Pierre Bonneau and Jacques Willemont, among others, accompanied by piano music by Cardew, Rzewski, Weill, Wolff and Wolpe
MAR 15 11.30 Focus on the composer Hao-Fu Zhang with music performed by Nahandove Ensemble and commentary by the composer

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
MAR 11 20.15 Jan Michiels, piano: Dufourt, Schubert, Liszt, Schoenberg
MAR 12 20.15 Arditti Quartet: Boesmans, Parra, Djordjevic, Dufourt

Gasthuis van de Stad

02.511.34.20, info@arthis.org
MAR 16 20.00 Alexandru Tomescu, violin; Horia Mihail, piano: Mozart, Brahms, Enescu, Wieniawski, Saint-Saens

Miniemenkerk

Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84, www.minimes.net
MAR 11 20.00 Concerto Italiano conducted by Rinaldo Alessandrini: Monteverdi

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 0475.76.23.32
MAR 15 11.00 Ysaÿe Piano Trio: Kissin, Brahms

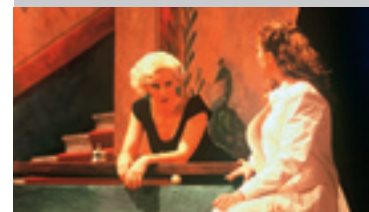
DON'T MISS

Così fan tutte

15 March to 9 April - Antwerp & Ghent

The Flanders Opera returns its youthfully energetic *Così fan tutte* to Flanders after making it a smash hit across Europe. Directed by Guy Joosten, the tale of two men who set out to test their fiancées' faithfulness is performed by a new generation of Mozart singers, conducted by Baroque and classical expert Attilio Cremonesi. A highlight of this opera season.

→ www.vlaamseopera.be



Royal Conservatory of Brussels

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
MAR 12 20.00 Sophie Karthäuser, soprano; Jean-Luc Votano, clarinet; David Lively, piano: Schumann, Schubert, Kalliwoda
MAR 17 20.00 Pavel Haas Quartet: Prokofiev, Haas, Dvorak
MAR 19 20.00 Historical Instrument Orchestra conducted by Philippe Pierlot, with Brussels Chamber Choir: Bach, Charpentier

Saint Michael and St Gudula

Cathedral
Sinter-Goedeleplein; 070.22.21.07, www.ticketnet.be
MAR 13 20.00 Les Choristes - Petits Chanteurs de St-Marc with Les Pastoureux children's choir, Waterloo: classical, French chanson

Théâtre Marni

Vergniestraat 25; 02.639.09.80
MAR 11 22.30 Eric Sleichim/Dj Matthew Wright
MAR 12 22.30 Quintet MQK perform music by Peter Vermeersch

Leuven

Concertzaal Lemmensinstituut
Herestraat 53; 016.233.967, www.lemmens.be
MAR 12 20.00 Chamber choir and Atelier Oude Muziek Lemmensinstituut conducted by Erik Van Nevel



Antwerp

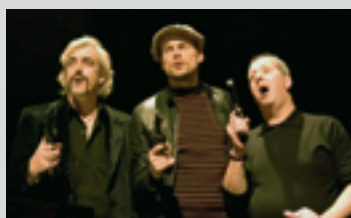
Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
MAR 15-26 15.00/19.30 Così fan tutte by Mozart with the Flemish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Attilio Cremonesi, directed by Guy Joosten

MORE THEATRE THIS WEEK

The Game is Up! festival → Vooruit, Gent →

Abattoir Fermé → Monty, Antwerp

Theaternalpertuis → Cultuurcentrum, Hasselt



**Antwerp****deSingel**

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
MAR 18 20.00 Mahanthappa-Dresser-
Hemingway

Stadsschouwburg

Vlamingstraat 29; 050.44.30.60,
www.cultuurcentrumbrugge.be
MAR 11 20.00 Massot/Horbaczewski/
Florizoone

Borgerhout**Rataplan**

Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
MAR 13 20.30 Hamster Axis of the
one-click Panther

Bruges**De Werf**

Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
MAR 16 20.30 The Cookers
MAR 19 20.30 Hamster Axis of the
one-click Panther

Brussels**Art Base**

Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20,
www.art-base.be
MAR 13 21.00 Luis Reis, blues and
ballads

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195;
02.733.13.78
Concerts at 20.30:
MAR 11 Sunship MAR 14 18.00
Crystal Feel MAR 18 Steven Delannoye
Trio MAR 19 Jazz Now: MDM Band

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15,
www.cirque-royal.org
MAR 18 20.30 Ruben Intégral with
Richard Ruben and the Ivan Paduart
Band, comedy/jazz

Le Bar du Matin

Alsebergsesteenweg 172;
02.537.71.59
MAR 12 21.00 Bronco Project, jazz/
funk fusion

Sass'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; www.sazzn jazz.be
Concerts at 20.30:
MAR 11 Thomas Champagne MAR
12 Jam Session MAR 13 Sazz Ground:
Cumali Bulduk MAR 14 Moyera
Tchaven

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be
MAR 11 22.00 Pascal Schumacher-
Nicolas Kummert 30th Birthday Party
MAR 12 21.00 The Singers Night MAR
13 22.00 Giacomo Lariccia Spellbound
MAR 14 22.00 Brussels Rhythm &
Blues Club: The Witness MAR 16 22.00
Master Session MAR 17 22.00 Laurent
Doumont Soul Band MAR 18 22.00
Chamaquiando, salsa MAR 19 22.00
Ruoco-Sintaine-Rassinfosse Trio

The Cotton Club - Grand Casino

Duquesnoystraat 14; 02.289.68.66
MAR 14 22.00 Milk

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
MAR 12 Tomas Sotolongo & Para K
Sepas MAR 13 Peter Nathanson MAR
14 Gilda Solve & the New Look Trio
MAR 17 Cannonbal Adderley Project
MAR 18 Lieven Laureys Quartet

**Antwerp****Sportpaleis**

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
MAR 14-28 20.30 Marco Borsato

Ardooie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82,
www.deschaduw.net
MAR 13 20.30 T.p.o.d.
MAR 20 20.30 De Wilfrieds

Borgerhout**De Roma**

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40,
www.deroma.be
MAR 15 20.30 Eliza Carthy
MAR 19 20.30 Marijke Boon

Brussels**Ancienne Belgique**

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24,
www.abconcerts.be
MAR 18 20.00 Pantha du Prince +
Animal Collective
MAR 19 20.00 Yevgueni. HT Roberts.
Yoko Sound + the DIPLOMAT +
Pornorama

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.vkconcerts.be
MAR 14 20.45 Les Heritiers + 1982

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
MAR 13 23.00 Drumderground
& VW Spring Sessions presents:
Dumderground 8. Sigma. Culture
Shock. Master X
MAR 14 23.00 Fuse & Flesh presents:
Anja Schneider, Pan-Pot, Spirit
Catcher, Kolombo, Geoffroy, Mitch

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15
MAR 13 20.00 The Do
MAR 16 20.00 Antonis Remos

Le Bar du Matin

Alsebergsesteenweg 172;
02.537.71.59
MAR 19 21.00 Dan Miller

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.226.12.57
MAR 11 20.00 Friendly Fires
MAR 15 20.00 Oi Va Voi
MAR 18 20.00 Pascale Picard

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34,
www.recyclart.be
MAR 14 22.00 Newworldaquarium +
Tin Man Live + Roger 23 + Joost De
Lijser

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07,
www.vkconcerts.be
MAR 15 21.30 Medeia + Bison BC +
Burst + The Ocean
MAR 18 20.30 Romano Nervoso +
Electric Six

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
MAR 14 20.00 Pain & Indica +
Nightwish

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TICKETS NOW!**Clouseau****From 1 May -
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annual December concerts
of Flanders' beloved Clou-
seau; this year they're making
more than 20 stops across
the region, starting on 1
May at Antwerp's Sportpa-
leis. Finally, there should be
plenty of tickets without all
that scrambling for those
who strive to see the pop duo
two or three times a year.

www.clouseau.be

**Ghent****Handelsbeurs**

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01,
www.handelsbeurs.be
MAR 14 20.00 Kraakpand #3.2
MAR 19 20.00 The Presidents of the
United States of America

Hasselt**Muziekodroom**

Bootstraat 9; www.muziekodroom.be
MAR 12 20.30 Bryan Lee & The Blues
Power Band

Leuven**Het Depot**

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
MAR 12 20.00 Mish Mash
Soundsystem + Dropping Dishes +
Dada life
MAR 18 20.00 The Heptones

**Antwerp****Zuiderpershuis**

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00,
www.zuiderpershuis.be
MAR 12 20.30 Yamandu Costa (Brazil)
MAR 15 20.30 Korean Creative Music
Ensemble: Tea Music
MAR 19 20.30 Toumast, Touareg rock
music

Ardooie**Cultuurkapel De Schaduw**

Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82,
www.deschaduw.net
MAR 15 20.00 Yevgueni

Brussels**Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)**

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
MAR 17 20.00 Buenos Aires tango:
Orquesta El Arranque, Duo Montes
y Arias, Gloria & Eduardo and Ballet
Tangovia Buenos Aires, music and
dance

Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40,
www.senghor.be
MAR 12 23.00 Nawal (Comores)
MAR 19 23.00 Yamandu Costa, guitar
(Brazil)

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
MAR 19 20.15 Kamilya Jubran (Middle
Eastern)

Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,
www.stekerlapatte.be
MAR 14 21.30 Zanga
MAR 19 21.30 Film concert: Modern
Times by Charlie Chaplin (1936) with
music performed by Quentin Manfroy
and Eric Bribosia

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00,
www.muziekpubliek.be
MAR 15 20.00 Riccardo Tesi &
Banditaliana (Italy)

Zaal de Maalbeek

Hoornstraat 97; 02.734.84.43,
www.muziekpubliek.be
MAR 13 20.00 World music ball:
N'Java (Madagascar), Odemba OK Jazz
All Stars (DRC)

Leuven**Institute for Ireland in Europe**

Janseniusstraat 1,
reception@leuveninstitute.eu
MAR 18 20.00 Liam Ó Maonlaí (free
concert, reservation required)

Universiteitshal

Naamsestraat 22; 016.324.015,
www.boombal.be
MAR 12 20.00 Boombal, dance party
with live folk music

**Antwerp****deSingel**

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
Until MAR 13 20.00 Compagnie DCA
in Coeurs croisés, cabaret/striptease
choreographed by Philippe Decouflé

Brussels**Kaaitheater**

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59,

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www.kaaitheater.be
MAR 12-14 20.30 Extraction,
choreographed by Marc Vanrunxt
with Eva Kamala Rodenburg

Théâtre les Tanneurs
Huidevettersstraat 75; 02.512.17.84
MAR 12-21 20.30 Cie La Dame de
Pic and Karine Ponties in Humus
vertebra, choreographed by Karine
Ponties

Ghent

Capitole
Graaf van Vlaanderenplein 5;
070.25.20.20, www.lordofthedance.be
Until MAR 14 15.00/20.00 Lord of
the Dance, Irish dance show



Antwerp

Belfry Little Theatre
Paardenmarkt 111; 0495.31.76.87,
bats_tickets@yahoo.com
Until MAR 16 20.15 Oscar and
the Pink Lady by Eric-Emmanuel
Schmitt, adapted and staged by
Malinda Coleman (in English)

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
Until MAR 13 20.00 Toneelgroep
Amsterdam in Kreten & Gefluister,
adapted from Ingmar Bergman's Cries
and Whispers, staged by Ivo van
Hove (in Dutch)

Brussels

KVS Bol
Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00,
www.kvs.be
Until MAR 14 20.00 KVS & Ro
Theater in Het Laatste vuur (The Last
Fire) by Dea Loher, staged by Alize
Zandwijk (in Dutch with French and
English surtitles)

Kaaitheater
Sainctelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59,
www.kaaitheater.be
MAR 13-14 20.30 Forced
Entertainment in Spectacular, staged
by Tim Etchells (in English)
MAR 19-21 20.30 tg Stan in Stukken
(in Dutch)

The Warehouse Studio
Waelhemstraat 69a;
www.ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Until MAR 14 20.00 English Comedy
Club in Absurd Person Singular by
Alan Ayckbourn, (in English)



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 Agirregoikoa
Until MAR 29 Insert the Passing of a
Perfect Day (Revisited), installations
by Katleen Vermeir

Fotomuseum
Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00
Until MAR 15 Vincen Beeckman:
Made in Strombeek, retrospective
Until JUNE 7 Erwin Olaf: EyeCandy
1984-2009, retrospective
Until JUNE 7 Yang Fudong: East of
Que Village, video installation
Until SEP 13 Photography in Belgium

during the Interbellum

**Koninklijk Museum voor Schone
Kunsten/Royal Museum of Fine Arts**
Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
MAR 14-JUNE 14 Goya, Redon,
Ensor: Grotesque paintings and
drawings
Until MAY 10 Camiel Van Breedam:
Collages 2002-2008, recent works on
paper by the contemporary Belgian
artist

Bruges

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

Brussels

Argos Centre for Art and Media
Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03,
www.argosarts.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

Atomium
Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72,
www.atomium.be
Until MAY 24 Bi-Polar. From South
to North, scientific exhibition on
current research and expeditions in
the Arctic and Antarctic

Belgian Comic Strip Centre
Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80,
www.stripmuseum.be
Until MAY 17 Czechicrulum Vitae,
Czech history and legends in comic
strips by contemporary Czech artists
Until JUNE 7 20 years of Manga in
Europe, Japanese comic strips

Belvue Museum
Paleizenplein 7; 02.511.44.25,
www.belvue.be
Until MAY 31 Boy or Girl...Destiny
for a Lifetime? Belgium 1830-
2000, the evolution of perceptions
of masculinity and femininity in
Belgium over the past two centuries

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
Until MAR 15 Image/Construction
3 Cities, Brussels, Bruges and Liège
seen in monumental photographic
montages
Until APR 19 Robbrecht & Daem:
Pacing through Architecture, works by
the Ghent-based architects
Until MAY 17 Monumental-size
installation by contemporary Italian
artist Maurizio Cattelan (part of
Turin festival)
Until MAY 24 From Van Dyck to
Bellotto: Splendor at the Court of
Savoy, paintings from Turin's Galleria
Sabauda, with works by Flemish
masters, including Brueghel, Rubens
and Van Dyck (part of Turin festival)
Until JUNE 30 N.i.c.h.e. 360
architekten, scale models by Jan
Mannaers and Stephane Beel

**De Elektriciteitscentrale European
Centre for Contemporary Art**
Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.35
Until MAR 29 Moet elke wreedheid
wel gezegd? (Should Every Cruelty
be Said?), work by 102 artists on the
theme of Belgium today

Fondation pour l'Architecture
Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80,
www.fondationpouirlarchitecture.be
Until OCT 18 De tijd van de boetiek
(The Time of the Boutique), window
shopping from 1800 to today

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimenstraat 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

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

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

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,
representations of madness in films,
plays, paintings and contemporary art

Kunsthall 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

Witte Zaal
Posteernestraat 64; 09.267.96.77,
www.francekunststart.be
Until APR 4 Juliaan Lampens:
architectural projects pictured by Jan
Kempenaers
Until APR 4 Pieter Vanden Broecke:
graphic works

Leuven

Tweebonnen library
Rijschoolstraat 4; 016.22.65.22
Until APR 19 Ceci n'est pas la BD
flamande (This is Not the Flemish
Comic Strip), installation by 20
contemporary Flemish comic
illustrators and writers

Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum)
Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75,
www.speelgoedmuseum.be
Until MAR 31 Gils, Belgische saga
van de elektrische trein (Belgian Saga
of the Electric Train)
Until SEP 30 Cowboys and Indians

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11,
www.africamuseum.be
Until AUG 31 Omo: People &
Design, Hans Silvester's photographs
of southwestern Ethiopia's nomadic
tribes and objects from the museum's
collection

Waregem

Be Part
Westerlaan 17; 056.62.94.10
Until MAR 29 Steve Schepens:
Horror 30, installations and videos



Antwerp

Afrika! Afrika!: African circus
performance in the style of Cirque
du Soleil
Until MAR 15 at Gedempte
Zuiderdokken, Waalse Kaai
0900.69.001, www.afrika-afrika.com

SID-In Antwerpen: Study and
information days for prospective
higher education students
MAR 12-14 at Antwerp Expo, Jan
Van Rijswijcklaan 191

www.ond.vlaanderen.be

Borgerhout

Circo Roma: Modern-day circus
week
Until MAR 14 at De Roma,
Turnhoutsebaan 286
03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be

Brussels

Ars Musica 2009: Beyond: 20th
edition of the contemporary classical
music festival including emerging
musicians and composers, plus
tributes to established modernists
Ligeti, Dufourt, Pousseur
Until APR 10 at Flagey, Heilig
Kruisplein, and venues across the
country
02.641.10.20, www.arsmusica.be.

Citizen Jobs: Fair for jobseekers and
students
MAR 13 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan
86C
www.citizenjobs.be

Irish Night: food, drink, theatre and
folklore
MAR 13 20.30 at GC Op-Weule, Sint-
Lambertusstraat 91
02.775.92.00,
www.gemeenschapscentra.be

Offscreen 2009: Second edition
of this international film festival
featuring works by independent
filmmakers, cult classics,
documentaries and offbeat genres
Until MAR 22 at Bozar, Cinematek
and Cinema Nova
www.offscreen.be

St Patrick's Day Parade: Parade
to mark Ireland's national holiday,
followed by a sports day and family
activities
MAR 15 11.00 in Cinquantenaire
Park
www.brussels-st-patricks-day-parade.
be

Take the Stage: Meet Your School!:
Information day for prospective
theatre students
MAR 15 11.00-19.30 at La
Bellone, Vlaanderenstraat 66 and
Kaaitheaterstudio's, Onze-Lieve-
Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81
02.201.59.59, www.vti.be/take
thestage

Understanding Belgium Today:
Lecture series in English starting
with an introduction to Fundamental
Institutions of Belgium by Johanne
Poirier
MAR 17 17.00-19.00 at VUB,
Franklin Rooseveltlaan 50
02.650.45.80, http://formcont.ulb.
sc.be

Ghent

Sfeer: Interior decoration, garden and
swimming pool fair
MAR 14-22 at Flanders Expo,
Maaltekouter 1
www.sfeer.be

Ghent

The Game is Up! 09: Annual festival
in which multidisciplinary artists
and experts respond to the challenge
of "how to save the world in 10
days" with music and performance
projects on global warming, the
financial crisis, famine, drought and
overpopulation
Until MAR 14 at Vooruit, Sint-
Pietersnieuwstraat 23
www.vooruit.be

Kortrijk

On Stage With....: Series featuring
music producers, DJ, writers and
others with a relationship to music.
This week: young Flemish author and
songwriter Saskia De Coster
MAR 12 20.00 at De Kreun, Jan
Persijnstraat 6
056.37.06.44, www.dekreun.be

DUSK 'TIL DAWN

SAFFINA RANA

Anima closing Flagey, Brussels



Every film festival closing party at
Flagey attracts a crowd that is intent
on having a good time. The end of
Brussels animation film fest, Anima
2009, on 28 February was no excep-
tion.

The fun started around midnight
when Belgian film school winners at
the awards ceremony and the audi-
ence at the final screening started
trickling down from the festival bar,
enticed by the waft of '80s soul funk
and fresh pancakes being made stra-
tegetically at the bottom of the stairs.

Doc CLD (*photo*), a resident DJ at
Crema e Gusto nights in Brussels and
a regular at Vooruit in Ghent, had
even the most resolute of wallflow-
ers shuffling. He mouthed words to
the crowd-pleasers he was spinning
between breaks in conversations and
bites of rolled-up pancake. Arms
went up in the air as Sister Sledge's
"Lost in Music" slid into a remix of
Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the
Wall", which cascaded into Soulwax's
"NY excuse".

A large screen boosted the ambiance
with brightly coloured animation
clips, but watching the crowd was
far more fun. Many had turned into
Naruto, when paper masks of the
Japanese animé hero were thrown
into the throng.

By 2.00, rows of coats and jump-
ers hung discarded over the sides
of the banisters as their owners got
down to some retro moves on the
foyer carpet. I'm left wondering if
the baggy-jeaned breakdancer that
was circled by the crowd had really
anticipated what sort of rug burns he
was in for.

*Be in town on 27/6 for the next
walk-in film festival party at Flagey,
closing out the Brussels Film festival*

On deck

I'm quite keen on the large, ware-
house style parties like I Heart
Techno that periodically crop up
around Belgium. This year I'm going
to try out Sensation, a huge, glitzy,
tech-house all-nighter at the Ethias
Arena in Hasselt on 14 March. DJs
hitting the decks during the eight-
hour spectacle of acrobats, light-
shows and fireworks include Armin
Van Buuren, Eric Prydz and Dr
Lektroluv. From what I've heard,
performers abseil from the roof,
flames shoot from the stage and
carnival floats part the crowds. Can't
wait.

➔ www.sensation.com.



Next week

Antwerp redefines its waterfront by staging concerts, food festivals and art events

FLANDERS TODAY
MARCH 11, 2009

FACE OF FLANDERS

ALAN HOPE



Balthasar Boma

In the past couple of weeks, a bombshell has been dropped on Flemish television – something that's been talked about for nearly two decades, but which nobody ever seriously believed would come to pass: Balthasar Boma has got himself a girlfriend.

Boma is the flamboyant owner of Boma Meat Industry but is better known as the chairman of football club FC De Kampioenen, which sits centre stage in the sitcom of the same name on VRT's channel één. Played by former teen idol Marijn Devalck, Boma is self-important, overdressed (he favours suits in primary colours and thick neck-chains) and the least successful womaniser since Mozart's Don Giovanni, who boasted 1,865 conquests, but whom we never actually see getting off with anyone.

To an outsider, it has to be said, the sitcom looks old-fashioned and studio-bound, the characters cut-outs, the jokes creaky. It feels like the Flemish equivalent of an ensemble show like *Hi De Hi!* or *You Rang, M'Lord*, ghostly British sitcoms (which Flemish TV incidentally loves to repeat).

FC De Kampioenen is now in its 19th season, and the latest storyline went like this: Boma is beginning to feel the limits of the borders of Flanders. He decides to emigrate to Canada to raise reindeer. This is disastrous news for the club, which need his sponsorship, so they hatch a plan to keep him home by giving him what he wants the most: a girlfriend.

Enter Goedele Decocq, a 45-year-old anthropologist (played by Machteld Timmermans). The sparks begin to fly. The whole of

Flanders is on tenterhooks.

The series' producer, Rik Stallaerts, is currently on location shooting for Season 20, which suggests that the plot to retain Boma will be successful. But the real question is, why, after 20 years, is this largely silly TV show so successful?

"It's not only successful when it goes out, it's unbelievably popular when it's repeated," Stallaerts says. "There are now about 250 episodes, and during the summer months it's repeated four or five times a week." The original broadcasts regularly achieve viewing figures of up to 1.4 million, which is huge for Flemish TV.

"The reason people love it is that it's so recognisably Flemish," Stallaerts explains. "It reflects a typical part of Flemish culture – sitting and having a nice drink together after the football match."

In fact, though the setting is a local football club, there's precious little football played;

Boma is self-important, overdressed and the least successful womaniser since Mozart's Don Giovanni

the characters are mainly at home or, more often, in the club's café, run by the fiery Pascale, who used to have a thing with Boma, and for whom he still carries a torch.

Pascale is one of several of what Stallaerts describes as "strong female characters". Not to be confused with feminists – the women are castrating harridans, with men who are infantile, ineffectual buffoons. Balthasar Boma is unmarried, rich and employs two of the women – one as his secretary and the other, Carmen, as his unlikely cleaning lady. He's apparently the boss, but they walk all over him, as indeed does everyone else.

"There was once a version made in Portugal, with local comic actors, and the format was almost identical," says Stallaerts. The Flemish *FC*, meanwhile, is very big in the Netherlands. Over the years there's been talk of VRT producing a Dutch version, but that's unlikely to materialise. "There wouldn't really be enough in it for us," explains Stallaerts. "A Dutch version would end up being watched here, and that would affect ratings of our *FC*."

In any case, the Dutch receive VRT on their cable, so they can watch the original. "They also enjoy it because it's typically Flemish for them," says Stallaerts. When the producers do laugh-track recordings (an episode is shown to a live audience so they can record the laughter) Netherlands come in force. "We get people from as far away as Groningen," says Stallaerts.

Dorian Van Der Brempt, director of the Flemish-Dutch culture organisation deBuren, described the series as "a fictional self-portrait of Flanders. The real-

life version of *De Kampioenen* can be found in the inimitable *Man Bijt Hond*. For 20 years *De Kampioenen* has been playing in one situation with almost identical characters. That gives you an idea how timeless, and perhaps even universal, the programme actually is."

The 20th season begins airing in September, but, in the meantime, shooting begins in May for the first *Kampioenen* movie, which will involve all the main characters, but about the plot of which Stallaerts remains stonily silent. ♦

→ www.een.be/fcdekampioenen

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



fout →

"You've done it again!" I hear from the next room. What now? I think. "No one would ever say *een ruime assortiment*, not even the most ill-educated Dutch speaker." That's me put in my place. I am now busy trying to figure out why my wife is talking about a large assortment.

Then I see the copy of *Flanders Today* lying on the kitchen table. Oops, not another howler. I immediately go into defensive blame mode: It's that new layout, I say, or probably their compositor (when was the last time you heard that word?); no, they have different software.

She then fires off a broadside: "go and check on your computer." There is no escape, and as I am confronted with my basic grammar error, she sinks me with an old-fashioned look.

So folks, *mea culpa*. For the irregular reader of this column, let me fill you in. A couple of weeks ago I discussed the word *ruimte* – space. I included some examples of the adjective *ruim*, which means, among other things, roomy. At this point my grammar deserted me. What I forgot, not for the first time but just for a minute, was that an adjective between the indefinite article and a gender neutral noun such as *huis* – house has no ending: so *een mooi huis* – a nice house (not *een mooig huis*).

Conversely, with male/female nouns, the ending –e is added: so a nice table is *een mooie tafel*. In my recent column, I gave three expressions with *ruim*, and as luck would have it, all with neutral nouns; and yes, I wrote *ruime*. Let me give them again but this time minus the offending suffix: *een ruim uitzicht hebben* – to have a broad view; *een ruim huis* – a roomy house; *een ruim assortiment* – a large assortment.

Have I learned anything from this? Well, double check to avoid double Dutch. Also, it shows how language errors are differently regarded. I must confess that as an English speaker the plethora of endings in other languages is more a curiosity than an essential: after all, English ditched most of its endings long before the invention of printing.

For you the reader, especially the learner of Dutch, who may have been led astray, and the teachers who use these articles in their classes, I hope this act of contrition will suffice. Though I hear a suggestion of sackcloth and ashes from the next room.

For me, writing this column today is having a cleansing effect: *ik ben in de fout gedaan* – I made a mistake. I feel I now have een schone lei – a clean slate and can begin the search for next week's word.

The last word →→→

Hard justice

"Of course I'm disappointed. It's unacceptable. I haven't even buried my boyfriend yet."

Iris Pieters, after the man who killed her boyfriend while drunk-driving was released from custody after four days

Too young to die

"At the end of March I go under the scanner. That's when I'll get the good or bad news. It has to be good. I'm 36. You don't die at 36."

Vlaams Belang politician Marie-Rose Morel on her fight against cervical cancer

Desperately seeking (1)

"E. Stas. 41 years, in prison, seeks woman for friendship and relationship. Likes heavy metal, tattoo. Contact Hasselt prison."

Convicted murderer Erwin Stas advertises for love in a contact magazine

Desperately seeking (2)

"There are still a lot of taboos about losing your job, but I wanted to show I'm not ashamed."

Unemployed Ghent man Fred De Clercq, 39, who created a website to advertise himself online
<http://tinyurl.com/fred-zkt-werk>