

Shipping forecast.....7

Jan de Nul Group hit the headlines recently when crew members were taken hostage off the Somali coast. We find out about the company's big construction projects in the Gulf region



"A bit more edgy"8

The new director of the Flanders Opera has already shaken things up with his programming of the production *Samson and Delilah*. Now he's launching a new festival that mixes opera and contemporary musicals



Walking with dinosaurs..... 10

They're 10 metres tall, 1.6 tons and can eat you alive. Whether you write it off as showbiz flash or marvel at the technology, they're no denying that the dinosaurs in this show are incredibly realistic



At your fingertips

Everything you want to know about Flanders
– and a few things you might wish you didn't
– at the click of a mouse

ALAN HOPE

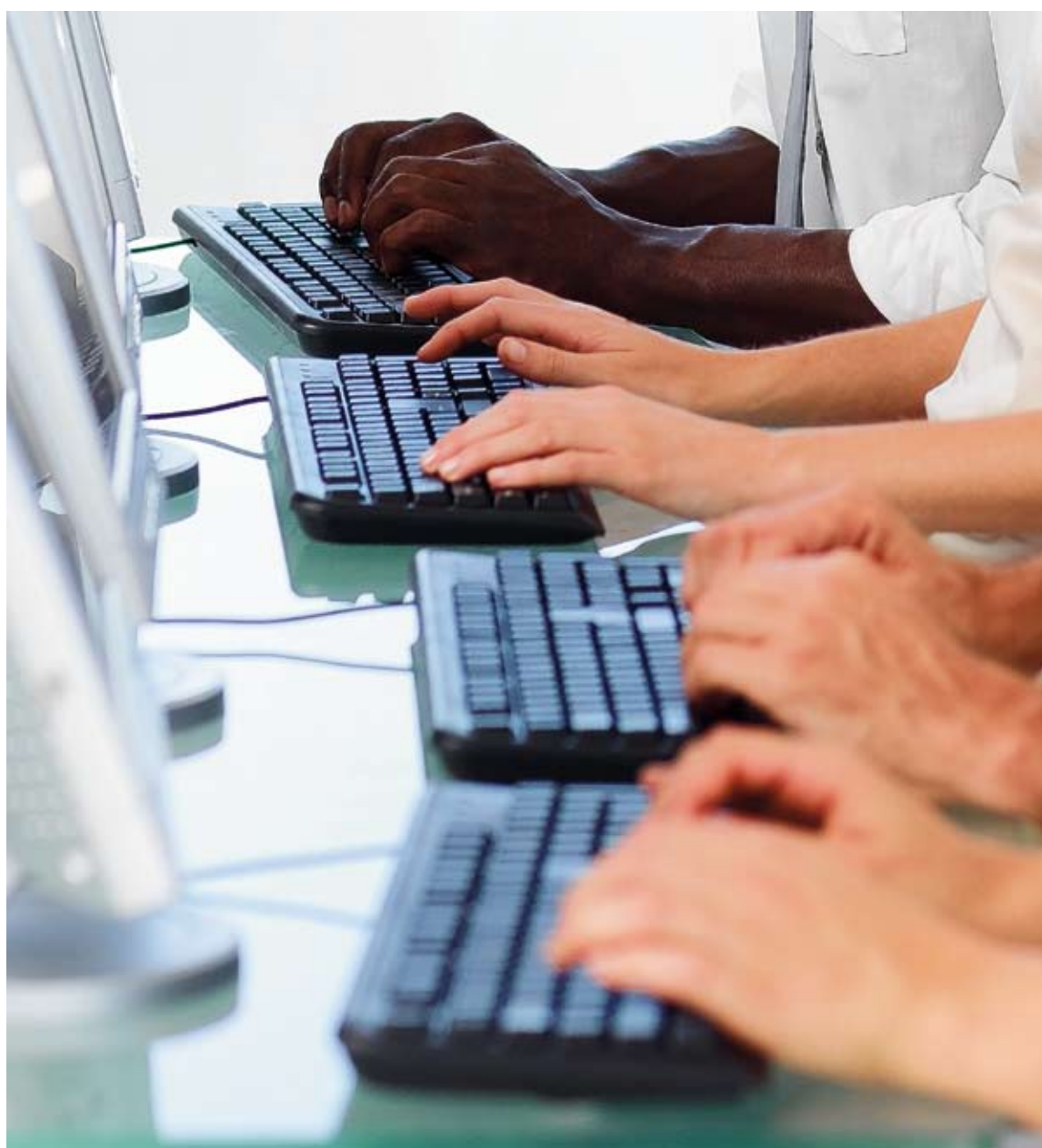
The hot topic of this election season, in the Flemish papers at least, is not the economy or the idea of Guantanamo Bay prisoners coming to Sint-Gillis. It's the story of how a middle-aged woman, who happens to be the sister of the finance minister and the public prosecutor of Liège, expressed her political views on her Facebook page. As it happens, she supports the party of her brother, which nobody was allowed to know until now (and which no-one surely could have guessed).

That's how deeply the world of the internet has become ingrained in our consciousness. The virtual aspect of the story – should she have published to the world? – is the entire story.

New media, if we can still call them that, are everywhere this election season. Not just the likes of Joke Van de Putte, who, as a 27-year-old Groen! candidate, might be expected to have a blog, a Facebook page and access to Twitter, but also, for instance, Ivo Belet, a 50-year-old CD&V candidate for the European Parliament, who, besides the ubiquitous Facebook also has his own cool-looking website (www.ivobelet.be).

Currently Twittering on Skynet are such trend-setters as Jean-Luc Dehaene, Guy Verhofstadt and Wilfried Martens, which is a little like finding out that Gordon Brown has a tongue-piercing.

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© Sean Pior/Shutterstock

Blankenberge "stalker" goes to prison

A Blankenberge man who sent 132 emails to the city council over a period of more than four years has been sentenced to one year in prison and fined €1,100 by a court in Bruges. The judge ruled that the correspondence was tantamount to stalking. He also made a new law by ruling that a body such as the council – a legal person – could be considered equivalent to a natural person, and thus be eligible to be stalked.

Henri Vandebosch's campaign began when the pétanque club

of which he is a member was forced to leave its home in the town's Leopoldpark. The council at first said it was a matter for the concessionary of the park and refused to intervene. In the meantime, a new pétanque club was set up in the park.

"Since then Vandebosch has kept on pestering us with emails," complained mayor Ludo Monset. "Just about every day there came mails about how unjust the situation was and how the city authorities was a corrupt gang. A citizen has the right to air his grievances,

but his emails soon went beyond all decency."

According to the prosecution, he also began sending the mails, which by now contained the most outlandish personal accusations against members of staff, to the press and to government ministers.

Vandebosch denies being a stalker, and claims he never did anything wrong. "I send people mail; I don't even call them up. Anyone who doesn't want to read my mail can leave it unread," he said. ♦

Record €66 million fine for Proximus

Parent company Belgacom faces new investigation

ALAN HOPE

Telecoms giant Belgacom last week suffered its second major blow in a week, with the announcement that the Competition council is to carry out an "informal" investigation of a demand sent by the company to its suppliers calling for price cuts of at least 20%.

Earlier in the week, daughter company Proximus, the mobile phone operator, had received the biggest fine ever handed out in a competition case. The company will appeal the €66.3 million fine, given by the council as a result of abuse of a dominant market position.

The fine relates to the period 2004-2005, when Proximus was dominant on the market of mobile telephony for business clients. The complaint was initially brought by BASE, which claimed it could not gain market share no matter how low its prices. Proximus would always match a price cut by BASE with one of its own, the complaint said.

The council, on investigation, found that Proximus, which is a subsidiary of Belgacom controls the physical telephone network in Belgium, was charging less

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News in brief

Antwerp has been named as the European Youth Capital for 2011, following on from Rotterdam this year and Turin in 2010. Nearly 30% of the Antwerp population is under 25, with that proportion rising by the year. “Young people have to be given the chance to show what they can achieve,” said council youth policy adviser Jeff Van Poppel. Antwerp has led the way in youth participation, he said, seeking young people's advice in town planning, for instance, as well as the establishment of the first youth press agency Stamp Media.

→ www.stampmedia.be

A proposal to establish a weekly “Veggie-day” in Leuven was defeated in a meeting of the city council last week. The proposal, from Groen!, follows the lead of Ghent, which last month brought in Veggie-day on Thursdays, to encourage people to explore the vegetarian option. Ghent also pledged to serve only vegetarian meals on that day in the city's schools, which was not even part of the Leuven proposal. The council there only has two city schools to run. In addition, councilors were lobbied by angry farmers who opposed the plan and handed out leaflets featuring tasty meat recipes. “It used to be it was our mothers, now it seems it's the politicians who tell us what we can and can't eat,” said a farmers' representative.

Flemish astronaut Frank De Winne took off on schedule last week from the European Space Agency's space-port in Kazakhstan for a six-month stay in space. De Winne will help to man the International Space Station, before taking over command in October, the first European ever to do so. The launch took place in the presence of Prince Filip as well as Buzz Aldrin, the second man to set foot on the moon. “Everything's going fine, everything's perfect,” De Winne called out to the crowds on the way to the launch pad.

Life is getting cheaper, according to the consumer price index published last week, which showed negative growth in May for the first time in 50 years. In comparison with the month of April, natural gas was down by 5.4%, electricity down 2.3% and fresh vegetables down by a massive 12%. Gas and electricity prices have been falling for four months now, but May was the first time the basket of goods and services used to calculate the index was down as a whole – minus 0.37%. Not since 1960



branquinho © Belga

Top Antwerp designer closes down label

Antwerp-based designer Veronique Branquinho is to close down her label James after 10 years. The designer blamed falling orders, as well as a number of customers who defaulted on payment.

Branquinho, who despite her name was born in Vilvoorde, is a graduate of the world-renowned Antwerp Fashion Academy. Like contemporaries Raf Simon and Kris Van Assche, she studied under Walter Beirendonck, one of the original Antwerp Six who put Antwerp on the fashion map. Branquinho, because of her prominence, is often thought to be one of the original six, whereas she was only a child when they broke through on the *couture* scene.

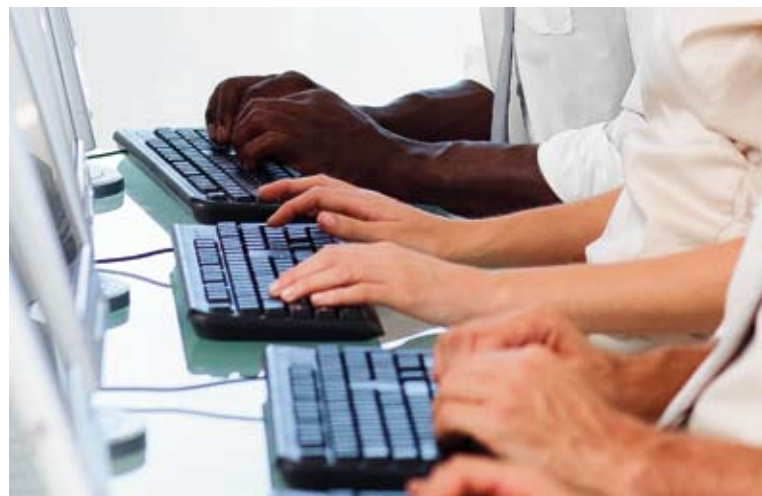
After graduation, Branquinho worked for Miu Miu in Italy and Natan in Belgium before finding success with her own collections. She picked up awards all over, moved into menswear and then, in 2003, opened her own store in Antwerp. The Antwerp Fashion Museum held an exhibition of her work in 2008, featuring a sports car dressed in tweed.

The James label was set up in 1998, and its closure now will put nine people out of work. Branquinho is also creative director for Delvaux leather goods, and has several agreements with other companies like Levis paints and mail order company 3Suisses. She also teaches at the University for Applied Arts in Vienna.

“Despite the praise they received, recent collections have seen markedly fewer orders placed than is usually the case,” a press statement said. “We also have a growing number of orders that have been produced but are not being paid.”

has the index gone into negative figures.

The national rail authority NMBS is to introduce a system from September warning travellers of late or cancelled trains by SMS. Customers with season tickets who sign up for the free service MyTrainInfo on the NMBS website can fill in their travel details and be warned in time of any delays, with alternatives also being suggested. It will also be possible, for a cost of 30 cents a message, to check on times for trains on one-off journeys or for non-season ticket holders. This week tests were due to begin on the system with thousands of volunteers.



FLANDERS TODAY

Independent Newsweekly

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Publisher: VUM

NV Vlaamse Uitgeversmaatschappij

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Bad advice

Eleven out of 12 DIY stores "give bad advice", according to a survey carried out by Test-Aankoop. One in two staff gave advice that was "below minimum standards, even for simple jobs."



FLANDERS TODAY
JUNE 03, 2009

Belgacom demands suppliers slash prices – or else

Record fine for Proximus



→ continued from page 1

for calls between two of its own customers than it did for calls involving one of the other providers (Mobistar later attached itself to the BASE complaint). This meant that competitors would find it impossible ever to undercut Proximus tariffs. The council supported the allegation of abuse of a dominant position. The fine itself is 15% of the €340 million in sales made by Proximus in that market sector in 2005, with an additional 30% because the offending behaviour was carried on over two years. Proximus is to appeal the fine, which could have been double, at 30% of sales, had the council considered the offence grave enough. In special circumstances, the Competition Council has the authority to set a fine at 10% of the company's entire turnover – or €200 million for the period in question.

Nevertheless, the bill could still increase for Proximus, because the ruling from the council is exactly the evidence needed by BASE and

Mobistar for an action against the company claiming damages.

Later in the week, government minister Vincent Van Quickenborne announced he was sending the Competition Council in again, this time to Belgacom itself, to carry out an informal investigation into another possible competition offence. Belgacom, it emerged, sent a letter recently to suppliers, asking them to review their prices to help the company save 20% on its outgoings. In addition, the letter contained an announcement that Belgacom was planning a round of "sourcing optimisation" – in other words, cutting the number of suppliers to those most amenable to the company's requirements.

Belgacom immediately defended its policy as no more than other companies do, especially in times of crisis. But Belgacom's size and market dominance, together with the implied threat in the letter, are factors which could lead to further difficulties with the Competition Council. ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€75,000

damages received by actress Greet Rouffaer for severe burns sustained in an accident on the set of the series *Wittekerke* 12 years ago, when a caravan exploded.

6 in 10

Belgians use sun-screen in situations where it is advised, according to a survey by consumer magazine Test-Aankoop. While most people use sunblock on the beach and when sunbathing, fewer do so for walking, hiking or winter-sports. The magazine also found little difference between supermarket brands and those sold by pharmacists.

2,000

Facebook friends for Guy Verhofstadt within 90 minutes of opening his account last week. But the former PM is a long way behind political friends and foes alike: former minister Inge Vervotte has 4,320; fellow Gentenaar Freya Van den Bossche has 4,327 and Limburger Joris Billen has 4,590.

550

of the 800 accident blackspots identified by the Flemish government five years ago have had work done to make them safer, according to public works minister Hilde Crevits. The remaining 250 are due to be completed by 2011.

1 in 4

Belgian women gets a snog at least once a day, according to a kissing survey carried out by chewing-gum manufacturer Mentos. Almost half said their current partner was not the best kisser they'd ever had, and 12% thought doing it with tongues was "disgusting". Bad breath and over-zealous kissing are the two biggest turn-offs.

8,531

people applied for study visas last year, with 21% (1,848 cases) being rejected. That's fewer than in 2007, when the refusal rate was 26%. Most applications come from Morocco (1,249), Cameroon (1,136), the US (588) and China (452).

14

number of times the case of alleged drug use by cyclist Frank Vandembroucke has now been argued before a judicial or disciplinary tribunal. Last week in Antwerp the prosecutor called for one year's imprisonment for the offences committed between 1998 and 2002.

€105 million

spent last year by the justice system, compared with a budget of only €89.4 million. Most of the cost – €52.6 million – goes on lawyers' pay. But the biggest increase this year was on telephone costs, up by more than 56% to €21.3 million.

88

apartments in Bruges will be heated by residual heat produced by the local waste incineration plant by 2013, it was announced by the project developer Prodecom. The heat is currently used for Bruges prison and the air conditioning in the Sint-Jan hospital. This is the first private sector beneficiary.



The Kunstberg in central Brussels is to be equipped with a bike-lift from mid-September to help cyclists tackle the steep incline.

The lift has been specially designed as a new version of the world's only bike-lift at present in operation, in Trondheim in Norway (pictured). Not unlike certain types of ski-lift, the *Trampe*, as it is called in Norwegian, is a continuous band with pedals at intervals. Cyclists put one foot on the moving pedal and stay seated on their bicycle, allowing the moving band to haul them uphill.

The Brussels version is slightly modified, allowing the pedals to fold back into the mechanism when the cyclist lifts his or her foot off, thereby reducing the possibility of accidents. The technique for using the lift takes some getting used to, manufacturers Skirail admitted. "It's a bit like learning to ride a bike." In Norway, meanwhile, the *Trampe* has become something of a tourist attraction.

But the best things in life are not all free: trips on the bike-lift have to be paid for by magnetic card, perhaps to discourage joy-riders. Pascal Smet, Brussels' mobility minister and himself a cyclist, has now promised another lift for the hill approaching Kruidtuin from the centre. If the two lifts prove successful, others could follow.

CULTURE NEWS

Commercial TV station VT4 has been fined €12,500 by the Flemish media regulator for product placement in a cookery programme. During two weeks in January this year, the programme *Lekker Oosters* made regular mention of the brands Uncle Ben's and Suzy Wan, as well as showing their products repeatedly. A VT4 spokesman complained they were being judged under the old version of the law governing the media, which changed after the programmes were broadcast.

Pop singer Milow was the most downloaded Belgian artist in 2008, according to figures from the Belgian Entertainment Association. Milow's second CD, released last year, reached the top of the Ultratop charts but only with the single "Ayo Technology" did he penetrate beyond Flanders' borders. "Thanks to the internet, I have new fans, even in the US," the singer commented.

Sociologist John Vincke, who did pioneering work in the field of gay studies, died last week at the age of 53. He had been suffering from cancer and elected to die by euthanasia. Vincke was the first in this country to carry out large-scale studies into the gay and lesbian community and its welfare, before turning his attention to HIV and Aids in the 1990s. "Through his research, Vincke made homosexual men visible for the first time," said long-time collaborator Alexis Dewaele.

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At your fingertips

A guide to the best sites to help you navigate in Flanders

→ Continued from page 1

According to estimates, some seven million Belgians are now online, or about 67% of the population. That's well above the European average of 49%. Let's see what there is to get up to out there, shall we?

Social

Netlog is the Belgian equivalent of Facebook, with 46 million users, most of them young people. In some countries, notably Belgium, Netlog claims more users than Facebook. In practice, the two services are pretty similar.

→ www.netlog.be

Tourism

Visit Flanders offers a variety of information, depending on where you tell it you come from. It's clearly aimed at tourists or absolute newcomers, with an emphasis on things to do and see. Some interesting links all the same, and one of the few gay sections out there.

→ www.visitflanders.be

I'd be wary of any website promising to teach you Flemish – especially one that spells it Flemish – but there are lots of resources on the web for basic **Dutch lessons**. Having said that, the availability of language courses in real life is so huge, including free lessons and native teachers, that distance learning doesn't have much to commend it. Still if all you want is a primer or a refresher course, here are a few freebies.

→ www.forbeginners.info/dutch

→ www.valley-trail.com (with dictionary and translator)

→ www.livemocha.com/study/beginner-dutch/1

→ www.taalgarage.be

Culture

Some of us thought it disastrous when the old BRT Radio 3 changed its name to **Klara**, as if a venerable dowager had started calling herself Nikki, but Klara's evolution



Find it all online: from recipes using local specialities to concerts in your city

hasn't only been a marketing ploy. From a rather stuffy classical music station, it has made space for other kinds of music, too.

The website is packed with goodies, from online live listening to videos to extensive background information. It's also a lesson in how to get a huge amount of options on a homepage without making it impossible to navigate.

→ www.klara.be

Arts Flanders is a website dedicated to the arts, but it only updates every two months, so it's often not very timely. The events calendar, at the time of writing, was still showing events in February and March. Nevertheless it's one of the most beautiful sites I've ever seen. The range is enviably democratic: all the way from Anima Eterna to Zita Swoon, including foreign dates for Flemish artists. In English only.

→ www.artsflanders.be

Shopping

Cosmox is the webshop of the VRT, which means that it sells everything to do with Flemish public television and radio. That means DVDs of *FC De Kampioenen*, books spun off of TV series like *Mijn Vader*, box sets of *Secret Army* and Ketnet merchandise. And it's all shipped free.

→ www.cosmox.be

Jobs

Stepstone is in English, and the job that came up in my hypothetical search was a corker: TV correspondent on EU affairs for a major broadcast network. But, on closer inspection, this dream job has been up for over a month. Perhaps it was too good to be true? Sign up for the newsletter and get job offers by email every day.

→ www.stepstone.be

Don't forget these major Flemish job sites.

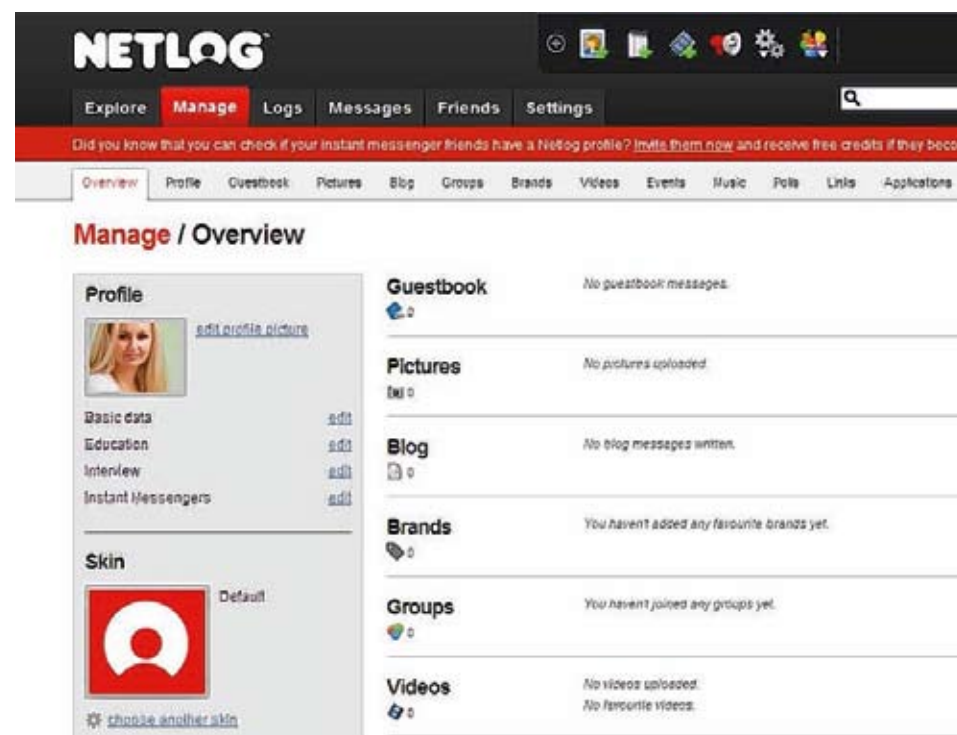
→ www.vacature.be

→ www.jobat.be

→ <http://vdab.be>

Food

Flanders brought the world "food pairing", the science that tells us that bananas



Netlog is the Flemish version of Facebook

go well with Parmesan cheese, peppermint and cloves and should be eaten with a nice Chardonnay. Even if your dinner-party plans are not along those Heston Blumenthal lines, you can play with the food-pairing site for hours. What about chicken, milk chocolate, roasted peanuts and Jules Destrooper cookies? How many F-words would Gordon Ramsay give that?

→ www.foodpairing.be

More conventional are the three chefs who put together **Flemish Foodies**: nothing more outlandish than belly of cod with octopus ink, or spiny lobster with chicory and chorizo. The recipes are highly involved – the last one there has 34 ingredients – and the photos are possibly more delicious than the food. Kids! Come and get your raw beef with octopus and hummus!

→ www.flemishfoodies.be

Food and wine are perfect subjects for Web 2.0 exploitation because so much rely on USG – user-generated content. One wine writer, for instance, can only get through a handful of wines in a day, but a whole community can share information on prices, varieties and quality almost endlessly. And that's what they do on **Kurkdroog**, where right now the top buy is a Museum Real Reserva from Colruyt at only €11.75.

→ www.kurkdroog.be

Pop Culture

Not exactly lowbrow, but not as rarified as Klara, is **Cutting Edge**, an online magazine of culture and media, covering, for example, Gabriel Rios, *Paniek in het dorp*, Flight of the Conchords, Evi Hanssen and so on. It's in Dutch, but you can't honestly pretend to be with it in this country if you're still stumbling along in French. Sorry but that's so 1968, like being caught with Jane Birkin songs on your iPod.

→ www.cuttingedge.be

Urban Exploration, or "urbex", brings the highest standards of photography and aesthetics to the gonzo adventure of exploring abandoned buildings and sites. The proponents stress they don't do any damage – "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints" is the motto – and let's face it: they are leaving evidence of their visits all over the net if things go wrong. One of the best is Arno Raps, who took one of the photos we published last week, and whose own site is www.hierzo.net. Some others from the same field:

→ www.urb-ex.com, who also went to Chernobyl, the Shangri-La of urbex.

→ www.urbanexplorationsquad.be

→ www.abandoned-places.com

KUTsite has been going, amazingly, since 1999 and, despite its rude name, (ask a Flemish friend) it's a most level-headed film review site, all the way from arthouse to telly (in Flanders the journey is not so long). It's all in Dutch.

→ www.kutsite.com

Kids, meanwhile, can play along with their favourite TV characters on the website of **Studio 100**, although they probably know that already.

→ www.studio100.be

And not forgetting another hands-on media site.

→ www.ketnet.be

Information

Life is not all exquisite art projects and shopping, and sometimes you just gotta get by. Nowadays everyone catches the bus (www.delijn.be and www.mivb.be), plans train-trips (www.nmbs.be) and looks up telephone numbers (www.skynet.be/dienst-witte-gids) online.

As those of us in the business know too well, newspaper readers are increasingly keen on getting their information online: www.standaard.be, www.demorgen.be and www.detijd.be. KifKif offers news, jobs and more under a banner of multicultural cooperation:

→ www.kifkif.be

For weather information, you can turn to www.kmi.be, and for traffic conditions <http://mobiris.irisnet.be> or www.wegeninfo.be. Finally, for organising an evening out or just fishing for entertainment, nothing touches the newly reorganised **UITin-Vlaanderen**, which is as comprehensive an agenda site as you could wish for.

→ www.uitinvlaanderen.be

Got any good tips of your own for sites in or about Flanders? Send them to editorial@flanders-today.eu, and we'll add them to a links list that will soon appear on our own website:

→ www.flanders-today.eu

Follow us on Twitter (@flanders-today) or join us at Flanders Today on Facebook.

What's it all about?

The campaign for the regional elections has not inflamed great passions amongst the electorate. Even the main players seem merely to be going through the motions. What happens after the elections may prove more interesting than what went before

ANJA OTTE



Elections fail to ignite: Flemish political party posters in Antwerp

The new Flemish government will most probably consist of at least three parties. In coalitions like this, parties can never push through their entire programme. Usually they are happy enough to get just two or three issues into the new coalition agreement. What these will be this time remains a mystery to most observers, as there are really no issues that stand out. In fact, most of the attention is focused on who will and who will not be part of the new coalition.

The discussion was fired up by Karel De Gucht, the federal foreign affairs minister and liberal heavyweight, when he said that his party would just as rather govern with the small nationalist N-VA as it would with its current partner, the socialist SP.A. The liberal free marketeers oppose the so-called traditional tripartite agreement (composed of Christian Democrats, liberals and socialists), for fear of being isolated in a leftist government. The socialists reacted to this by warning of a "cold" antisocial government should they be left out.

All of this is overshadowed by what is happening in French-speaking Belgium, where the liberal MR and scandal-ridden socialist PS are at each other's throats. It is expected that only one of them will be in the new governments of the Walloon and Brussels regions and the francophone community. Most probably, this will also have an impact on the federal government, in which MR and PS are both represented at the moment. The outcome of the regional elections may end up in a federal reshuffle, or even new elections.

Flemish politicians definitely keep this in mind when they are plan-

ning their new favorite coalition. Some people even dream of an unprecedented "Jamaican" coalition, with Christian Democrats, liberals and greens. This is no longer considered completely unrealistic, as it may reflect the new coalitions in French-speaking Belgium.

Issues afoot

Apart from this "politicians' politics", no topic has emerged to dominate the campaign just yet. But these are some of the issues that have cropped up:

1. Taxes: The *jobkorting* is a tax deduction of €250 to €300 annually for people who have jobs. The idea behind this was that in times of labour shortage as many people as possible should be stimulated to work. Clearly, this was before the economic crisis hit Belgium. Now Open VLD wants to double the *jobkorting*, because in their eyes the middle classes deserve a break, while the Christian Democrat CD&V and socialist SP.A say that there is no budget to do this, especially not since the higher incomes benefit from it as well.

2. Institutional matters: Most politicians in Flanders agree that their level of government has not enough competences, but to parties like N-VA and CD&V this is part of what is at stake in these elections. Minister-president Kris Peeters (CD&V) has demanded that the new government agreement should contain the Flemish demands for **state reform** – while in fact the decision about this is the responsibility of the federal level. Five years ago, the agreement included a similar passage, which led to the failed institutional talks

of 2007 and 2008. CD&V now hopes for a new, more willing attitude from the French speakers.

3. Budget: In contrast to the federal level, Flanders has very few **budget problems** and is debt-free. This might change, though, as prime minister Herman Van Rompuy (CD&V) has warned that Flanders may have to make do with €1.5 to €2 million less, due to the economic crisis. This message has irked the Flemish minister for the budget Dirk Van Mechelen (Open VLD), who claims that he will watch over the budget no matter what. He reproaches Van Rompuy's government for its "immobility". SP.A heavyweight Frank Vandenbroucke, on the other hand, has replied that his "daring plan" for government investments will not cost all that much.

4. Welfare: Open VLD has attacked CD&V on its track record in welfare, saying that it has not managed to get rid of the **waiting lists** in provisions for the disabled, despite a significant rise in the designated budget. The liberals even want the new minister for welfare to be one of them, while traditionally this government post goes to a Christian Democrat. CD&V defends itself by pointing to the rising demands in this area.

5. Public transport: De Lijn, the Flemish public transport company, has an ambitious plan to double its **tram and bus** capacity by 2020. Too costly, say most parties. Only SP.A stands behind this proposal, as this is part of its "daring plan" of investments aimed at turning the economic tide. Flemish minister for mobility Kathleen Van Brempt (SP.A)

has come under attack because the traffic jams are just as monstrous as before, despite huge investments in public transport.

6. Public works: Open VLD is the only party that speaks out clearly in favour of building the Lange Wapper viaduct, part of the **Oosterweel link**, which is to close the Antwerp ring road. The greens are against it because of the fine particles the traffic will produce. SP.A, who has defended the plan in the past, seems to be changing its mind on this, saying it awaits the results of more studies.

7. Economy: Minister-president Kris Peeters (CD&V) has been challenged by the greens on his Flanders in Action (VIA) plan, which aims to make Flanders a centre for **logistics**. The greens argue that this is not productive, as it leads to more traffic jams but few jobs.

8. The state of politics: Over the last couple of years, Belgian politics as a whole has not been a pretty picture with prolonged discussions at the federal level before a government was formed, failed talks on state reform, the resignation of prime minister Yves Leterme and minister for Justice Jo Vandeuren, scandals surrounding the French speaking PS, and endless fighting between and within parties. This may result in a substantial number of the electorate opting for **non-establishment vote**. This will benefit the relatively new Lijst Dedecker in the first place, but possibly also N-VA and the greens, who have stayed out of most of this. Of the traditional parties, it is expected that SP.A will pay the highest price.



How to vote?

Voting takes place on Sunday 7 June between 8.00 and 15.00. Take your ID and the *oproepingsbrief* that you receive in the post if you registered on the Belgian electoral role. Hand these to the official in your local polling station. He or she holds onto your ID card and gives you a plastic token. Go into the voting booth and select your party from the list on the screen. You can either vote for one party or select a candidate from the party list to improve their chances of being selected.

Building a new future

In the face of an economic crisis and pirate raids, a Flemish company is spearheading efforts to develop ports in the Gulf region

MARTIN BANKS



The seven islands project has been temporarily suspended

The Jan de Nul Group hit the headlines recently when its dredging ship, the Pompei, was seized by Somali pirates. The dredger, or stone carrier, was on its way to Durban from Dubai when it was captured off the coast of East Africa, north of the Seychelles, on 18 April. As *Flanders Today* goes to press, the Pompei remains anchored off the Somali coast while negotiations for its release continue.

Maritime piracy aside, the Aalst-based company is better known for its work in large-scale projects around the world, including Arab countries like Dubai. In 2002, it was awarded the dredging contract for the famous Palm Island project, involving the creation of a four kilometre-long peninsula in the form of a palm tree.

"It was a very lucrative contract for us," admits Filip Morobe, area director for the company's Middle East operations. "And, fortunately, the work was completed in 2006 before the crisis took hold."

The company, however, has been less fortunate with another of its projects in Dubai – the waterfront development of seven islands involving the reclamation of 350 million cubic metres of rocks. This contract, worth some €1 billion, has been temporarily suspended due to the impact of the fiscal crisis on the Dubai economy.

So far, work has started on only one of the seven islands, and Morobe estimates that, unless the suspension is lifted, the company stands to lose a cool €800 million. "It is a real blow, particularly as this con-

tract alone accounts for 7-10% of our earnings for the coming year," he says. "But there's not a lot we can do about it, I'm afraid."

The company, though, is well-placed to come through the current problems. Boasting an annual turnover of €2 billion, most of its 4,000-strong workforce is based abroad, with only 10% in Belgium.

"We have been affected by the recession but have not had to make any redundancies," notes Morobe. "Most of our people working on the suspended Dubai project, for instance, will be relocated to work in other places like Australia and South America."

Others will be offered work in the Sultanate of Oman, where the company is also currently active on

projects like the creation of a brand new port at Duqm, 600 kilometres from the capital, Muscat. The work, worth €400 million, involves reclaiming 40 million cubic meters of land near a tiny fishing village. The project started in 2007 and will not be finished until 2012. A total of 400 people are employed comprising, as elsewhere, a mix of locals, Europeans and other nationalities.

"When it's completed, the port will be used as a dry dock, a refinery and also as a military base. So you can see that, through our work in such places, we are contributing to their long-term economic survival," says Morobe. "A lot of these port developments are in locations that are economically under-developed and, once completed, you can see a whole new town or city emerge." In Oman, Jan de Nul is also involved in similar medium-size projects at the port of Salalah, in the south of the country.

For now, though, much media attention will focus on the ongoing efforts to free the 10 crew (including two Belgians) on board the captured vessel Pompei. "We are obviously becoming increasingly concerned for their safety and are doing all we can to secure their release," says Morobe. "The Belgian government appointed a special team to lead negotiations with those responsible, and it's possible that these talks could go on for some time yet."

He says the company is likely to introduce new measures to prevent a repetition. "We respected the instructions of our insurers, who insisted that we do not sail close to the Somali coast. The Pompei was 700 miles off the coast at the time, yet was still captured. "We sail 15 to 20 times a year off the Somali coast and are considering having a military presence on board all our vessels to ensure this does not happen again." ♦

→ www.jandenul.com

New ferry links Zeebrugge with Scotland

RORY WATSON

A new ferry service between Flanders and Scotland began last week, nine months after the demise of the Superfast link that had operated for six years. Norfolkline, which already connects Dunkirk and

Dover, has introduced a new Italian-built vessel on the 20-hour crossing between Zeebrugge and Rosyth. It will sail in each direction three times a week, and offer a range of fares, including mini-breaks.

The company said that it was happy with the level of interest already being shown and was encouraged by the fact that it was being actively contacted by road transport companies. Norfolkline hopes that

its policy of combining passengers and freight, in contrast to Superfast's reliance on the former, will ensure the route's viability. ♦

→ www.norfolkline.com

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Aerospace • Metris

The Leuven-based industrial metrology company Metris has received a €6 per share takeover proposal from a Japanese company believed to be Nikon. Metris is a leading supplier to the aerospace and automotive industries but has suffered from increased competition and the economic downturn. Once a high performer on the Brussels stock exchange, it was named Enterprise of the Year in 2006.

Aid • Reibel

Reibel, the Brussels-based logistics and renewable energies group, has won an €8 million contract with the United Nations to ship 1,100 containers of aid from Italy to Chad. The company has long been associated with aid NGOs and has already handled transports to areas such as Croatia and Ethiopia for the Red Cross.

Auto • Beherman

Kontich-based car distribution and financial holding company Beherman is to take over the import and sales activities of Saab vehicles on the Dutch market. The move strengthens Beherman's position in the Benelux area as it already was responsible for the Saab brand in Belgium and Luxembourg.

Economy • confidence

Business confidence rose in May for the second consecutive month, according to the country's National Bank. The economic environment indicator was at its lowest in March, but the construction and trade sectors improved while manufacturing and services remained stable. Meanwhile, household confidence also perked up and reached its highest level since October last year.

Insurance • AG

Fortis Insurance has been renamed AG Insurance following the take-over of Fortis by the French BNP Paribas. The AG brand is the historic name of the company before its merger with the Dutch Amev insurance firm in 1990, when it was rebranded as Fortis.

Pharma • UCB

The Brussels-based pharmaceutical products company UCB is launching its Vimpat anti-epileptic drug on the US market on 1 July. Sales of the medicine are expected to yield up to \$1 billion per year.

Shopping • Uplace

A 55,000-square-metre shopping complex named Uplace Machelen is expected to open in 2014 just outside Brussels. The facility is expected to be in direct competition with other planned developments nearby.

The Age of Aquarius

The new director of Flanders Opera launches a rebellious festival

ANDREW MCILROY

Aviel Cahn, the new general manager of Flanders Opera, is a slim, handsome man. With a mission. When I ask him what attracted him to Flanders, he says: "The cultural scene here is revolutionary. I don't want to do nice, contemplative opera. I want something a bit more edgy."

His first major production here, Saint-Saëns' *Samson and Delilah*, directed by Israeli-Palestinian duo Omri Nitzan and Amir Zouabi, caused equal measures of offence and approval, as much due to the decision to use both Palestinians and Israeli artists in the staging. "International critics get it more than the locals," he says (I think with a flutter of satisfaction). "But the opera world in Belgium is pretty comfortable. I want to shake it up."

Although Cahn is not about to turn the genre into some kind of agit-prop, it's clear that he thinks opera has a political message. "Historically, that was the case," he says carefully. "Verdi and Wagner were revolutionary. You can put politics on stage or have a politician message, but only if the art comes first. I'm not going to do propaganda."

He has already started changing the feel of the place. The design and graphics are brasher, and he has started running interviews, lectures and round tables to expand the impact of the music. He also wants to get a younger audience through the doors. Although that is going to be famously difficult, (opera and classical music not being top of the MTV and YouTube generation's hit lists), his latest venture, the Opera XXI festival, is an example of how he intends going about it.

Opera XXI, which Cahn intends as a biennial event, is a sort of toolkit of contemporary Flemish music made up of four companies, three generations of composers and three world creations all wrapped up in one festival.

Principally an initiative of the Flanders Opera and Antwerp's deSingel, the festival owes its form to so many contemporary productions already being programmed close together. As a result, various actors who have been invigorating contemporary musical theatre in Flanders were given a chance to put their enthusiasm into a common project. "We are going to put some of the Flemish identity – self-critical, uncomfortable – into the opera world," says Cahn.

The centrepiece of Opera XXI is Karel Goeyvaerts' *Aquarius*, a

colossal work that occupied the last 10 years of the 20th-century composer's life, and which has never been given a full staged performance. There will also be a chance to see Kris Defoort's new opera *House of Sleeping Beauties*, which has been hugely praised, and works by the upcoming generation Dominique Pauwels and Joachim Brackx.

Cahn himself clearly likes his music difficult, but he isn't about to frighten away the uninitiated; the festival programme is not too purist. There will be a broad range of styles under the heading "musical performing arts", including contemporary opera and musical. Defoort's work, for example, is very jazz-influenced and both musically and visually ultra-accessible. Alongside the performances, there will be a series of international exchanges where artists can meet each other.

Cahn may be the perfect man to steer his ship through the various critical, practical and aesthetic seas. He is a confirmed polymath, having proved himself both a talented programmer and organiser. Born in Zurich in 1974, he has a PhD in law. "Lots of lawyers work in opera. It's a good foundation given the difficulties of managing an opera house," he smiles. He set about managing the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and then, in 2000, spent a year as international business and artistic director at the China National Symphony Orchestra in Beijing.

After that, Cahn moved on to head up planning and casting at the National Opera of Finland and later became opera director of the Bern City Theatre. This range of experience would be enviable even for a much older man. Not least of Cahn's skills appears to be his unerring ability to spot talented singers. A detailed knowledge of production allows him to achieve big results with small budgets. For Opera XXI, Cahn and his colleagues did not go looking for public money, but invested in it with their own company (and, I suspect, personal) funds.

A new mission for Flanders Opera may be reflected in the decision to launch the Opera XXI festival, which is, after all, a pretty blatant attempt to give distinctive Flemish talents their due. And to do so will mean turning over some artistic apple carts. "Take the Goeyvaerts," Cahn says. "It doesn't look or feel like a classic opera should. It doesn't even really have a libretto as such. It will shock people. Goeyvaerts is barely known outside of Belgium, and yet without him,



The new musical *Adam's Apples* by composer Dominique Pauwels (above, left) is based on a Danish film (top); pianist Jan Michiels (above, right) plays Goeyvaerts and Brahms

the current generation of Defoort and Pauwels is unimaginable. He is their godfather but he is also an innovative European voice.

Perhaps this is the start of a Flemish classical music movement reminiscent of the time when artists like Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, and Alain Platel shot Flemish dance and theatre into the world spotlight. I suspect in

the back of his mind something is bubbling along those lines. Cahn hasn't come to Belgium to round off a career; he's come here to launch it. He is at Flemish Opera until at least 2014, and we should expect those five years to be marked by a degree of feather ruffling and experimentation.

Ruffled or not, once again

the Flemish cultural flagship steams ahead. Having already conquered the world of dance and the visual arts, Flanders is now setting its sights on opera, jazz and contemporary classical. Music, it seems, is about to become a new language for the polyvalent Flemish artist. ♦

➡ www.operaxxi.be

The return of Alex Stockman

While waiting for the long-absent director's new film, go hunt down the first

IAN MUNDELL

The news that Alex Stockman is shooting his second feature film means that he can finally be removed from the long list of Flemish cinema's missing-in-action. After an impressive debut in 2000 with *Verboden te zuchten*, he seemed to vanish, only to pop up again in 2003 as one of the producers of Tom Barman's excellent *Anywhere the Wind Blows*. (Speaking of which, where is his second film?)

In 2006 there was a spooky short film by Stockman, *Eva reste au placard les nuits de pleine lune* (*Eva stays in the cupboard on nights of the full moon*), about a disabled man who becomes able-bodied for one night every month. This screened at the Venice Film Festival, but then nothing more was heard of its director – until this year. He is shooting the new feature film *Pulsar* in Brussels with rising Flemish star Matthias Schoenaerts (*Loft*, *De Smaak van De Keyser*).

It will be a while before we see *Pulsar*, but to whet the appetite it is now possible to rent or buy *Verboden te zuchten* on DVD. Literally translated as "No Sighing", the film is variously known in French as *The Presentiment* or in English as *I Know I'll See Your Face Again*. Clearly an elusive character.

At the centre of the film is 26-year-old Joris (Stefan Perceval), who has decided to leave his girlfriend, Valerie, and Brussels. But just as he is



Stefan Perceval plays a lost soul in *Verboden te zuchten*

arriving at South Station something stops him in his tracks. He turns aside and checks into an old hotel. From now on he is in suspension, brooding over his situation and whether or not he should leave. He hangs around the hotel or walks the streets, occasionally stopping to leave telephone messages for his friends, apparently reporting in from cities on the way to Portugal.

A chance encounter leads him to Louis (Senne Rouffaer), an elderly man of doubtful qualification who claims to be a doctor, and in turn to Luzie

(Stefanie Bodien), a young woman who appears to have the same sense of dislocation as Joris. They wander the city together, and a romance seems to bloom, but then Luzie disappears into the night.

Verboden te zuchten feels like a dream. It is filmed in luminous black and white, without the restless camera movements that characterise so much independent cinema. Joris appears to go unnoticed by the people around him, like a phantom witnessing what happens after he has

left town. Only other people who are equally detached really seem to see him: a tramp who promises to come to his aid if he ever needs it, men passing their days in bars, the precocious daughter of the hotel owner, the deluded doctor. These fragmentary encounters and rambling conversations seem innocuous, and yet they build into a strong narrative that is resolved by his meeting with Luzie.

It is also one of the best films ever made about Brussels, bringing to life the peculiar atmosphere around South Station before the developers moved in and illuminating the city's other dead zones, such as the multi-story car park off Anspachlaan where Joris and Luzie romantically while away an afternoon.

Early reports of *Pulsar* suggest that it takes place in similar territory. Schoenaerts plays Samuel, a young man who starts to lose touch with reality when his girlfriend goes to New York on a work assignment. He doesn't go crazy, but on a very subtle, emotional level he separates from everyday life. Slowly the tone of the film switches to follow him into this detached state of mind. ♦

Verboden te zuchten is subtitled in English, French and Dutch; extras include the short film *In de vlucht* and an interview with the director

➡ www.corridor-films.be

dance

SHARON LIGHT



Falling to pieces

On 4 June, Rosas will show Brussels what happens when a Japanese-born dancer with 25 years under her belt decides to collaborate with a UK-based performance artist with no dance training whatsoever.

Tim Etchells has been watching Fumiyo Ikeda dance with the Brussels-based company for the last quarter century. His own work has developed across the channel in Sheffield, where he works with art collaborative Forced Entertainment. Although never having worked together before, in the summer of 2008, they decided to team up on what has now become *in pieces*.

Over the course of the past four months, work has begun in earnest. The production mixes movement and text, with the two artists working together on both aspects. As Etchells stated up front: "I'm not a choreographer, and I don't have a dance vocabulary. It was interesting

to be close to and part of this process, to think about how it works and to find the language to talk about it."

Ikeda, on the other hand, jumped in early on, providing snippets of text to stimulate the artistic process. A Japanese radio show had provided a series of topics to which listeners were supposed to respond with personal anecdotes by phone or post. These phrases – such as "Something my father never told me" or "A memory from the summer of 1989" – formed the basis for this collaboration.

"We didn't have a big headline concept," Etchells admits, but, as *in pieces* evolved, the themes of memory and identity have come to the fore. "How and what we remember, how we define ourselves in stories and in gesture."

The artists placed a major emphasis on a balance between movement and text. While

movement maintains a certain amount of ambiguity – one is often imagining explanations for what is presented on stage – text has a way of explaining things very succinctly. "What we *didn't* want to do was make a piece where the movement was super-ambiguous and the text told you what was going on," says Etchells. "Instead, the text remains ambiguous and open and playful, like the movement." (The text, by the way, is all in English.)

And what about that title? According to Etchells, it's meant to reflect both the work itself and the idea behind the work – in other words, a fragmentary work about the fragmentary nature of human existence.

in pieces

Where: Kaaistudio's, Brussels

When: 4-6 & 10-13 June

➡ www.rosas.be

Dinosaurs roam Antwerp

The spectacular show that recreates the age when dinosaurs ruled the earth is coming to Belgium

MARTIN BANKS

The series won six Emmys, three BAFTA awards and was seen by a worldwide audience of 700 million. *Walking with Dinosaurs*, first broadcast on BBC back in 1999, set out to create the most accurate portrayal of prehistoric animals ever seen on the screen.

Combining fact and informed speculation with cutting-edge computer graphics and animatronics, the six-part mini-series, which was billed as a "wildlife documentary", took two years to make and was the most expensive documentary television series per-minute ever made.

Narrated by Kenneth Branagh and costing €6.9 million, it was praised by the public and professionals alike. Palaeontologist David Norman, Director of Cambridge University's Sedgwick Museum, said about the series: "We have gained unexpected insights of long extinct animals. Having to make the animal go through a realistic step cycle makes all the difference in understanding how it works."

Now, in the best traditions of showbiz, the TV show has transferred to the stage at nearly twice the budget. More than 200 million years after they ruled the world, these awesome giants are coming to Flanders this September, and tickets have been flying out of the door. Having sold out so quickly, the venue has since added two extra shows.

The show includes life-size and extremely realistic-looking dinosaurs, including a T-Rex mother defending her baby against predators, the tank-like Ankylosaurus and even the flying Ornithomimus. A total of 10 species are represented, from small, swift meat-eaters to the giant, gentle Brachiosaurus.

Although they seem fierce and impenetrable, incredibly-intricate mechanics are involved in the creation of the dinosaurs.

"To make it appear that these creatures are flesh and blood weighing six, eight or even 20 tons, we use a system called 'muscle bags' made from stretch-mesh fabric and filled with polystyrene balls," explains Sonny Tilders, who heads up the team of dinosaur designers. "These are stretched across moving points on the dinosaurs' bodies, and they contract and stretch in the same manner that muscle, fat and the skin does on real creatures."

The larger dinosaurs are moved by puppeteers using miniature versions of their counterparts on stage. "The puppeteers use 'voodoo rigs' to make the dinosaurs move," explains Tilders. "They are miniature versions of the dinosaurs with the same joints and range of movement as their life-sized counterparts."

The puppeteers manipulate the voodoo rig, and these actions



Fighting, playing and feeding: Two-hundred million years of dinosaur life illustrated and explained

are interpreted by computer and transmitted by radio waves to make the hydraulic cylinders in the actual dinosaur replicate the action. The smaller dinosaurs, meanwhile, actually have specialist puppeteers inside them controlling the movements.

The sheer scale of the show is such that only venues the size of Antwerp's Sportpaleis are considered suitable, according to Carmen Pavlovic, CEO of Global Creatures production and technology company, which will stage the show in Antwerp. "The dinosaurs are full-size, making the show so immense, it can only fit in arenas. It is a spectacle of unprecedented size and quality," she says.

Directed by Broadway veteran Scott

Faris, *Walking with Dinosaurs: The Live Experience* depicts the dinosaurs' evolution, complete with the climatic and tectonic changes that took place, which led to the demise of many species.

Reviews in the US, where the show has been on tour prior to coming to Europe, have been, it has to be said, a tad mixed. Variety describes the script as "mostly dull and clichéd", while Newsweek calls the show: "That rare entertainment beast that parents and kids can enjoy together."

Tim Haines, creator and producer of the original BBC series, meanwhile, has given his seal of approval. "At its core," he says, "the show manages to do what the TV series did so

successfully, which is to make people imagine they are looking at real dinosaurs."

This would certainly appear to be the case, according to audiences, who are raving while simultaneously warning that smaller kids in the front half of the seating can be scared out of their wits. ♦

Walking with Dinosaurs: The Live Experience

11-13 September
Sportpaleis, Antwerp

→ www.dinosaurlive.be

Tyre tracks

DAVE MEYER



Small Town Flanders

Lier

Lier, surrounded by a network of canals and rivers, is not a standard Flanders tourist spot. And yet, with its medieval town hall and myriad churches, the small city just southeast of Antwerp boasts scenery on par with Bruges.

This ride starts at the Grote Markt, in front of the 14th-century town hall. Follow Antwerpsestraat past its row of stores over the first canal of the ride. At the train station, turn left, following signs for bike path 11.

The path detaches to the right, following the railroad out of town to the west, alternating sides of the tracks. Horses in pastures and fallow fields of wildflowers line the way to junction 13. Crossing back over the tracks, the path crosses a busy road past a field of sheep and young lambs.

The quiet lane passes a series of weathered brick, ivy-grown houses before junction 27 and then 34. After coming onto another busy road, turn right to path 31 and then left to the Nete River. A paved path follows the water's edge, but it is currently under construction: a blessing in disguise. Take the dirt path through the small wood instead. If you ride quietly here, you might find yourself surprising

rabbits and birds as the path curves on.

Soon the path returns along the river. Steeples rising on the horizon point the way to Duffel, home of the eponymous bags and coats. This is the ride's halfway point, and the town is worth a visit, with a variety of cafes that make for nice rest spots.

To continue, cross the bridge and turn left, heading back along the opposite bank to path 40. The Nete Canal appears on the right, so the path slices along a narrow spit between the two bodies of water. Bushes of fragrant violet flowers scent the way.

Past the sluice, continue along the canal towards intersection 30, with the steeples of Lier taking their turn to mark the way forward. At 30, follow path 20 and then 89, curving over a bridge and then back to the canal.

On many Flemish rides, there are hidden stretches of surprising natural beauty; this is one of them. During the middle ages, the labyrinth of waterworks around Lier

defended the town. Today, it is a nature preserve, with dozens of bird species, many sporting new offspring at this time of year, appearing and disappearing with each turn; a wonderful bit of riding.

When you come out from the rivers to the railroad, turn left past a far less charming First World War pillbox. Follow signs for the Grote Markt, and soon you will be back below the town hall – ready to begin a visit of the town itself.

Distance:

20 kilometres

Difficulty:

Easy; paved and flat riding through some beautiful natural areas make it a good family ride

Time:

90 min

Malta-media

Three centuries after a spectacular set of Flemish tapestries was sent to Malta, they still adorn the walls of St John's Co-Cathedral

LEO CENDROWICZ

More than three hundred years ago, an extraordinary order was placed with the Brussels atelier of Judecos de Vos, the renowned tapestry manufacturer and court weaver of France's King Louis XIV. The order, for the princely sum of 40,000 Italian scudi, was to produce a set of 29 hangings for the St John's Co-Cathedral in the Maltese capital of Valletta.

The dazzling result was the largest complete tapestry series in the world. Made with wool and silk and threaded with gold and silver, they still hang in the cathedral and are considered some of the most treasured artefacts on the island. They also represent an unlikely connection between Malta and Flanders.

Between the 15th and 19th century, tapestries were the sumptuous decoration *par excellence* in countless European churches, palaces and other wealthy residences. Works of art, they also offered protection from the cold and drafts. Tapestries reflected the self-image and socio-economic status of the patrons and instructed and entertained everybody who could afford them.

At the time, tapestries were like big budget movies today: sweeping storylines, spectacular production values, with a mass appeal across the western world. And, like Hollywood now, Flanders was the capital of tapestry creation. The Malta order was the tapestry blockbuster of the age.

Why Malta?

As for Malta, it had become a crossroads for commerce and culture. In 1530, the Knights Hospitaller – also known as the Order of St John, or the Knights of Malta – established themselves on the island. They would stay there until 1798, when Napoleon threatened to invade Malta: the order surrendered without resistance, and the Knights scattered across Europe.

But during their time on Malta, the Knights transformed what they called "merely a rock of soft sandstone" into a flourishing island with mighty defences. Their efforts included founding Valletta and building the city's St John's Co-Cathedral.

Built between 1573 and 1578, the structure was originally the conventual church of the Order of St John of Jerusalem. The name co-cathedral refers to its later,

dual role: in the 1820s, the Bishop of Malta, whose seat was at Mdina, was allowed to use St John's as an alternative see.

It was initially a bare, austere construction, reminiscent of a military fort. But while the exterior has barely changed, the interior became increasingly ornate, decorated with Baroque finishes and expensive artwork (including "The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist" by Caravaggio, who was briefly himself a Knight).

The key authority amongst the Knights was the Grand Master. Tradition required that, upon his appointment, he would present the church with a gift or *gioia*. The collection of Flemish tapestries was the gift of the Aragonese Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful, elected in 1697.

What did he order?

By 1701, the set of Flemish tapestries arrived in Malta. The entire collection consists of 14 scenes measuring 6 x 6 metres, depicting the life of Christ and allegories, and 14 woven panels measuring 1.80 x 6.6 metres representing the Virgin Mary, Christ the Saviour and the Apostles. They are divided into two seven-piece cycles and are all modelled on drawings by Rubens, with the exception of the Last Supper, which was from a Poussin.

Amongst the large horizontal Rubens are scenes from the life of Christ: the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi; the Last Supper; and the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Others cover allegorical scenes, identified as "Time Exploring and Unveiling Truth", "The Four Evangelists", "The Destruction of Idolatry" and "The Triumph of Charity". Additional oblong panels are hung as fillers between the principal square panels and majestically depict the disciples, the Virgin Mary and Christ. The collection also includes a regal portrait of Grand Master Perellos y Roccaful.

"This grand set portrays the principal and fundamental divine truths of the Catholic faith and were intended to convey a message: the supremacy of the Catholic Church and the fame and grandeur of the Grand Master and the Order," says St John's curator Cynthia de Giorgio.

The tapestries were originally hung from the main cornice along the nave of the church during important occasions, like the feasts of Corpus Christi and St John the Baptist. Now they are brought out only for special occasions; the last was Pope John Paul II's visit in 1990. But they remain on display in the cathedral museum.

What's in store for the tapestries now

Today, the cathedral is working on two projects for their grand collection of Flemish tapestries. The first is to find more space for them. Only a part are on display at any one time, so plans are being developed to open new rooms for them within the St John's complex. There are even suggestions that the cathedral purchase and restore a palazzo nearby or dig up the square in front of the cathedral in Valletta to build an underground museum to showcase some of the tapestries.

"The tapestries actually deserve a museum in their



own right," agrees de Giorgio. "You need the length of the nave of St John's Co-Cathedral if you are to exhibit them properly, and we are in the process of identifying a space for them. The foundation has future plans to have an appropriate chamber to house the tapestries, with controlled lighting, humidity and temperature."

The other project is an ongoing restoration of the valuable works. At least two are sent every year to the De Wit Laboratories in Mechelen – the Belgian Ministry of Defence arranges the transport – as part of a project that will take at least eight years to complete and will cost about €1 million.

The restoration, partly sponsored by the King Boudewijn Foundation, started two years ago with those that suffered most as a result of the passage of time and neglect. Every large tapestry takes about a year of delicate and demanding work by trained experts.

But once the restoration is complete, the tapestries should be returned to their former glory. And visitors will be able to marvel at these pieces of Flemish cloth that have weathered the centuries to become beloved Maltese treasures. ♦

➡ www.stjohnscocathedral.org



The tapestry blockbuster of the age: above, "The Triumph of Charity"; above right, the vanity panel for the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta



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Sunset Boulevard

"All right, Mr DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up."

REBECCA BENOOT

The final line of Billy Wilder's Academy Award-winning classic *Sunset Blvd* is legendary. This at-the-time revolutionary film portrays Hollywood during the 1940s and '50s as a shadowy, hypocrisy-ridden world inhabited by an army of wannabe's and has-beens.

Gloria Swanson was immortalised as the beautiful yet tragic Norma Desmond, a faded film star who tries to make her comeback by tricking up-and-coming screenwriter Joe Gillis to create a script that will make her go down in history. She falls madly in love with him in the process. And then, despite her foolproof plan, trouble turns up disguised as the lovely Betty Schaefer.

Sunset Blvd became a milestone in movie history because it dared to take a look at the darker side of Hollywood and humanity while combining several genres such as black comedy, dra-

ma and *film noir*.

In 1993, musical legend Andrew Lloyd Webber, responsible for *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Evita* and, of course, *Cats*, sunk his teeth into the material and added another genre to the mix. Aided by writers Don Black and Christopher Hampton, *Sunset Boulevard* was transformed into a stage musical that went on to win numerous Tony Awards. After its première at the Adelphi Theatre in London, it ran for 1,529 performances and soon made its way to The United States where Glenn Close embodied Norma Desmond.

Over the past 16 years, there have been many international productions, and now Dutch theatre and media mogul Joop Van Den Ende has translated it to Dutch and brought it to Belgium. Paul Eenens, who directed Dutch versions of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *The*

Sound of Music was called in to do the staging. It's now probably the most-anticipated musical of the year in Flanders.

Musical fans should be impressed by the requisite glamour of the stage: A rotating set alternates between Norma's lavish mansion and the film studios where the cast plays out the love affairs and betrayals. The cast is all Dutch, and the Netherlands two biggest musical-theatre stars, Simone Kleinsma and Pia Douwes, will take turns portraying the larger-than-life Norma Desmond.

4-14 June

Stadsschouwburg, Antwerp

www.stadsschouwburg
antwerpen.be



Antwerp

Café d'Anvers

Verversrui 15; 03.226.38.70, www.cafedanvers.com

JUNE 5 22.00 Mimazu with Karotte and Momsclub

JUNE 6 22.00 Silicone Soul new album release party

Sportpaleis

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060

JUNE 6 20.30 Neil Young

Borgerhout

Trix

Noordersingel 28; 03.670.09.00, www.trixonline.be

JUNE 7 16.00 Aborted + The Acacia Strain + Salt the Wound + Unleash the Fury + Rafflesia

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be

JUNE 3 20.00 Cupofy + Aloha from Hell. Chris Cornell

JUNE 6 20.00 Liam Jarvis

JUNE 10 20.00 The Ghost of a Thousand + Gallows

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.218.37.32, www.botanique.be

Concerts at 20.00:

JUNE 3 Krakow + Carla Bozulitch + Marissa Nadler JUNE 4 The Inspector Cluzo + Fishbone. Circlesquare + Junior Boys JUNE 5 Phoenix. Chester French JUNE 7 Dan Deacon & The Ensemble. Lissy Trullie JUNE 9 The Maccabees

Magic Land Theatre

Hoogvorststraat 8-14; 02.245.24.53, www.magicland-theatre.com

JUNE 6 18.00 Blows, Cupid Kids, The Astronaut, The Auto-Didakt & Friends

Piola Libri

Franklinstraat 66-68; 02.736.93.91, www.piolalibri.be

JUNE 5 18.00 Lady Flavia

JUNE 11 18.00 Beppe Crovella

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseulaan 208; 0900.00.991

JUNE 5-6 20.00 Patrick Bruel

Ghent

Charlatan

Vlaammarkt 6; 09.224.24.57, www.charlatan.be

JUNE 4 22.00 Campina Reggae

JUNE 11 22.00 Too Tangled

El Negocito

Brabantdam 121; 0479.56.73.95, www.mi-negocio.net

JUNE 4 22.00 Falling Man

Frontline

Overpoortstraat 37; 09.223.22.27 www.thefrontline.be

JUNE 6 20.00 Suburbia in Ruins + Outcry Collective + Warship

Kinky Star

Vlaammarkt 9; 09.223.48.45, www.kinkystar.com

JUNE 7 21.00 Azeda Booth + Uberdope

Trefpunt

Bij Sint-Jacobs 18, www.trefpuntvzw.be

JUNE 8 21.00 Rauw en Onbesproken



Antwerp

Buster

Kaasrui 1; 03.232.51.53, www.busterpodium.be

JUNE 10 22.00 Beep!

Brussels

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be

JUNE 6 22.00 Stepbrother George

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78

JUNE 6 18.00 Tricycle

JUNE 11 20.30 Cycle 'Borderline':

MidlBoj

Sass'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78, www.sazznjazz.be

Concerts at 20.30:

JUNE 5 Jam session JUNE 6 Alegria

JUNE 7 Jam session JUNE 8 Rock

Aimé JUNE 9 Time Out JUNE 11

Hasan Yarimundia Ensemble

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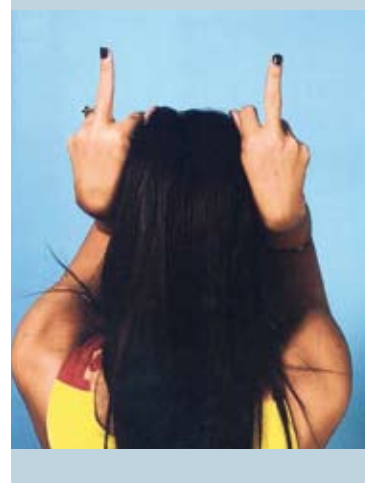
Lily Allen

23 October

Lotto Arena
Antwerp

You may know this young British pop sensation from her insults hurled at Elton John onstage at the GQ Awards or from her frequent need to flash her chest in public or from her never-ending drinking and ecstasy ingesting. Did you know that she sings, too? And extraordinarily well, with bold, honest (if expletive-laden) lyrics and all the energy her exploits would suggest. Why not? As she told Elton: "I'm 40 years younger than you; I've got my whole life ahead of me."

www.lotto-arena.be



Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be

Concerts at 22.00:

JUNE 3 Caribe Con K, Caribbean

music JUNE 4 Yves Peeters Group

JUNE 5 Beep invite Nicolas Kummert

JUNE 6 Espresso JUNE 8 Master

session JUNE 9 Laurent Doumont Soul

Band JUNE 10 Chamaquiando, salsa

Ghent

El Negocito

Brabantdam 121; 0479.56.73.95, www.mi-negocio.net

Concerts at 22.00

MORE MUSICAL THEATRE THIS WEEK

Brussels Shakespeare Society → Corroy Castle

Dangerous Liaisons → Erasmus School, Brussels

Broadway Highlights → Petit Theatre Mercelis, Brussels

JUNE 3 Pixl Trio **JUNE 8** Giovanni Barcella with Giovanni di Dominico + Daysuke **JUNE 9** Bram Stadhouders Korps **JUNE 10** Uki-Yo: Giovanni di Dominico + Daysuke and João Lobo

Lokeren

Lokerse Jazzklub
Gasstraat 27; 09.348.32.78, www.lokersejazzklub.be
JUNE 6 21.00 Twist of Fate



Ardoorie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82, www.deschaduw.net
JUNE 12 20.30 Lieven Tavernier and Bruno Denecker

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be
JUNE 5-6 20.30 Hommage to Wannes Van de Velde
JUNE 7 15.00 Toeters & Bellen, benefit concert for De Kleine Wereldburger for kids and adults

't Werkhuis

Zegelstraat 13; 03.236.37.13
JUNE 6 20.30 Tango Arrabal Ensemble

Brussels

Art Base
Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20, www.art-base.be
JUNE 5 21.00 Laos kai Kolonaki (Greece)
JUNE 7 21.00 Sandip Gosh (India)

Ghent

De Bijloke
Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92, www.debijloke.be
JUNE 3 20.00 Kaushiki Chakrabarty, (Northern India)

De Centrale

Kraankindersstraat 2; 09.265.98.28, www.decentrale.be
JUNE 5 21.30 Issa Mbaye Diary Sow & Friends (Senegal/Mauritania)

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060,

www.vooruit.be
JUNE 3 20.00 Hommage to Wannes Van de Velde

Hasselt

KC Belgie
Burgemeester Bollenstraat 54; 011.22.41.61, www.kunstencentrumbelgie.com
JUNE 6 20.00 Omar Souleyman (Syria) and Group Doueh (Western Sahara)



Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
JUNE 6 20.00 Hommage to Karel Goeyvaerts with Champ d'Action and James Wood

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
JUNE 6 11.00/14.00 An American in Paris by George Gershwin with Liège Philharmonic conducted by Pascal Rophé with Maurane, narrator
JUNE 7 11.00 Queen Elisabeth Music College Soloists: Trio con Fuoco: Smetana, Ravel. Dolorès Lahuerta, soprano; Philippe Riga and Christia Hudziy, piano: Szymanowski
JUNE 10 20.00 Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition 2009 prizewinners concert with Liège Philharmonic conducted by Pascal Rophé
JUNE 11 20.00 Czech Philharmonic conducted by Zdenek Macal: Dvorak's cello concerto op 104, Martinu's Symphony No 1

Chapelle de Linthout
Oude Lindelaan 2; 0475.90.88.87, www.laudantes.com
JUNE 4 20.30 Laudantes Consort conducted by Guy Janssens: Masses, motets and lamentations by early English composers

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
Until JUNE 12 12.30 Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition 2009 prizewinners concerts

Miniemenkerk

Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84, www.minimes.net
JUNE 9 20.00 Collegium Vocale Gent conducted by Philippe Herreweghe: Cristóbal de Morales' Missa Mille Regretz, motets

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
JUNE 4 20.00 Peter Wispelwey (replacing Truls Mørk), cello; Havard Gimse, piano: Beethoven, Strauss, Debussy, Franck

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
JUNE 6 20.00 Champ d'Action conducted by James Wood, in a tribute to Karel Goeyvaerts, with music by Goeyvaerts and James Tenney



Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
JUNE 9-14 15.00/20.00 Aquarius: L'Ère du Verseau by Karel Goeyvaerts, directed by Pierre Audi, choreographed by Inbal Pinto and conducted by Sian Edwards

Brussels

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
JUNE 9-26 15.00/19.00 The Marriage of Figaro by Mozart with De Munt Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jérémie Rhorer (Peter Tomek **JUNE 23** & 24) and Choir conducted by Piers Maxim, staged by Guy Christof Loy



Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
Until JUNE 5 20.00 House of the Sleeping Beauties by Kris Defoort, staged by Guy Cassiers conducted by Patrick Davin with choreography by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (in English with Dutch and French surtitles)

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
JUNE 3 20.30 Korean Screens, four solos created for Korean dancers by Belgian choreographers

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be
JUNE 4-13 20.30 in pieces, performance/dance written and staged by Tim Etchells, performed by Fumiyo Ikeda (in English)



Aalst

De Werf
Molenstraat 51; 053.73.28.12, www.ccdewerf.be
JUNE 3 20.00 Laat mij zingen, featuring Ingeborg, musical show (in Dutch)

Antwerp

Arenberg
Arenbergschouwburg 28; 070.222.192, www.arenbergschouwburg.be
JUNE 9 20.00 Laat mij zingen, featuring Ingeborg, musical show (in Dutch)

Bourlaschouwburg

Komedieplaats 18; 03.224.88.44, www.lod.be
Until JUNE 6 20.00 Olympique Dramatique in Adams Appels, musical composed by Dominique Pauwels, based on the Danish film

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
Until JUNE 5 20.00 House of the Sleeping Beauties by Kris Defoort, staged by Guy Cassiers conducted by Patrick Davin with choreography by

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (in English with Dutch and French surtitles)

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900, www.sherpa.be
JUNE 4-14 Sunset Boulevard, musical (in Dutch)

Brussels

De Markten
Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25, www.demarkten.be
Until JUNE 10 21.30 De Eeuwige Jeugd van Joseph Haydn (The eternal youth of Haydn) (in Dutch)

Ghent

Capitole
Graaf van Vlaanderenplein 5; 0900.69.00, www.capitolegent.be
JUNE 4-7 15.00/20.00 Anatevka (Fiddler on the Roof), musical (in Dutch)

Heusden-Zolder

CC Muze
Dekenstraat 40; 011.80.80.89, www.muze.be
JUNE 5 20.00 Laat mij zingen, featuring Ingeborg, musical (in Dutch)



Antwerp

Extra City
Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
Until JUNE 20 Sergei Eisenstein: The Mexican Drawings, 1930s sketches by the master Russian filmmaker during his stay in Mexico

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00
Until JUNE 7 Jimmy Kets – Brightside, photographs
Until JUNE 7 Erwin Olaf: EyeCandy, retrospective of the Dutch photographer's cutting-edge work
Until JUNE 7 Yang Fudong: East of Que Village, video installation
Until SEP 13 Fotografie in België tijdens het Interbellum (Photography in Belgium Between the Wars)

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34
Until SEP 27 Chris Burden, videos, sculptures and installations by the contemporary American artist, plus live performance on May 30 at 20.00

Modemuseum (MoMu)

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70, www.momu.be
Until AUG 16 Paper Fashion, garments made of paper and related materials concentrating on the 1960s

NICC - Nieuw Internationaal Cultureel Centrum

Tulpstraat 79; 03.216.07.71
Until JUNE 21 De Doorgeefshow, curated by Koen Theyx, with works by contemporary artists Felix de Boeck, Nico Dockx, Jodi and Joëlle Tuerlinck, among others

Plantin-Moretus Museum

Vrijdagmarkt 22; 03.221.14.50
Until JULY 19 In the Wake of Columbus: Antwerp Books and Prints around the World, early books, maps and illustrations printed in Antwerp

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until JUNE 14 Goya, Redon, Ensor: Grotesque paintings and drawings

Zilvermuseum Sterckshof

Cornelissenlaan; 03.360.52.52
Until JUNE 21 Van Kempen, van zilversmid tot fabrikant (from Silversmith to Manufacturer),

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silverware by the Dutch designers since the 19th century

Bruges

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

De Bond

Buiten Smedenvest; 050.44.30.40
Until JUNE 7 Joris Ghekiere: Gradient Dark, recent works by the contemporary Flemish artist

Groeningemuseum

Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43
Until JULY 21 Charles the Bold: The Splendour of Burgundy, Flemish Primitive paintings, armour, tapestries, manuscripts, fine gold and silverware that were stolen from the Burgundian court in the 15th century

Brussels

Belgian Comic Strip Centre
Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80, www.stripmuseum.be
Until JUNE 7 20 years of Manga in Europe, Japanese comic strips

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
Until JUNE 30 N.i.c.h.e. 360 architecten, scale models by Jan Mannaers and Stephane Beel
Until SEP 13 Sophie Calle, photographs, audio and video works by the contemporary French artist
Until SEP 13 Disorder, sculptures and paintings by conceptual artist Bernar Venet and comic strips about the art world by Jacques Charlier
Until SEP 13 Portraits of Artists: 80 Years of the Centre for Fine Arts in Pictures

CCNOA

Blvd Barthélémy 5; 02.502.69.12, www.ccnua.org
Until JUNE 14 Terence Haggerty: wall painting by the British artist

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until JUNE 21 Carmen Hoyos-Hoy: Virevoltante/Wervelend, installation

Danish Cultural Institute

Koningsstraat 35; 02.5230.73.26
Until JULY 5 Knit: Strik, traditional knitting shown alongside new and experimental designs by young Danish designers

De Loge Architectuurmuseum

Kluisstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until AUG 2 Louise Bossut, Nicolas Van Brande and Olivier Thieffry: (reflect)3, photographs of shops, cafés and other commercial venues in Brussels

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25, www.demarkten.be
Until JUNE 28 The Stone Road, photographs

Flemish Parliament - De Loketten

IJzerenkruisstraat 99; 02.552.40.43
Until JUNE 13 The World of Roger Raveel, paintings by the contemporary Belgian artist

Folklore Museum

Eikstraat 19; 02.279.64.36
Until JUNE 21 Brusselse Orgels, didactic exhibition on organs

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until JUNE 6 Dorothée Van Biesen, textiles
Until JUNE 6 Romina Remmo, paintings
Until JULY 25 Dress code, clothing

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63

Until OCT 15 Een geheugen op papier (A memory on paper), Jewish life in Belgium recorded in historic postcards

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.226.12.57, www.botanique.be
JUNE 4-AUG 9 Stephan Vanfleteren: Belgicum, black and white photographs by the contemporary Belgian artist
JUNE 4-JULY 12 Overview, 25th anniversary show: works by 20 photographers presented free in Le Botanique park

Maison Pelgrims

Parmastraat 69; 02.534.56.05
Until JUNE 14 Michel Doutreligne: Gammes et Amalgames, acrylics on paper 2004-2009

René Magritte Museum

Essegheemstraat 135; 02.428.26.26, www.magrittemuseum.be
Until JULY 31 Paintings by Liège-born artist Francine Holley

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until AUG 30 Vegetal City, how to reconcile city and nature, the vision for a sustainable future by Belgian architect Luc Schuiten

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11, www.fine-arts-museum.be
Until JUNE 30 Brussels Comics: Frames of Reference, 20 contemporary Belgian comic strip artists and works by those who have influenced them
Until AUG 23 Alfred Stevens: retrospective of the Belgian artist (1823-1906)
Until SEP 6 Art and Finance in Europe: 16th Century Masterworks in a new light, works from the museum's collection

STIB Headquarters

Koloniënstraat 62; 02.515.20.52
Until SEP 26 Metro Art Memory, retrospective and genesis of 80 art works in the Brussels' metro, with models, drawings and sketches by Pierre Alechinsky, Paul Delvaux and Hergé, among others

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33
Until AUG 2 Luc Tuymans: Against the Day, 20 new paintings by the contemporary Flemish artist

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until JUNE 14 Wouter Rawoens: Roest op het Ijzeren Gordijn (Rust on the Iron Curtain), work by the contemporary Flemish photographer
Until JUNE 14 Frank Steyaert: Het teruggevonden verhaal (The Rediscovered Story), ceramics

Dr Guislain Museum

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be
Until JUNE 30 Burland Toyland, works made from recycled materials by Swiss outsider artist François Burland
Until SEP 13 Unknown Secrets, paintings by Serbian outsider artist Goran Djurovic
Until SEP 13 Mens: Andere culturen als amusement (People: Other Cultures as Amusement)

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be
Until JUNE 21 Emile Claus and Rural Life, paintings by the Belgian Impressionist (1849-1924) shown alongside works by his contemporaries, including Constant Permeke, Constantin Meunier and Henry Van de Velde

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

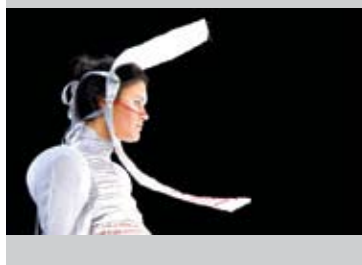
Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.

DON'T MISS Mode Shows

All month Across Flanders

June is fashion month in Flanders. Five fashion-schools all hold their graduate shows this month, which sounds like a bore if you're not into that scene but which, in fact, is a blast for anybody with a heartbeat. Besides the receptions, parties and champagne, the shows themselves – all open to the public – always showcase outrageous designs from young people who haven't had the creativity beaten out of them yet. Most notable are Antwerp and Brussels, with their ongoing spark of competitive edge. It's young, fashionable Flanders at its best.

➡ www.lacambre.be
➡ www.antwerp-fashion.be



be
Until AUG 2 Dara Birnbaum retrospective: The Dark Matter of Media Light, video installations redefining what it can mean to be a woman in a fast-evolving world
Until AUG 23 Beyond The Picturesque, interpretations of landscape in contemporary art
Until AUG 23 Extra: Meteoriti, sculptures by Bizhan Bassiri

Witte Zaal

Posteernestraat 64; 09.225.42.90
Until JULY 4 The Ornamental Body: From Inmate Tattoo to Body Paintings, with photographs by Mariette Michaud and works by 5 artists

Hasselt

Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21
Until OCT 31 In Her Shoes, trends and evolution of women's shoe design, from 1900 to contemporary designers

Knokke-Heist

CC Scharpoord
Meerlaan 32; 050.63.04.30, www.fotofestival.be
Until JUNE 7 International Photography Festival, local and international photography show and competition, plus installations on the theme of the relationship between still and moving images

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum
Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00
Until JUNE 14 Objectschilderijen, works by various artists

Ypres

Ikob
Loten 3; 087.56.01.10
Until JUNE 21 Angebot + Nachfrage: Bring It All Home, paintings by contemporary Dutch artist Loek Groothans and installations by 20th-century Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers



Opera XXI: New biennial festival of contemporary opera and musical theatre
Until JUNE 23 in Antwerp and Ghent
www.operaxxi.be

Brussels

Brussels Accessible Art Fair: Summer edition of the art fair where you buy direct from international artists, including charity auction
JUNE 5-7 at Hotel Silken Berlaymont, Karel de Grotelaan 11-19 www.accessibleartfair.com

EuroFeria Andaluza 2009: Spanish cultural fair with Andalusian folkloric activities, equestrian show, music, dance and regional gastronomy
JUNE 4-7 at Atomium, Heysel Park
www.euroferia.net

Festival Zonder Snoer of Stroom: Free music festival featuring jazz, world and folk. Performances by 20 choirs on June 6, 120 fanfare musicians on June 7
JUNE 6-7 at Warandepark
www.zondersnoerofstroom.org

Groot Milieufest: Annual event celebrating the environment with music, dance, street theatre, children's village, organic and fair trade food and products
JUNE 7 12.00 at Jubelpark
www.leefmilieubrussel.be

Kleine Zavel art fairs: Three international art fairs in and around Kleine Zavel: Brussels Non European Art Fair (www.bruneaf.be), Brussels Oriental Art Fair (www.boaf.be) and Brussels Ancient Art Fair (www.baaf.be)
Until JUNE 9

La Cambre Mode[s]: Annual graduate catwalk show of the Brussels fashion school
JUNE 5-6 20.00 at Halles de Schaerbeek, Koninklijke Sint-Mariastraat 22
070.25.20.20, www.lacambre.be

Momentum Festival: annual performance festival for both internationally renowned and emerging artists
JUNE 5-7 across Brussels
www.momentum-festival.org

Ghent

Coupurefeesten: Street festivities in the neighbourhood around the Coupure: concerts by Roland Van Campenhout, Aardvark deLux, Mass Market and more
JUNE 6 15.00 at Hospitaalbrug, Coupure Links and Rechts
0496.02.66.69, info@coupuregent.be

Kortrijk

Modedefilé: Annual fashion and theatre costume show of the Kortrijk Academy
5-6 June 20.30 at Kortrijk Academy, Houtmarkt 5
www.academiekortrijk.be

Wild West Whisky Fest: Tastings, guided tours and samples
JUNE 6-7 at Kortrijk Xpo, Doorniksesteenweg 216
www.kortrijkxpo.be

Sint-Niklaas

Modeshow: annual fashion show of the graduation class of the academy
JUNE 6 21.00
kwartier westakkers, Grote Baan 111
www.academiesintniklaas.be

DUSK 'TIL DAWN

SAFFINA RANA



Only Vert Pop gets Tom Barman spinning

Vert Pop

Horta Gallery, Brussels Central Station

This is the one, people.

This is my contender for the party of the year. Unless you're tied to the railway tracks, don't miss dEUS front man Tom Barman and Leroy Thornhill from The Prodigy spinning the decks in an Art Nouveau hide-away underneath the centre of the capital on 5 June.

The Vert Pop team is exceptionally good at finding atmospheric places for its yearly shin-dig, since 2004. Last year it was held in the de-consecrated Gesu church in Brussels, with its beautiful stained glass windows and echoing acoustics.

This year the team has out done itself. A vast warren of tunnels stretches out from the central railway station beneath the most tourist-laden area of Brussels, on the edge of Grote Markt. Closed off from the public part of the station for some 20 years, they lead to an underground chamber designed, along with the rest of the station, by Ghent-born architect Victor Horta in 1912. According to the organisers, it has been transformed into a futuristic spaceship.

Although hidden away for so long, part of the underground complex has played host to special events. An art party I once went to was replete with a shallow inflatable swimming pool and DJs spinning on mock diving boards. Untouched since their closure, glass-fronted frames in the tiled corridors still held timetables and posters from the early 1970s.

With Thornhill and Barman heading the line-up, along with Mattie Safer of The Rapture, I'm expecting a night of infectious dance-your-socks-off rhythms and an up-for-it crowd of Belgians and expats. Supported by the green party Ecolo, the tickets are only €10 on the door. Get there early; they always sell out.

5 June, doors at 22.00
Entrance through Spanjeplein

➡ www.vertpop.be

FACE OF FLANDERS

ALAN HOPE

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN

Michiel Vandeweert

An 11-year-old boy from Limburg is charming crowds and fighting to beat the odds

The big Flemish name in Germany these days is not big at all. He's about a metre 10, weighs around 15 kilos, and he's bald, even though he's not yet 11.

Michiel Vandeweert suffers from progeria, a disease that leads to premature ageing and, while medical science may not expect him to live much longer, he and his family have other ideas.

Progeria, short for Hutchinson-Gilford progeria syndrome, is a genetic disorder affecting one in eight million people. It is characterised by distinctive facial features, paper-like skin, baldness and stunted growth. Progeria patients have a small, fragile build and resemble little, old people. They suffer from atherosclerosis and heart problems but yet not other ailments of ageing, such as arthritis and memory problems.

Progeria patients do not live very long; the average life expectancy is about 13. There are currently 52 known cases of progeria children in 29 countries across the world, according to GlobalHealthPR. The health communications group recently launched a worldwide campaign to increase awareness of the disease and perhaps unearth the 150 cases they estimate are still undiscovered.

Michiel Vandeweert was born in Hasselt in 1998 and, in 10 day's time, he'll be 11 years old. According to his parents, Godelieve and Wim, writing on their own website, Michiel was frail from the start, ate badly and had severely dry skin. Repeated visits to specialists revealed nothing unusual.

Then Michiel's lack of height and weight – at the age of four he weighed only nine kilograms – and his thinning hair rang alarm bells. Finally, after researching the subject themselves and meeting the parents of another affected child in the Netherlands, they forced the doctors to admit the diagnosis of progeria.

Amazingly, Flanders has four progeria children, and all of them live in Limburg: Toon, now aged seven, and Matz, whose parents have decided not to seek the publicity the other parents use to campaign for awareness of the disease.



The fourth victim is Amber, born in February of 2006 not only appearing robustly healthy but also declared by the doctors to be so. But Amber's hair started to fall out, and, though they were convinced it was an impossibility, her parents insisted on genetic tests right away.

The tests came back positive,

handed over €10,000 raised by volunteers to help the family pay the huge bills involved in Michiel's treatment. Part of the evening was a reading by Michiel himself from the book by journalist Marijke Vrijzen *Ga ik dood als ik twaalf ben?* (*Will I Die When I am Twelve?*).

Michiel's German stardom came

The Vandeweerts are only the second family in the world with two progeria children of different ages

shocking the doctors. Amber is Michiel's sister and, although identical twins with progeria have been born in the past, the Vandeweerts are the second only family in the world, to the knowledge of medical professionals, with two progeria children of different ages.

For the Vanderweerts, life goes on. Michiel is undergoing experimental treatment in Boston, which has led to growth in centimetres rather than millimetres, and his health is holding up.

At a benefit evening in April in Sint-Truiden, former Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt

about when he was taking part in a production called *Pirate der Liebe* (*Pirates of Love*), which was presented by progeria children from all over Europe in Stuttgart. The German media just happened to be there, and they proclaimed Michiel "*Einer der grösse Stars des Stücks*" (one of the biggest stars of the show).

"To be honest, you could hardly fail to notice our Michiel," proud dad Wim explained to *De Standaard*. "I have to say, he really stole the show. I knew all along my boy was a charmer; now they know it in Germany too."

→ www.progeria.be



hoop →

We've all dreamed a dream in times gone by. Some of you may have longed to join Buzz Light-year, for instance, on his way to infinity and beyond. Yet all of us in Flanders are rooted to mother earth, little more than mobile trees.

All that is, unless you are Frank De Winne, who, as my morning paper put it, *schrijft geschiedenis* – is writing history. Frank was one of the three astronauts who took off last week in Kazakhstan for a six-month stay on board the International Space Station and, in the latter stages, he will take over as commander.

Many Belgians remember 21 July 1969 foremost as the day when Eddy Merckx won his first Tour de France. Earlier that day, I was in the middle of a throng in a Swedish campsite peering at a TV set to gape at the Americans landing on the moon. It was a moment to inspire. Well, Frank's exploits may also have a similar effect on those who watched the launch at 12:34 on 27 May.

The leader in *De Standaard* certainly hoped that young people would be spurred on to take up sciences. But in these harsh times, Frank's challenge has a more general uplifting effect: *Frank draagt de hoop van ons allen mee de ruimte in* – Frank carries the hopes of us all into space.

Under the leader, I noticed a small article titled *De Winne leest De Standaard* – De Winne reads *De Standaard*. So what? It seemed a desperate attempt at hanging onto his coat tails, but later I came across a full-page ad showing the ISS between earth and moon with a floating dog clutching *De Standaard* between its jaws. Apparently, *Frank vroeg of hij elke ochtend De Standaard kon lezen in het ISS* – Frank asked if he could read *De Standaard* in the ISS every morning.

I can't imagine this was a condition for his accepting, but his wish has been granted, digitally. As the paper said, *voor ons is de ruimte geen obstakel* – space is no obstacle for us. It's funny to think that Frank will be able to follow the fate of the handbag snatchers arrested in Geraardbergen, as well as the Tour de France.

Though it will rather spoil the interviews he'll give in November on his return: as the paper puts it, *hij zal niet verbaasd opkijken als de Vlaamse regering sinds zijn vertrek grondig gewijzigd is* – he won't sit up surprised if the Flemish government has fundamentally changed since his departure. To ensure that Frank really has all the news at his fingertips, perhaps he should take out a free subscription to *Flanders Today*.

→ www.standaard.be/frankdewinne

The last word →→→

Love, actually

"What I love about politicians is their mixture of love for humankind and scorching personal ambition."

Rik Torfs, university professor and TV personality

Blown up

"It's wartime art. Magritte painted a lot during the war, when everything here had been blown up and there were only remnants of reality left over. That's why he painted so many things only halfway, or even less. That's what we learned here today."

A Japanese reporter after a visit to the new Magritte Museum in Brussels

Acting normal

"The relationship between Claire and Mathilde is not good, it's not bad, it's just normal."

Prince Laurent, reacting to rumours of rifts between the royal daughters-in-law

Live another day

"I've no desire, as the emails announce, to bleed to death or to let myself be flayed."

Didier Reynders, vice-premier, responding to recent death threats