

Silent battle 6

Buruli is one of the world's most crippling tropical diseases, but it takes a back seat in the public eye to other afflictions, such as malaria and tuberculosis. One Flemish researcher has spent her life trying to combat it



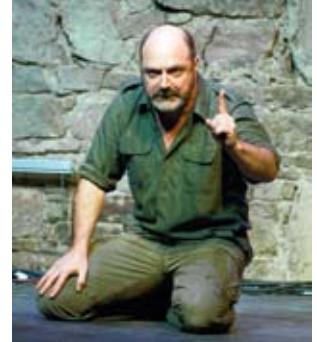
**Motoring
across Arabia 8**

Two Flemish women took their motorcycles across Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and the Arabic Peninsula. Their book describes the reactions of locals and provides an astonishing photographic record



**Ode to a
grandfather 10**

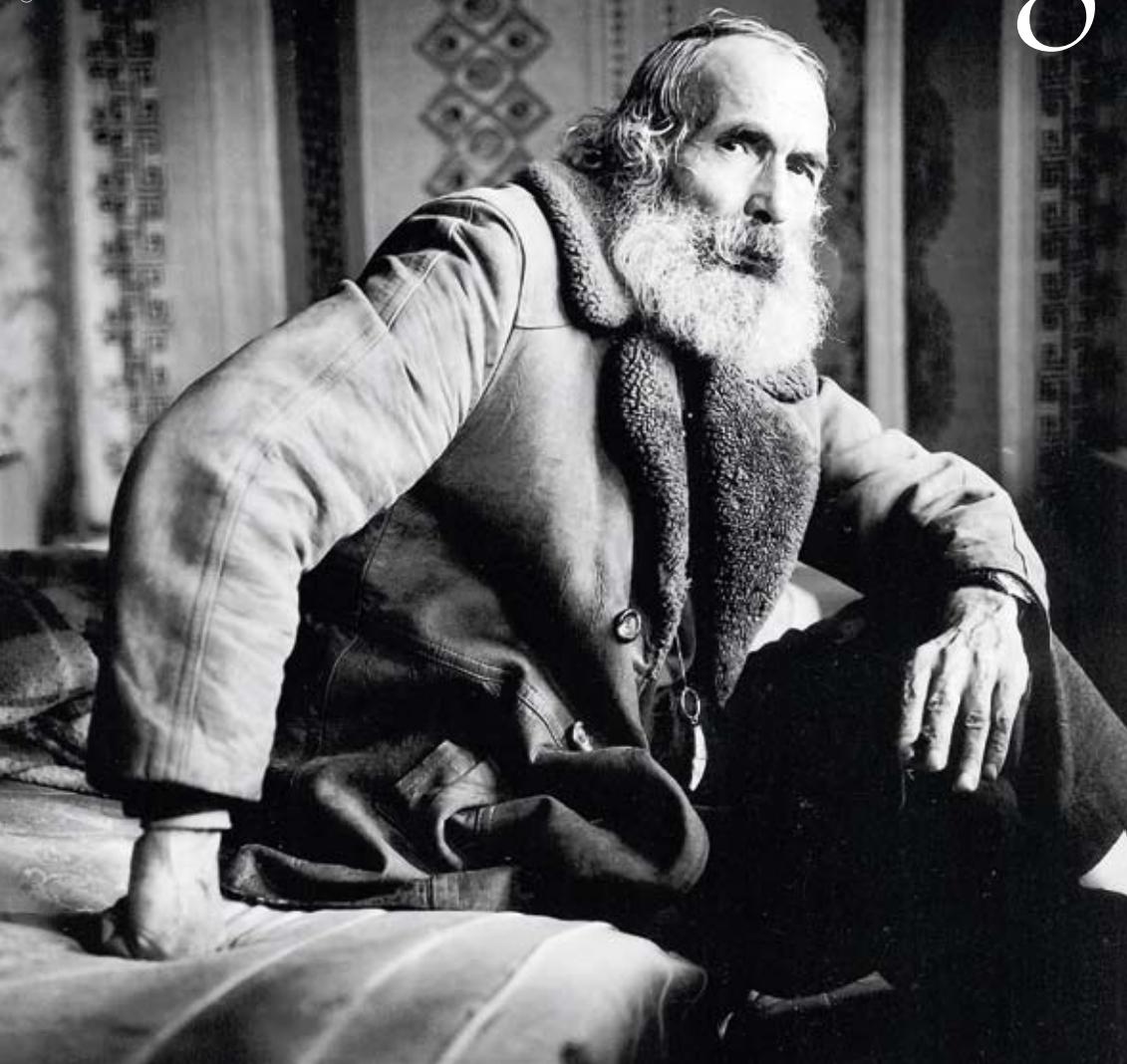
It took 70 years, but British actor Cameron Stewart finally cracked the home-made binding of his grandfather's First World War memoir. When he read excerpts on Radio 4, he caused a national sensation. Now his one-man show comes to Bruges



#112

© Stephan Vanfleteren

Living



in poverty

One in 10 people in Flanders doesn't have enough money for basic needs

ALAN HOPE

The arrival of winter weather at the end of last year highlighted the plight of asylum-seekers sleeping in train stations and the problems facing the more conventional homeless. The sudden severe cold also coincided with the release of figures on the extent of poverty in Flanders and in the country as a whole. Not surprisingly, the economic crisis that marked the whole of 2009 has also had an effect on that problem.

Poverty in Belgium is a regional matter. The national average for those who live under the poverty line stands at 15.2%, but in Flanders, the figure is 10.9%. In Wallonia, the number rises to 18.8%, and in Brussels it is higher still, at 23%. That means poverty affects nearly one in four people in the capital.

The poverty line lies at 60% of median income. (Half of all households lie above the median, and half below). This figure is then adjusted to take account of the composition of the household:

how many children and other dependants, etc. At the website of the Centre for Social Policy (CSB), a calculator allows anyone to determine their own household's position on the scale. For a single person, the line is €878 a month; for a family of two adults and two children under 14, the figure is €1,844.

Single parents have it worst

But poverty is also a function of several social factors. According to the yearbook on poverty and social exclusion from the University of Antwerp, nearly 28% of single parents are living in poverty, not far from twice the national average. To put it another way: while people in Flanders are on the whole only as poor as their relatively prosperous neighbours in the Netherlands, single parents are on a similar level to the people of Lebanon or Ghana.

► *continued on page 5*

Schoolteacher confesses to three murders

Killing of teenager in 2007 solved

ALAN HOPE

Ronald Janssen, the man who last week confessed to the murders of Shana Appeltans and Kevin Paulus in Loksbergen, Limburg province, in the early morning hours of 1 January, is also the killer of Annick Van Uytself, a teenager murdered on her way home from a party in Schaffen in April, 2007. Reports that Janssen had confessed to the Van Uytself murder were confirmed on Monday by the Leuven prosecutor's office.

Shana and Kevin, aged 18 and 22, were found dead in a burning car barely half an hour after leaving a family party on New Year's Eve. Both had been shot in what was described as a professional manner. Janssen, who lived next door to the Appeltans family, was interviewed the following Tuesday, at which point the Hasselt prosecutor would only say there were "indications but not proof" of his involvement.

By the following day, investigators said they had found "clues" during a search of Janssen's home – firearms (but not yet the murder weapon), and he was officially placed under arrest as a suspect. Janssen, 38, is divorced and the father of two daughters, aged eight and 11. He teaches technical drawing at a school in Herk-de-Stad, where Shana had once been a student. Reports said he enjoys a spotless reputation at the school, while neighbours were divided between finding nothing to remark upon and considering him somewhat solitary and distant.

According to reports, attributed to unnamed sources "close to the investigation", there had been a long-running feud between Janssen and Paulus, which came to a head on New Year's Eve and led to the shootings. Janssen alone killed both victims and set the car on fire to destroy evidence, he confessed.

► *continued on page 3*

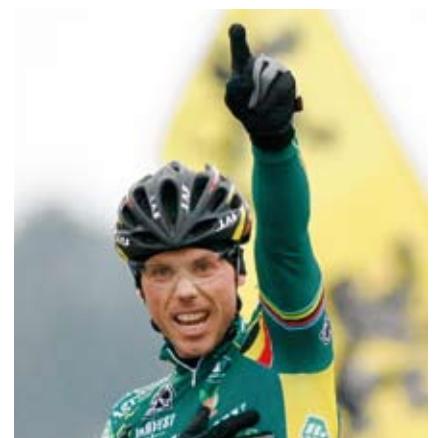
Sven, Kim and Yanina share taste of victory

Flemish cyclist Sven Nys rode to victory on Sunday in the Belgian cyclocross championships to claim his seventh national title. Nys, 33, overcame a poor start and an early accident to defeat Klaas Vantornout and Tom Meeusen, in second and third place respectively, in the race at Oostmalle, Antwerp province.

The race was marred when world champion Nies Albert was pulled from his bike by a Nys fan, suffered a broken rib and was forced back into ninth place. Nys condemned the attack and pointed out that assaults on riders was becoming part of the sport.

Two other Flemish sports stars recorded victories this week: Kim Clijsters defeated fellow Belgian Justine Henin in a nail-biting final at the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Australia on Sunday. She donated her winnings, about €27,500, to the Royal Children's Hospital in the city, which she had visited. Meanwhile, Yanina Wickmayer, who only

weeks ago looked like she might not play again this year, beat Flavia Pennetta of Italy to win the Auckland Open in New Zealand, her third WTA title. Wickmayer was suspended at the end of 2009 by the Flemish doping authorities for failing to fulfil whereabouts requirements. The ruling has been suspended pending an appeal.





CONTENTS

News 2 - 3

- News in brief
- Fifth Column: Has he changed?

Feature 5

- The social cost of poverty

Focus 6

- The battle to combat an overlooked disease
- Breast-fed babies grow slower

Business 7

- Jobs on the line at AB InBev
- Small supermarkets booming in bad weather
- Week in business

Arts 8 - 10

- Biker grrls motor across Arabia
- War memoirs on stage in Bruges
- A double helping of Hitchcock

Active 11

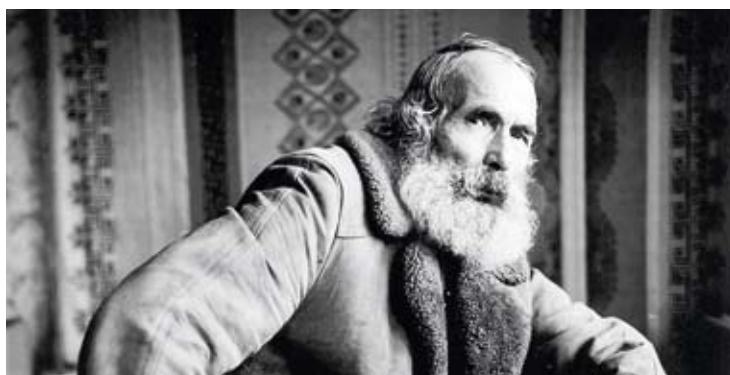
- Pull on those wool socks and walk

Agenda 13-15

- Rockabilly by Heavy Trash
- Three pages of arts and events

Back page 16

- Face of Flanders: Frieda Van Wijck
- Talking Dutch: our language expert looks at slippery roads
- Bite: Veggie restaurant Greenway
- The Last Word: what they're saying in Flanders



Our cover photo is from the *Poverty in Belgium* series by Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren. He says of the series: "In First World countries, the new forms of poverty are caused less by material need than by an absence of human contact. ... Those who are most at risk are people who are unable to adapt to the constraints of an ever-more rationalised working world."

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Independent Newsweekly



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News in brief

Energy drinks like Burn and Red Bull can be addictive and may lead to nervous irritability, anxiety and headaches, warn scientific advisers to the federal health ministry. The drinks may also, when combined with alcohol, give a falsely reassuring impression of how intoxicated the drinker is, with the risk of drunk driving or unsafe sexual contacts, the Superior Health Council said. Pregnant and breastfeeding women, children under 16 and those who are sensitive to caffeine were advised not to drink energy drinks at all.



© Paul De Smet

Composer rejects award

On a cosmic scale, it may not be on a par with The Beatles returning their MBEs or Paul Scofield declining a knighthood, but composer Luc Breweys caused some upheaval in the world of Flemish culture last week when he rejected a nomination for this year's Culture Prizes.

Culture minister Joke Schauvliege last week issued a list of 33 nominations in 11 categories. Among them were nominees for the music prize, including Breweys, jazz composer and trumpeter Bert Joris and Baroque oboe player Marcel Ponseele. All three are worthy, but Breweys considered the line-up a comparison of apples and pears. He also criticised the existence of prizes at all: "I would argue for sustained support for composers, rather than a consolation prize," he told a radio interviewer.

Breweys (*pictured*) is not the first to reject a nomination. In 2007, the artist Francis Alÿs, then aged 47, turned his nomination down because he felt the prize should go to a younger artist.

Breweys is considered one of Western Europe's leading contemporary composers but complains that, far from receiving official support, he is heavily taxed by the Belgian authorities. In 2006 he composed the opera *Luomo dal fiore in bocca* for De Munt. "From what I earned for that, 70 to 80% was taken away by the taxman," he said.

Other nominees for a Culture Prize, each worth €12,500, are:

Visual arts: Edwin Carels; Berinde De Bruyckere; Johan Grimonprez (see page 10)

Criticism and essays: Eric Min, biographer of Ensor; David Van Reybrouck on populism; Dirk Van Hulle, Beckett specialist.

Film: Documentary *Enjoy Poverty* by Renzo Martens; the new Cinematek film museum; feature *(N)emand* by Patrice Toye

Stage arts: Benjamin Verdonck; new media theatre CREW; music theatre ensemble LOD

Prizes will also be awarded in architecture, heritage, youth theatre, food culture, theatrical literature and volunteer work. The results will be announced on 1 February.

The Ghent University Hospital has become the first medical centre in the country to offer routine consultations for **women intending to become pregnant**. The consultations are open to women with no fertility problems to create the best conditions for a healthy pregnancy. Usually, midwife Ilse Delbaere said, women only visit a doctor some weeks after conception, even though the first weeks are a very important period.

Media director **Mieke Berendsen** last week became the first senior figure to fall to cuts promised by the incoming general manager of the Flemish public broadcaster VRT. Berendsen, whose background is in advertising and marketing, had been with the broadcaster for less than four years but came under fire for the number of managers and outside consultants in her department.

The director of Tourism Flanders in New York, Dan Benjoseph, has been **officially reprimanded** for sending out an invitation to a reception that featured a map of Flanders with Brussels in the area of Antwerp and the area to the south of Flanders named as "France" instead of Wallonia. Tourism minister Geert Bourgeois said the error was "neither structural nor intentional" and

described the outrage in the French-speaking part of the country as "exaggerated".

A member of governing party CD&V has introduced a bill to scrap the requirement of two **witnesses to the act of marriage**, described by Raf Terwegen as "outdated". In recent years, the requirement for official witnesses has been abolished in the cases of bequests, birth announcements and death certification. "Sometimes witnesses are simply plucked off the street or out of a café," Terwegen said.

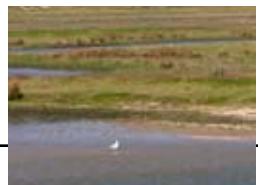
Gerrit De Backer, 84, last week poured the last *pintje* in **café In Den Vos in Oombergen** – 325 years after the establishment first

opened. De Backer, whose mother's family traces its ownership of the café to the 18th century, has decided to devote his time to his hobbies after 38 years behind the bar. "I'm saying goodbye to part of my life," he said, "but a man can't stand still forever." The building has been sold, but the new owner's plans are not known.

Ghent University professor Marleen Temmerman has been nominated for a **Lifetime Achievement award** by the *British Medical Journal*. Temmerman, also a member of the Senate, acts as an expert on women's sexual health in the developing world, with particular attention to the problem of Aids in Africa. Visitors to the BMJ website can vote for their choice.

→ www.bmj.com

Nature reserve Het Zwin, near Knokke, saw the start of a three-year renovation to turn it into an educational and eco-friendly tourist attraction



Does confessed killer have more to reveal?

→ continued from page 1

By Wednesday, 6 January, speculation emerged that Janssen might be able to provide a lead in the case of the murder of Annick Van Uytself, fuelled in part by star lawyer Jef Vermaessen, who represents Annick's family. According to Vermaessen, his knowledge of the Van Uytself investigation, together with his familiarity with serial killer cases, led him to believe Janssen might be involved.

At a packed press conference last Monday morning, the Leuven prosecutor announced that Janssen had indeed confessed to Annick's murder. It was made clear there would be no more information released on the matter.

Details of Annick's murder – not least a motive for the killing – are far from being clear. Annick's body was wrapped carefully in plastic sacks and dumped in the Albert canal, and investigators found no trace of the killer's DNA. How and why she was killed, and whether there are more revelations to come from Belgium's latest serial killer, will for now remain a mystery.

It has emerged that Janssen was already linked to the Annick Van Uytself case by an anonymous tipster, who had contacted police investigating the murder. The tip was said to be "too vague" to be of any use. "We certainly didn't do anything wrong," a spokesman for the Leuven prosecutor said. ♦



Mourners attend the funeral of murder victims Kevin Paulus and Shana Appeltans

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Has he changed?

So, some say the new Yves Leterme has arrived. In his second term as prime minister, the Flemish Christian-Democrat (CD&V) is using an entirely different, more moderate tone of voice than he did two years ago. In parliament, he recently spoke of his "will to calm down" (although it was unclear who or what exactly was to calm down – Belgium? Leterme himself?).

In his latest interviews, he asked every level of government to co-operate in battling the economic crisis. He called for a "co-operative federalism", a term that echoed the "fighting federalism" that his predecessor Herman Van Rompuy condemned and that seemed to describe somewhat the attitude of the "old" Leterme.

Leterme claims that he has not changed at all. It is the circumstances that prompt him to take on this new stand. And, he says, in the 2007 federal election campaign, he never focused on "communitarian" issues.

There may be some truth in that, but that is not how most people perceive the "old" Leterme. He was, after all, the man who formed a cartel with the separatist party N-VA, an alliance that contributed greatly to his electoral victory. There was also the misunderstood irony in his words that some French speakers seemed "intellectually incapable of learning Dutch", a claim that tainted his reputation with the francophone colleagues with whom he later had to negotiate.

There was also an earlier remark that splitting the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency – a highly delicate issue for decades – required no more than "five minutes of political courage". When Leterme as Flemish minister-president decided to stand as a candidate for the federal parliament, he referred to the need for state reform as his major motivation. Moreover, he said he did not want this state reform just for the sake of it but because it was the only way to tackle major economic issues. And what made the first federal government under prime minister Leterme such a mess? The failed talks on state reform, which dragged on forever.

Leterme now leaves all of that behind him. The reason for this is the economic crisis – the very same issue that once made him champion state reform so dearly. So has he changed? Or is it simply the circumstances that have changed? Who can tell?

One thing remains constant, though. Yves Leterme would still rather talk about football club Standard than about politics. So maybe he has not changed all that much after all.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



197,102

speeding tickets issued in 2009 to drivers caught by the 24 cameras on Belgian motorways

1,000,000

Bongo gift certificates sold in 2009, a 40% increase on 2008 sales. Other gift box formats, like Vivabox, also saw sales skyrocket last year

3,027

interventions by the Army's bomb disposal unit DOVO in 2009, 50 more than the previous year. The unit still receives regular calls to dispose of unexploded First World War munitions

220,375

unemployed in Flanders at the end of 2009, an increase on 2008 of 42,300. Labour training service VDAB forecasts a further 60,000 job losses in 2010.

€28,000,000,000

extra savings deposited in 2009 with the five largest banks, bringing the total in savings accounts to nearly €200 billion, despite rock-bottom interest rates

The north wind doth blow, and we shall have snow

A switch of low and high pressure areas to the north and south, combined with a change in wind direction, left most parts of Europe last week in the grip of snow and ice. While Flanders had it relatively easy, with warnings of dangerous conditions on secondary roads, road salt was due to run out on Tuesday, after *Flanders Today* went to press.

A 25-year-old woman was killed on the Brussels ring road at Groot-Bijgaarden after hitting ice. Less serious accidents took place all over the region as motorists struggled to cope with icy conditions. Brussels Airport suffered some delays, but air traffic was hit harder by tough conditions at destinations like Lyon, Geneva and Barcelona.

Public transport in Flanders was reported to be running normally, with the exception of a few delays in Antwerp. A number of Eurostar trains to London were cancelled, and Thalys to Paris suffered delays of up to a half hour.

The family help organisation Familiezorg warned that elderly people living alone and unable to go out risked hypothermia or dehydration. The Flemish government suspended the hunting season until 20 January because of the snow, while further snowfalls were forecast for the middle of the week. ♦



© Henning Verguts/Belga

Police seize gold, jewels, luxury goods

Police in Antwerp last year seized property worth an estimated €166 million in connection with criminal investigations into drugs trafficking and white-collar crime, among other offences. It was the highest value of property ever seized in the port city.

The director of the city's judicial police, Stany De Vlieger, speaking at a New Year's reception, said 2009 had been "a top year" in which more police had been detailed to follow the money trails behind criminal investigations.

The most valuable category was artworks, which are often the proceeds of crime. This year's haul included a genuine Rembrandt. Cash and other negotiable notes like stocks and bonds came to €60m. Police also seized a Jacuzzi and a thoroughbred racehorse, a Porsche and a Ferrari, and eight gold ingots.

A judge will decide the ultimate fate of the seized property. A certain amount, at any rate, will find its way into the state coffers.

The main seizures:

Cash and bonds	€60m
Gold	€200,000
Artworks	€80m
Racehorse	€650,000
Luxury cars	€1m
35 properties	€23.5m

Also in 2009, Antwerp police examined 426 computer drives, tapped 825 telephone lines and identified 187 suspects using fingerprints. ♦



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Living in poverty

One in eight children grows up in a family where neither parent has a job

→ *continued from page 1*

In fact, single households in general are worse off: almost 22% of singles are under the poverty line. The elderly are also more likely to be poor: 22.3% are below the line. Finally, sickness is both a cause and an effect of poverty. The chronically ill are more likely to be poor – one in eight families has financial problems as a result of a chronic illness, according to a survey by the Christian Mutuality health fund.

At the same time, poverty causes people to skip medication or put off treatment, thereby exacerbating existing conditions. “There are many families who have it so difficult that they have to choose between a visit to the doctor or buying food,” says Joost Moonen of Welzijnszorg, a non-profit organisation that assists those affected by poverty. According to a survey carried out by Welzijnszorg and its French-speaking counterpart, the poor pay a life-expectancy premium of 15 years. In other words, poverty takes an average 15 years off your life.

Children

Children are the main victims of poverty: 12% of children – one in eight – in this country are growing up in a family where neither of the parents has a job, according to the Antwerp University’s yearbook. This is higher than the average for the EU (at 9.4%) and lower than only four other countries.

“There is a risk that [these] children will grow up without the example of someone who has taken part in the workforce,” said Antwerp researcher Danielle Dierckx. Federal minister for social integration Philippe Courard has pledged to spend €4 million this year to tackle child poverty.

Self-employed especially vulnerable

But the demographic of poverty is slowly changing. According to Antwerp University sociologist Jan Vranken, poverty is encroaching into what was once the secure middle class. “People who budgeted sensibly and took on loans as double-earners, are now being confronted by the burden of repayments after one or both of them has lost their job,” he explains.

The longer-term consequences are worrisome: the poverty trap becomes difficult to escape. Meanwhile, those who are unable to work, or who cannot find work, eventually face a negative effect on their pensions.

The self-employed middle class are especially vulnerable. Last year, a record number of businesses went bankrupt – 9,515, or 12% more than in 2008. Most of those were small



© Mark Renders/Belga

Many of Belgium's homeless are asylum seekers, who this winter have slept in train stations due to lack of accommodation

businesses, and, according to Unizo, the union for the self-employed, more are having to apply to Unizo's Tussenstap programme, which helps out business owners in difficulties and those who have had to close.

Business failure for the self-employed is more than simply the loss of a job; more members of the same family may be hit, years of investment may be lost, and homes and savings may well have been mortgaged to keep the business going. The dramatic effects of the economic crisis for business owners and their families is “underestimated by society,” according to a Unizo spokesman. The number of people who visited the Tussenstap site rose in November alone by 50% to 4,500. From a poll taken by Unizo, 67% of business owners knew someone in their circle of acquaintances who was having serious problems. ♦

- www.centrumvoorsociaalbeleid.be
- www.ua.ac.be/main.aspx?c=0ASESE
- www.welzijnszorg.be

Extremes: homelessness and hunger

FLANDERS: POVERTY IN FIGURES

Homelessness is only the most visible face of poverty, and the recent cold weather pushed the problem to the top of the news agenda.

The headlines before Christmas were taken up with homeless families of asylum-seekers for whom the federal agency Fedasil could not find accommodation. Temporary arrangements were made, including putting some of them up in hotels. Last week the agency revealed that the situation now, while less extreme, is still pretty bad: according to Flanders Refugee Action, before Christmas 30 to 40 people a day had to be turned away for lack of a place to sleep; now it is down to 24 to 27 people a day.

The wave of people who offered a place in their own homes to shelter

the homeless was a mixed blessing, according to Caritas International. “The response from individuals was enormous,” says Karla Sandoval, “but we have made a point of asking people to think twice. People reacted out of the goodness of their hearts, but that sort of offer brings a huge responsibility with it. People who still want to go ahead can contact Fedasil.”

Meanwhile, the Brussels Collective for Street Deaths issued figures for 2008, which reveal that the average age of death of a homeless person is 49 years. In 2008, the youngest of the 32 street people who died was 21 and died of an overdose; the oldest was 81. Cancer is the main cause of death, followed by overdose.

There are plans in the works to possibly

accommodate the homeless in royal apartments in Wallonia, in disused government buildings or in military barracks, but so far none of these options have become reality.

Another high-profile sign of poverty is the collection of food help, which rocketed in 2007 and 2008. In 2006, for example, 9,400 tonnes of food worth €21.6 million were collected and donated to feed a total of 106,900 people. By 2008, however, the amount of food had risen to 12,200 tonnes, at a market value of €32.5 million, to feed 110,700 hungry people.

Welzijnszorg's Soep op de Stoep (Soup on the Pavement) runs until 15 February: volunteers across Flanders help supply food to those in need.

- www.soepopdestoep.be
- www.fedasil.be

Table 1 – Risk of poverty by household

Type of household	Flanders	Belgium
Single person	21.7%	25.6%
Two adults (under 65)	5.7	8.1
Two adults (one/both over 65)	21.2	20.4
Single parent	27.6	35.8
Two adults, one child	5.9	9.3
Two adults, two children	5.0	8.2
Two adults, three+ children	12.5	17.8
Overall totals	10.9%	15.2%

(Source: UA Yearbook, 2006 figures)

Table 2 – Profile of the homeless person in Flanders

Female	33%
Younger than 30	52
Older than 50	14
Foreign origin	27
Single	66
Lower school only	30
Secondary school only	23
Receiving unemployment benefits	37

(Source: UA yearbook, 2007 figures)

10,780

families in Flanders – 207 a week – were under threat of eviction in 2008 for non-payment of rent

100,000

families need help to pay for gas and electricity, either through social energy provision at lower than market prices, or budget meters to control consumption

€900 million

The amount needed to lift all pensioners in Belgium above the poverty line, according to Jos Berghmans of the Centre for Social Research at the Catholic University of Leuven.

€607

half of all married women in Flanders has a pension of less than €607 a month because of the number of years worked, making them more dependent on their husbands, who receive an average of €1,300

73,781

families are involved in arbitration to allow them to agree on a plan for paying off debts – mainly energy costs, loans, health costs and tax arrears

20%

of those who follow a course of retraining to return to the workforce are still working two years later

Fighting buruli

A Flemish researcher has spent her life trying to cure a tropical disease little known in the west

MARIE DUMONT

All you see at first is a small, innocuous-looking lump under the skin's surface. Then there's swelling, a rash, and later a festering ulcer that spreads and starts eating into flesh and bones. By that time, the limbs have become horribly deformed and an amputation is often necessary.

Buruli is a spectacularly crippling skin condition that affects thousands of new victims every year, mostly children under 15. How come we never hear about it? Because European countries are thankfully spared, unlike Australia, South America, some parts of China and, above all, western Africa, where it is most widespread among poor, rural communities living near rivers, lakes and swamps.

Also because buruli, despite all its attendant horrors and stigmas, is usually not deadly – a mixed blessing that causes it to be regarded as less of a priority than other tropical illnesses, like malaria. Of all the poor cousins of modern medical research, buruli is one of the poorest.

"Nobody's interested," laments Professor Françoise Portaels, a 65-year-old Belgian scientist who has just retired from Antwerp's Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM). She herself is a notable exception, having devoted four decades of her life to understanding and fighting the disease.

A mycobacteriologist, Portaels specialises in illnesses caused by certain types of bacteria. She has visited Russian prisons to study resistant strains of tuberculosis, and hunted wild fauna in the southern United States to try and account for the few remaining cases of leprosy in the region (her suspicion is that many armadillos are affected and pass it on to humans).

But buruli, which is caused by a related germ called *bacterium ulcerans*, was always her pet subject. What drew her to it was precisely the general lack of interest, and that sufferers are so young and vulnerable: "I'm also a mother," she points out.

Known as Tefoun-Tefoun ("whitish, cotton-like wound") in Benin, Hella Gbonyo ("ugly disease") in Ghana and Lupi Lupi ("wound that does not heal") in Uganda, buruli first came to the attention of western nations at the end of the 19th century. Portaels came into contact with it in 1970, when, as a young researcher, she moved to the Congo with her husband for a few years.

Her chief contribution was to locate *bacterium ulcerans* in a water insect, a task that was made complicated by the inadequate technologies available at the time and ended up taking nearly 40 years. The discovery was an important breakthrough, though, as it established that buruli is caught through contact with stagnant or slow-moving water – although exactly how that happens remains a mystery.

"It's taken a lot of faith," Portaels says, looking back on all those years, "but faith of the right kind that comes with humility and open-mindedness. You need to let go of your convictions sometimes and accept that you are on the wrong track. That's how you keep making discoveries... all your life."

Buruli is now treated with two antibiotics and can often be cured if caught early enough. There's even talk of a vaccine. The disease, meanwhile, is receiving more attention and subsidies – a Swiss foundation has recently launched the research programme Stop Buruli, which involves the ITM and six other laboratories around the world. These advances raise hope that buruli can be, if not fully



© Meredith Foundation

Buruli is contracted mostly by children under 15

eradicated ("we can't," as Portaels puts it, "clean up every lake in every affected region"), at least brought under reasonable control.

But that won't happen with science alone. "The communities need to be educated," Portaels insists. "And it's pointless telling them to stay away from rivers and lakes when they have no access to clean water." Getting them to seek early medical help, a key condition of recovery, is another challenge: "They know they're sick, but this is just one of their many ailments. Sometimes the nearest hospital is 20 kilometres away, and the only way to get there is to walk."

Through the years, "I worked with my brain and with my hands, but mostly with my heart," Portaels continues with a tremor in her voice. "I tried never to forget the patients beneath the hard facts and the scientific bickering and rivalries. They're really what kept me going."

Although her team at the ITM will continue with the research, and she has been granted two emeritus professorships that will enable her to stay in contact with the field, Portaels clearly regrets leaving the job half-finished. Parents who watch their children return to school on their own two legs after a simple course of antibiotics probably see it differently. ♦

→ www.itg.be
→ www.stopburuli.org

Slower growth rate for breast-fed babies

Study by the VUB stresses that breast feeding is still the best method

ALAN HOPE

Babies who are breast fed from birth will grow more slowly than babies fed with infant formula, according to researchers at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), but they eventually catch up with their peers. Breast feeding is still the preferred method for new babies, the team stresses.

The research was carried out by three scientists with the Laboratory for Anthropogenetics at the VUB and the Centre for Youth Health Care at the Catholic University of Leuven and will be published in the February issue of *Annals of Human Biology*.

The team's research concerns the parameters for determining normal growth patterns in children as a whole, which are based on World Health Organisation growth curves from data on children aged 0 to five years from a variety of countries.

However, children in the developed world are generally larger and heavier than in other parts of the world, which leads to them being considered overweight in comparison to WHO curves. According to the team, it would be more accurate to measure Flemish babies against growth curves determined by Flemish data – and they have provided the necessary measures.

Those reveal that children are getting taller and heavier across the board: the average 18-year-old male is now 1.2 centimetres taller than his counterpart 10 years ago; for girls the difference is 0.9cm. At the same time, 18-year-olds are one kilogram heavier on

average than a decade ago.

The scientists stress that the slower growth of breast-fed babies is normal and that parents should not consider it a disadvantage. The study looked at a representative sample of 3,287 Flemish children under the age of three and measured their length or height, weight, Body Mass Index and head circumference. In Flanders, 68% of babies are breast fed at birth, but the proportion drops off suddenly: at six months, the figure is 25%. A large number of mothers return to work after the end of the 16-week statutory maternity leave period, which makes continued breast feedings difficult or impossible. Babies in poor families where the mother has a low educational level are less likely to breast feed, though this is not true for families of immigrant origin of a similar social level.

The figures show that while weight, BMI and head circumference in breast-fed babies all conform to Flemish growth curves – and all are ahead of WHO curves – that is not the case for length. "In the first year of life, the growth of children who are breast fed is slowed slightly," says researcher Mathieu Roelants. "But a short while later, those children make up their delay. In any case, breast feeding remains the best way to feed young children." ♦

Source: Roelants, Hauppie and Hoppenbrouwers, *Annals of Human Biology* -February 2010, Vol 37, No 1



© Kapu/Shutterstock

Babies in Flanders are getting taller and heavier

Prevalence of breastfeeding in Flanders according to age

Age in months	Any breast feeding (%)	Exclusive breast feeding (%)
0	58	48
1	50	37
2	44	35
3	42	31
4	43	29
5	40	24
6	37	27
7	22	13
≥8	5	4

InBev plans job cuts

With beer-drinking habits changing, the Leuven based company takes action

ALAN HOPE

The Belgian connection with the world's number one beer brewer, AB InBev, weakens again after the group announced last week that it would be cutting jobs at the Leuven headquarters.

The decision confirms rumours that have been circulating since November, when plans were announced for restructuring in Central Europe. Despite attempts by the company to quell speculation, rumours were rife that a round of cuts in Western Europe would follow.

Unions feared that depots – five in Flanders and two in Wallonia – would be hit, reflecting changes in distribution as a result of a growing tendency for people to drink less beer, especially in cafes. This trend has been exacerbated with the introduction on 1 January of a stricter ban on smoking in cafes. Since 1982, average annual per capita beer consumption in Belgium has fallen from 99 litres to 82

litres. At the same time, consumption has moved from pils to specialty beers.

The restructuring of AB InBev is all the more important to the company because of the acquisition of Anheuser-Busch, the largest American brewer, just before the global economic crisis broke in 2008, at a price of €36 billion. The acquisition, which made AB InBev the largest brewer in the world, had adequate financing, but still obliged InBev to undertake a round of severe cuts.

The result is a loss of 263 jobs in Belgium, or about one job in 10. The aim, the company said, is a "streamlined, flexible and commercially focused local organisation". On the production level, efficiency measures could cost 114 jobs. In sales, despite pressure on CEO Carlos Brito to deliver "top-line growth" – in other words, to sell more beer – a further 189 jobs are on the line. On the other hand, a telesales unit and a customer service operation will



© Belga

Workers protest against proposed job losses outside InBev in Leuven

provide 40 new jobs, bringing the net loss to 263.

Unions responded with lightning actions in protest. Pickets blockaded the entrance to the company's plant in Leuven in an action that was expected to continue until

Tuesday of this week, after *Flanders Today* went to press. Two of the three brewing kettles were disconnected, bringing capacity down to 30%. Unions said they expected the next move to come from negotiations with management. ♦

SMEs financially healthy despite crisis

The financial health of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Flanders is robust thanks to careful management during the years leading up to the outbreak of the economic crisis, according to a report compiled by business analysts Graydon for the self-employed union Unizo.

Despite a record year for bankruptcies in 2009, and a record, too, for the number of jobs lost as a result, the report shows that only 15% of small businesses are at an increased risk of going bust in the current economic climate. Low-risk companies account for 72% of all SMEs, with medium-risk companies representing a further 13%. That compares with high-risk figures from Wallonia of nearly 17% and low risk of 72%; Brussels, meanwhile, scores less well with nearly 27% high-risk and about 57% low-risk.

The study took in 502,000 SMEs across Belgium, including one-man operations but excluding the professions (such as architects, doctors, etc.). It studied a number of economic indicators, like profitability, productivity and liquidity, to determine a risk profile.

For a great many of the indicators chosen, the study shows a growth period from about 2002 to 2007, then a slowdown or stability in 2008. By the end of that year, the financial and economic crisis was beginning to make its effects felt. The median level of profitability climbed from 6.9% in 2000 to 10% in 2007, but in 2008 the figure dropped to 8.8%, effectively wiping out two years of growth.

The sectors representing financial services, IT, healthcare and communications had the highest profitability – up to 15% – while car manufacturing, textiles and catering had the lowest – down as far as 3.5%.

The increasing pressure on businesses is reflected in the evolution of the number of days credit allowed by suppliers. This has been constantly dropping since 2000, when the median stood at 50 days, while in 2008 it was down to 40 days. At the other end of the scale, SMEs are also demanding swifter payment from their own creditors, from a median of 52 days in 2000 to 46 days now. ♦

→ www.unizo.be/kmorapport

Weather gives new lease of life to smaller shops

The neighbourhood corner shop and smaller supermarkets are experiencing a new lease of life, thanks to the bad weather. Figures for the end of 2009 from Buurtsuper.be, the organisation that represents small retailers, show a 10% increase in sales for small food retailers in Brussels and Flanders in December compared to the same period in 2008.

"Smaller shops and supermarkets are reached more easily; it's natural that people prefer, in bad weather, to pop into a shop closer to home," said Buurtsuper director-general Luc Ardies. "Our members are telling us they had more people come through the doors in December than they've ever seen before. The snow

is a bit of a blessing for us."

The economic crisis was already having a reviving effect on the fortunes of the corner shop. Supermarket giants Delhaize and Carrefour both operate chains of franchised stores owned and run by small business owners. In recent months, the parent companies have stood by and watched as their offspring – Delhaize City, Proxy and Carrefour Express – took back market share.

This is said to be due to more competitive prices and the simple fact that people are less willing to take the car to go to a supermarket when the same or similar products are available around the corner. The franchise operations may resemble

Unemployment figures "tip of the iceberg"

The true unemployment figures in Belgium are more than twice as high as reported, while the situation is in fact worse now than it was in the 1970s, according to leading Flemish economist Geert Noels, writing last week on his influential blog Econoshock. In November 2009, according to the latest figures from the benefits authority RVA, there were 321,911 people unemployed in Flanders – 7,000 more than in October and 27,000 more than a year previously.

However, the figures also show 214,510 workers whose employment was entirely supported by the RVA, and another 180,989 currently in technical redundancy, part-time unemployment, or bridging pension or using up time-credit, all of which are financed by the RVA. When these figures are taken into account, the true out-of-work total rises to 717,410, or more than double the official figure.

For Brussels, Wallonia and the country as a whole, a similar trend applies, according to Noels:

Wallonia 281,176 official/498,881 real
Brussels 96,741 official/133,109 real
Belgium 699,828 official/1,349,400 real

"A benefit economy doesn't have to be a problem if the government can support it, but it is not sustainable with a €20 billion hole in the budget," Noels said.

In addition, the growing real unemployment figures cannot be attributed to the current economic situation, Noels claimed. "If you work from the real figures you see that things are worse today than they were in the 1970s. In fact, more people have moved on to benefits even in the good years of the last decade," he said. "It certainly seems like a structural problem to me." ♦

→ www.econoshock.be



Carrefour

the giant supermarket chains more than the old-fashioned independent grocer, but they are independent businesses, often staffed by families. "People realise that

they can shop here for quality products that don't have to be more expensive," said Ardies. ♦

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Airlines • Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines has taken over BMI's route between Brussels and London Heathrow, representing four flights a day. In addition, the Belgian carrier will increase the number of its daily flights to Bristol and Newcastle to three a day.

Auto manufacturing • Beerens Group

Beerens Group, a car importing and distribution company, has taken over Opel dealerships in Zaventem and Vilvoorde from the bankrupt Kroymans.

Autos • sales

New car sales surged 21% in December compared to the same period in 2008. But the year as a whole ended with an 11% percent drop to 476,194 new registrations. Market leader was Renault with some 47,000 new cars sold, followed by Peugeot and Citroën.

Banks • KBC

Flanders largest financial institution is to float up to 40% of its Czech affiliate, CSOB, on the Prague stock market in April. Meanwhile, KBC is creating an asset management company in partnership with India's Union Bank.

Energy • GDF Suez

In the closing hours of December, French energy group GDF Suez signed the year's largest property deal, involving the rental of 75,000 square metres of office space in two buildings under construction near North Station in Brussels for a period of 15 years. The company will relocate all of its Belgian operations – Electrabel and Tractebel – to the new facilities as of 2011. The deal marks the end of Electrabel's presence in a prestigious building next to the Royal Palace, which it has occupied since 1929.

Mail • Belgian Post

The Belgian Post Office has acquired a majority stake in MSI Worldwide Mail company for an undisclosed amount. The Virginia-based company is specialised in the international distribution of mail and parcels for third parties.

Medical tech • Agfa Gevaert

The Mortsel-based medical imaging technology company has signed a four-year contract worth some €500 million with the Chinese authorities for the sale and distribution of radiographic equipment.

Retail • Free Record Shop

Dutch retail group Free Record Shop, specialised in CDs and audio/video products, is to take over nine Extrazone stores that formed part of the bankrupt Sonica group.

Two women, two motorcycles, two great big continents

A Flemish couple publishes a book about the adventure of a lifetime

MARIJKE MAES

In 2007, Trui Hanoule and Gaea Schoeters embarked on a great adventure – a journey across Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and the Arabic Peninsula. On motorcycles.

Facing extremes of both heat and cold and entering regions with less than stellar human rights reputations, the couple from Sint-Niklaas spent seven months crossing desolate landscapes, playing power games with border guards and enjoying more hospitality than they ever knew possible. Gaea, 33, is a journalist, and Trui, 49, is a photographer, so a book about the trek was inevitable. It's called *Meisjes, Moslims & Motoren* (Girls, Muslims and Motorcycles).

Flanders Today: The one thing everybody wants to know is why you embarked on such a trip. It does seem kind of dangerous, particularly for two women.

Trui: When I was 18, I lived in Finland for a year. I've had my eye on the horizon ever since. I backpacked on my own and later made two journeys with my girlfriend to India on our motorbikes. Gaea and I decided to start driving east, but turn left in Iran. We wanted to visit that fascinating cluster of countries in Central Asia, like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and also the Pamir Highway.

Gaea: There is just so much world! We went east because that's the only direction that allows you to keep on driving.

Trui: And it offers you the great experience of undergoing the transition of cultures, from our Western civilisation to the former Eastern bloc and onto the Muslim countries. And even further you reach Buddhism and Hinduism. We wanted to see the background of all the TV images.

"We went east because that's the only direction that allows you to keep on driving"

How did you experience the Muslim culture?

Trui: The fact that we were women was actually not that important. First, we were travellers, then we were travellers on motorbikes, and only then did they notice we were women. For Muslims, it is a duty and a blessing to look after travellers, and that came first.

Gaea: Of course, we didn't look like normal tourists on those bikes. The bikes were really a big hit with them.

Trui: Sometimes the fact that we were women caused confusion. Since they flocked around us as soon as we arrived, we were often already "friends" by the time we took our helmets off and they realised we weren't men. I think they mainly felt admiration for what we were doing. But that doesn't mean they would allow their wives to do the same.

Gaea: Because we were westerners, we were allowed to do things the local women aren't. We could sit on the men's side in the restaurants for instance.

"We carried pictures of ourselves with men and told them they were our husbands. It just saves you a lot of explaining"

You are a couple; did that never lead to any trouble?

Trui: No, the thought didn't even come to their minds that that could be the case. They thought all kinds of things – that we were sisters, or mother and daughter. But not that. They just didn't consider it.

Gaea: We did have "fake husbands" though. We carried pictures of ourselves with men and told them they were our husbands. It just saves you a lot of explaining. We could not tell them we were lesbians, and they really cannot understand that someone is single. Then they pity you and think there's something wrong with you. [laughs]

Trui: Sometimes I found it hard to lie, especially when we met people who we connected with. But you can never be sure.

How was it to wear the headscarf?

Gaea: In Iran, you don't have much choice; it's the law. But elsewhere, we never wore it, and nobody made a remark about that.

Trui: It's really hell in the heat because you don't only have to wear the scarf but also some kind of mantle. So you're fully dressed all the time. And when someone knocked on our door, there was always some panic because we were "in our hair". But in the end you get used to it. We met a lady in Iran – a photographer and a very progressive woman. She thinks that in the west we focus too much on that headscarf.



Top: Gaea (left) and Trui: ready to roll

She says that Muslim women experience totally different problems that are much more fundamental.

Gaea: At least the headscarves offer the women the chance to go outside. In Iran, the women wear a chador, but you see as many women on the streets as men. And that's something you can't say of all Muslim countries.

You also went to the Arabic peninsula, but that was not your plan from the outset...

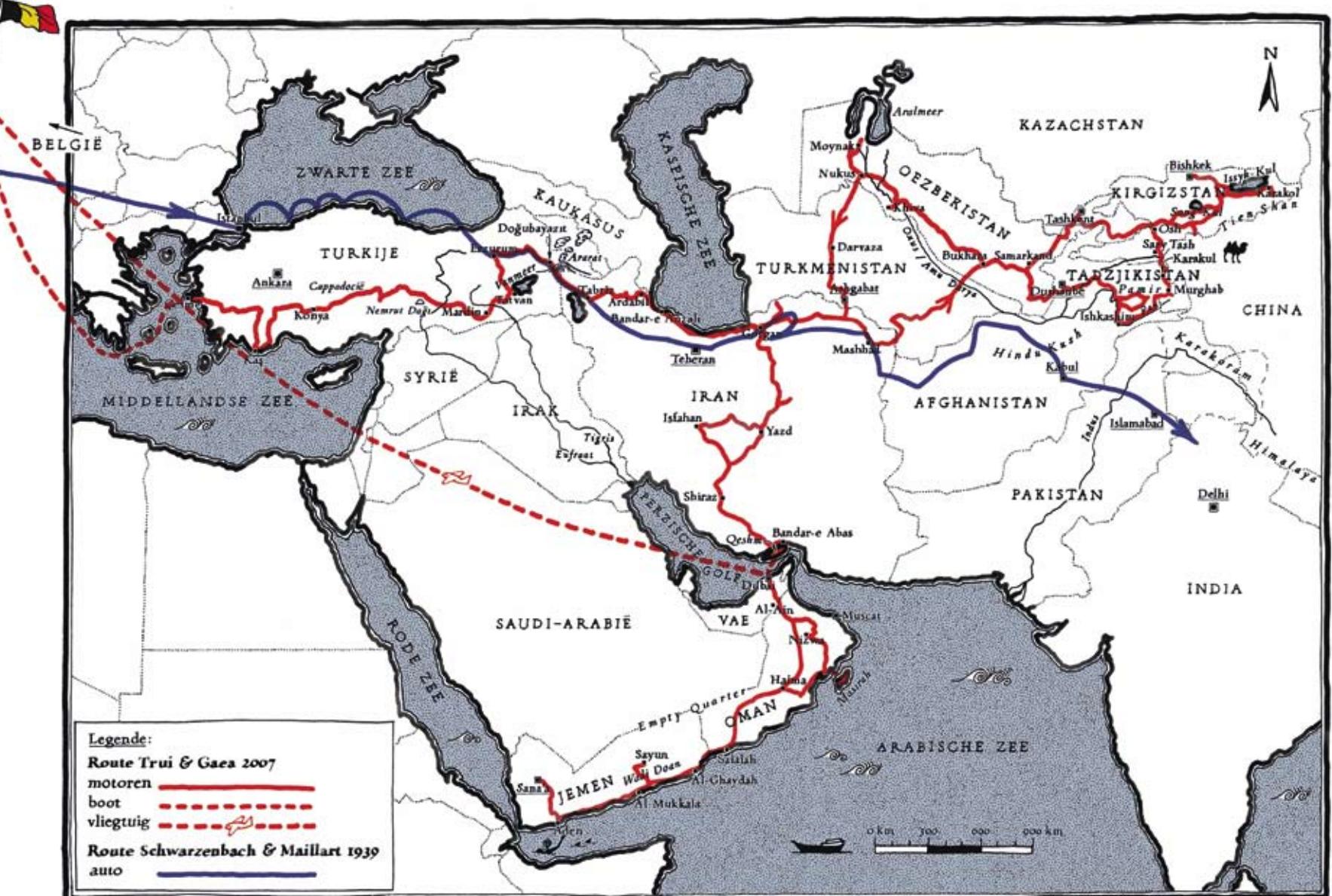
Gaea: We were supposed to drive back through Turkey, but it became clear that it would just be too cold. It was minus 20 degrees there. On top of that, the problems between the Turks and the Kurds reached its peak around that time. So we decided to start driving south. We doubted about going to Yemen because of its reputation concerning kidnappings and women's rights. But we went; it turned out better than we anticipated. The people are very concerned about their bad image and asked us to tell everybody at home what a great country they have.

Your experience with the locals in general seems to be have been very positive. Does that also apply to your dealings with the authorities?

Gaea: Central Asia is renowned for its visa and border problems. You are confronted with the old Russian system that starts to break down over there. You need a hundred documents to be able to travel, and when you're lucky enough to find out what you need – because nobody tells you – you still have to manage to get them. But there wasn't that much corruption against tourists. And always helpful was the trick with the cigarettes. When they stop you, you hand out cigarettes to everyone. It's just lubricant for the negotiations. The worst was Turkmenistan. You're obliged to pay for everything in dollars, but because they see that as an exchange

All photos ©Trui Hanoule and Gaea Schoeters





From Turkey into Central Asia, the women motorcycled across Iran, Oman, Yemen and Central Asian countries rarely visited by Westerners: "You're treated like a hero all the time."

transaction, they charge you for it!

Trui: You have to switch on your Zen attitude. When they want to sit on your motorbike, for example, you just let them.

Gaea: Actually we complemented each other very well. Trui was brisk and wanted everything arranged quickly; I played the innocent woman who really needed the custom officers to get us into the country. One or both usually worked.

You asked people to send you mail to different post offices, where you could pick it up. Wouldn't email have been easier?

Gaea: Getting a letter is totally different from getting e-mail. It's nostalgic, romantic, tangible. But a lot of it got lost. Once we went to the wrong office to get something. It turns out that the man who had to help us had Alzheimer's, and he got more and more confused because we were convinced something was there for us. Our apologies, we were wrong!

Trui: But it was great to find our mail in small corners of post offices. It usually meant we lost half a day because we always had to go to the main post office and then find someone who knew what we wanted. It's an old fashioned system, but if you want to mail something like a book or a motorcycle part, it's often the only way.

What was your best experience?

Gaea: The fact that the people were so warm and open. We often rang a doorbell late at night to ask if we could put up our tent and were promptly asked to come in and eat and drink. When you consulted your map on the way, people always stopped to help. If you didn't need their help, they returned with a gift, like some fruit or a cookie. People over there find it normal to take you home and get nothing in

return.

Trui: Of course, there is also a downside: as a guest you have a very active role. Sometimes you long for a hotel room where you're just left in peace.

Gaea: In Oman, a desert state, literally everybody stops when you're standing somewhere. In the end, we rode a kilometre into the desert to get some peace, and still they came with their 4x4s.

What did you miss the most during your travels?

Trui: A good museum. And international news, which was hard to find.

Gaea: I mainly missed good coffee. Halfway across Turkey, that just stops.

When you returned, what did you miss from the journey?

Gaea: The people. The Iranians, for instance, were so sweet and open, so warm. Nobody asked us if we were Muslims. In Afghanistan or Pakistan, that's usually the first or second question. The people in Iran just want to know what you think about their country. They are really proud of themselves.

Trui: In Iran, they feel the religious rules are forced on them, while on the Arabic peninsula they're more a part of the culture.

Gaea: A journey like that is very good for your ego; you're treated like a hero all the time.

Trui: It is also addictive. It's a different life, and everything is reduced to its essence: where will we sleep and eat, and will the motor keep running.

Gaea: I learned one big lesson: if you're afraid of something, just do it. Usually, it's not so bad. ♦



Meisjes
Moslims
& Motoren

Gaea Schoeters
Trui Hanoule

Meisjes, Moslims & Motoren
is currently only available in Dutch

My grandfather, myself

British actor brings celebrated war memoirs to the stage

LISA BRADSHAW

When Cameron Stewart was a little boy, his mother told him that when he became a grown-up actor (his aspirations clearly in place) he should do something with his grandfather's diaries.

When you are young, the yellowed, curled pages of your grandfather's diaries are perhaps not of much interest. But when he looked through them a few years ago, he thought, "This is astonishing."

Stewart's grandfather was a captain with a Scottish regiment in the First World War, and he kept a record of his daily experiences stationed in the Somme and Passchendaele. Many entries that might seem mundane in other circumstances, such as the chance to have a bath, take on a fresh import. Other stories, such as the reaction of Flemish citizens when your troop descends on their town, or when the mud reaches your armpits, or when you suddenly feel a rat licking at the grease in your hair, bring the day-to-day life of an officer on the frontline into wary focus.

Captain Alexander Stewart was the only officer of his intake to survive the war, and, once home, he elaborated on the diaries, creating a memoir. The diaries remained a family heirloom for 70 years and Cameron finally decided to publish them in e-book form in 2007. The following year, he recorded it as a talking book and read some excerpts on the *Today* programme on BBC Radio 4. "And then all hell broke loose, really," he says.

The public response was enormous. The memoirs brought the war into living rooms and kitchens, and provided some British people with their first real understanding of the horrors of the frontline and the devastating loss of life. The prose is sensitive, informative, anecdotal. Britain fell in love with it.

Cameron's grandfather had titled his memoir *The Experiences of a Very Unimportant Officer in France and Flanders during 1916 – 1917*, and a hardcover was published in 2008 by Hodder & Stoughton under the title *A Very Unimportant Officer*.

So Cameron had done what his mother, now deceased, had told him he should do. But he is, after all, an actor. He premiered the one-man show *My Grandfather's Great War* at the Edinburgh Festival in 2008, and the *Daily Telegraph* called it "the most affecting show in town". He's now toured it across Britain, and, fittingly, Flanders will be the first stop on his international tour.

The English Theatre of Bruges, which keeps a sharp eye on the best of Edinburgh, will host the show in its tiny, 30-seat theatre. Cameron has performed it for both small and larger audiences, but in such an intimate setting, he says, "I feel like I'm actually talking to them. Which gives it a different slant."

The show re-enacts some of his grandfather's experiences verbatim from the diaries, mixed with his own reflections on the concept of war. "I'm rather torn because I have an awful lot of respect for soldiers and especially for my grandfather... but I abhor war," he says. "I was a bit worried that soldiers wouldn't like it, but quite a few of them have come to see it, and they've really enjoyed it and liked what I'm saying." ♦

My Grandfather's Great War

22-24 January, 20.00

English Theatre of Bruges, Walplein 23

→ www.ematema.com



Scripting reality

Alfred Hitchcock becomes a character in someone else's film

LISA BRADSHAW

On 12 August 1962, the day Johan Grimonprez was born, François Truffaut was visiting the Hollywood set of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. This visit would lead to Truffaut's famous book of interviews with the "master of suspense".

Forty-seven years later, Grimonprez has used these interviews to style his film *Double Take*. Except in *Double Take*, Hitchcock doesn't meet Truffaut. He meets himself.

"If you meet your double, you should kill him. Or he will kill you. Two of you is one too many. By the end of the script, one of you must die." When Hitchcock says these words, the notion of "script" might seem simple. But as this shrewd and absorbing movie progresses, the idea of scripts becomes much more complex.

Grimonprez, born in Roeselare and educated in Ghent and New York, is a complicated character himself. You ask him what you think is a simple question about media representation, and you find yourself embroiled in an in-depth conversation about 1950s political constructs and corporate conspiracies. Fifteen minutes later, you quietly ask yourself: did he answer my question?

But it doesn't matter because he's certainly said something useful. Like this, for instance: "If you see your double, you should kill him" is such a Belgian thing," he says. "You're Flemish, but you're not Dutch, or you're Walloon, but you're not French. You speak a dialect, but you have to learn proper Dutch in school. So you're always distanced. There's no Belgian language; it's a subtitled country. Ironically, that ends up being your asset. The Belgian identity is all about being displaced."

Grimonprez is a filmmaker and curator, as well as a teacher of New Media at New York's School of Visual Arts. *Double Take* picks up themes of his first two films – *Dial H-I-S-T*

O-R-Y, about terrorists and the media, and *Looking for Alfred*, about the casting of Hitchcock doubles.

Double identities and screen representations are at the heart of *Double Take*, which has won numerous prizes at festivals, including at Sundance and Berlin. Grimonprez mixes footage of Hitchcock, commentary by a famous Hitchcock double, scenes from *The Birds*, and commercials and political news footage from the 1950s and 1960s to weave a deceptively simple connection between illusion and reality.

By taking footage out of context (not to mention showing it four decades later), the director makes explicit ludicrous displays of political theatrics. The famous 1959 "Kitchen Debates" between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, for instance, with its location in an exhibition of labour-saving modern appliances, comes off like a comedy routine at best, corporate control of the White House at worst. It's an act – a double – of real Cold War negotiations that must be interpreted by viewers in much the same way a film like *The Birds* must be interpreted. "The Kitchen Debate mirrors what was going on in society, which is an interesting method that Hitchcock always used," says Grimonprez.

Possibly even more amusing than Nixon trying to charm Khrushchev (and Khrushchev not really having any of it) are the Folgers coffee commercials from the 1960s, in which women's ultimate goal is to make the perfect cup of



coffee. Their marriages, it seems, depend on it. "The world is so abundant with fictions and images that we grow up with," says Grimonprez. "The innermost desires that we project into society – we've seen them already on TV. It's how we make up our reality. We don't question commercials, but if you look at them from 20 years ago, you see how we have been infected with those codes."

In the middle of it all, a 1962 Hitchcock meets his double – himself from 1980. According to his own rules, only one can survive. ♦

Double Take opens at Arenberg Cinema in Brussels on 13 January, in Ghent in February and in Leuven, Ostend and Kortrijk in March
→ www.imaginefilm.be

Walking away the winter woes

Don't curse the cold – bundle up and embrace it in Flanders' nature reserves

MELISSA MAKI

The holiday season, with its twinkling lights, cheerful Christmas markets and festive spirits, is now behind us. After all of the excitement, food and presents, getting back to the grind can be depressing – particularly when faced with the idea of a couple more months of dreary winter weather. It just so happens – and bear with us here – that fresh air, exercise and beautiful scenery are a cure for the post-holiday blues. It's a scientific fact that getting those endorphins going improves the mood.

In our quest for a happy Flanders, we welcome you to our four-part series on *winterwandelingen* (winter walks) around the region. This week: the beautiful (especially in winter) Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen nature reserve in Ghent.

Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen

In the western part of Ghent, just past an unsightly strip mall off Driepikkelstraat, lies the main entrance to Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen, a 230-hectare natural oasis for wildlife and humans alike.

The city owns the majority of this property, which has been set aside as a nature and wildlife preserve. The city and Natuurpunt Ghent, a membership organisation dedicated to environmental conservation and education, have collaborated to build the area into an natural urban treasure.

My latest visit was a rare, sunny day in late December. It is striking to be within the bounds of such a picturesque and peaceful retreat within minutes of leaving hectic city streets. I chose a route (signposted at the entrance) that spanned all of the trails, circling along the perimeter of the park in a matter of a couple of hours.

There are six entrances to the park; if it's your first visit, I suggest starting at the main entrance, which features a visitors' centre that is equipped with loads of information about the reserve, as well as a cafeteria and toilets. Each access point has a map of the park's three main footpaths, which range from two to 5.5 kilometres in length. The walks are estimated to take between one to two-and-a-half hours.

In December, the trails were snowy and icy.

On warmer days in the winter and spring, that turns to mud, so I recommend waterproof boots (although I did see one woman strolling confidently in her high heels). All of the trails are relatively easy, making this a great place for a family outing. The western portion of the park has more flat and gravelly paths, and one of the trails – Meerskantpad – is handicap accessible. People with disabilities can get permission to use bikes in the reserve. Otherwise, biking is restricted to a specific section of the park (which is probably too small an area for a good ride).

The reserve is well used and appreciated by people of all ages: in the summer, it's practically a social event wandering around with a huge portion of *Gentenaars*. Even now, despite the chilly conditions, I saw dozens of people – from families with children running around throwing snowballs to elderly couples quietly walking hand in hand.

The Leie River divides the natural area into two parts: the northern section is called the Bourgoyen, while Ossemeersen lies to the south. The landscape here is a valley with marshy grassland that is intersected by canals and ditches. The distinctive knot willow tree is a common sight along the trails, as are a wide variety of water birds. Now is one of the best times to visit the Bourgoyen. Flooding makes this area a paradise for wintering waterfowl; it has been recommended as a Ramsar site – an area of international importance for wintering water birds – due to its population of *slobeenden*, or shovellers, a species of ducks.

There are two viewing huts in the reserve that offer excellent vantage points for bird watching and photography. Other birds you can expect to see in the winter are widgeon and teal ducks and the ruff, which wades around the waters. Natuurpunt Ghent keeps a regular tally of regional bird sightings on their website, including those within the reserve. The organisation also provide free tours through the Bourgoyen on the first Saturday of every month. ♦

→ www.natuurpuntgent.be



© All photos: Melissa Maki

GETTING THERE ►►

Entry to Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen is free, parking is available at the main entrance. Four points of entry have bike racks and are accessible by public transport:

Main entry Driepikkelstraat 32 : bus 3 (stop Jutestraat)

Entry Mahatma Gandhistraat: bus 9/73 (stop Appelstraat)

Entry Bunderweg-Drongensesteenweg: bus 14/15/16/17/18 (stop Drongen Watersportbaan)

Entry Jean-Pierre Baudetlaan en Zandloperstraat: bus 9 (stop Vliegpleinkouter)



Nature Centre:

Where environmental education meets warm drinks



The main entrance of Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen allows easy access to the Natuur en Milieacentrum De Bourgoyen (Bourgoyen Nature and Environmental Centre), an impressive education centre that is jointly run by the city of Ghent and Natuurpunt Ghent. In this welcoming building, crafted with passive design principles, you learn about general conservation tips as well as the history and flora and fauna of the area.

The centre rents binoculars and provides access to an environmental education library. Information is all in Dutch, but the interactive exhibits are interesting even if you aren't fluent. You'll also find a cafeteria on weekends, featuring a mix of organic and fair-trade drinks and snacks. It's the perfect place to reward yourself after a long, chilly walk with a hot bowl of soup. Cosy up with some glühwein or hot chocolate, or choose from a respectable beer list that includes Gageleer – an organic Belgian brew.

→ www.gent.be/bourgoyen-ossemeersen



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Heavy Trash

PM DOUTRELIGNE

When New York rockabilly merchants Heavy Trash played Ghent's Vooruit in 2007, the gig was, with impeccable accuracy, billed as a "rock'n'roll master class". Not of the sit-down-and-take-notes variety, but the kind that leaves you with a gaping mouth, asking yourself, did this just happen?

This tends to be the effect lead singer and guitarist Jon Spencer has had on his audience throughout his career. Back in the late 1980s, he was terrorising all and sundry as part of arty iconoclasts Pussy Galore. Then, shortly after launching the sleazy Boss Hog with his partner Cristina Martinez, came mainstream recognition with his baby (the clue is in the name): Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. Mixing the raw energy of The Cramps with the riff-based efficiency of the Rolling Stones and the work ethic of James Brown, JSBX wrote the blueprint for many of today's more commercially successful acts, most notably The White Stripes (with their main man Jack White coming across like a cheap, contrived version of Jon Spencer).

Given the Spencer's propensity for starting new projects, Heavy Trash were quickly dismissed as *yet* another distraction, this time celebrating the oft-under-rated world of 1950s rock'n'roll. But five years and three albums later, Spencer and his sidekick, Matt Verta-Ray (of defunct indie darlings Madder Rose) have acquired a cast-iron reputation among notoriously unforgiving rockabilly audiences the world over. Somehow this tribute to the '50s was always on the cards, Spencer having on countless occasions spoken of his undying admiration for Sam Phillips, the owner of Memphis' legendary Sun Studios.

Any good musician can come up with a decent record; true artists, however, bring another dimension to their music when in a live environment, and Heavy Trash's trump card is the effervescent interaction between Spencer and Verta-Ray. Howling like men possessed, grinning like Cheshire cats and hamming it up Vegas-style, these two really know how to put on a show.

The bulk of the material on this

tour will surely consist of songs from the band's latest opus, *Midnight Soul Serenade*, but nods to the past are inevitable – listen out in particular for the infectious "Kissy Baby" and the ultimate showstopper "They Were Kings". Speaking of kings, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of Elvis' birth, you would be hard pressed to find a more fitting tribute. ♦



15 January, 20.00

**Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110**

→ www.abconcerts.be

MORE ROCK THIS WEEK

Ok Go → *Ancienne Belgique, Brussels*

Haloo Kosmo record release → *Botanique, Brussels*

Humo's Rock Rally preselection → *Zaal De Swerver, Middelkerke*



MUSIC NEWS

Music Industry Awards

Absynthe Minded big winners

The pop/rock band Absynthe Minded were the big winners at the MIAs last Friday night, 8 January. The annual January ceremony awards the best in Flanders-based music for the previous year. The Ghent band won Best song ("Envoi"), Best album (pictured), Best rock group and Best overall group. Solo rock artist Daan also came out on top with four wins, including Best solo artist (man) and Best composer. Lady Linn, who has re-popularised jazz numbers in Flanders, won Best solo artist (woman).



→ <http://mias.een.be>



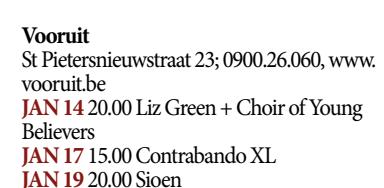
Charlatan
Vlasmarkt 6; 09.224.24.57,
www.charlatan.be
JAN 14 22.00 Drive Like Maria + Del Piero & Carlito + Red D + The Nicholsons
JAN 16 21.30 Blaute & Melaerts



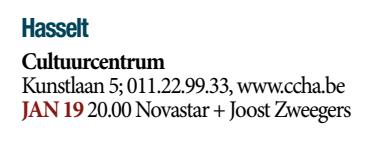
Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01,
www.handelsbeurs.be
JAN 15 20.00 Trixie Whitley
JAN 16 20.15 Eva de Roovere



Kinky Star
Vlasmarkt 9; 09.223.48.45,
www.kinkystar.com
JAN 16 21.00 Butsenzeller
JAN 17 21.00 Elephant Leaf
JAN 19 21.00 Poco



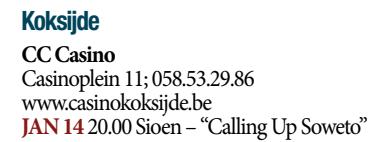
Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
JAN 14 20.00 Liz Green + Choir of Young Believers
JAN 17 15.00 Contrabando XL
JAN 19 20.00 Sioen



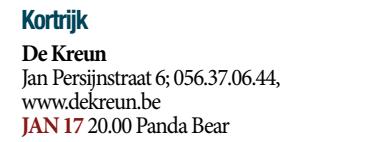
Hasselt
Cultuurcentrum
Kunstlaan 5; 011.22.99.33, www.ccha.be
JAN 19 20.00 Novastar + Joost Zweegers



Muziekodroom
Bootsstraat 9; 011.23.13.13,
www.muziekodroom.be
JAN 14 20.30 The Electrophonics
JAN 16 21.30 Modfest



Koksijde
CC Casino
Casinoplein 11; 058.53.29.86
www.casinokoksijde.be
JAN 14 20.00 Sioen – "Calling Up Soweto"



Kortrijk
De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44,
www.dekreun.be
JAN 17 20.00 Panda Bear

Agenda

FLANDERS TODAY
JANUARY 13, 2010

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,
www.stuk.be
JAN 16 20.30 Panda Bear

Roeselare

CC De Spil
Spilleboudtreet 1; 051.26.57.00,
www.despil.be
JAN 14-15 20.00 Axelle Red

Sint-Niklaas

OJC Kompas
Driekoningenstraat 48; 03.776.72.70, www.ojckompas.be
JAN 15 18.00 Wrecking Ball + Peter Pan Speedrock (CD release) + Hootka + afterparty with The 5'Z

Ternat

CC De Ploter
Kerkstraat 4; 02.582.44.33,
www.ccdeploter.be
JAN 16 20.30 Kleztrory

Turnhout

De Warande
Warandestraat 42; 014.41.69.91,
www.warande.be
JAN 14 20.15 Joost Zweegers



Antwerp

Buster
Kaasrui 1; 03.232.51.53,
www.busterpodium.be
JAN 14 21.00 Buster Blues Jam **JAN 15** 22.00 Ambient Jazz Duo **JAN 16** 22.00 Tiger Lili **JAN 19** 21.30 Cicadas **JAN 20** 21.30 Chad McCullough Quartet

De Hopper

Leopold De Waelstraat 2; 03.248.49.33,
www.cafehopper.be
JAN 17 16.00 Ariadne & guests
JAN 18 & 25 21.00 The Circle
JAN 19 21.00 Tutu Puoane Quartet

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40,
www.deroma.be
JAN 15 20.30 Tjits Delbeke with Sir Yes Sir
JAN 16 20.30 Kris Defoort & Han Bennink

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
JAN 16 20.30 De Nolf + Sheppard + Palmaerts

Brussels

Atelier 210
Sint-Pieterssteenweg 210; 02.732.25.98,
www.atelier210.be
JAN 18 21.00 Jazz Cats: The Yellowjackets

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
JAN 16 18.00 Tutu Puoane Quartet
JAN 20 20.30 Charlier with Sourisse Quartet

Piola Libri

Franklinstraat 66-68; 02.736.93.91,
www.piolalibri.be
JAN 19 19.00 Apéro Jazz: Capparos with Ferandez duo, guitar/fusion

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34,
www.recycleart.be
JAN 16 20.00 Crappy Goes Maxi!, electronic/free jazz

Sazz'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78,
www.sazznjazz.be
JAN 14 20.30 Box Story
JAN 16 20.30 Sazz n Jazz Quartet with Gursel, pop/rock/Turkish
JAN 20 20.30 Mathilde Renault

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be
JAN 14 21.00 The Singers Night **JAN 15** 22.00 Alexandre Furnelle Quintet **JAN 16** 21.00 Brussels Rhyth'm Blues Club: The Witness **JAN 18** 22.00 Master Session **JAN 19** 22.00 Laurent Doumont Soul Band **JAN 20** 22.00 Chamaquiendo

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45,
www.themusicvillage.com
Concerts at 21.00:
JAN 14 Lady Sinatra **JAN 15** Tutu Puoane
JAN 16 The Vintage Jazz Cats **JAN 20** Nathan Daems Quintet

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
JAN 20 20.00 Michael Moore

Grimbergen

CC Strombeek
Gemeenteplein; 02.263.03.43,
www.ccstrombeek.be
JAN 20 20.30 De Nolf + Sheppard + Palmaerts

Meise

GC De Muze
Brusselsesteenweg 69; 02.272.00.29,
www.demuzevanmeise.be
JAN 17 11.00 Roelant & Vleminck – "Trumpet through the centuries"



Brussels

Sazz'n Jazz
Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78,
www.sazznjazz.be
JAN 15 20.30 Grup Cemre, Anatolian folk

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00, www.muziekpubliek.be
JAN 20 12.30 Hamon-Martin Duo

Meise

GC De Muze
Brusselsesteenweg 69; 02.272.00.29,
www.demuzevanmeise.be
JAN 16 20.00 Filippo Gambetta

Vilvoorde

CC Het Bolwerk
Bolwerkstraat 17; 02.255.46.90
JAN 20 20.30 Etta Scollo – "Les Siciliens"



Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28,
www.amuz.be
JAN 15 21.00 Ausonia Ensemble conducted by Frédéric Haas, fortepiano: sonatas and piano trios from 18th-century London

JAN 16 21.00 Frank Theuns, traverso and flute; Jos van Immerseel, harpsichord and piano: French music from the Baroque period and early 20th century
JAN 17 15.00 Zefiro Torna and Pantalone in Te Ros!, family music inspired by Flemish tales of chivalry

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
Concerts at 20.00:
JAN 13 Blndman presents Kwadratur #2/ Transfo, a new work by Flemish composer Luc Breweys, conducted by Eric Slechim

JAN 14 Altenberg Trio Wien: lecture/recital around Dvorák's Dumky Trio (in English)
JAN 15 Altenberg Trio Wien: piano trios by Haydn, Schnittke, Schumann **JAN 19** Piet Van Bockstal, oboe: lecture/recital on contemporary British composer Jonathan Harvey (in Dutch)

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02,

Free
subscription!

Antwerp

JAN 14 20.00 Andrew Tortise tenor; Richard Egarr harpsichord and piano: five centuries of British song from John Dowland to Peter Maxwell Davies
JAN 17 15.00 Rubens Ensemble: Chausson, César Franck

JAN 20 20.00 Lecture Songs #1: first of a new series by Muziektheater LOD that combines early music performances with lectures by prominent thinkers. Baroque ensemble B'Rock, conducted by Frank Agsteribbe: Purcell, Matthew Locke. Speaker is the mathematician and philosopher Jean-Paul Van Bendegem (in Dutch)

Brussels

Bozar
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
JAN 14 20.00 Lille National Orchestra conducted by Jean-Claude Casadesus, with young musicians from the Chapelle Musicale Reine Elisabeth: Beethoven, Ravel, Bizet

JAN 15 20.00 Ein Abend in Wien, with soloists, ballet, choir and orchestra of the Johann Strauss Music Theatre Lodz, conducted by Tadeusz Kozłowski: ballet extracts, polkas and waltzes
JAN 16 from 12.00 Klara in het Paleis: day-long musical marathon featuring the Edding String Quartet, early music ensemble Zefiro Torna, pianist Abdel Rahman El Bacha and the Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Michel Tabachnik

JAN 17 11.00 Laura Quesada Alcaide, flute; Laurence Cornez, piano: Bach, François Borne, Frédéric Devreese, Lowell Libermann
JAN 20 20.00 Abdel Rahman El Bacha, piano: Ravel

Ghent

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01,
www.handelsbeurs.be
JAN 20 20.15 Belcea Quartet: string quartets by Beethoven and Szymanowski



Brussels

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
JAN 19-FEB 4 15.00/20.00 Elektra by Richard Strauss, directed by Guy Joosten, with Evelyn Herlitzius/Nadine Secunde, sopranos (Elektra), and De Munt Symphony Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Lothar Koenigs

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02,
www.vlaamseopera.be
Until JAN 17 15.00/20.00 Candide comic operetta in two acts by Leonard Bernstein. The Flemish Opera Symphony Orchestra is conducted by Yannis Pouspourikas, staging by Nigel Lowery. With singers Michael Spyres Jane Archibald and Graham Valentine



Antwerp

Toneelhuis/Bourla
Komedieplaats 18; 03.224.88.44,
www.toneelhuis.be
Until JAN 15 20.00 Het Toneelhuis in Ashes, choreographed by Koen Augustijnen

Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02,
www.vlaamseopera.be
Until FEB 13 Royal Ballet of Flanders in Grands Egarde, with music performed by deFilharmonie, conducted by Benjamin Pope

Brussels

Kaaïtheater
Sainctelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59,

DON'T MISS



Elektra

19 January to 4 February
De Munt, Brussels

When she penned "So Happy I Could Die", outrageous pop singer Lady Gaga could have been inspired by the destiny of Elektra – another powerful woman, albeit of a different time and place. This one-act opera by Richard Strauss enjoys a brand new performance by the Flemish stage master Guy Joosten. Based on Sophocles' Greek tragedy and the perfect follow-up to De Munt's recent *Iphigenia* operas, *Elektra* is all about murder, revenge and the sheer joy that comes from victory – too much joy, in fact.

On 24 January, Polish writer Lisa Appignanesi, co-author of *Freud's Women*, and Ghent psychology professor Paul Verhaeghe, talks about the themes of *Elektra*, in English with French and Dutch translation.

► www.demunt.be

www.kaaitheater.be
Until JAN 17 Les Ballets C de la B in Out of Context, choreographed by Alain Platel

Théâtre les Tanneurs
Huidevetersstraat 75; 02.512.17.84,
www.lestanneurs.be
JAN 19-22 20.30 Cie La Dame de Pic in Humus vertebra, choreographed by Karine Ponties

Grimbergen

CC Strombeek
Gemeenteplein; 02.263.03.43,
www.ccstrombeek.be
JAN 15-16 20.30 Rosas danst Rosas, choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker

Leuven

30CC - Schouwburg
Bondgenotenlaan 21; 016.32.03.20,
www.30CC.be
JAN 13-14 20.00 Rosas in The Song, choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker



Aalst

De Werf
Molenstraat 51; 053.73.28.12,
www.ccdewerf.be
JAN 14 20.00 Compagnie Barbarie in Too Far East is West (in Dutch)

Antwerp

Het Paleis
Theaterplein 1; 03.202.83.11,
www.hetpaleis.be

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Until MAR 19 Sunjata, de leeuwenkoning van Mali (The Lion King of Mali) (ages six and up; in Dutch)

Bruges

De Werf

Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29,
www.dewerf.be

JAN 13 20.30 Toneelgroep Ceremonia in Ma dr e (in Dutch)

Brussels

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25,
www.demarkten.be

JAN 15 12.30/20.30 Van Zilverpapier in Silence Fini, music theatre

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vlaakstraat 81;
02.201.59.59, www.kaaistudio.be

JAN 14-16 Actor#1, installation/performance by Kris Verdonck (in English)

JAN 20 20.30 & 21.30 Propositions 1 & 2: Reanimation, Reconstruction by Miet Warlop (without dialogue)

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00,
www.kvs.be

JAN 15-16 20.00 Rops/Snare, music theatre by Eric Thielemans and Josse De Pauw (in Dutch)

KVS Box

Arduinklaai 9; 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.be
JAN 20-23 20.30 Weg by Josse De Pauw, music by Peter Vermeersch, performed by De Pauw, Vermeersch and Peter Vervloesen (in Dutch)

The Warehouse Studio

Waelhemstraat 69a; 0477.40.87.04,
atc.theatrebrussels.com

JAN 19-30 20.00 Oscar and the Lady in Pink, monologue performed by Ruth England (in English)

Dilbeek

Weststrand Cultuurcentrum

Kameriklaan; 02.466.20.30,
www.weststrand.be

JAN 16 20.30 Els Dottermans in Was will das Weib?, music theatre (in Dutch)

Eeklo

CC De Herbakker

Pastoor De Nevestraat 10; 09.218.27.27,
www.ccdeherbakker.be

JAN 13 20.30 Toneelgroep Ceremonia in Ma dr e (in Dutch)

Ghent

Bij' De Vieze Gasten

Reinaertstraat 125; 09.237.04.07,
www.deviezegasten.org

JAN 13 15.00 4HOOG in De Brief (in Dutch; ages 6 and up)

De Bijloke

Jozef Kluykensstraat 2, 09.233.68.78, www.lod.be

JAN 14-23 20.00 Autopsie Van Een Gebroken Hart (Autopsy of a Broken Heart), written and staged by An De Donder & Dominique Pauwels (in Dutch)

NTGent Schouwburg

Sint-Baafsplaan 17; 09.225.01.01,
www.ntgent.be

Until APR 2 20.30 Els Dottermans in Was will das Weib? musical theatre (in Dutch)

Leuven

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,
www.stuk.be

JAN 13-14 20.30 De Roovers & Bloet in Bakchus, adapted from Euripides' The Bacchae, staged by Jan Decorte (in Dutch)

Lokeren

CC Lokeren

Kerkplein 5; 09/340.50.56, www.lokeren.be/cultuur

JAN 13 20.15 Cie Cecilia in Altijd Prijs (Always a Winner), written and staged by Arne Sierens (in Dutch)



Antwerp

Fashion Museum (MoMu)

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70,
www.momu.be

Until FEB 21 Delvaux: 180 Years of Belgian Luxury, history of the Belgian leather goods manufacturer

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09, www.kmska.be

Until JAN 17 In the Footsteps of Bartók: Lajos Vajda and Hungarian Surrealism

Sfinks Café

Heuvelstraat 63a, Boechout; 03.455.69.44,
www.sfinks.be

Until MAR 11 Arbeiders onder druk (Workers under pressure), photographs by Tineke D'haese and Eric de Mildt, in cooperation with Oxfam-Solidariteit

Bruges

Bruggemuseum-Gruuthuse

Dijver 17; www.uitvindingvanbrugge.be
Until APR 25 De uitvinding van Brugge: De stad van Delacenserie (The Discovery of Bruges: The City of Delacenserie), the 19th-century architectural facelift of Bruges, thanks to local architect Louis Delacenserie

Stadshallen

Markt 7; 050.44.82.82, www.brugge.be
Until JAN 17 That's all Folks! The endless clash between Reason and Destiny, works by various artists that raise questions about the human condition and the notion of destiny

Brussels

art)&(marges

Hoogstraat 312-314; 02.511.34.20
www.artthis.org

Until FEB 21 Surprising Dialogues, selection of outsider art from the new museum shown alongside works from fine arts museums in Belgium

Atomium

Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72,
www.atomium.be

Until APR 25 Ludic Modernism in Belgium 1955-1963, photographs, posters, models, films and furniture recall the popular architectural style, also known as Spirou or the '58 style

Autoworld

Jubelpark 1, www.autoworld.be

Until JAN 17 Bugatti 100 Expo, classic cars from private collections, shown alongside posters, paintings, models, sculptures, bronzes and other works

Beursschouwburg

August Ortsstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be

Until FEB 26 I Wasn't Born Yesterday, Deary: A Trip in the Eye of Guy Maddin, photographs by Michèle Matyn of the Canadian town of Winnipeg, home to cult film director Guy Maddin

Bozar

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be

JAN 16-APR 18 Frida Kahlo y su mundo, works by the Mexican artist on loan from the Dolores Olmedo Museum

Brussels Info Place (BIP)

Koningsplein; 02.563.63.99,
www.biponline.be

Until JAN 29 Christophe Licoppe: Brussels by Night, photographs

Brussels Park

Paleizenplein (www.btcctb.org)

Until FEB 17 Building a Fair World, outdoor photography exhibition organised by the Belgian development agency BTC/CTB

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63

Until FEB 21 Arno Stern: Retrospective, some 50 works from Belgian and international collections

Natural Science Museum

Vautierstraat 29; 02.627.42.38,
www.naturalsciences.be

Until AUG 29 Whales and Dolphins

Royal Museum of the Armed Forces

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33,
www.legermuseum.be

Until FEB 28 Aanvalleuh!, works by Belgian comic strip artists

Until APR 11 Dieren in de oorlog (Animals in the War), archive photos and films of animals affected by the First World War

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11,
www.kmkg-mrah.be

Until MAR 14 Vier Doornikse

wandtapijten uit Pastrana (Four Tournai Tapestries from Pastrana), historically important tapestries originating from the Belgian city of Tournai and restored in Spain (marking the EU Spanish presidency)
Until APR 18 Isabelle de Borchgrave's I Medici: a Renaissance in Paper, life-size paper replicas of historic costumes
Until DEC 27 World Press Photo

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11,
www.fine-arts-museum.be

Until JAN 31 Delvaux and the Ancient World, some 60 paintings and drawings by the Belgian artist

Until JAN 31 The Art of Gaming, works from the collection of the National Lottery on the occasion of its 75th anniversary

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49,
www.tour-taxis.com

Until MAR 28 It's Our Earth! From Kyoto to Copenhagen, interactive exhibition exploring the effects of climate change on the natural world

Until MAR 28 John Fitzgerald Kennedy: The American Dream, photographs, audio-visual documents and objects relating to the assassinated US president (www.jfk-expo.be)

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.340.00.50,
www.wiels.org

Until JAN 24 Speedy Wash #6: installations by Anna Rispoli and Teresa Srdalovich

JAN 16-APR 25 Felix Gonzales-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form, retrospective of the late Cuban-born American artist

Geel

Gasthuismuseum

Gasthuisstraat 1; 014.59.14.43,
www.gasthuismuseumgeel.net

Until MAR 31 God of Doctoor?, collection illustrating the history of healing in Geel

Ghent

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Cittadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be

Until FEB 7 Max Beckmann, prints and paintings from the collection of the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal

Until FEB 7 Fernand Léger's Le Grand Déjeuner, masterpiece painting on loan from the Museum of Modern Art in New York

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Cittadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.be

Until JAN 31 Stefaan Dheerde, installations

Until JAN 31 Jasper Rigole, audiovisual installations

Until JAN 31 Faux Jumeaux (False Twins), changing exhibition curated by Michel François

Until FEB 7 Ben Benaouissa: Jan Fabre revisited, performance art

Until MAR 14 GAGARIN The Artists in their Own Words, a collection of texts by participating artists

Groot-Bijgaarden

Kasteel

Is. Van Beverenstraat 5; 02.427.03.33, www.grandbigard.be

Until JAN 17 De Wonderlijke Kerst van Tsar Nicolas II (The Wonderful Christmas of Tsar Nicolas II), documents, photos, films, dresses and religious statues from around 1900 Tsarist Russia

Hasselt

Cultuurcentrum

Kunstlaan 5; 011.22.99.31, www.ccha.be

JAN 17

FACE OF FLANDERS

Frieda van Wijck

While her VRT colleague Linda de Win fights off hate groups on Facebook, Frieda van Wijck just gets more and more popular. She's just been pegged to present the new culture show on Canvas, *Cobra TV*. And at the end of last year, she was voted the most influential woman in Flanders by *De Standaard*'s weekend magazine.

Van Wijck, 59, was born in Hasselt and trained as a journalist. Having started out on the radio, she moved over to television, serving time on the various editorial departments of what we now call the VRT: at *Panorama*, the news and *Terzake*. From about 2000 on, she began to take more of an onscreen role, interviewing politicians on *Terzake*, steering celebrities through the lengthy reminiscences of *Spraakmakers* and even presenting a quiz show.

Eventually her name became associated with *De zevende dag*, a Sunday lunchtime news and politics show that's come to be absolutely central to the coming week's news agenda, on a par with *Meet the Press* in the US or the old *Weekend World* in the UK. Van Wijck and Alain Coninx brought a softer tone to the show than their predecessors, and it's that more congenial side that marked Van Wijck's style since she stopped presenting *De zevende dag* in 2004.

She was then the presenter of the popular late-night magazine *De laatste show*, where she played host to a variety of guests from all corners of the celebrity



ALAN HOPE

world: not only those who have something to plug, but anyone who happens to be in the public eye on any given day, as long as it's relatively light, to allow Flanders to go to bed with a smile. She gave up the job, though, in April last year.

Cobra TV promises to be "about culture in the broadest sense of the word, whether it's a talented tattoo artist or a free jazz cellist who abuses his strings with a chain saw," according to Canvas. It's the public broadcaster's latest attempt to tame the culture beast.

In *De Standaard*'s year-end round-up of the decade's most influential celebrities, she started third, behind Goedele Liekens, who's all about celebrity, and Phara de Aguirre, who's all about hard news. It's no accident that Van Wijck, whose talents bestride both camps, managed to overtake both of them and cross the finish line in first place.

→ <http://cultuur.canvas.be>

bite

SHARON LIGHT

Greenway

I have an aunt who has been a committed vegan for more than 30 years. She gave up all animal products way before it was cool to do so and certainly long before restaurants or food companies were catering to her restrictions.

Much as I love my aunt, there was much four-year-old whining on my part in preparation for visits to her house. "There's nothing to eat there!" (I guess the roots of my current career were evident even then.)

Vegan – and vegetarian – food has come a long way. Many Belgian establishments may still be lagging behind the vegetarian trend, but others have excelled in feeding this particular demographic – so much so that even a carnivore can feel satisfied.

When it comes to vegetarian restaurants in Belgium, Greenway is an institution. Since 1997 in Ghent, and since 2004 in Leuven, they have supplied Belgian palates with simple, straightforward fare. Prices are low, helped by the basic setup: you order at the counter and bus your own table before you leave. But the décor is bright and comfortable, so you'll hardly feel like you're in a cafeteria.

In some ways, the menu is not so different from a Belgian brasserie – salads, soups and pastas are as typical as they come, except for being vegetarian (or vegan, where



indicated). You'll find a few sandwiches, including "Join the club sandwich", a haloumi-cheese-and-temppeh combo, voted best sandwich in Belgium at Flanders Expo's 2008 Horecabeurs (hotel and restaurant trade fair).

The veggie-burger market has always been a tough one. Greenway offers three contenders, made especially for them by local veggie-burger specialist La Vie Est Belle: cheese and potato, spinach and carrot. A world food section finishes off the menu, including chili, curry and lasagne, and daily specials feature vegetarian proteins: beans, tofu and tempeh, oh my!

Desserts are one area that often seems to suffer in vegetarian establishments, particularly vegan attempts. Greenway's selection is not as rich as your local bakery, but they do offer a good selection of brownies, tiramisu and pies. Greenway can also be enjoyed at home. All dishes are available for take away, or for the true fans, seek out their catering service. For the lazy and/or sceptical, you need look no further than your local Delhaize. Greenway chef and founder Paul Florizoone contributed several dishes to the store's line of ready-made meals, each inspired by local, well known chefs. His resulting microwavable concoctions are enjoyable renditions of typical Greenway meals.

→ www.greenway.be

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



strooien →

The most dangerous place in Flanders these days is the pavement. Most roads have been salted to allow cars free passage. But try using the sidewalks or cycle lanes, and you are likely to come a cropper.

Comments on an Antwerp website are typical. "Het is een regelrecht schandaal – It's a downright scandal; er wordt niet gestrooid op fietspaden – cycle lanes are not salted", complains one resident, who then spoils his rant slightly: "Ben dus verplicht met de auto te gaan werken – So I'm obliged to go to work by car."

It's a lovely verb *strooien*, don't you think? Perhaps it's all those vowels in the middle and echoes of the English verb "to strew", which conjure up images of scattering rose petals. It can also be translated as "sprinkle", as in *suiker strooien* – sprinkle sugar. Though I can't decide how to translate what has been going on in Zwijndrecht in the Netherlands. The headline reads: *Strooien met suiker ipv zout* – salting with sugar instead of salt (*ipv* stands for *in plaats van* – instead of). I suppose it should be sprinkling instead of salting.

At first I thought this a desperate measure to make up for dwindling salt supplies, but no. Apparently *de strooiwagens van Zwijndrecht strooien een combinatie van zout en een suikerachtige substantie* – the Zwijndrecht gritting lorries sprinkle a combination of salt and

a sugar-like substance. It's a Canadian idea and much more effective than just salt. Snow melts as soon as the sugar-salt hits it.

Another advantage is not surprising: *het plakt beter op het wegdek* – it sticks better to the road surface. What's more, *de mix is roestverend en waait minder uit* – the mix prevents rust and is carried less on the wind, thus making it more effective. Though I can imagine that pedestrians and cyclists may have the opposite problem of sticking instead of slip-sliding away.

(Another digression. Isn't *waaien* a lovely verb too? It has similar charms to *strooien*; all those vowels and the connection with the English to waft, which suggests gentle breezes.)

All this road salt costs money, which some consider a waste: *dat is uw en mijn geld op straat smijten* – that's your and my money they are throwing on the streets. Others reason differently: *liever wat geld "op straat" dan achteraf betalen voor blik en andere schade* – rather some money "on the street" than later paying for dents and other damage.

As we are supposed to keep the pavement in front of the house free of snow and ice, I think I will dig out those sachets of sugar that are lying about in the kitchen and put them to good use.

THE LAST WORD...

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

"We've given our country a bit of its self-respect back."

Herman Van Rompuy and Karel De Gucht, top EU office-holders, interviewed in *De Morgen*

...but not for Daerden

"I really hope Daerden was drunk. I hope it for the sake of the socialist party and for the country."

Comedian Bert Kruismans, referring to the latest embarrassing incident involving federal budget minister Michel Daerden

Hungry maggots

"The media is feeding like ruthless, hungry maggots on literal and figurative corpses."

Former culture and youth minister Bert Anciaux, on media coverage of the Loksbergen murders

Acting up

"Acting is far too serious a business for pretending."

Josse De Pauw, who is beginning a retrospective of his stage and screen career