



Europe in Flanders
 How does the rest of Europe shape us?
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 p10

#160 A star is born



A film student bucks the system to make a beautiful little movie that's impressing audiences across Europe

LISA BRADSHAW

Usually it's a good idea to listen to the advice of your college professors. But now and again, you have to go your own way, and it's a wise student who knows when that time is.

Gust Van Den Berghe took his idea for a final-year project to his professors at RITS film school in Brussels. Rather than the assigned short film, he wanted to make a feature. He wanted to base it on an old Flemish Christmas story by a writer decidedly considered dated, and he wanted to use mentally handicapped actors in the lead roles.

The answer was simple: No.

Van Den Berghe decided that this was the moment to not take no for an answer. He gave the school a script he wrote up for a short film – “just to keep them calm” – then went out and made his feature in secret. He came back a year later and submitted it. Then his film was accepted to screen at Cannes’ prestigious Director’ Fortnight – a dream come true for any first director, a near impossibility for a film student’s final project. The buzz around the grainy black-and-white Bergmanesque film with mentally handicapped actors was furious, and the director and his cast – all present – received a standing ovation.

The 75-minute feature is based on a 1924 Christmas play by Flemish author Felix Timmermans, which used to be performed all across Flanders this time of year. It’s called *En waar de sterre bleef stille staan* (And Where the Star Stood Still). The film is releasing under the Dutch title in Flanders, but is playing at festivals under the international English title *Little Baby Jesus of Flandr*. It’s the story of three men who are tired of being broke and cold one winter, so they set out dressed as the three kings to sing for money. It goes remarkably well, but when they stumble upon the birth of a child in their travels, they give away all their worldly gain

to the family. This makes them feel very good, but the following year, one of the three wants to keep the money he’s earned, causing a rift in the group. Soon after, the devil appears to him (in a fantastic top hat and tails), and he finds his offer hard to resist.

“I was reading a lot of old Flemish literature at the time, and I stumbled on this lovely little play,” Van den Berghe tells me from Africa, where he’s currently looking into possibilities for his second film.

► *continued on page 5*

Mums-to-be warned on flu

Pregnant women, the chronically ill and old people have been advised to have themselves vaccinated against flu, said the government’s expert on the subject, Professor Marc Van Ranst. The reason is the return of the H1N1 virus behind last year’s pandemic, which has recently caused the deaths of 10 people in the United Kingdom. The so-called Mexican flu virus – though it has nothing to do with Mexico – occurs in most people as a mild form of the common seasonal variant. However, it is a danger to several risk groups, including pregnant women, especially in the second and third trimesters. The majority of the fatalities in Britain this year were pregnant women. So far in Belgium, one person has tested positive, though the case was not serious enough to require hospitalisation.

The standard flu vaccine contains H1N1, so there is no need for a special or additional jab for those who have already had one. Van Ranst’s office has also requested that GPs report all cases of respiratory infection so that further tests can be done to rule out the presence of the H1N1 virus. The virus is more contagious than seasonal flu, and infected people are contagious for longer. Advice to help stop spreading the virus is the same as for seasonal flu: cover the mouth when coughing and sneezing, wash hands regularly and use paper tissues. And, if you are infected, don’t go to work: your boss may thank you, but your colleagues won’t.

Can read, won’t read

High scores for literacy, but demand for books is down

ALAN HOPE

Flemish teenagers score higher than average in the developed world for literacy, according to figures just released by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The figures are the results of the latest survey from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and cover three fields: ordinary reading, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy.

The scores are based on a test taken last year by 4,496 students aged 15 in more than 150 Flemish schools. The average score for the country overall was 506, enough to earn Belgium eighth place out of 65 nations. Flemish students, however, scored an average of 519. (The worldwide average was 500.)

If Flanders were to be considered separately, it would fall in sixth place just behind Japan. The table is led by South Korea, Finland, Canada and New Zealand, respectively.

Flanders scored even better in numeracy and scientific literacy. On numeracy (or “mathematical literacy”) Flanders scores higher than the OECD average in test levels 4, 5 and 6, but falls into 14th place because a hefty 14% of students didn’t pass level 1. In the top-scoring countries, Finland and Korea, there was no such differential. If only the top scorers were to be considered, the education department argued, Flanders would be in fifth place, and the highest non-Asian country on the list.

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OFFSIDE

"Scrap Machelen and Zaventem" plan unveiled



ALAN HOPE

Extend the Ring around Brussels to 17 lanes. Widen the Vilvoorde viaduct to 11 lanes. And finally, turn the municipalities of Diegem, Machelen and Zaventem into industrial zones, sending the current inhabitants to live elsewhere.

These are just three of the proposals for making Brussels a more successful industrial city, from the study "Capital Solutions for Brussels" drawn up by the Spanish consultancy Garvida+ on the orders of "15 major international companies" and released last week.

The reaction was immediate. Jean-Pierre De Groef, mayor of Machelen, told FM Brussel that the plan was "unrealistic". Other local politicians described it as "crazy" and "unacceptable". Eric Van Rompuy, Flemish parliamentarian and alderman in Zaventem, commented: "The future of the region is contained in the Flemish Urban Area around Brussels [policy document] and only those options are binding... All the rest is a fantasy dreamed up by consultancies who tailor their vision to the needs of their clients."

But in fact, Garvida+ does not exist, and the 15 international companies that De Groef had called upon to reveal themselves also do not exist. The whole "Capital Solutions" plan was a hoax by Greenpeace, who had gone so far as to produce and distribute the 34-page PDF document as well as set up a fake website for the phantom consultancy.

The intention was to draw attention to the impact of existing plans for the area around Brussels if they are carried out. "Just to be clear," the organisation said in a statement, "we didn't invent anything. All we did was to take the current policy to its logical extreme." Some of the outrageous claims in the study, Greenpeace said, are only slight exaggerations of existing policy.

In the so-called START-plan, for example, "there is talk of doubling airport activities in Zaventem from 15 to 35 million passengers by 2025 and...an increase of hundreds of hectares of logistics area."

If all of the projects currently being studied by the Flemish and Brussels regions were to come to fruition, said Joeri Thijs of Greenpeace Belgium, 763 hectares of land would be required. Machelen (which includes Diegem) consists of or less than one-fourth of the extra terrain required.

FLANDERS TODAY

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News in brief

One of the three suspects of a **triple murder in Wemmel** last month has admitted he was present at the house, but denies any part in the murder. Milton R claims he was the driver who brought the two killers to the home of Michel Devleeschouwer, but that he stayed outside while the shootings took place. A family of three was shot dead, a visitor seriously injured, and the killers escaped in two cars stolen from the family. Two of the suspects were extradited from France to Brussels last week.

A man accused of taking part in **pirate attacks** on shipping in the waters off the coast of Somalia was due to be delivered to Belgium last week to face trial. The man, a Somali national, was arrested off the coast of Kenya at the end of November by the Belgian frigate Louise Marie, which is patrolling in the area as part of an international anti-piracy force.

The Brussels municipality of Schaerbeek will equip its cleaning department with **a cart and two draught horses**, which will be used to pick up rubbish from the commune's 800 public rubbish bins, as well as gather leaves in the autumn. The horses, which will come into service in March, will be billeted in Josaphatpark.

Father Godfried Pieraerts, a Norbertine monk and keen astronomer who established Flanders' first public observatory in Grimbergen in 1967, has had **an asteroid named after him**. Asteroid 2001 PM29 is one of many discovered by Thierry Pauwels of the Royal Observatory of Belgium. Pauwels last week gave permission for it to be renamed after Pieraerts, who died in 1984.

East Flanders province will this year provide **free buses** to and from Ghent, Aalst and Sint-Niklaas on New Year's Eve, at a cost of €20,000. The buses will serve 42 municipalities in the province, as well as the three towns.

Everyone over the age of 50 living in Flanders will be contacted over the next three years for **screening for bowel cancer**, Leuven professor Eric Van Cutsem announced last week. About 4,500 new cases are diagnosed in the region every year, with a death toll of more than five people a day on average.

UZ Brussel, the hospital of the Free University (VUB), is **looking for sperm donors** to avoid having to call on foreign sperm banks. New regulations have limited to six the number of fertility patients who can be

treated with one donation, with the result that supply is unable to keep up with demand. All males aged 18 to 44 are eligible. Further information at 02.477.66.52 or www.spermdonor.be.

Eight men arrested in Antwerp on suspicion of organising funds and recruitment for **terrorist organisations** have been remanded in custody by a court in Mechelen. The group was also suspected of organising a terror attack on a Belgian target, though the target was never identified.

The first group of asylum seekers to be **housed in military barracks** last week took up residence in Houthalen-Helchteren, Limburg province. The barracks has space for 550 people, who will be looked after by the Red Cross. Across the country, the defence ministry will provide space for about 2,400 asylum seekers in barracks.

Some municipalities in Limburg, Flemish Brabant and East Flanders are almost **out of their stocks of road salt**, following the recent wintry weather. The Flemish roads agency, which grits motorways and regional roads, has enough stocks, but local authorities in some places are running short. A new shipment of salt is on its way from Egypt, due to arrive in Antwerp on 20 December.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Jill Rootsmaert

Last week Jill Rootsmaert was named by the business insider *Financial News* as one of the 100 rising stars of the financial sector in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. But Rootsmaert, from Oostkamp near Bruges, doesn't consider herself either a Master of the Universe or, as she puts it, "one of the cowboys".

Rootsmaert, 29, studied law at Ghent University and economic analysis of law in Hamburg before joining the banking group Fortis. She worked for Fortis in Amsterdam, but, before long, the bank went bust and was sold off to the French. She was snapped up by Henderson Global Investors in London, and it's there that she forged the reputation that makes her a rising star.

"I knew I was on the long list of *Financial News*, but I was quite shocked when I found I'd made the final list," she told *Flanders Today* from London, where she shuttles back and forward from the Amsterdam office. "I had family, friends and former colleagues getting in touch to congratulate me. One old friend from Flanders called to say he'd seen pictures of me in all the papers of the people on the train. I was surprised the reaction in Belgium was so positive."

Her work, put simply, is to trade in currencies: buy low, sell high. But because she's trading on behalf of investor clients, risk control is a major part of the equation. She's not the sort of trader who shouts at her Reuters screen. "You can't just act out of panic," she says.

Still, the stakes are huge. On a good day, she could see hundreds of millions of dollars passing



through her hands. "There are two important things you have to keep in mind," she explains. "One: can you look yourself in the mirror every morning and be sure you made the right call? Two: can you justify yourself to your investors? Because it's their money you're working with. If you want to play cowboy, do it with your own money." Where does this rising star want to be in 10 years? "I want to be the same person I am today, but with more experience." And does she have a million-dollar bonus to look forward to this Christmas? "Oh God, no."

→ www.efinancialnews.com/fn100

Belgium and the United States have signed an agreement on the exchange of information on fingerprints and DNA held in their police databases



Young people spurn books in favour of the internet

continued from page 1

In scientific literacy, Flanders comes in 11th place, with just under 13% failing to pass level 1. Once again, with the exception of Finland, the table is led by the Asian countries. Despite these high scores on literacy, it was argued last week that the very age group that took part in the PISA tests are turning their back on books. Half of all 15-year-olds said they would open a book only to gather information or if they were obliged to for school. Fewer than one in five considers reading to be a leisure activity.

"Despite fantastic results, we're going backwards," Flemish education minister Pascal Smet commented. "We have to teach our children to enjoy reading." The discrepancies between the different schools systems – general humanities students score higher than technical or professional

students – needs to be looked at, he said, returning to a theme he addressed earlier in the year (see *Flanders Today*, 22 September) of Flemish students being tracked in education at a too-young age. "We shouldn't select too early. In Flanders, study choices are made at 12, but only at 16 in Finland".

One publishing industry representative said the fault lay with teachers who fail to update their reading lists to make them relevant to young people today. That view was echoed by Geert Joris, director of boek.be, the industry's umbrella organisation. "I have the impression that teachers themselves no longer enjoy reading," he told *De Morgen*. "They also come from an internet generation....To impress someone for books, you have to love them yourself."

For those young Flemings who do read, meanwhile, Stephanie Meyer (*Twilight*) is the favourite author, followed by Stieg Larsson (*Millennium*), Paolo Giordani (*The Solitude of Prime Numbers*) and Tom



© Shutterstock

A dying pastime? Figures show that reading for pleasure declines with the generations

Lanoye (*Sprakeloos*), according to a survey of under-26s carried out by the youth website CJP. Favourite newspaper is *De Standaard*, while favourite magazine is *Humo*. By a margin of about three to one, young people rejected e-readers, insisting books should be made of paper.

- Elsewhere, 170,000 members of the Flemish education system

have been told they will not be getting a pay rise until 2013 at the earliest. However, the government has promised to improve working conditions in an effort to make teaching more attractive to new entrants. Measures include allowing teachers to work 80% of their hours and extra money for administration to help to lighten the load on class teachers. ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



42%

of children in Flanders were born out of wedlock in 2007, the latest year for which figures are available. In the year 2000, by contrast, the figure was 22%

2,900,000

Belgians – about one in four – suffer from chronic pain, with 73% reporting pain every day of their lives, according to a survey carried out in 15 European countries by pharmaceutical company Pfizer

54%

average score of drivers aged between 26 and 55 in a test of their knowledge of driving laws

€6.52 million

earmarked for a Media Fund set up by the Flemish government to subsidise the production of high-quality TV fiction, animation and documentaries. The plan has to be approved by the full government and by the EU Commission

7,722

people found guilty last year of driving without a valid licence, up from under 4,000 10 years ago. The figure includes foreigners who have a licence that is not valid in Belgium. The minimum fine is €1,100

UZ Brussels ordered to pay damages for incorrect diagnosis

The UZ Brussel, the university hospital of the Free University (VUB), has been ordered to pay damages estimated at €400,000 to the family of a child born with a severe handicap after its pre-natal tests appeared to rule out the possibility.

The parents in question had an older child who suffered from the rare congenital metabolic Sanfilippo Disorder, or MCS III. About one in every 50,000 children in the Netherlands suffers from the disease, in which the lack of a critical enzyme prevents the breakdown of old cells, leading to the build-up of toxins in the organs of the body.

The family's first child died at the age of 12 and, because it is an inherited

condition, the couple chose to be tested when the wife became pregnant again in 1999. The couple were clear that if the test indicated the presence of the disease, the pregnancy would be terminated.

The tests carried out at UZ Brussel, the only Belgian hospital to provide it, came back negative, but when the child was born she was found to have Sanfilippo. In 2004, the family took legal action, charging that the hospital had been negligent in failing to diagnose the handicap, thereby exposing the child to a life of suffering. The case is almost certainly unique since, as several commentators pointed out, the suit was brought in the child's name, and

so effectively had her sue against her own birth.

The size of the damages awarded as well as the ruling itself came as a surprise. Doctors point out that no medical diagnosis is 100% reliable. At the time of the test, only one diagnostic process was available, which on later inspection turned out to be faulty. The hospital itself made no mistakes, the defence maintained, and is likely to appeal to the Cassation Court.

The medical profession will, meanwhile, be weighing up the consequences of the ruling carefully and considering what it might mean in terms of their responsibilities in future.

The child in question died in March this year, at the age of 10. ♦

EU **trio.be**

What the Belgian presidency of the EU is up to this week

The accord reached by governments at the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancún last week is "a new step in the right direction," according to Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege, who attended the meeting as president of the EU Council of Ministers. "The active and cohesive approach of the EU – the 27 member states and the Commission – helped bring divergent positions closer together."

The EU, she said, was in favour of niche agreements that built on the Copenhagen and Kyoto accords. What was achieved was an agreement to include the Copenhagen accord of 2009 in the process of drawing up the UN Convention on Climate Change. That involves a statement that the increase in global temperatures compared to the pre-industrial era must be limited to two degrees and a Green Climate Fund of \$100 billion (€75.8 bn) for poorer countries to cut emissions. "In the name of the Belgian EU presidency, I am proud that the 27 member states



Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege (foreground) with EU commissioner Connie Hedegaard in Cancún contributed a major effort to the world-wide struggle against climate change," Schauvliege said. "That was possible because Europe for the first time in a long time was able to speak with one voice."

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Frankieleaks

While the rest of the world is fascinated by Wikileaks, Flanders, too, had its own leaked message. In an email – which ended up by mistake in the hands of the N-VA – the Flemish socialist negotiator Frank Vandenbroucke outlined what is wrong with one of the many proposals for a revamped finance law.

Vandenbroucke seemed to share N-VA's criticisms, but at the negotiating table he took the opposite view. N-VA, a party that does not need much to make it paranoid, suspected that a trap was being set and almost walked out of the talks. In the end, Vandenbroucke himself left, stating that the task of forming a government exceeded his "own little person". Exit Vandenbroucke, again.

When Vandenbroucke, now in his 50s, became party president of the Flemish socialists at the age of 34, he came across some money that could not be accounted for. It later became clear that this was part of a bribery scandal. Vandenbroucke, who wanted nothing to do with the cash, told his staff to get rid of it. Burn it, if necessary, he said.

When those very words were published years later, Vandenbroucke resigned as foreign affairs minister and retired to Oxford to study.

Three years later, he returned. He was now an expert on "the third way" and became SP.A's ideologue, nicknamed "the professor". With the electorate, Vandenbroucke has always had a large following. In recent years, though, irritation grew within the SP.A with "know it all" Vandenbroucke, who, for all his big words, often behaved like a solo player.

In 2009, SP.A party president Caroline Gennez decided not to make him a minister in the Flemish government, to the surprise of many, not least Vandenbroucke himself. Exit Vandenbroucke, again.

Once again, though, he returned. In the 2010 federal elections, the SP.A had a dismal result, but Vandenbroucke triumphed, gaining as many votes as Johan Vande Lanotte, who headed the Senate list. He was back at the negotiating table, where any help in the endless technical discussions was welcome (although his lecturing style once again irritated some).

Last week's talks were abruptly halted after news came through that the mother of Vande Lanotte, the royal mediator, had fallen terminally ill. There are more important things than politics, the negotiators said. A remarkable conclusion in a country that has been without a government for more than six months, but – finally! – one that all negotiators could agree on.



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A star is born

New film opens in cultural centres across Flanders just before Christmas

→ *continued from page 1*

"I started toying with the idea of making a film from this play, and I realised that I couldn't work with common actors," he continues. "That would make the film pompous or seem outdated. I wanted to re-invoke this mixed feeling of simplicity versus modernism in this story about popular religion and belief."

So he went to Theater Stap in Turnhout, a company made up of only mentally handicapped actors. They shot the film in early 2009 in Flanders, mostly in the Kempen area of eastern Antwerp province. These actors, says Van den Berghe, bring "a sense of sincerity" to the story. "In the creation of their characters, they don't lie. They don't try to make them better or uglier than they are. I think that for other actors it would be very difficult not to interpret a story like *Little Baby Jesus*, trying to add an extra layer of *je ne sais quoi*."

He did, however, have to make some alterations to his script. "I very soon realised that the dialogue was too complex for the

actors to remember. But also too complex to fit the story. So in a way, they were keeping me closer to my initial purpose."

Van den Berghe, 25, recently won the award for Best Director at the 16th Athens International Film Festival, and the film is screening at other festivals across Europe. Critics note its Bruegel-esque imagery or its Italian neo-realism, and Van den Berghe is being compared to Fellini and Pasolini. All fairly annoying, really. "This old Flemish story is cultural heritage," he insists. "You could scare people into thinking that this is a very difficult film. While it's just a very simple film."

Van den Berghe, meanwhile, has passed film school.♦

After its avant-premiere on 19 December, Little Baby Jesus of Flandr screens on 21 and 22 December in cultural centres across Brussels and Flanders before opening in regular cinemas. Visit www.theaterstap.be for a complete listing



© Bas Bogaerts/BELGA

Beauty in simplicity: Gust Van den Berghe



Little Baby Jesus of Flandr avant-premiere

in the presence of Gust Van den Berghe

19 December, 20.00

Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

Brussels

→ www.bozar.be

In Dutch with French subtitles

"Believe first" · Turnhout's Theater Stap is home to only mentally disabled actors

Gust Van den Berghe might not have considered the possibility of working with mentally disabled actors if there hadn't been a Theater Stap. The company in Turnhout attracts Flanders' top directors and choreographers, who continue to come up with intriguing ideas for this unique group of actors.

Theater Stap was founded 25 years ago with the express purpose of allowing mentally handicapped people with acting abilities the chance to train in theatre. The local cultural centre, De Warenne, handed over their stage and technicians, prompting other culture centres to do the same. In their very first year in 1985, they staged 10 performances in Flanders and 10 in the Netherlands.

Although it is not the only company in Europe with mentally disabled actors, it is the only one that has garnered such a high level of respect. Theater Stap is not an "activity"; it's professional theatre.

"I think the key of our success is that we started with very big ambitions," says Marc Bryssinck, artistic director of Stap (which means "step"). We decided that we would make theatre that would be a successful artistic experience and not just interesting because of the 'phenomenon'. Most other acting projects begin within institutions with a more pedagogical approach, with social workers. They don't reach the same level of quality because they don't have theatre skills."

Theater Stap has produced about 30 plays – from classics like *Medea* and *Frankenstein* to original, contemporary productions. Sometimes it's a production with only Theater Stap actors, and sometimes they mix on stage with non mentally handicapped actors.

Bryssinck directs the occasional production, but

mostly visiting directors bring a particular idea to them – or borrow some of the players for outside productions, as did Gust Van den Berghe for his film *Little Baby Jesus of Flandr*.

"Gust had heard of us," explains Bryssinck, "and he came here with this idea of doing this old Flemish tale in the middle of winter with mentally disabled actors, and he said 'the school is not with me.' It's okay, we said, we are."

That was, in fact, not the company's first film. They have made two others, including last year's *Sterven en Leven van Jan de Vroey* (*The Death and Life of Jan de Vroey*), which was screened during the travelling Theater Stap Air Show across Antwerp province last summer.

Bryssinck was a professional musician in 1985, hired by the company to play and compose music for productions. He soon found himself doing nothing else. "I lost my heart here," he says. "It's very comforting and satisfying to spend my life with these people. They are constructive, honest and very, very loyal. And they amaze me. They do things that nobody else would."

When I ask what seems like an obvious question – what are the challenges of putting together a production with all or half Theater Stap actors – he seems almost confused. Aside from never having worked in house with another theatre company to use for comparison, he doesn't see anything as a "challenge" so much as a "surprise".

He then relates the story of an actor doing a scene where he had to pretend to put on a cloak and mask, sort of like Zorro. But they weren't really there – it was part of the play to mime the act of donning the

costume. It came off in rehearsals and performances with no problem, but then during one particular performance, the actor seemed to have trouble getting the mask on properly. He kept taking it off and trying to adjust it. But of course the mask didn't really exist. Bryssinck: "I was behind the curtain, and he looked at me, but I couldn't help him. What could I do?"

It's an experience Bryssinck will never forget. "For him, that mask was really there; he wasn't pretending, and he couldn't go on. It was amazing."

Bryssinck at the moment is trying to get his head around the company's next production, its very first musical.

He's clearly concerned about this new undertaking, yet knows better than to be sceptical. He's watched the actors travel the world in dance productions with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, portray African immigrants in a highly symbolic piece by Dutch director Lotte van den Berg, writhe on the floor screaming in avant-garde productions that made audiences squirm and, this year, receive a standing ovation at Cannes. "I don't have the 'truth' about what they're capable of," says Bryssinck. "It you're always theorising, nothing gets done. Our baseline has always been 'believe first.' LB



Theater Stap in a version of *Don Quixote*

A state of flux

Belgian scientists have set their sights on an holistic ecology project to save the Congo rainforest

EMMA PORTIER DAVIS

Towering over the rainforest canopy, a scaffold equipped with measuring devices would provide scientists with a wealth of data about the potential for the Congo River Basin – an important, yet largely overlooked and endangered eco-system – to save our climate.

Together with a programme to measure biodiversity (the number of species) in this rainforest, which, at 1.8 million square kilometres is second in size only to the Amazon, a crew of Belgian scientists hope to put a value on keeping the forest alive, creating a potential money spinner for its impoverished residents.

This so-called eco-variance flux tower would measure the Congo forest's ability to photosynthesise – that is, to suck up harmful levels of carbon dioxide, the climate-altering gas we emit from our cars and industrial processes at an alarming rate, and turn it into oxygen.

Already, there are several of its kind in the Amazon, which is, therefore, much further down the road to securing protection from loggers. Meanwhile for the African forest, which crosses six countries including the former Belgian colony, the scientists are still fighting for the €300,000 needed to build this tower.

"Almost nothing has been done in the Congo, although the forests play an important role in the CO2 exchange globally," explains Pascal Boeckx, professor from the University of Ghent and leader of the project. "Congo is a black spot; no one knows how much exchange happens there."

And yet, the Rainforest Foundation UK estimates the yearly rate of deforestation at 10,000 square kilometres. This is chiefly due to the west's love of tropical wood, poorly enforced limits on logging and mining of the rich mineral resources like cobalt, used in

applications such as jet engines.

The forest is already the world's only home to several endangered species such as mountain gorillas. But scientists say there are countless other species that we stand to lose. Aside from this terrible loss of biodiversity, some of these plants and animals are a vital source of medicines.

For the climate, there is also bad news. Losing the trees will not only cost us an important carbon sink, but as they are chopped down, it will also result in the emission of billions of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere.

Money spinning

Boeckx and his team have submitted a proposal to the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO) and the Congo Basin Forest Fund (an initiative of the UK and Norway) in the hope of gaining funding to measure the carbon dioxide exchange, the carbon contained in the forest, and biodiversity.

Their ultimate selling point is that the project will eventually generate money for the local people. The United Nations is discussing a global scheme called Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, under which the owner would receive a credit for every piece of forest saved.

These credits, already under development for the Amazon, could be traded on the fast-developing carbon market where, for example, industrial companies that have exceeded limits set by regulators for carbon emissions can buy them to make up for their shortfall. (They are also the same credits that you and I can buy online to offset our carbon emissions for flights.)

This would create an incentive for the people of the Congo River Basin to preserve the forests rather than illegally logging timber and clearing land for mining.

Such schemes are not without their opponents.



A flux tower in the Amazon Basin, an area that already contains several. Flemish scientists are trying to get funding for the first in the Congo River Basin

Indeed, the European Commission has repeatedly said it is yet to be convinced of their viability. How, for instance, do you know that a forest owner in the Congo has not just gone further into the forest and cut down trees there instead?

"Everything relies on each country introducing a monitoring, reporting and verification system," says Boeckx. "There's a huge need to form teams locally that can do this. But by measuring the carbon, you can calculate what the forest is worth. The Congo government has jumped on this."

Developing financial incentives is one way to secure this. "This gives the developing countries, which will suffer most from climate change and are less able to deal with it, the

possibility to do something to protect their forest and gain international currency to be invested."

The good news is that the team has secured funding to measure carbon intensity and biodiversity. But there is no budget so far to fund the tower, a lynchpin of the project. Boeckx plans to meet again with BELSPO next week to convince them of the value a flux tower could bring.

Boeckx: "If you look at the broader aspects of the tropical forest for carbon dioxide exchange in the Congo River Basin, you quickly realise that there *has* to be a flux tower there." ♦

The human factor • The city centre keeps moving further away, but the Port of Antwerp tries to lure the people back

MARC MAES



Power to the people: Philippe Demoulin

Over the years, Antwerp's city centre has moved further away from its port, making it less visible – less a part of every-day life. Whereas before, one could witness a ship loading fruit or bags of coffee, a container doesn't reveal its contents anymore. "I'm convinced that giving people insight is crucial in strengthening the port's 'licence to operate,'" says Philippe Demoulin. "The delays on large infrastructure projects like the Deurganckdok or the Oosterweel connection have proven that providing adequate communication and dialogue are essential."

That's the goal of the province-owned Havencentrum Lillo, or Lillo Port Centre. "The centre follows the concept of the triple bottom-line," says Demoulin. "Economic, environmental and human." Demoulin is general manager of the centre, which this year drew about 47,000 visitors to learn about the 130 square kilometres that make up Antwerp's port. Some of those participated in one of the guided tours, designed to "increase public awareness and support of the port," says Demoulin.

Koen Helsen, vice governor of the province of Antwerp and president of the port centre, meanwhile, stresses the importance of the port's 150,000 jobs for the surrounding communities, and the importance to the port of efficient transport infrastructure to and from the hinterland. "This is why in 1988 the province authorities launched the Lillo Port Centre – to promote the Port of Antwerp as a source of prosperity," explains Helsen.

Initially set up for a young public, the centre now welcomes the general public, tourists, professionals, and decision makers.

The centre also organises visits from schools, associations and companies, which this year made up 83% of visitor numbers. Tours of the constantly upgraded interactive exhibitions are tailor made for each audience, explains Demoulin, including "student tours for different ages or thematic tours focusing on logistics, food products or technical topics." Joining a guided tour, which include English tours, is the only way to get access to certain port installations, says Demoulin, "which are subject to strict measures since 9/11." The centre offers information packages and

network possibilities for companies and acts, explains Demoulin, "as a safe house". Located near the port's main entrance motorways, it serves as an emergency shelter in case of catastrophe, with a capacity for 120 people.

The centre emphasises the port's importance to

the local economy, its role in the global logistical chain and introduces visitors to its protected nature areas. Demoulin: "We want our visitors to go home with a 'wow' feeling." ♦

⇒ www.portcentre.com

Court throws out biggest fraud case ever

Wealthy bank clients bilk Belgium out of €400 million in taxes

ALAN HOPE

A fraud case in which two banks conspired to help wealthy clients evade tax amounting to some €400 million has been abandoned by the court of appeal in Brussels because investigators used inappropriate methods to gather evidence. The case has been described as the biggest fraud case in Belgian history. The KB-Lux case saw charges brought against five executives of the former Kredietbank (now part of KBC), including CEO Remi Vermeiren; six executives of the Luxembourg-based sister bank KB-Lux, including CEO Damien Wigny; and three beneficiaries of the conspiracy. All 14 have now been acquitted after the evidence against them was thrown out for being tainted.

The main evidence was a list of more than 8,000 names of KB-Lux account holders, stolen in 1995 by disgruntled workers who had been laid off. There were also files explaining 300 cases in which the banks had set up special arrangements to allow clients to evade taxation. The former employees first tried to turn their files into cash by blackmailing some of the clients concerned, which landed them in jail for breach of banking confidentiality. In the end, the papers found their way into the hands of the Belgian authorities.

A court in Brussels in December 2009 ruled that the case against the 14 accused – 11 bankers and three clients – was not admissible because the evidence had been obtained illegally. It had been directly obtained from an informer who was on a blacklist signifying that investigators could not work with him.

To cover up this fact, police had arranged to "find" the list by accident in a corridor in the apartment building where the informer lived. According to the Brussels court, the investigators had been "dishonest, partisan and manipulative". Investigating magistrate Jean-Claude Leys, now advocate-general in Mons, was criticised for helping to cover the police's activities.

The appeal court was not obliged to follow the trial judge's reasoning: unlawfully obtained evidence can still be admissible under Belgian law, provided the gravity of the case justifies the irregularities. But the court appears to have considered that not to be the case.

The 14 accused were facing charges of forgery, tax fraud and conspiracy. Originally, some 41 suspects faced charges, but the number was reduced to 14 before the case came to court. Of the 8,000 account holders on the stolen list, most reached an



KB-Lux CEO Damien Wigny in a Brussels court last week

agreement with the tax authorities to pay up and avoid prosecution.

"This is painful because it is, and remains, fraud," said Bernard Clerfayt, the secretary of state in charge of tax fraud. "Thanks to an error of procedure, tax dodgers go free."

According to Groen! spokesman Stefaan Van Heck: "It is dismaying that the government is unable to fight tax fraud within the existing legal framework. The victim is the honest taxpayer, who has to pay for the millions that major fraudsters withhold from the taxman."

Leys, meanwhile, said that he carried out his duties "in good

faith and conscience. When I hear accusations of falsifying evidence, pressurising witnesses and carrying out a dishonest investigation – all those false accusations are painful. I will carry on denying them to my last breath."

The court has not ruled on the grounds of the case, but with the rejection of the main evidence, that has little likelihood of success. An appeal might be possible to the Cassation Court, but only on procedural grounds. At the weekend, the chances of that succeeding were assessed by one expert as "practically non-existent". ♦

Government names and shames "business guide" scammers

The government has taken action against fake advertising scams by listing the names of the companies concerned on the website of the economy ministry. The move is an endorsement of a campaign carried out over recent months by Unizo, the organisation representing small businesses.

The problem involves companies pretending to be compiling local business guides and sending out mass mailings that offer free advertising to businesses. However, in the small print of the application are costs for paid advertising, often at exorbitant rates. To make matters worse, the guides themselves may never materialise or, if they do, they are worthless documents that recipients throw away.

This year so far, almost 1,100 complaints have been made about false business guides, described by minister Vincent Van Quickenborne (pictured) as "a real plague".

The government website lists the names of 35 companies, although some are the same scammers operating under different names. "We advise you to be extremely careful whenever you receive offers

from the following companies," the website counsels. And it goes on to suggest advice to businesses that are approached:

- Never sign an ambiguous agreement or one you don't understand
- Check that all invoices are for services carried out
- If you've been scammed, report it to the economy ministry

Unizo has welcomed the move, but insisted the names and information also needs to be passed on to the justice system with a view to prosecution – something which does not happen at present. "Following this initiative by minister Van Quickenborne, it's now up to justice minister Stefaan De Clerck to see to it that the problem is treated as a priority," said Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt.

The economy ministry website also provides information on other forms of business fraud, such as Nigerian letters, fake lotteries, 0900 number scams and work-from-home offers. ♦

→ <http://tinyurl.com/275xkxp>



People in the news

Albert Ragon, director general of Rotselaar-based Danone België, has been awarded the first AXA Wo_Men@Work award for gender equality within his company, the insurance company announced.

Toon Bossuyt, owner of Boss Paints in Waregem, West Flanders, has been awarded this year's **Small Business Entrepreneur** prize by Unizo. The prize includes a cheque for €7,500 and a chance to take part in an international entrepreneurship competition next year in Palm Springs, California. Bossuyt was praised for his drive, customer friendliness and daring vision.

Luc Vansteenkiste, former head of the employers' organisation VBO, **went on trial this week**, along with four others, on charges of insider trading in Fortis shares at the time of the bank's collapse in September 2009.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Autos • Alcoppa

Kontich-based automobile distributor Alcoppa will import Korean SsangYong vehicles to the Benelux countries, as well as to Germany, Poland and Switzerland following a recent agreement. Alcoppa is taking over the distribution of the Korean brand's models following the bankruptcy of the Dutch Kroymans, the previous importer.

Banking • Bank of China

Bank of China inaugurated its first Brussels branch last week in a bid to support Chinese companies and individuals in their operations in Western Europe and to help Belgian firms in developing their activities in China. BOC's leading competitor ICBC bank is poised to make a similar move early next year.

Banking • KBC

Flanders' largest bank has paid €72 million to push to 100% its stake in the Bulgarian CIBank. KBC already owns other assets in Bulgaria, including the DZI insurance company. Meanwhile, the bank is reorganising its retail operations in Belgium under the "Net 3.0" programme to double the number of branches open on Saturdays and to develop more personalised services for high-value customers.

Construction • Blavier

Liège-based homebuilders Maisons Blavier will expand into Flanders over the next three years.

Energy • Fluxys

Gas network operator Fluxys has signed an agreement with the Russian Gazprom to launch a study into stocking natural gas in an underground area in Wuustwezel, Antwerp province. If research is conclusive, Gazprom would sign a 20-year contract next spring to stock up to 700 million cubic metres of gas. The company is also studying the possibility of distributing compressed natural gas across Belgium, used in powering vehicles.

Media • BD

Belgique Diffusion, the country's largest direct mail and free media distributor, owned by the Dutch TNT group, has received three takeover bids. Publishers Roularta and Rossel in partnership with the Flemish regional investment fund GIMV are believed to be the frontrunners, with the French Mediapost and a Dutch investment fund close behind. A decision is expected before Christmas.

Steel • Arcelor

The Genk-based stainless steel operations of Arcelor Mittal, the world's largest steel producer, are to be affected by the group's decision to spin off its stainless operation worldwide through an IPO. The move is said to be a first step in the process of selling the business.

Building the perfect chair

From the most solemn of cathedrals to the brightest fast food joints, the legacy of Maarten Van Severen is firmly in place

ANNA JENKINSON

Maarten Van Severen's .03 chair is an icon of 20th-century design. Even if the name doesn't ring any bells, you've sat in one: they're found in places as diverse as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, McDonald's restaurants across Europe and Sint-Baaf's Cathedral in Ghent. And that diversity was the goal of Van Severen, who died of cancer at the too-young age of 48. "Maarten didn't want the chair as a piece of art; he wanted it to be in the world," says Kris Lenaerts of the Maarten Van Severen Foundation, as we walk around a new exhibition dedicated to the late Flemish designer's famous chair. "He wanted his chair all over the place," he continues. "You can put it where you want. It adapts very easily. It keeps its personality."

It isn't the only time that Lenaerts, who long ago became friends with Van Severen, refers to the chair as if it were a human being.

Still, an exhibition devoted to one single chair? But Lenaerts holds firm. "A chair like this, it doesn't fall from heaven."

.03 Maarten Van Severen at the Design Museum in Ghent takes visitors through the stages of the chair's life, from the designer's original attempts to create "his chair, the chair" in his own workshop through to collaborations with design and manufacturing companies Top-Mouton (now Aiki) and Vitra.

Part of an archiving project being undertaken by the Maarten Van Severen Foundation, the exhibition includes photographs, filmed interviews, design sketches and letters, as well as many models of the chair itself.

Keeping Van Severen's workshop and materials together was an idea the designer himself had talked about to family and friends, including Lenaerts, before his death in 2005. Van Severen, who also worked on projects together with famous Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, wanted researchers and new designers to be able to consult his archive and for the objects to act as a source of inspiration for future generations. For Lenaerts, this shows that Van Severen was aware he had achieved "something quite important" in the design world.

Building the .03

A key feature of the .03 chair is the way in which the back, seat and legs are one fluid line. Until 1999, when Vitra started producing the chair, mass-market chairs were essentially made up of three separate sections: a back, a seat and the legs. Now these components were all one movement, supported by two legs at the back, Lenaerts said. "This was something completely different on the mass market."

On entering the exhibition, held downstairs in an open, white space full of light, you are first confronted with two very similar looking chairs. On closer inspection, you perceive the differences: the angle of the back, the thickness of the legs. One is a chair produced by Van Severen in his workshop; the other is the Vitra version. Only by sitting on both do you become aware of the

most striking contrast; the Vitra chair uses a foam material that actually adapts to your body.

The differences are subtle, but each took time to develop, demanding new techniques and approaches. Form, function and material all played a role in the design. "Maarten thought of all these aspects together because he considered a chair a complicated piece of furniture," Lenaerts explains. "He wanted it to be perfect."

The emergence of the .03 chair took more than a decade, from 1986, when Van Severen designed his first chair, through CN° II (or Chair Number 2) in 1992 to Vitra's mass-produced .03 chair in 1999.

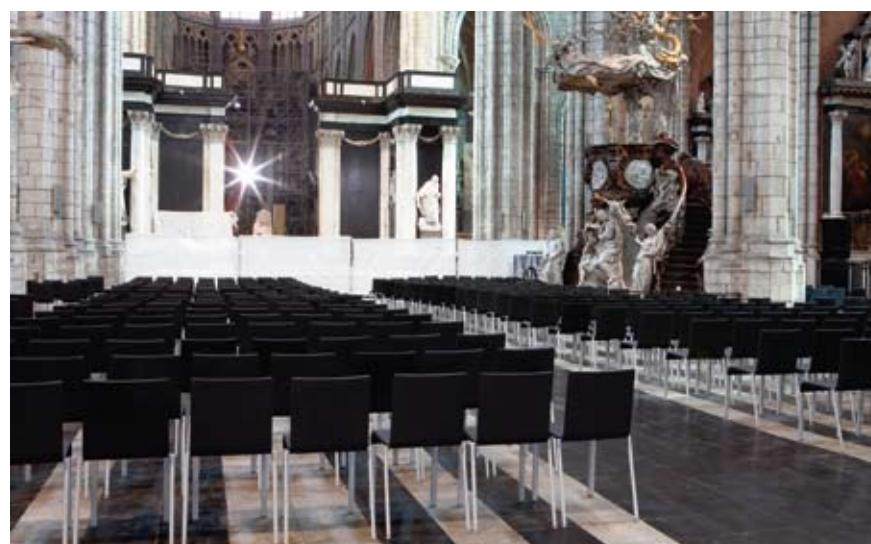
A key stage of its development was when Van Severen met Nick Top of Top-Mouton in the mid-1990s, and they agreed to work together to solve the designer's production difficulties. "It was a relief for Maarten," Lenaerts says, explaining how it meant that Van Severen no longer had to deal with practical problems such as late deliveries or product faults.

Not that perfection was allowed to be compromised. One of the exhibits is a chair with the word "model" scrawled on the back: this was the chair kept in the Top-Mouton/Aiki workshop so that if the workers had any doubts about a feature, they could go and check the model.

The exhibition uses Van Severen's own tables to display his sketches and letters, while the chairs themselves are perched on simple, white shelving units. It all aims to show the importance of archive material. "We want to prove that archives can be very exciting," Lenaerts says. "Just because it's an archive doesn't mean that it's dead material."

To underline this point, the exhibition includes a film of recent interviews with, among others, Van Severen's wife, Nick Top and Vitra's Rolf Fehlbaum. And a wall of one room is filled with large colour photographs showing locations where the chair is used today, including the Seattle public library and Filigranes bookshop in Brussels.

The deceptively simple .03 chair is very much alive. ♦



It didn't fall from heaven: modern and classic at once; hundreds of .03 chair fill Ghent's Sint-Baaf's Cathedral

© The Maarten Van Severen Foundation

And now for something completely different: Maarten Van Severen

.03 Maarten Van Severen

Until 27 February
Design Museum Gent
Jan Breydelstraat 5

→ www.designmuseumgent.be

How do you archive a chair?

Archiving the design work of Maarten Van Severen (1956-2005) is not a straightforward task. At the most basic level, how do you archive a chair? The City Archive of Ghent, where the objects are stored and inventoried, is more used to dealing with paperwork than 3D objects. But even the paperwork can be baffling, since Van Severen rarely dated anything. These are just some of the difficulties that the

Maarten Van Severen foundation, set up by his family and friends in 2008, is dealing with as it seeks to keep the designer's artistic legacy alive.

In some respects, it is a race against time. Take, for example, the reams and reams of faxes where the words are literally disappearing from the old thermal paper and so need to be transferred to a more durable medium before they are lost

forever. Van Severen was a great fan of the fax, hating typewriters and, later, computers. His aversion to the internet meant that he had his secretary write any emails that needed sending. The foundation aims to complete the inventory and make it available online by 2015. Whether that goal is achieved depends on several factors, not least securing further funding. Kris Lenaerts of the foundation remains optimistic and is already

planning to take the Ghent exhibition on a world tour. He feels it is his and the foundation's duty to allow as many people as possible to discover Maarten Van Severen, described by exhibition organisers as "undoubtedly the most important Belgian designer of the previous two decades".

→ www.maartenvanseveren.be



Because everyone starts out little

Children from across the world bring messages about their lives in a colourful, engaging exhibition

EMMA PORTIER DAVIS

When Anthony Asael asked a class of schoolchildren in Colombia how they would represent the concept of freedom, one boy ran out the room, ripped off his shirt and jumped from a small jetty into the river, providing just one of the stunning images captured by Asael and his partner for their exhibition *Art in All of Us*, which opens next week in Antwerp after its recent run in Brussels. Over a period of five years, Brussels-born Asael and Madagascan-born Stéphanie Rabemafara visited 192 countries (all the ones recognised by the United Nations), 310 schools and 18,400 children, taking vivid photographs en route and commissioning the children to draw pictures and write poems about their lives.

Their mission was to create awareness through art from other cultures, thereby building a more tolerant world. The result is an eye-catching collection of photos, revealing words and colourful sketches. Comprising children's art from across the world, its purpose is to be understandable to children (and adults) everywhere.

"We wanted to give children an opportunity to communicate, to talk to us," says Asael. "They don't get much opportunity, and yet they have so much to say. Art is a universal language. You can show these pictures to any child anywhere in the world, and he or she will understand it."

As well as being about children, the exhibition is oriented towards them. Both colour and black and white, each photo and sketch has an explanation, but you have to lift a tag to discover which country it comes from. It's designed to stimulate questions, encourage imagination and fill children with a sense of curiosity about the world in which they live. These smaller visitors to the exhibition, in fact, provide an insight into the way children perceive the world. We pause by a photograph from Afghanistan of a child walking past an exquisite mosaic wall, and Asael asks what questions come to my mind. Apparently, adults typically ask about the beautiful backdrop; children just want to know why the girl is walking barefoot.

Another shot taken in the Congo features a handful of children staring upwards with ecstatic smiles, prompting the question, "what are they looking at?". Asael reveals that he asked the children to imagine it was midnight and that they were looking at a star that represented their biggest dream.

The children's artwork, meanwhile, shows us their world through their eyes. "Country" is an abstract notion for a child," explains Asael, adding that these pictures are more like presentations rather than representations.

The drawings are thought-provoking, indeed. I spend ages pondering who is who in a picture of a Qatar family until Asael explains that culture dictates older people must be drawn taller.

Particularly poignant was a sketch of a North Korean knee fight. This is a game relished by kids in the school yard where they have to hop about on one foot and try to knock each other. In a world where we had just learned about this country's attack on its South Korean neighbour, this was a



© Sri Lanka, Anthony Asael-Stephanie Rabemafara

sharp reminder that innocent children live there, too. Reaching out to children in North Korea was also a logistic challenge for Asael and Rabemafara. It took them two-and-a-half years to convince the authorities to allow them to bring their programme there. This forced them to apply the five principles (or Ps) they adopted for the trip: patience, passion, perseverance, people and positive. Essential principles given that to embark on their whistle-stop tour, which eventually found some corporate sponsors, the couple sold everything they owned. Starting with a budget of just €7 per day, they slept at schools and orphanages and avoided flying except for inter-continental travel. In a world that has witnessed several catastrophes affecting children in the last five years, not least the Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods, I ask Asael if this was time and resources well spent. "Children don't need only food and water," he answers. "They need the dream, the hope, to smile, to create. Even in an emergency, our work is essential to raise the spirits of people."

To keep young visitors further engaged, *Art in All of Us* has a workspace where they can draw their own pictures and post them to children in other countries. They're also kept busy playing on a giant floor puzzle of the 27 EU member states with a super-size blackboard, and by photos that allow them to poke their heads through a hole and join a scene. The exhibition just finished up at Brussels' Tour & Taxis and opens next week in Antwerp's Central Station. Asael promises that the bigger space will allow for even more activities. His hope is that, with sponsorship, his team can eventually take the exhibition to other cities. ♦

Art in All of Us

21 December – 8 May
Antwerp Central Station

→ www.artinallofus.be

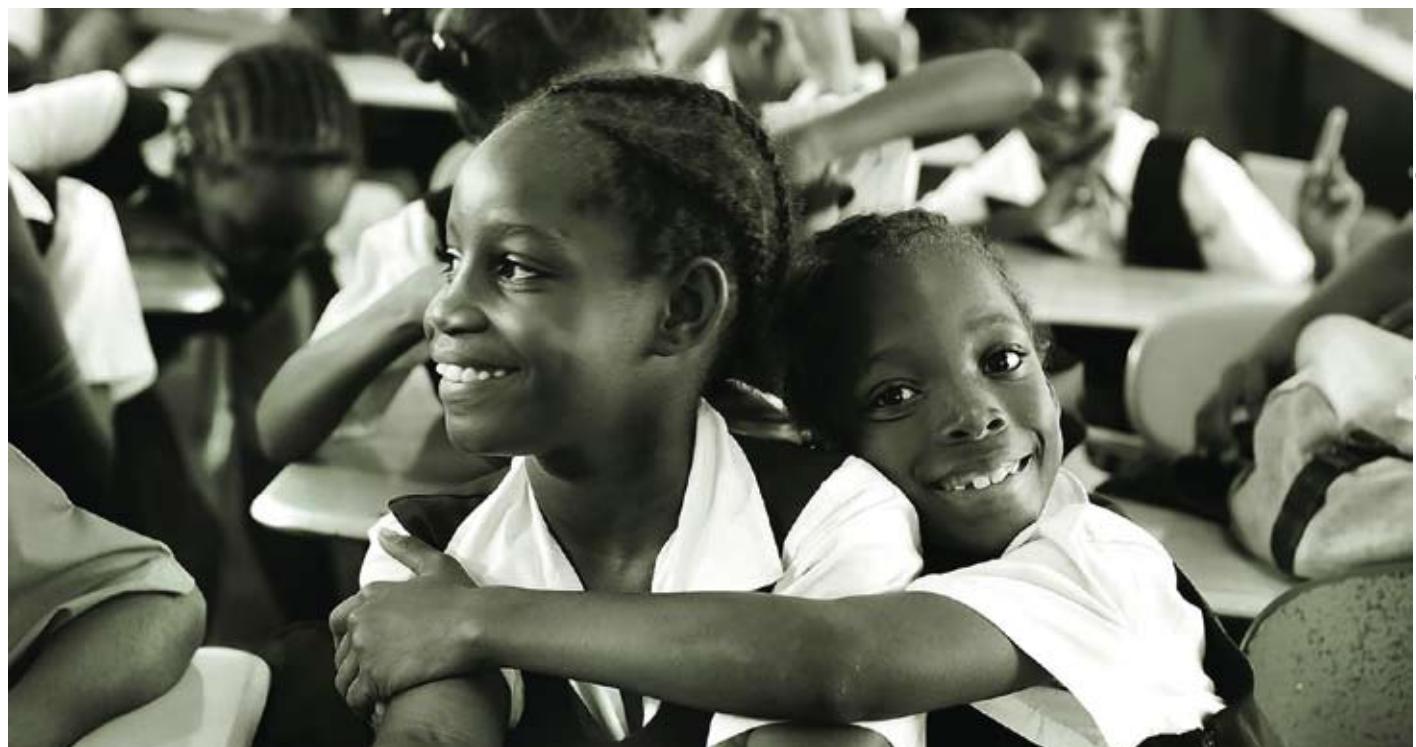
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© Jamaica, Anthony Asael-Stephanie Rabemafara

Living Cross channel

Whether merchants or soldiers, the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish have been in Flanders for more than five centuries

DEREK BLYTH

An narrow cobbled lane leads through damp fields to the Stonemanor English shop in Everberg, Flemish Brabant. Look for the bright red British phone box, and you're there. It could almost be a country house in southern England, but then you push open the door and find yourself in a typical English mini supermarket.

What makes Stonemanor different from a local store down the road in Kortenberg? Well, pause in the biscuits section, and you find brands that are familiar names only to someone who has spent a childhood in England munching Hobnobs or Kipling French Fancies.

Turn down the next aisle, and you see mysterious products that British people will drive half a day to find, like jars of Marmite or Woodward Gripe Water. And at this time of year, the Englishness of the English shop is beyond dispute, with shelves piled high with jars of mincemeat and Christmas puddings from a dozen different suppliers. Many of Stonemanor's regulars live in the semi-rural municipalities around here, like Tervuren, Vossem and Kortenberg. They send their children to the British School of Brussels (in Tervuren), which opened in 1970 just in time to serve the first wave of British families settling in Belgium after the UK joined the European Community in 1973.

The Irish joined the European Communities in the same year and, like the British, opened shops selling home products. But they also brought Irish pubs to almost every town in Flanders, sometimes taking over old Flemish cafés that had been on the site for a generation.

Both Irish and British are here for the same two main reasons. Either they work in the European institutions or they are employed in one of several thousand international companies in the region.

The oldest traces of the English and Scots are found in Bruges, where each of these two nations had a trading house. The Scottish House has disappeared entirely, but the stone foundations of the 15th-century English trading house are still standing on the Spiegelrei canal. Here, in an early

version of the European Union, Scots and English traded with merchants from as far off as the Baltic and Venice. The main import from the northern countries was high-quality wool that came from sheep raised on the high ground in the Cotswolds, Yorkshire or Scotland. The ships on their return voyage carried red bricks, Flemish roof tiles and the occasional masterpiece by a Flemish painter.

The links between Britain and Flanders were among the most intense that existed in the mediaeval world. The English printer William Caxton spent time in Bruges as a member of the English merchant community and took advantage of a printing press newly installed in Leuven to print the first ever book in the English language in 1474.

the Antwerp exchange that he imported the model to London. The writer Thomas More also passed through Antwerp on a political mission and set the opening part of his famous political tract *Utopia* in the Flemish port.

Trade collapsed in Flanders during the 17th century, but the flow of Flemish art to Britain continued as English collectors fell in love with the baroque excesses of Rubens and Van Dyck. Rubens became Sir Peter Paul Rubens. Van Dyck joined him in the British aristocracy as Sir Anthony van Dyck.

The British began to take a fresh interest in this region in the early 19th century when British troops marched through Flanders repeatedly in the Allied effort against Napoleon. After Napoleon's decisive defeat at Waterloo, some of the British soldiers stayed on in the capital city of Brussels or the quiet backwater of Bruges. Many chose the region because the Belgian franc was weak against the pound. But others came for the business opportunities that opened up after 1830 as Belgium embarked on its industrial revolution.

The expatriate British community played an important role in restoring the old buildings of Bruges, according to the Belgian historian Roel Jacobs. Not only



that, they persuaded the local authorities to design new buildings in the style of the 15th century, so that Bruges would appear to be a seamless mediaeval web. "It's all fake," cried a headline in *The Guardian* newspaper some years ago (which did nothing to deter British tourists from visiting the town). The UK currently represents about 32% of visitors staying overnight in Bruges, against 34% coming from France, the Netherlands and Germany combined.

Taking on Belgian beer?

In 1909, an English brewer called John Martin crossed the sea to Belgium and set up a beer bottling company in Antwerp. The company later started brewing a British-style beer originally called Bulldog Pale Ale but later sold under the less-pugnacious label John Martin's Pale Ale. The beer proved a favourite with British soldiers in Antwerp after the Liberation in 1944 and at its height produced some 100,000 hectolitres per year.

British beers remained popular in Flanders in the 1960s and '70s, when Bass and Whitbread had a strong presence on the market and English-style pubs were a favourite with locals. But the British ales lost ground in the 1990s as Irish bars took over and it's now rare to sit down in a café next to someone drinking John Martin's Pale Ale.

Yet family-run John Martin's remains a serious business, divided between John Martin's grandsons Anthony, who runs the beer business in Antwerp, and John, who manages the family's upmarket hotel group from Genval. The group recently opened Martin's Patershof in Mechelen in a sublimely romantic 19th-century church.



The Island of Ireland Peace Park and its monumental Irish round tower is a First World War memorial in Messines, West Flanders, unveiled on 11 November 1998

The call of the port

In the 16th century, Antwerp gradually replaced Bruges as the trading centre of the Low Countries and the English merchants duly shifted their offices. By this time, trade was truly global and the splendidly ornate Antwerp stock exchange controlled a large share of capital flow across the world.

The English banker Thomas Gresham lived in Antwerp for a time as a financial agent and was so impressed with the success of



You have to be British to yearn for Hobnobs



British soldiers in Antwerp after the Second World War were loyal to John Martin's

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Flemish tapestries, like this one from the 16th century, were bought by British royalty as decoration and protection against the cold seeping through damp castle walls. Not only were the tapestries largely made from local wool, they served as advertisements for the fine clothing that could be imported from Flanders

In Flanders Fields

Whenever war breaks out in Europe, it isn't long before the British army is making plans to cross the sea to Belgium. The most concentrated fighting on Flemish soil began in 1914 when Britain, supported by Ireland and other countries that were then colonies, defended the Flemish town of Ieper (or Ypres) in West Flanders. The region around Ypres is now thick with war memorials, monuments and more than 140 war cemeteries.

The cemeteries have been a draw for tourists from Britain for almost a century. Aware of the potential, the Flemish region recently launched a plan to invest some €15 million in new projects to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War. Tourism minister Geert Bourgeois drew up a list of five places where the new funds would be concentrated, including the enormously successful In Flanders Fields Museum, a new visitors' centre at Lijssenthoek Cemetery and a museum garden at Zonnebeke.

Once the war was over, most of the British soldiers went home, but a few stayed on as gardeners to look after the military cemeteries, which had been designed in the style of English gardens. A small British community grew up in the restored town, centred on the English Church and the British Memorial School. One headmaster wrote: "Who can deny that, but for the Ypres British Memorial School, the character of these children might not become too merged in the Continental and, more, lose touch and sympathy with the land of their fathers?"

Flanders in Europe in Flanders

Flanders has spent the last six months leading many EU discussions and initiatives as part of Belgium's presidency of the European Union, with the slogan "Flanders shines in Europe shines in Flanders". In a four-part series starting this week, we explore the influence of a variety of European regions on Flanders – and vice versa.

James Fox, born in 1935, was one of the children of British gardeners who went to the school in Ypres. In May 1940, as the German army swept across Flanders, the school was hurriedly evacuated. Fox, five at the time, describes the experience in his memoirs *The Children who fought Hitler: A British Outpost in Europe*.

The links between Britain and Flanders have changed over the past two decades. The big British multinationals like ICI and BP have pulled out of Antwerp; the ferry services to Britain barely carry any passengers these days; tea shops and British bars are disappearing fast; and the UK's passport and visa services are now based in Paris. But, in fact, there are many British companies still present in Belgium. Glenn Vaughan, director of the British Chamber of Commerce in Belgium, estimates that "there are hundreds of British companies, but they often look just like Belgian companies." He believes that "brand Britain" is still highly regarded in Belgium. "There is a positive view of the UK as a dynamic country in terms of business and arts and design."



A self portrait by Antwerp-born Anthony van Dyck, later Sir Anthony, which gives pride of place to the gold medal given to him by King Charles in 1633

© Wikimedia Commons



British soldiers during a moment of calm on the First World War ramparts of Ypres

© Documentatiecentrum In Flanders Fields, Ieper

Going British

British School of Brussels

www.britishschool.be

British Council

www.britishcouncil.org

British Chamber of Commerce

www.britcham.be

Stonemanor

www.stonemanor.uk.com

Going Irish

Irish Club

www.irishclub.be

Irish Theatre Group

www.irishtheatregroup.com

Irish Wolfhound Club

www.iwcb.be



Al het stadsnieuws in 3 talen
Toute l'info régionale en 3 langues
The local news in 3 languages

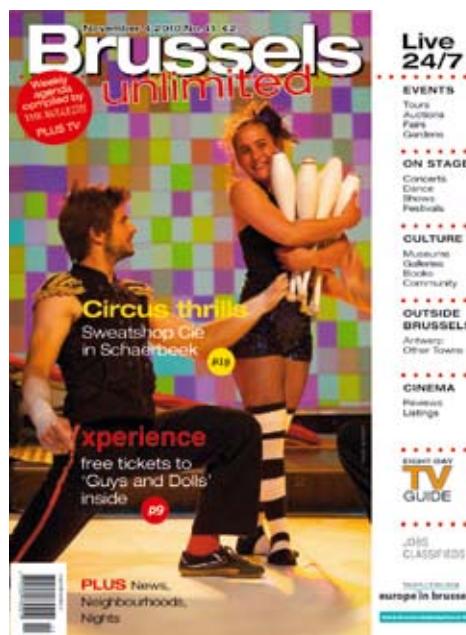
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The Nutcracker

EMMA PORTIER DAVIS

I'm a sucker for tradition when it comes to ballet, especially at Christmas, so inked into my agenda this season is a trip to Ghent's Capitole to see the Saint Petersburg Theatre Ballet's annual performance of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*.

You might think this would be an un-adventurous cultural pursuit, particularly as the production will be performed exactly as the original was when it premiered in Saint Petersburg on 18 December 1892.

But one glance at the sumptuous costumes and festive stage sets, and I'm whisked into a reverie of girlish fantasy. I want to see the ballet performed exactly as I imagined it would have been in days of old.

The Nutcracker score, which will be performed in Ghent by the National Philharmonic Orchestra of the Ukraine, was commissioned at a time when ballet was dwindling in popularity in Western Europe. Indeed, it was the brainchild of French choreographer Marius Petipa who left his homeland for Saint Petersburg.

He created 50 new ballets during his 30-year reign at the Imperial Russian Ballet, including the ubiquitous *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, also with scores by Tchaikovsky, who famously said he was less satisfied with *The Nutcracker*.

When you hear that he took up a dare to produce a melody based on the notes of a scale in sequence, you indeed wonder how serious he was about it. That's until you consider that this experiment resulted in the *pas de deux* that tops off the well-known "Waltz of the Flowers".

Ever since that magic trio of works, Russian ballet has become synonymous with classical, romantic ballet and dominated the scene, even surviving the repressive Stalinist regime when only a couple of ballets were produced. Saint Petersburg continues to churn out world-class performers.

The secret to its success is that it took the best bits from the French and Italian schools, rejecting the over-the-top displays of French renown and the dour interpretations of the Italians.

This perfect marriage and a devotion since the Golden Age of Russian Ballet to tradition has kept the Saint Petersburg Ballet, which comprises students from the Vaganova School (the oldest ballet school in the world), in business since its formation in 1990 after the fall of communism. As for story, the ballet's star is a girl called Masha who is given the nutcracker by an inventor for Christmas. He tells her that it was once a prince, condemned to doll-like form by an evil mouse king.

She wakes that night to a houseful of mice ravaging the Christmas tree. The Nutcracker comes to life and, with an army of tin soldiers, tries to stop the vengeful mouse. Eventually victorious, she then transforms into a beautiful young woman and he back into a prince. It's the stuff kids' dreams are made from, and *The Nutcracker* is reputedly aimed at children and often seen as a lighter and less innovative production. The ballet opens with a matinee performance on Sunday, perfect timing for the little ones. It's not going to be ground-breaking, but, with such a beautiful performance, does it have to be? ♦

19-20 December
Capitole Gent
Graaf van Vlaanderenplein 5
→ www.capitolegent.be

MORE DANCE THIS WEEK

Rosas in The Song → Kaaitheteer, Brussels →

The Last Hallucinations of Lucas Cranach → Bozar, Brussels

Ballet of Flanders in Swan Lake → Stadsschouwburg, Antwerp



Antwerp

Arenbergschouwburg
Arenbergstraat 28; 070.222.192
www.arenbergschouwburg.be
DEC 19 20.15 Hindi Zahra
DEC 21 20.15 Art Bécaud - Marijn Devalck sings Gilbert Bécaud

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40
www.deroma.be
DEC 16 20.30 Isbells **DEC 17** 20.30 Balkan Fever Antwerp **DEC 18** 20.30 Pieter Embrechts, Thomas de Prins & The New Radio Kings **DEC 19** 15.00 Wim De Craene

Lotto Arena

Schijnpoortweg 119; 070.345.345
www.sportpaleis.be
DEC 17 20.00 The Scabs

Nova

Schijfstraat 105; 03.259.04.20
www.nova-kiel.be
DEC 17 20.15 A Tribute to Eva Cassidy

Sportpaleis

Schijnpoortweg 119; 070.345.345
www.sportpaleis.be
DEC 17-29 times vary Clouseau

Trix

Noorderingel 28; 03.670.09.00
www.trixonline.be
DEC 16 20.00 Wixel + Head Full of Flames + Horses
DEC 23 21.00 Eigen Makelijk featuring Tourist + Typhoon + 2000Wat, more

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
www.abconcerts.be
DEC 16 20.00 The Drums
DEC 17 20.00 Songs from the Brill Building: Chris Peeters, Dany Caen, John Terra, more
DEC 19 20.00 Bobby Bazini

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
www.botanique.be
DEC 15 20.00 Cécile Hervé + Suarez, Lilly Wood & The Prick
DEC 16 20.00 Eté 67
DEC 17 20.00 Rafik El Maai Ensemble, Jaltalin. Rap Contest

Magasin 4

Havenlaan 51B; 02.223.34.74,
www.magasin4.be
DEC 15 20.00 Le Singe Bblanc + Yikez!
DEC 18 18.00 TRC + Lazare + Dirty Fingers, more

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
www.vkconcerts.be
DEC 16 20.15 The Graviators + Saint Vitus

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060
www.vooruit.be
DEC 15 19.30 Selah Sue + Yuko
DEC 17 20.00 Radio Modern party with Boogi Phil & The Rhythm Devils, more
DEC 19 20.00 Nomad Swing

Hasselt

Muziekodroom
Bootstraat 9; 011.23.13.13
www.muziekodroom.be
DEC 22 19.00 Caliban + All That Remains + Soilwork

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Conservatoriumplein 1; 056.37.06.44
www.dekreun.be
DEC 16 20.00 Steve Slingeneyer
DEC 18 20.00 Hitch + Rape Blossoms



Antwerp

CC Berchem
Driekoningenstraat 126; 03.286.88.20

DON'T MISS

An Italian Christmas

23 December, 20.00

Bozar, Brussels

Choosing from Christmas concerts can be tough, but our money's on this one, in which the ultra-cool Flemish baroque orchestra B'Rock performs Antonio Caldara, Arcangelo Corelli, Händel and more, fronted by Spanish soprano Raquel Andueza. Don't expect to nod off.



→ www.bozar.be

www.ccbe.be
DEC 17 20.30 Philip Catherine

Buster
Kaastrui 1; 03.232.51.53
www.busterpodium.be

DEC 17 22.00 Cruz Control **DEC 18** 22.00 Hit of the Century - Kaat Hellings **DEC 20** 19.00 Big Jam JazzPop Borgerhout **DEC 21** 19.00 Pop-Soul Night

De Hopper
Leopold De Waelstraat 2; 03.248.49.33
www.cafehopper.be
DEC 15 21.00 Wout Gooris Trio **DEC 20** 21.00 Martin Zenker Quartet

Brussels

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
www.jazzstation.be
DEC 15 20.30 Fox **DEC 18** 18.00 Manu Hermia Trio

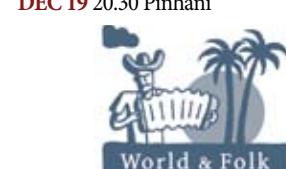
Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:
DEC 16 Mess Trio **DEC 17** Slang DEC 18 Nono Garcia **DEC 20** Master Session **DEC 21** Tassin & Di Maio Quartet

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
www.themusicvillage.com

Concerts at 21.00:
DEC 15 Luna **DEC 16** Alegria Group **DEC 17** Bizarcorde Quartet **DEC 18** Ken Ard **DEC 22** Franka's Poolparty

Théâtre Molière
Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00
www.muziekpubliek.be
DEC 17 20.00 En-Trace **DEC 18** 20.00 Blindnote

VK Club
Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
www.vkconcerts.be
DEC 19 20.30 Pinhani



Antwerp

CC Deurne
Frans Messingstraat 36; 03.360.85.50
www.ccdeurne.be
DEC 22 20.00 Peter Holvoet-Hanssen and Les Øffs

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00
www.zuiderpershuis.be
DEC 18 20.30 Puerto Candelaria

Brussels

Bozar
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00
www.bozar.be
DEC 19 20.00 David Murray Cuban Ensemble plays Nat King Cole in Spanish

© L. Bernaerts

Agenda



Antwerp

Amuz

Kammenstraat 81; 03.292.36.80

www.amuz.be

DEC 19 15.00 La Petite Bande conducted by Sigiswald Kuijken: Christmas cantatas by Bach

DEC 21 21.00 Patrizia Bovi, soprano and narrator; Chiara Banchini, violin: Giuseppe Tartini

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

www.desingel.be

DEC 17 20.00 Lecture/recital by Till Fellner, piano: Beethoven **DEC 18** 20.00 Till Fellner, piano: Beethoven **DEC 22** 20.00 Concerto Köln, Collegium Vocale Gent conducted by Marcus Creed: Bach's Christmas Oratorio

Bruges

Concertgebouw

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02

www.concertgebouw.be

DEC 15 20.00 Collegium Vocale, Concerto Köln conducted by Marcus Creed: Bach's Christmas Oratorio

Brussels

Bozar

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00

www.bozar.be

DEC 15 12.40 Werner Van Mechelen, baritone; Jozef De Beenhouwer, piano: Schubert's Die schöne Müllerin **DEC 16** 20.00 Belgian National Orchestra and European Union Choirs conducted by Patrick Davin Boesmans, Rodrigo, Aubert, more **DEC 17** 20.00 Les Arts Florissants conducted by William Christie: Rameau's Anacréon **DEC 18** 20.00 Ex Tempore conducted by Florian Heyerick; Christoph Graupner **DEC 19** 11.00 Fine Thing Helseth, trumpet **DEC 21** 20.00 Russian National Orchestra conducted by Mikhail Pletnev: Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich

DEC 22 12.40 Miniemerk Orchester and Choir conducted by Benoît Jacquemin: Bach. 20.00 Les Agrémens conducted by Guy Van Waas: Vivaldi, Johann Adolf Hasse, Geminiano Giacomelli, more

Flagy

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20

www.flagy.be

DEC 22 20.15 Flemish Radio Choir conducted by Bo Holten: Christmas carols

Miniemerk

Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84

www.minimes.net

DEC 20 20.00 Huelgas Ensemble conducted by Paul Van Nevel: music from 14th-century Cyprus

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30 www.mim.be

DEC 19 11.00 Philippe Raskin, piano: Chopin, Schumann, Rachmaninov, Jean-Marie Rens

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapstraat 30; 02.213.41.37

www.kcb.be

Until DEC 16 20.00 Artemis Quartett: Beethoven string quartets

DEC 18 20.00 Martin Fröst, clarinet; Itamar Golani, piano: Traditional klezmer music

Ghent

Conservatorium

Hoogpoort 64; 09.269.20.74

www.debijloke.be

DEC 16 20.00 Jan Kobow, tenor; Christoph Hammer, pianoforte: Schubert's Winterreise

De Bijloke

Jozef Kluykensstraat 2 09.233.68.78

www.debijloke.be

DEC 17 20.00 Mala Punica conducted by Pedro Memelsdorff: Medieval polyphony

DEC 18 20.00 Christine Busch, violin; Conradin Brotbek, cello; Cornelis Witthoeft, piano: Brahms, Rihm, Shostakovich

DEC 22 **20.00 Nathan Braude, viola;** Jean-Claude Van Den Eynden, piano: Penderecki, Shostakovich, Joseph Jongen, more

Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.91.65

www.handelsbeurs.be

DEC 16 20.15 Severin von Eckardstein, piano: Liszt, Busoni, Medtner, more

DEC 19 15.00 La Hispanoflamenco conducted by Bart Vandewege: music from the Spanish Renaissance

Hoeilaart

Maison de la Musique

Edgar Sohierstraat 33; 02.657.96.52

DEC 18 20.00 Geoffrey Baptiste, André Roe, Pieter Dhoore, Laurent Beeckmans, piano: Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Dvorák, more

Leuven

Abdijskerk Vlierbeek

Vlierbeekstraat; 016.23.84.27 www.30cc.be

DEC 19 15.00 Flemish Radio Choir conducted by Bo Holten: Christmas music by Edvard Grieg, Franz Uytenhove, François Gevaert, Percy Grainger

Lemmensinstituut

Herestraat 53; 016.23.39.67

www.lemmens.be

DEC 16-17 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic, Lemmensinstituut choir conducted by Edmond Saveniers: Mendelssohn's Elijah **DEC 21-22** 20.00 Lemmensinstituut Choir conducted by Erik Van Nevel: English cathedral music



Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02

www.vlaamseopera.be

Until DEC 26 15.00/18.30 Rossini's Semiramide conducted by Alberto Zedda, staged by Nigel Lowery (in the original Italian with Dutch surtitles)

Brussels

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39 www.demunt.be

Until DEC 31 times vary Puccini's La Bohème conducted by Carlo Rizzi/José Miguel Esandi, staged by Andreas Homoki (in the original Italian with Dutch and French surtitles)



Antwerp

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900

www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

DEC 15-19 times vary Royal Ballet of Flanders in Swan Lake, choreographed by Marcia Haydée

Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00

www.zuiderpershuis.be

Until DEC 16 20.30 Chokri Ben Chikha in Heldenood voor de beschaving: de finale (Heroic Death for Civilisation: The Finale) (in Dutch)

Bruges

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900

www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

DEC 16-19 times vary Royal Ballet of Flanders in Swan Lake, choreographed by Marcia Haydée

Brussels

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be

DEC 22-23 20.30 Needcompany in Needlab 17 by Jan Lauwers (in English)

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

www.desingel.be

Until DEC 18 20.00 Toneelhuis in Hout, written and directed by Abke Haring (in Dutch)

Fakkelteater Zwarte Zaal

Reynderstraat 7; 070.246.036

www.fakkelteater.be

Until DEC 19 20.30/15.00 Ganesh, een perfecte god (A Perfect God), directed by Martin Michel (in Dutch)

Klokhuys Theatre

Parochiaanstraat 4; 0495.31.76.87

www.eenlevenzonderjou.com

DEC 16-19 20.00 Een leven zonder jou (A Life Without You), musical directed by Dirk Schattner (in Dutch)

Monty

Montignystraat 3-5; 03.238.91.81

www.monty.be

DEC 16-18 20.30 tg Stan in The Tangible, music/dance/theatre (in Arabic and English with surtitles in Dutch and English)

Mortsel Mark Liebrecht Schouwburg

H. Kruisstraat 16; 03.449.83.02 www.streven.be

Until DEC 19 20.15 tg Streven in Het Weekend by Michael Palin, directed by Marc Van Extergem (in Dutch)

Theater Zuidpool

Lange Noordstraat 11; 03.232.81.04

www.zuidpool.be

Until DEC 23 20.00 Jorgen Cassier, Sofie Decler and Jan Decler in Lucifer (in Dutch)

Wilrijk Dionteater

Sint-Camilusstraat 29; 03.827.87.08

www.dionteater.be

Until DEC 18 20.15 Bloed, Zweet en Tranen (Blood, Sweat and Tears), written by Jack Staal, directed by Lode Torfs (in Dutch)

Zuiderkroon

Vlaamse Kaai 81-83; 03.229.18.00

www.zuiderkroon.be

DEC 19 14.00 Deborah De Ridder in Tell Me On a Sunday, one-woman musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber, staged by Frank Van Laecke (in Dutch)

Brussels

Erasmus Hogeschool Brussel

Blok D, Nijverheidskaai 170; www.erasmushogeschool.be

Until DEC 18 15.00/20.00 Sweeney Todd: De bloedbarbier van Fleet Street (The Demon Barber of Fleet Street) (in Dutch)

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be

DEC 22-23 20.30 Needcompany in Needlab 17 by Jan Lauwers (in English)

Agenda

FLANDERS TODAY
DECEMBER 15, 2010

drawings and photographs of the development of the '03 chair by the Flemish designer
Until FEB 27 Art Nouveau and Art Deco from the Netherlands, a selection of objects from the Drents Museum Assen collection

Dr Guislain Museum
Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95
www.museumdrguislain.be

Until JAN 27 Bobby Baker Diary
Drawings: Mental Illness and Me, more than 150 drawings by the British performance artist illustrate her 10-year journey through psychiatric institutions
Until MAY 8 The Weighty Body: Of Fat and Thin, Perfect or Deranged, a history of fasting for personal, esthetic, religious or economic reasons

Kunsthal Sint-Pietersabdij
Sint-Pietersplein 9; 09.243.97.30
www.gekleurdverleden.be
Until APR 25 Gekleurd verleden: Familie in oorlog (Coloured Past: Family at War), stories of World War Two, told by everyday people

Museum of Contemporary Art (SMAK)
Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03 www.smak.be
Until JAN 30 Paul Hendrikse: A Vague Uneasiness, works by the Dutch artist
Until FEB 27 Hareng Saur: Ensor and Contemporary Art, spotlight on the continuing contemporary aspect of work by James Ensor, shown with work by international contemporary artists
Until MAR 27 Inside Installations, 10 installations from the museum's collection
Until MAR 27 Adrian Ghenie, paintings by the Romanian artist

Stadsmuseum Gent (STAM)
Bijloke - Godshuizerlaan 2; 09.269.87.90
www.stamgent.be
Until MAY 1 Enlightened City, an examination of how light affects a city through diaries, models, paintings, photographs and installations

Hasselt
Fashion Museum
Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.239.621

Holidays! markets and special events

Aalst

Until JAN 9 Sun-Thurs until 22.00; Fri-Sat until 00.00 Covered ice-skating rink and Christmas village, Grote Markt; www.aalst.be

Antwerp

Until JAN 2 Sun-Thurs 11.00-20.00, Fri-Sat 11.00-22.00 (24, 25 & 31 Dec until 17.00) Christmas market and skating rinks, Grote Markt & Steenplein
DEC 18-24 Music for Life, Groenplaats
DEC 31 23.30 Fireworks on the Scheldt
JAN 9 11.00-14.00 Mayor's New Year's Drink

DON'T MISS

Hout

Until 18 December
deSingel, Antwerp



© Koen Broos

Toneelhuis' Abke Haring's new work *Hout* (Wood) is confounding critics as much as it is fascinating them, generally a good sign for avant-garde theatre. A family of four moves in slow motion, forcing each other to participate, utilising submission to their own advantages. Rather than a narrative, it's a visual kaleidoscope of machinery and humans, rituals and death-watches. If you don't search it too hard for meaning, you'll find it seeping in on its own. At press time, it was nearly sold out, but it continues next week at STUK in Leuven and next month at Brussels' Kaaitheater.

→ www.desingel.be

www.modemuseumhasselt.be
Until JAN 9 Devout/Divine: Fashion vs Religion, examples of religious symbolism in designs of the past decennia

z33
Zuivelmarkt 33; 011.29.59.60 www.z33.be
Until MAR 13 Alter Nature: We Can, works by international artists about humans' manipulation of nature

Kemzeke

Verbeke Foundation
Westakker; 03.789.22.07
www.verbekefoundation.com
Until JAN 30 The Cloudknitters: 100 Records, record sleeves decorated by visual artists
Until APR 10 Certified Copy, works by 20 international artists on the theme of reproduction and cloning
Until APR 10 Mark Verstockt: A Portrait, an overview of the Flemish artist's work in celebration of his 80th birthday
Until APR 10 Trou de Ville, group show featuring press releases, e-mails, videos and photographs on guerilla art

Knokke-Heist

Cultuurcentrum Scharpoord
Meerlaan 32; 050.630.430
www.congocollectie.be
Until JAN 16 Congo Collection, Congolese sculptures and masks

Kortrijk

Museum Kortrijk 1302
Houtmarkt-Begijnpark; 056.27.78.50, www.kortrijk1302.be
Until JAN 9 OnGELOOFlijk: van hemel, hel en halleluja (UnBELIEFable: From Heaven, Hell and Hallelujah), religious objects and symbols from the past 500 years

Leuven

Museum M
Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28; 016.27.29.29
www.mleuven.be
Until DEC 16 Beatrice Albers: Patrimonies, installations by the Flemish artist
Until JAN 9 Ozo: Joke Van Leeuwen,

works by the Dutch author, poet, illustrator and performer

Until JAN 16 Robert Devriendt: Victimes de la Passion, paintings by the Flemish artist
Until JAN 23 Mayombe: Meesters van de magie (Master of Magic), sculptures and objects from the Congolese collection of the Catholic University of Leuven
DEC 17-MAR 20 David Shrigley, drawings and sculptures by the English artist

Ostend

Kunstmuseum Aan Zee (MuZee)
Romestraat 11; 059.50.81.18
www.muzee.be
DEC 18-MAR 27 The Responsive Subject, works by Flemish artist Guy Mees

Venetiaanse Gaanderijen

Zeedijk/Parijstraat; 050.40.34.38
www.west-vlaanderen.be
Until MAR 13 Visual Arts Competition 2010, recent works by West Flemish artists



Belgium's EU Presidency: Belgium takes the helm of the European Union Council for six months, with a cultural programme to mark its presidency
Until DEC 31 across the country www.brusselsinternational.be

Ballet in the Cinema: The Nutcracker, live from Moscow's Bolshoi Theater

DEC 19 16.45 in Kinepolis cinemas across Belgium www.kinepolis.com/ballet

Antwerp

Cirque du Soleil: Saltimbanco
DEC 22- JAN 2 times vary at Lotto Arena, Schijnpoortweg 119 0900.26.060, www.cirquedesoleil.com

Rommelant: Second-hand and antiques

fair
DEC 18-19 10.00-18.00 at Antwerp Expo, Jan Van Rijswijkstraat 191 03.260.81.20, www.rommelant.be

Bruges

Brugge Centraal: Festival celebrating the art and culture of Central Europe, with dance, theatre, music, literature, film and major exhibitions
Until JAN 30 across Bruges www.bruggecentraal.be

Brussels

Armwoede, Pauvreté, Poverty: Programme of talks, activities, performances and artistic interventions on the topic of poverty
Until JAN 16 at KVS, Lakensestraat 146 02.505.10.00, www.kvs.be

Museum Nocturnes: Brussels' museums stay open late, with guided tours and special events

Until DEC 16 on Thursdays, across the city <http://www.nocturnes.brusselsmuseums.be>

Norway Now: Festival of contemporary Norwegian culture with classical and pop music, literature, architecture, film and graphic design

Until MAY 24 across Brussels www.abconcerts.be

SpokenWorld: International festival exploring the current state of the world as performers, writers and academics express their thoughts. This year's theme is Mobility and Identity
Until DEC 20 at Kaaistudio's www.kaaitheater.be/spokenworld

Ghent

Boekenfestijn: Book fair
DEC 16-19 at Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1 02.220.00.00, www.boekenfestijn.be

Roeselare

Until JAN 10 10.00-22.00 Ice-skating rink, ski hill, night shopping and Christmas village www.centrumroeselare.be

Ronse

DEC 17 18.00-00.00; **DEC 18** 14.00-00.00; **DEC 19** 13.00-19.00 Christmas market with live music and fire shows on Sat www.ronse.be

Sint-Niklaas

Until JAN 9 11.00-23.00; Fri-Sat until 1.00; **DEC 24 & 31** 11.00-18.00 Ice-skating rink, Grote Markt www.sint-niklaas.be

Sint-Truiden

DEC 17-JAN 9 11.30-22.00 Christmas market and ice-skating rink, Groenmarkt (behind Town Hall) www.toerisme-sint-truiden.be

Turnhout

DEC 16-30 13.30-22.00; **DEC 24** until 18.00; **DEC 31** until 1.00 Covered ice-skating rink www.turnhout.be

Veurne

DEC 17-JAN 16 Mon-Thurs 11.00-21.00; Fri-Sun 11.00-22.00; **DEC 24 & 31** 11.00-16.00; **DEC 25 & JAN 1** 14.00-22.00; **JAN 10-16** 11.00-18.00 Covered ice-skating rink and Christmas market, Grote Markt www.veurne.be

Waregem

Until JAN 9 Mon, Tue, Thurs 17.00-21.00; Fri 17.00-22.00; Sat-Sun 11.00-22.00; **DEC 24 & 31** 11.00-16.00; **DEC 25 & JAN 1** 14.00-22.00 Covered ice-skating rink, Park Baron Casier www.waregem.be

Westerlo

DEC 19 14.00-18.00 Christmas market, Marktplein www.toerismewesterlo.be

Wetteren

DEC 18-19 14.00-20.00 Christmas market, Markt **Until JAN 9** 10.00-22.00 Ice-skating rink, Markt www.winterinwetteren.be

Ypres

Until DEC 26 Tues-Thurs 16.00-20.00; Fri-Sat 14.00-22.00; Sun 14.00-20.00 Christmas market, Grote Markt www.kerstmarkt-ieper.be

KATRIEN LINDEMANS

DUSK 'TIL DAWN



Hibernating in front of the fireplace is one way to keep warm. Dancing with hundreds of your sweat-soaked brethren is another.

FM Brussel Tonight

After previous editions in Flagey and the Metropolitan Public Library, radio station FM Brussel chose K-Nal for this year's edition of FM Brussel Tonight. On 18 December, the FM Brussel DJs team up with the residents of Libertine Supersport, the popular Saturday night party at K-Nal in the centre of Brussels.

Spread over two dance halls you'll find FM Brussel's finest record masters. Join Jules X in Hall 1 - he'll play anything from electro and old skool to house, funk and even disco. Also present is the duo Kong & Cortez, who started their career in Opwijk's legendary youth club Nijdrop. Both DJs are called Koen and spin electro in any form or shape. Libertine Supersport's resident Rick Shiver will round off the night. Hall 2 lines up Laurent Guldentops, Marcus, The Jelly Bellies and Geoffroy, all famous from their DJ sets on FM Brussel. Both Libertine Supersport and FM Brussel attract a very cosmopolitan crowd, always up for a party. Tickets come at €8 euro in presale at FNAC.

→ www.fmbrussel.be

We love bubbles!

Apparently, Belgians are the biggest consumers of champagne per capita outside of France. Winter holidays are the perfect excuses for bubbles. If you don't get enough on Christmas Day, We Love Bubbles presents a "bubbles only" party on Christmas night in Knokke's casino - the last in its party tour around Flanders.

The theme is "Sex and the City", so show up in your best stilettos and silk dresses to find new love, heartbreak and fancy drinks. You won't run into any of the American TV series' superstars, but you might find your Ms/Mr right. Or at least Mr Big. Music is provided by the DJs of Hasselt club Versus, so expect commercial and dance. And remember, at the bar, nothing but bubbles!

→ www.welovebubbles.com

ROBYN BOYLE

bite



© Robyn Boyle

Flemish stew

There's an unspoken tradition among many Flemish people: the first thing they do upon returning to Belgium after a trip abroad is head to the nearest *frietkot* for an order of fries with a side of *stoofvlees*, also known as *stoverij* or *carbonnades à la flamande*. I've gladly taken on this tradition, although I have since discovered that Flemish stew is even better made from scratch.

It's not difficult, either, requiring only a bit of time and patience. The meat, sold in the supermarket in thick chunks called *rundstoofvlees*, comes from the tough shoulder or neck part of the cow and therefore needs a few hours of good slow cooking to tenderise. After a couple of hours on the stove, the collagen between the muscles begins to melt, resulting in ultra-tender meat and a flavourful sauce.

There are as many variations on this traditional dish as there are regional differences. I prefer *Gentse stoverij* because it calls for artisanal mustard from Ghent (Tierenteyn mustard, to be precise). I also prefer a dark brown beer, a dubbel or Trappist, while others experiment with lighter brews or even gueuze or Rodenbach for a more sour result.

To give the stew its characteristic sweetness, I use brown sugar, but *stroop* (a fruit-based syrup) is equally effective. To thicken up the stew, some use flour; I opt for slices of bread. The most important thing is that the stew has the right balance of sweet and sour, plus a subtle piquant kick.

This is the perfect recipe for a wintery Sunday – throw all the ingredients in a big pot first thing in the morning, go out for a long, brisk walk and come back to find your home filled with the amazing aroma of beef simmering in butter and onions, herbs and dark beer.

Ingredients:

1 kg boneless bite-sized pieces of stewing beef
1 bottle Postel dubbel (or other kind of beer)
2 tablespoons brown sugar
2 medium onions, roughly chopped
2 tablespoons butter
A few sprigs of fresh thyme
2 bay leaves
2 slices of brown bread, smeared with Tierenteyn (or any spicy mustard)
Vinegar
Salt and black pepper

Melt half of the butter in a large pot and sauté the onions until they are golden. In a separate skillet, melt the rest of the butter and sauté the beef shortly at a high temperature, turning the pieces until all sides are brown (inside the beef should still be raw). Add these to the onions, together with the thyme, bay leaves, pepper and salt.

Deglaze the skillet with the beer, allowing it to come to a brief boil before adding to the pot. Stir in the brown sugar and top with two slices of bread, mustard-side down.

Allow everything to cook uncovered at a low temperature for two to three hours, or until the meat has reached the desired tenderness – almost falling apart, but not quite.

Finally, do one last taste-test before sprinkling a few drops of vinegar and some salt and pepper to taste.

Naturally, Flemish stew is best served with fresh hand-cut fries and homemade mayonnaise. But really any carbohydrate will complement your stew, such as mashed or boiled potatoes or even simple buttered bread.

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #161

News

Who was the most impressive artist of the year, which scientist made the greatest breakthrough, and who was the year's (booooo) biggest scrooge? Find out next week as we look back at 2010

Arts

Looking for a last-minute gift? Find the best in Flemish graphic novels in our new monthly books page

Living

This week was Ireland and Britain, next week it's the turn of Poland, Hungary and Austria as we continue our Europe in Flanders series

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



‘geheim’

Thanks to the Big Leak, the cat's out of the bag, and many secrets aren't secret any more. It's true that some secrets are best kept. But, as recent revelations have shown, many are hardly worth the effort. Yet life wouldn't be half the fun if there were no secrets, and what would Aspe, Deflo and the other Flemish thriller writers do then?

As luck would have it, I have a book entitled *Het geheim* – The Secret standing on a bookshelf waiting to be read. Clearly all this exposure is a sign to get started. So I thought I would go through the first chapter with you.

It begins: *De vleugel hing in de lucht* – The grand piano hung in the air, which is an attention-grabbing start; *en tekende zich als een geblakerde karbonade af tegen de besneeuwde bergtoppen* – and stood out like a blackened steak against the snow-covered mountain tops.

Vlak boven het balkon bleef de piano zachtjes zweven – Just above the balcony, the piano gently swayed. *Van binnenuit duwde iemand de balkondeuren open* – From inside someone pushed the balcony doors open. The piano is lowered on to the balcony and pushed inside, then *de deuren gingen dicht* – the doors closed. As does the chapter, and no characters have been introduced. All I know is a grand piano has been moved

into an apartment with a view on snow-capped mountains.

Is this a tale about a concert pianist with a past? Why begin with a hanging piano? And what's the big secret?

I prefer to judge a book by its opening page rather than by its cover, but for you I'll sneak a glance at the blurb on the back: *heden en verleden naderen* – present and past come together ... *conflict tussen liefde en ambitie* – conflict between love and ambition ... *een tragisch geheim* – a tragic secret. It must be a Horowitz-type character with a dreadful wasting disease of the finger joints. Well, I'm taken by the mid-air piano and do like to tinkle, so I'll read on, in my own time.

I looked up a definition of *geheim*: *Een geheim is iets dat voor anderen verborgen moet worden gehouden* – A secret is something that must be kept hidden from others. And if you don't, then you give a secret away – *een geheim verklappen*.

Een publiek geheim is of course an open secret, and if you are good at keeping secrets, then *u zou het geheim naar de graf nemen* – you would take the secret to your grave. The so-called harmless ones, *geheimjes* – little secrets may be anything but, yet who has never wanted *een geheime laatje* – a secret drawer?

THE LAST WORD . . .

Health check

"Belgium is the sick man of Europe."

Bart De Wever, leader of the Flemish nationalist N-VA, interviewed in the latest issue of *Der Spiegel*

Cash in hand

"Collecting is in our blood. My father and mother used to travel regularly to the US, and they always came back loaded down with cases full of western stuff."

Tom Schoepen, son of the late Bobbejaan, who spent a fortune last week on Johnny Cash memorabilia, including €30,000 for a pair of the singer's overalls

In it together

"The self-employed do that, too: they make use of every available deduction to push their taxes down."

Bernard Clerfayt, tax-fraud minister, following an announcement that AB InBev paid zero tax last year on €6.8 billion profit

Looking for work

"I'm asking for no more than €30 a day, and, if need be, I'll work for free."

Laura Van Bouchout, 29, who wants to try 30 different jobs before she's 30