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Politicians protest at huge bank bonuses
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With love from Glasgow

Journalist writes first novel from old letter
p8

O-Hanami

April in the Japanese Garden
p11

From the ashes

After a term full of controversial proposals and a crippling credit crunch, Kris Peeters sees Flanders finally turning around



LEO CENDROWICZ

Kris Peeters bounds into the conference room with a spring in his step. A full year after his dramatic riding accident, when the minister-president of Flanders fell from his horse and broke his hip, he has recovered enough to go running during his lunch hour in the nearby Warandepark. "I'm feeling good," he declares. "My broken hip is totally recovered." Peeters, 48, is keen to get back into shape after a year of

rehabilitation, despite warnings from his doctor that he could damage his hip again if he goes too fast. He has already been racing: on 20 March, he ran the Dendermonde 10k in an impressive 55 minutes. And in September, he is planning to cycle up the 2,600-metre Col du Galibier in the Alps for the Climbing For Life charity, along with 20 asthma and cystic fibrosis patients.

But right now, showered and dressed after his lunchtime jog, he is ready to talk to *Flanders Today* in the neoclassical office in Brussels' Martelaarsplein, which serves as the Flemish government's headquarters.

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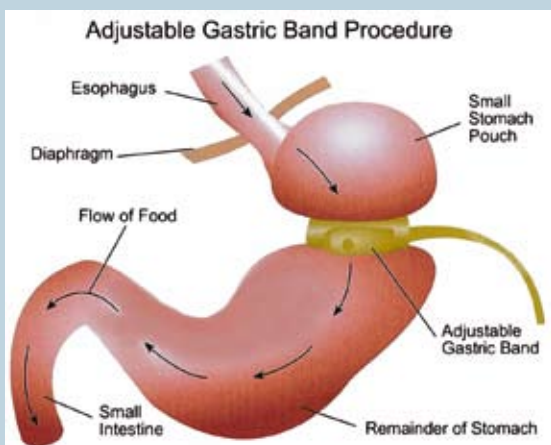
Gastric bands show "poor results"

People have "exaggerated expectations" of the potential for gastric band surgery to help them lose weight in the long term, according to the author of a new study published last week.

The study was carried out by Dr Jacques Himpens of Sint-Pieters University Hospital in Brussels and looked at 82 patients who had had gastric bands fitted more than 12 years ago. The procedure involves fitting a silicon band around the top part of the stomach in obese patients, effectively reducing its size and making it impossible for the patient to overeat.

On average, patients lost 43% of the weight they were expected to lose, in a range from 24% to 143%. Of the 36 patients who still had their bands in place, the excess weight loss was between 38% and 58%, with an average of 48%, a figure considered disappointing by doctors. However, more than 60% of patients said they were satisfied with the results.

Critics of the paper, published in the latest issue of the journal *Archives of Surgery*, point out that the study's sample was too small to draw conclusions and that both the bands and the techniques for implanting them —



the band is inserted using laparoscopic surgery — have improved since the study's patients were treated. "My impression is, even with the newer band, the results are not significantly better," Dr Himpens said. ♦

www.obesitycenteratcavell.com

Unions protest EU summit

Cobblestones and tear gas as demonstrators clash with police

ALAN HOPE

Three men have been charged with offences relating to last week's trade union demonstration at the EU summit in Brussels, in protest at plans to improve Europe's competitiveness. One man was charged with theft after he tried to steal photographic equipment from a police vehicle, and two men were charged with assault after being arrested for throwing stones at police. The demonstration ended in clashes in which 12 policemen were injured, none of them seriously.

Both Brussels mayor Freddy Thielemans and Brussels-City police chief Guido Van Wymersch described the outcome of the demonstration as positive, considering the number of people taking part — 13,000 members of the socialist union ABVV, with 6,000 members of the Christian union ACV gathering elsewhere in the city.

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FACE OF FLANDERS

ALAN HOPE



Gert Verhulst

The news last week that Gert Verhulst is the richest singer in Flanders came as a shock to many: Few people think of him as a singer at all. For most, he's the co-head of TV and multimedia entertainment empire Studio 100. For anyone who grew up in Flanders during the last 20-odd years, he's the human companion of a TV talking dog called Samson.

But according to a new book by financial writer Thierry Debels, Verhulst has made a total of €6.6 million from record sales, more than brothers Koen and Kris Wauters of Clouseau, crooner Helmut Lotti or Dani Klein of Vaya Con Dios. Verhulst owes it all to Samson, whose voice until 2005 was the work of Danny Verbiest (himself coming in at Number Seven in the rankings). Verhulst, born in the Berchem municipality of Antwerp in 1968, made his entry into television with the public broadcaster, then known as the BRT, at the age of only 19. Two years later he paired up with Samson for children's shows around Christmas, and the double act was so successful they got their own series. It's been running ever since, now in repeats, allowing Verhulst to maintain his fresh-faced look. The record sales are all songs recorded by Samson and Gert, clips for which received

extremely generous airtime on the BRT and then Ketnet.

Together with Verbiest and their producer Hans Bourlon, Verhulst set up Studio 100 in 1996, and it's been one of the most successful Flemish growth businesses ever since. It began by producing original children's programmes like *Kabouter Plop*, *Piet Piraat* and *Mega Mindy*, later diversifying into girl pop group K3, Plopsaland theme parks in Flanders, Germany and France, film spin-offs of their most popular brands, musical theatre and the acquisition of classic children's productions like *Pippi Longstocking*. Verhulst and Bourlon were named Managers of the Year by Trends magazine in 2008, and the company was named Entrepreneur of the Year in 2009.

"It's a constant struggle to maintain my credibility as a business leader while still being a pleasant personality," he explained in an interview. "But kids have never had a problem with that. In fact, Gert is the most boring character in the series. It's the other characters who bring it to life."

Koen Wauters came second in the richest singer list with €5 million, with Helmut Lotti third on €3.8 million.

→ www.studio100.be

News in brief

Dog shelters in Flanders are full to overflowing, with many with waiting lists of up to three months, it was reported last week. Populations continue to rise due to a policy of not euthanising dogs who don't find a home and the continuing demand for places for dogs abandoned by owners who no longer can cope with them.

More than 3,000 students from the Catholic University of Leuven last week broke the **world record for the loudest scream**, held since 2005 by a group of Finnish scouts. The students achieved a noise measuring 129.9 decibels – well above the pain barrier of 125 dB.

Beer brewer Alken-Maes last week **gave away 6,000 barrels of Maes Pils** in just three hours. The barrels, each containing five litres, are approaching their sell-by date. The brewer set up a Facebook page for the give-away, and each of the first 6,000 people to "Like" the page won a barrel.

Dock workers at the port of Antwerp are increasingly complicit in **drug smuggling** by organised crime, according to a report by the US State Department. Belgium is seen as a crucial hub for all kinds of criminal traffic, and the dockers



are often bribed with sums up to €15,000 to unload containers for the gangs, the report says. Last year a record total of 5.5 tonnes of cocaine was found at the port, where there are nevertheless only six customs officers on drug patrol.

Only **one in five Flemish authors makes enough to live on**, according to a survey of 113 literary writers by the Flemish Authors Association (VAV). The rest get by with the help of a partner's income, a pension or another job. Six in 10 make less than €3,000 a month gross, while the average income stands at €3,287. Only 30% of the average writer's income derives from writing itself; the rest comes from readings, subsidies and other sources.

Belgium's French daily newspaper *Le Soir* last week made history by producing an edition whose **first five pages were in Dutch**. The paper said the one-off issue, which was available in some of the municipalities circling Brussels, was a move to improve its image with Flemish readers. *Le Soir* has been prominent in its criticism of N-VA and its leader Bart De Wever, who refuses to deal with the paper's journalists. The paper also recently introduced a daily edition aimed at French-speaking residents of those same Flemish municipalities. The paper's editor,

Béatrice Delvaux, herself lives in Dilbeek, whose slogan is "Where Flemings are at home".

Members of the Flemish Parliament will get **two weeks' less summer holiday** this year, the body which runs the institution decided last week. Normally MPs return on the last Monday in September and begin committee work a week later. This year, however, committees will be ready to go to work on 19 September, the better to shadow the work of the government.

A **man who shot dead a justice of the peace** and her court clerk in Brussels in June of last year will not stand trial, a Brussels court decided last week. Iran-born Abdolazim Fathi Valmi, who apparently carried out the killings of justice Isabelle Brandon and clerk André Bellemans in revenge for a ruling which evicted him from his home, will be interned in a psychiatric institution for an indefinite period.

The **Hoge Kempen National Park** is applying for recognition as a world heritage site from the United Nations social and cultural organisation UNESCO. The 5,000 hectare park was established five years ago and has seen visitor numbers rise to over 700,000 a year. → www.rlkmb.be

OFFSIDE

Paging Doctor Dreamy

Think of a survey asking nurses to nominate their favourite doctor, and you might think you'd fallen through a time-warp to an age when dishy doctors and breathless nurses were a staple of romantic fiction. Nowadays, there's still a vestige of that old romance in the likes of dreamboat George Clooney as Dr Doug Ross in ER, and even the brashly insulting Gregory House, MD has his fair share of admirers.

Of course it's now much more common for doctors to be women and nurses to be men, so a competition being run by Care Talents, an employment agency for the nursing profession based in Jette and Kortrijk, turns out to be perfectly emancipated. Until 2 May, nurses can nominate a doctor of their choice and have a chance at winning €2,500.

As *Flanders Today* went to press, the field was led by Dr Jef Germonprez, an anaesthetist at the Sint-Augustinus Hospital in Veurne, with 410 votes. In second place is Dr Patricia Laporte, another anaesthetist at the Sint-Andries hospital in Tielt, at 404. She's described by her proponents as "a dream doctor", which, given her speciality, seems appropriate. Dr Ann Vandenbroucke, a specialist in geriatric medicine at the Damiaan Hospital in Ostend, is in third place with 390 votes. She is apparently "always in a good mood" and "as crazy as a back door", a Flemish expression which really needs no translation.

Interestingly, women account for four of the



top 10 places but only 14 of the top 50. Of the men, there's a fair helping of the distinguished and eminent, such as Dr Norbert Verleyen, a urologist at Jan Yperman Hospital in Ypres, or Professor Jan Poelaert of the UZ Brussel hospital in Jette.

There's also, may we be permitted to say on the basis of the website's photos, a decent representation of the dishy doctor sort; undoubtedly their credentials and talents are beyond reproach, but whose heart wouldn't suffer momentary arrhythmia at the appearance on rounds of the likes of Dr Pieter Goeminne, a respiratory specialist at the UZ Leuven, or Dr Dries Van Doninck, yet another anaesthetist, of the University of Antwerp Hospital in Edegem? Some things never change.

→ www.mijndroomdokter.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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Measures risk pushing wages and conditions into “negative spiral”, say unions

→ continued from page 1

“The police did their work well, and a lot of people used public transport, which relieved some of the traffic congestion, and the security details of the union were remarkably well behaved,” Thielemans said. The clashes that broke out, he said, were caused by 20 or so “trouble-makers who had nothing to do with the unions,” who had confronted police at the neutral zone knowing it would lead to violence. Police used tear gas and water cannons to repel the crowd of stone-throwers.

The union was protesting against a series of “antisocial” measures on the agenda of the EU leaders who were meeting nearby. The measures in the so-called competitiveness pact include scrapping the automatic indexation of wages and tighter restrictions on early retirement. These, would, the unions said, throw the EU into a negative spiral of competitiveness down.

For those who live and work in



© Reuters

Brussels, the demonstration led to disruption on the roads and on public transport. New chairman of employers' federation VBO Pierre Alain De Smedt said: “I understand workers' concern that certain matters might come under threat. But I regret that Brussels has been brought to a standstill by a demonstration. There are other

ways they might have displayed their discontent.”

According to Unizo, which represents the self-employed, the demo had little support among employees of small and medium-sized businesses. More than 83% of companies polled had no workers absent on the day, and more than 90% called for the

number of demonstrations to be limited.

“This action has brought the Belgian economy to a standstill in front of the eyes of the world's press,” said Jo Libeer, managing director of the Flemish small business network Voka. “The unions' obsession with demonstrations continues to damage our country's image.” ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



8,000

visitors last week for the rare, 72-hour blooming of the giant titan arum flowering plant in the National Botanic Garden in Meise

2,362

families in Flanders had their water cut off in 2010 for non-payment of bills, double the number in 2009. The cost of water rose by 54% from 2005 to 2010

7.6

cases of tuberculosis reported in Flanders per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 34 in Brussels. The total number of cases in 2010 across Belgium was 1,122

4,250

cases of bowel cancer every year in Flanders, with about 1,800 deaths. The health ministry now plans routine screening for all residents over the age of 50

90

bathtubs full of water, or about 7,400 litres, used by each person in Belgium every day, including water used to produce food. One litre of milk requires 1,000 litres of water to produce

F-16s carry out first strike on Libya

Belgian forces last weekend carried out their first bombardment of ground targets in Libya. Belgium has six F-16 fighters deployed to the conflict, which are based at the Araxos airbase in Greece. The defence ministry declined to say how many of the fighters had taken part in the attack, but confirmed they had all returned to base safely. No details were given, either, of

the nature of the target, although a spokesperson said there had been no civilian casualties.

The operation was within Belgium's mandate in Libya, the ministry said. Belgium's rules of engagement provide for the enforcement of the no-fly zone ordered by the United Nations, as well as for attacks on government forces that are attacking civilians.

The Belgian F-16s had previously carried out patrols over Libyan airspace, but without using the Sidewinder and Amraam missiles with which the planes are armed. Meanwhile, the Belgian navy minesweeper Narcis has been deployed in the Mediterranean under the command of Nato, to enforce the arms embargo on Libya. ♦

Police uncover “treasure trove” of stolen art

Police from Mechelen and Brussels last week uncovered a horde of stolen art objects worth up to one million euros. The find, described by investigators as a “treasure trove,” occurred in two warehouses — one in Willebroek and one in Brussels — and consists of hundreds of objects, paintings, musical instruments and jewels, including a vase by French Art Nouveau artist Emile Gallé and a bronze sculpture by Flemish sculptor George Minne, a contemporary of Knopff and Meunier who created two well known fountains with kneeling figures in Ghent and outside the Senate building in Brussels (shown).

The stolen objects were stashed by a former art dealer who was under investigation by police in France on suspicion of handling artworks stolen by a group of thieves from wealthy homes and galleries in Paris. French police, armed with an international arrest warrant, took part in last week's raids. The man is expected to be extradited to France. ♦



War monument removed

In Doel, a municipality of Beveren, a monument to British troops who helped defend the port of Antwerp during the Second World War has been dismantled and moved to an undisclosed location on the orders of the mayor of Beveren. The town council of Beveren intends to erect the monument at another place,

despite more than 1,700 signatures on a petition asking that it stay where it has stood since 1948.

The reason for the move is that the future of Doel is uncertain. The town, already largely abandoned, is scheduled to disappear under a plan to expand the left bank of the Port of Antwerp. That has been resisted

by a group of residents and activists, and a court recently ordered a stop to the demolition of empty houses. The organisers of the petition, calling themselves the Committee for the Protection of the British Monument, last week called on heritage minister Geert Bourgeois to issue a protection order for the monument. ♦

FIFTH COLUMN

Watching paint dry

“Liesbeth Van Impe is taking a week off to finally paint those stairs. Can everyone please let Wouter Beke quietly get on with his work until the paint has dried?”

The Facebook status of a prominent journalist last weekend summed up the political situation perfectly. Even European president Herman Van Rompuy clicked “like”.

More than 300 days after the elections, very little is happening, but another major crisis may be just around the corner. Officially Wouter Beke, CD&V party president and royal mediator, is still working away at finding an agreement. At the same time, everyone knows that the winners of the elections North and South, Bart De Wever (N-VA) and Elio Di Rupo (PS), respectively, have given up. They no longer believe a compromise on state reform is possible.

Where will this all end? New elections are a possibility, but only in theory. The majority of the electorate and of the politicians are against them. Even if elections were to take place, they would not bring a solution any closer, as the same parties are set to win again.

Another way out of the impasse would be a government without N-VA, the so-called classical tripartite, consisting of Christian-democrats, socialists and liberals. This scenario seems the most probable at the moment. Last week, it came a bit closer after caretaker prime minister Yves Leterme and his party CD&V lashed out at N-VA.

Leterme was outraged by N-VA's criticism that his caretaker government was beginning to act more and more like one in full power. “Make a new government. The sooner the better. Our cabinet's keys are ready to be handed over,” the CD&V-ministers stated in an open letter. “The real problem is that Bart De Wever has failed,” Leterme added.

Was this the beginning of the “endgame” De Wever predicted? Until now, CD&V preferred to stay close to its former ally. They both want the same state reform, but there is a tactical reason too: If CD&V enters a government without N-VA, it knows N-VA will only grow in opposition. The only way to tame it, is by pulling it in as well. The same holds true for all Flemish parties, but to CD&V it matters more, as N-VA vies the dominant position it traditionally holds.

The result is the same deadlock we have been in for over nine months now. We might as well watch Liesbeth Van Impe's paint dry.



BRUSSELS

One of the nicest view over brussels, 15th floor, close to Brussels centre and european institutions by Métro, 2 minutes from Métro Yser, 2 balconies (one with south view on a farmbrussels centre, one with north view on the canal and the atomium.) quiet neighbors, surrounded by parks.



SCHAERBEEK

exceptional house at 2 min walking distance from the Rogierplace, near all type of transportation, at 5 min from the Dansaertstreet. large livingroom, 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, separate storage/laundry room, 1 toilet, fully furnished kitchen. Nice view and access to large garden.



WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT

Dansaert street, near the



BRUSSELS



Centre Brussels near Dansaert area: Nice apartment DUPLEX 135m2, 2008 + parking place 1 car. Livingroom +/-30m2- separate diningroom + 16m2- fitted kitchen - 3 bedrooms (20m2;12m2;12m2) bathroom - showerroom - 2wc. Individual gaz heating. Apartment with a lot of light. In good condition. Excellent situation near shops,Dansaert area, metro(Yser) and ring.

WOLUWE SAINT-LAMBERT



ANDERLECHT

Two steps away from the House of Erasme, in a commercial district, this building located on 2 a13ca proposes: commercial ground floor with workshop 143 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m² and 1 flat of 30 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m² and 1 flat of 30 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m²

SAINT-GILLES



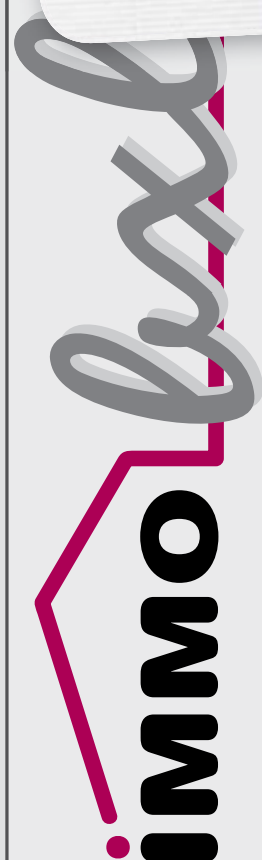
luxurious 1 bedroom apartments for sale with a view over Brussels. All the apartments have been completely renovated and are equipped with a wooden

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UCCLE

which has been totally renovated and reconstructed and was sold to the European Commission. There are different luxurious 1 bedroom apartments for sale with a splendid view over Brussels. All the apart-

ments have been completely renovated and are equipped with a wooden floor, fully equipped kitchen (microwave oven / dishwasher / fridge /...), videophone, complete bathroom with shower, new window frames with double glazing, security door, airconditioning.



BRUSSELS

Facing the nice Parc Cinquantenaire very spacious 4 bedroom house facing the Parc- 3 bathrooms - fully equipped kitchen - garage. One large and nice living room, 2 quiet bedrooms, kitchen is equipped, all in good conditions. Quiet

neighbors, surrounded by parks. A lot of light. In good condition. Excellent situation near shops, theatre,...



ANDERLECHT

Godeaux - Bemel area, house 3 façades of +/- 240m², completely renovated in 2004, living room 42m², fully equipped kitchen (microwave oven / dishwasher / fridge /...), breakfast corner, 4 bedrooms, closets, wooden floors, bathroom, toilet,

Jacuzzi, 2 shower rooms, garage + space in front of the house, garden, terrace, alarm system, security door, airconditioning.



FOREST

villa 4 facades of 300m², completely renovated in 2000, living room, wooden floors, fireplace, separate dining room, fully equipped kitchen, breakfast area, laundry room, 4 bedrooms, wooden floors, office area, bathroom,

shower room, cellar, garden 5acres, nice terrace, garage 2 or 3 cars, alarm system.

From the ashes

“I want to handle my own problems”

continued from page 1

And he's keen to get back to business, too. Flanders has been faced with a number of recent setbacks: its economy was injured in 2008 when the global credit crunch hit key financial institutions and forced a government bailout of the banks KBC and Dexia and insurance group Ethias. There has also been rehabilitation as the entire economy had to slowly rebuild.

“Our industry really suffered,” Peeters says. “It was a very severe crisis, with a lot of unemployment. But when you look at it now, it is amazing that the recovery was so quick.”

Peeters says this was partly because of pro-active measures, partly thanks to Germany. “We launched a lot of anti-crisis measures, and there was a strong recovery of the economy in Germany, our main trading partner. But we are ready for the future. With the Pact2020 we anticipated the Europe 2020 strategy. The implementation of the Flanders in Action plan is on schedule, with projects such as the New Industrial Policy, Flanders' Care and the living lab for electric vehicles.”

It's the economy

Flanders, even more than the other regions, is characterised by its highly productive, export-oriented economy (more than 80% of Flanders' products are sold abroad), high level of education and multilingualism.

Antwerp is the second-largest port in Europe, dealing with more than 178 million tonnes of freight in 2010. The chemical industry is another factor, and the Antwerp-based BASF plant accounts for about 2% of Belgian exports. “We have a very open economy, so our neighbours are extremely important, as is the issue of internationalisation,” Peeters says. “We have to think more European and more global.” Peeters ties this into Flanders' role in the Belgian presidency of the European Union in the second half of last year: The country's devolved federal system handed many important policy responsibilities to regions, and Flemish ministers chaired key EU Council meetings. “It was a chance to change the image of both the EU in Flanders and of Flanders in the EU,” he says.

And it appears to have worked, with Flemish officials applauded for their impressive helming of the presidency. Now Peeters is looking further afield, leading trade delegations to places like Qatar, Switzerland, Brazil and Russia.

Peeters, whose portfolio responsibilities are agriculture and foreign policy, as well as the economy, also points to innovation as an increasing driver of the economy. He reels off names of universities, institutes and research centres that have gained global renown for their work in areas like biotechnology, micro-electronics, health care, environmental technology, multimedia and information technology.

“A good compromise is a thing of beauty”

Investors also appreciate the English-language skills of the Flemish. “English has become more and more a *lingua franca* in Flanders in universities and research centres,” Peeters says. “In general, English is the language of the world, especially in science and research. In the past, people living here were aware of the importance of French, but now it's English. It's a fact of life.”

Antwerp angst: Opel and the viaduct

Despite these assets, General Motors last year dropped the axe on its Opel car assembly plant in Antwerp, shedding 2,600 workers – and 5,000 more in associated businesses. It was a move that infuriated Peeters, as Antwerp was one of Opel's more productive plants but appeared to be a victim of the carmaker's efforts to maintain good relations with Germany, where less efficient plants were based.

But now Peeters has more distance from the events. “It is amazing to see that this important company closed without a big social conflict,” he says. “It was a very delicate,

important social issue, but now we are trying to find new investors for the ground and the site.”

But the people of Antwerp proved more stubborn when it came to the plans for a massive viaduct over the docklands: A 2009 city-wide referendum comprehensively rejected the proposal for the “Lange Wapper”, a 1.5 km cable-stayed bridge with two motorway levels. Since then, Peeters has worked with Antwerp city authorities to develop a more expensive but less intrusive tunnel project.

“We always said it was not just a decision of the Flemish government but also the city of Antwerp,” he says of the new Oosterweel link. “The trick was to say to Antwerp: You asked for a tunnel, so you must pay the surplus.”

The agreement ends the long-running squabbles about the link, first proposed in the mid-1990s and due for completion in 2021. But Peeters says the referendum was a crude way to resolve it. “With those sorts of problems, it's not so wise because you ask people to say yes or no to very delicate, complex dossiers,” he says. “Also, people who want to vote ‘no’ will take part. But people who prefer the bridge stay at home. It is easier to motivate people who are against than people who are in favour.”

And how about that government?

That idea of negativity driving politics brings to mind the state of Belgium's federal government: nine months after the last elections, there is still no permanent administration in sight. Peeters is careful with this journalist not to be drawn too far into a comment on the force currently dominating Flemish politics, the nationalist N-VA, not least because they are coalition partners in the Flemish regional government.

“They won the election,” he says, quietly, referring to their 18.1% score in the country, and 27.8% in Flanders. “They are the biggest party in Flanders and in Belgium. This is what the people voted for, and we have to respect the vote.”

He says the only way out is to talk through the problem and reach a classic Belgian compromise. “A good compromise is a thing of beauty in politics,” he says. “It is wrong to say that a compromise is negative. A good compromise is not a bad solution. The system in Belgium is not black and white. You have to find a compromise. That's politics, in Belgium as in Flanders.”

Peeters insists Belgium is not paralysed by the crisis. “We have six governments and only one is in caretaker mode,” he says, referring to the regional and language community government system. “This explains why there is no crisis, no panic. There is certainly an impact, but it is not as big as some people think.”

As for his party, the Christian Democrat CD&V, it still has faith in Belgium as a nation state to bring together its disparate interests, Peeters says. But the crisis has revealed how the French and Dutch speakers see Belgium differently. “A very important lesson is that there is a very different vision about what can be achieved at the federal level,” he says. “Wallonia has the same issues to deal with – an ageing population, globalisation – and it wants the system to help. Our view is that we [regional governments] need to take on more responsibilities currently handled by the federal state, to do our own things. I am convinced that the federal level is important for us, but I need more competence for tax issues, and I need more responsibilities for health and labour issues. Because I want to handle my own problems.”

Unfortunately, the past nine months have seen politicians harden their positions, says Peeters. “The talks have not brought people much closer together,” he says. “The Flemish do not understand why they cannot have more competences. And in Wallonia, they don't understand why we ask that.”

And he thinks that will breed cynicism. “People are getting more and more negative about politics. They don't like it anymore,” he says. “Even in normal circumstances, it is difficult to convince people to follow politics. But now, I am convinced that people are a little bit disgusted by the situation. And that's a sad situation.” ♦



© Sebastien Priet / Reuters



© Thierry Roge / Reuters



© Fred Guerdin/Reporters

The three faces of Kris Peeters (from top): Fresh off the elections in June of 2009, with hope clearly still in his heart; at an Agriculture and Fisheries ministers meeting during last year's Belgian Presidency of the European Union; shading his eyes during a visit to the Technical and Scientific Research Centre for Diamonds in Lier

How did the frog cross the road?

A Europe-wide campaign demonstrates just how valuable your free time is

KATRIEN DEVULDER

It's not that you don't want to volunteer – it's maybe that you just don't know where or how. Flanders and, indeed, Europe are aware of this and hence 2011 is the European Year of Volunteering. The objectives of this European Commission initiative are to recognise volunteers in all areas of society and to increase awareness among Europeans of the huge value of voluntary work.

"The initiative was launched at the request of the European voluntary sector, who had noticed that, though voluntary work is already covered at a European level, it's never treated in a coherent or structured way," says Eva Hambach, head of the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk, or Flemish Volunteer Support Network (VSV). "The goal of the initiative is to highlight volunteering in Europe and to urge the European institutions to put volunteering on the agenda in a more fundamental and sustainable way."

You might have noticed the EYV Tour, which started in December near Brussels Central Station and will have stops all over Europe throughout the year. Each stage of the tour gives volunteers a chance to meet each other, engage with policymakers and discuss key issues for the future of their work.

In Flanders, initiatives are being coordinated by VSV, which aims to highlight volunteering in all its diversity and to encourage policymakers and organisations to look beyond 2011, engaging in long-term initiatives for volunteers.

A concrete initiative is the European institutions' Open Day on 7 May, during which you can visit the European Parliament and Commission. "We managed to make volunteering the main theme of this event, including an information market with several volunteering organisations," says



Would you like to assist at a compost site, like these volunteers in Westrozebeke, West Flanders ...

Hambach. "We also want to provide local authorities with ideas for local actions by organising an inspiration day and study days."

Time is on your side

About 870,000 people in Flanders volunteer in sectors as diverse as leisure, culture, environment, education and human rights. But sport and social work, like helping refugees or the homeless, are the most popular. The typical volunteer is aged between 34 and 54, has a good level of education and an income slightly higher than the average.

"It's interesting to see that it is in fact people with families and an active career who engage most in volunteering," says Hambach. "The busier people's lives are, the more they tend to volunteer. So when people argue that they have no time for volunteering, we can prove that it actually works the other way around."

And though voluntary work has increasing competition from other, more commercial, pastimes, the number of volunteers in Flanders has increased in the past decade and is expected to continue to grow. A lot

of voluntary actions are initiated by young people – precisely those one might expect to prefer video games or TV.

VSV is not worried that volunteering might one day lose the battle against new forms of leisure. "In Flanders, there is no sign that points towards a decline," says Hambach.



... or help frogs cross the road during their spring migration?

"Instead, we think that such new trends will create new forms of volunteering. However, it remains a challenge for organisations to give volunteering a cool image, so it can keep competing against those other ways of spending free time." ♦

→ www.vrijwilligersweb.be

Volunteering for dummies

Want to volunteer? Here are some things you might want to keep in mind.

- Consider what you're already doing in your free time. You might be a volunteer without realising it: leader in youth movements, member of the parent committee in your kids' schools, board member in a local association... All this is volunteering but isn't often considered as such.
- Ask yourself why you want to volunteer: to meet new people in a sport club or to have a quiet moment to yourself watering plants in a botanical garden? To help children in asylum centres with their homework or to help frogs and toads across the street during their spring migration? The reasons why people volunteer are as diverse as the activities.
- Google. Look for organisations or initiatives in your community or among your friends, and you will find that volunteering is not as far off as you thought it was. The website below also offers a broad overview of opportunities.
- In principle, anyone can volunteer. In most cases, there are regulations in place, so you don't have to worry about insurance, liability, etc. Special rules apply to children and sometimes to foreigners. Also, a lot depends on the kind of voluntary work and the sector in which you're working, so the best thing to do is contact an organisation in an area in which you are interested.

→ www.vrijwilligerswerk.be

Van Cauwelaert lock back in business

MARC MAES

Earlier this month the Van Cauwelaert lock was back in business for inland shipping traffic. The 83-year-old lock was taken out of commission in December 2009 for renovation works, during which time all of the port's inland navigation and barges were docked via the remaining locks.

The Van Cauwelaert, located between the centre of Antwerp and the city's north district, was opened in August 1928 as Kruisschanssluis (referring to the former Kruis Schans fortification built in 1583). It became a fourth entry to the port alongside the existing Bonaparte lock, Kattendijk lock and Royers lock.

The building of the new lock – 270 x 35 metres, with a depth of 9.75 metres – was one of the Belgium's first big public works projects and was built to attract larger vessels

and spread port activities north of the city.

King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth officially inaugurated the Kruisschanssluis from on board the MS Anversville; the ship went through a mooring wire attached to both walls (starboard and portside) of the lock, opening the infrastructure for port traffic.

In 1962, the Kruisschanssluis was renamed Van Cauwelaertsluis (*sluis* means lock in Dutch) after then mayor Frans Van Cauwelaert, who, during his term from 1921 to 1932, promoted the expansion of the Antwerp port.

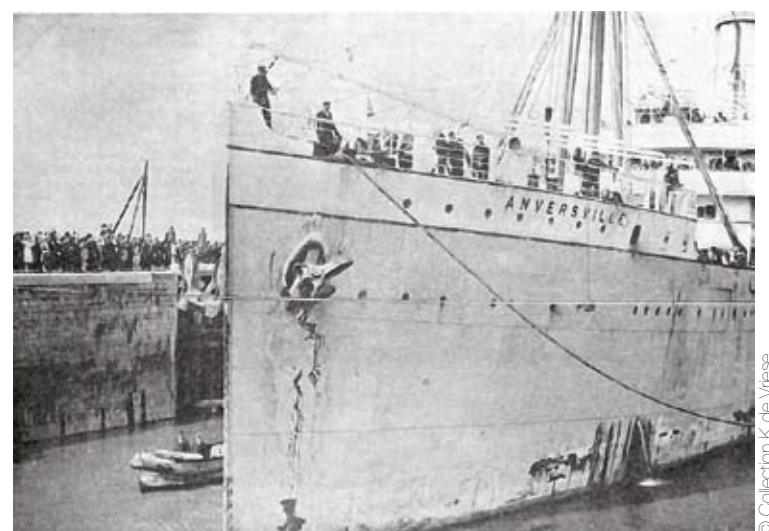
Serving general shipping traffic, the Van Cauwelaert was re-oriented to become an inland navigation lock in 2000, occasionally serving as back up when the Boudewijn lock (1955), Zandvliet lock (1967) or Berendrecht lock (the world's

biggest, built in 1989) were put out of order for technical reasons.

The renovation works, representing an investment of some €57 million, are part of the Masterplan Mobility Antwerp project to stimulate and facilitate inland shipping traffic and ensure a swift connection between the River Scheldt, the port installations and the Albert canal.

"The four lock doors and their operating mechanisms were replaced and two new technical buildings added on either side of the lock," says Kristof Devos, project engineer at the Maritime division of the Department of Mobility and Public Works. The lock's walls and operating platform were also reinforced and renovated – "ready to go for another 80 years," says Devos.

The whole process followed the principles of the mechanism used



The opening of the Van Cauwelaert lock in the summer of 1928

in the Berendrecht lock – a novelty in port locks. The door's rollers are made from neoprene synthetic rubber "to make lock movements run more smoothly," says Devos. In addition to the renovation

project, a new nautical command station was built serving both the Van Cauwelaert and Boudewijn locks, locally coordinating all marine traffic. ♦

→ www.portofantwerp.com

Politicians hit out at bank bonuses

Tax threatened on over-generous executive packages

ALAN HOPE

The Flemish Parliament last week voted unanimously to restrict the bonuses paid out to bank executives by their own boards. The measure affects banks that received assistance from the Flemish government during the financial crisis of 2008-2009.

Directors will not be able to pay themselves large bonuses as long as any of the state aid they received remains outstanding. And non-executive directors will be banned from receiving share or share options as part of their remuneration.

The measure was introduced by John Crombez, the financial expert of the Flemish socialist party, and followed news of a return to the open-handed bonus culture by some foreign banks (*see below*). The Flemish government would use its presence on an offending bank's board to call a shareholder meeting to vote down the bonuses.

The new rules, however, have largely symbolic value. The Flemish government was involved in the bail-out of three institutions: KBC, Dexia and insurer Ethias. The new rule passed last week is thought to have come too late to apply to Dexia,

whose bonuses were apparently set down on paper the week before. The government has in any case no representative on Dexia's board.

KBC, meanwhile, had paid out no bonus to directors in 2008 and 2009, although this year has seen a turnaround, and the bank intends to pay a dividend to shareholders for the first time since the crisis.

The federal parliament is expected to agree to a similar measure, introduced by Crombez's colleague Bruno Tuybens. Finance minister Didier Reynders warned he might use "fiscal instruments" to chastise any bank that went too far in paying out bonuses. The bonuses themselves are currently taxed at 70%, but Reynders might consider punitive taxes on the earnings of the banks involved.

The question of bonuses continues to make headlines:

- The CEO of Ageas, the successor to Fortis, not only missed out on a long-term bonus of up to €225,000, he also did not receive an increase of €100,000 (on a basic salary of €500,000) written into his contract, as a result of poor results



- Barclay's CEO Bob Diamond only makes €290,000 a year, but for 2010 he can look forward to a bonus of €7.6 million. The bonus might have been as high as €11 million, but the bank had promised the government to exercise restraint

- The director-general of Swiss bank UBS, on the other hand, has turned down his 2010 bonus after poor performance results. He also declined to take a bonus in 2009, his first year in the job;

- ABN Amro, this year showing a loss of €414 million, will pay out no

bonuses to chairman Gerrit Zalm or other board members

- The board of directors of ING has decided not to take bonuses or salary increases this year, after public outrage at the numbers involved. CEO Jan Hommen was to have received a bonus of €1.25 million on top of his salary of €1.35 million. The members of the board, meanwhile, were to receive a pay increase of 2%. ING had received €5 billion in support from the state at the time of the banking crisis, of which half still has to be paid back. ♦

PM kept report hidden

Caretaker prime minister Yves Leterme last week admitted he had covered up a report on the country's finances because of the damaging effect it might have had on Belgium's credit-worthiness in the eyes of the international financial markets.

The report, drawn up by the federal planning bureau, included an analysis of the effects on the federal budget if a proposal to hive off some federal competencies to the regions were to come into force. According to the bureau, the transfer of powers could not go hand-in-hand with the full transfer of budgets because that would leave the federal government with no margin to pay for pressing concerns, like the ageing of the population.

The report suggested a transfer of only 80% of the budget for any given item, something the regions have contested. In current circumstances, the federal government will be required by 2015 to either cut spending by 36% or find 36% more income, either via taxations like VAT or by raising income tax. If state reform were to lead to some responsibilities being transferred to the regions, the shortfall could go as high as 50%.

In February, the report was ready for publication and went to Leterme for approval. He asked the planning bureau not to publish immediately but to send it to the National Bank for advice "because of the delicate matter of the report and the volatility of the financial markets at that moment".

The government had been trying to calm the worries of the financial markets since the beginning of the year, in the run-up to two major bond issues that threatened to be ruined if the markets lacked confidence in Belgium's ability to honour its debts. According to Leterme, the report of the planning bureau would have fed into negative feelings, leading investors to demand higher rates of interest for bonds, or even putting them off buying altogether. ♦

Jobs news

The road haulage sector could be facing a shortage of as many as 10,000 truck drivers in the next decade, the **Social Fund for Transport and Logistics** warned. The sector is already having trouble filling vacancies, partly as a result of the industry's poor image among young people. The SFTL has now launched an information campaign for which 700 schools have already signed up.

Unions and management at **Dera Food Technology** in Bornem, Antwerp province, have agreed to a restructuring that will mean the loss of 58 jobs from a workforce of 136. Some of the redundancies will be taken up by early retirement for workers. The company is transferring production to Poland, while R&D remains here.



Trucker of the future?

Staff at **Innogenetics** in Ghent took strike action last week to call for a better package for workers being laid off. The company is cutting 59 jobs from a workforce of 270, a result of the takeover last year by the Japanese Fujirebio and the closure of Innogenetics' R&D activities here.

Flanders faces a shortage of 120,000 workers in all areas of the **health-care sector** by 2014, according to the office of Flemish health minister Jo Vandeuren. "We're facing an almost impossible challenge," a spokesman said. "The baby boom generation is retiring, but the need for health-care workers is increasing because of the ageing population." ♦

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Banking • KBC

Flanders largest bank is said to be considering the sale of its Polish Kredyt Bank for up to €1.2 billion. KBC had earmarked its Czech affiliate for an IPO, but poor stock market conditions seem to have forced the bank into seeking an alternative to meet the requests by the European Union in approving its rescue by the Belgian authorities in 2009. Meanwhile, the Dutch Van Lanschot Bankiers is weighing an offer for KBC's Luxembourg-based private banking affiliate KBL, after the collapse of the €1.35 billion proposal made by the Indian Hinduja group, rejected by regulators.

Construction • Besix

Brussels-based construction group Besix has signed a contract with the Anderlecht football club to renovate and expand its Constant Vanden Stock Stadium to 30,000 seats at a cost of some €40 million. The enlarged facility is expected to be inaugurated by 2015. The Anderlecht team will play its home games in Brussels' King Boudewijn Stadium during the works.

Construction • Heylen

Heylen Bricks company, based in Lanaken, Limburg province, has been acquired by the Austrian Wienerberger building group for an undisclosed amount.

Economy • Confidence higher

The Belgian National Bank indicator of business confidence was slightly higher in March, reflecting unchanged prospects in the manufacturing and building sectors and a slight upturn for services. However, consumer confidence dropped, impacted by the high cost of petroleum products.

Energy • Eneco

Dutch-based energy group Eneco will enter the Belgian private household market from August this year, in competition with Electrabel. The company, owner of Air Energy, claims to offer a combination of green- and gas-produced electricity.

Food and drink • Starbucks

US coffee group Starbucks is opening its fifth outlet in the country in Brussels' Central Station. The opening is slated for early June and follows the three stores opened at Brussels Airport and one in Antwerp's Central Station.

Insurance • Ageas

Brussels-based insurance company Ageas is spending €61 million to acquire the British Castle Cover brokerage, specialised in contracts for people over 50. The deal will strengthen Ageas' position in the UK, where it is already the country's second largest player in the 50+ segment.

Software • Microsoft

US-based software company Microsoft inaugurated its Cloud and Interoperability Centre in Brussels last week. The new facility will drive the adoption of cloud computing in private and public enterprises in Europe.

Marie and me

VRT journalist Annelies Beck goes in search of her roots in debut novel

REBECCA BENOOT

In 2009 Annelies Beck participated in the VRT documentary series *Verloren land* (*Lost Country*) in which several Flemish celebrities went in search of their roots. The TV newscaster already knew that her great-grandfather, August Keppens, had spent four years in Glasgow during the First World War. Then she got a hold of his Identity Book from her grandmother.

"When the First World War started, 1.5 million Belgians fled to France, the Netherlands and Great Britain," says Beck. "My great-grandfather took the boat to Folkestone, England, and afterwards most refugees were scattered across the country. He ultimately ended up in Glasgow, where he made wooden crates to store ammunition in."

Most Belgians who travelled to the UK during the period came from rural areas and small towns but often wound up in huge cities. Glasgow was, at the time, the second-largest city in the UK. "It must have been a major culture shock, but they were very warmly received," explains Beck. "Everybody wanted a Belgian in their home as a sort of badge of honour during the war. I found a quote in a diary at the Imperial War Museum saying: 'Everyone was Belgian-mad for a while.'"

While researching her family history, Beck, 37, stumbled across a letter in the Royal Archive in Brussels. It was written in 1914 by a girl called Marie Claes who had also fled to Glasgow, but this was no ordinary letter: It was addressed to King Albert I of Belgium. "She was writing about an injustice that had been done to a friend of hers," says Beck, "and when I first read this letter, I was really drawn to her."

The story then turns from curious to extraordinary: "I knew my great-grandfather had known a Marie Claes, and it so happens to be the same one."

From a letter to a book

Inspired by these real-life people and events, Beck transformed this lesser-known part of Flemish history into a novel instead of a non-fiction account as would have been expected from a journalist. "The power games that Marie talks about in the letter fascinated me," Beck goes on, "and what it must have been like for such a young girl to be caught up in this. What



drove her to write such a letter? I wanted to explore these people's incentives, and a novel offers a lot more opportunity to examine this. If I was writing non-fiction, I would have been limited to certainties; now, I have written a story that could have happened based on the facts at hand."

Over het kanaal (*Over the Channel*) tells the story of 15-year-old Marie Claes who goes to Glasgow with her family on what they call "a holiday" when the First World War breaks out. Besides coming to terms with the war, she is also faced with a new country, a foreign language and Glasgow's own social upheaval. By incorporating a multitude of characters, Beck widens her canvas from a simple coming-of-age story to a historical novel containing several layers of society.

"The rent strike in 1914 really cried out to me," she says, "because there's this poor Belgian community that is very much keeping to themselves but at the same time life in



Annelies Beck will tour bookshops as part of Flanders' Literary Spring

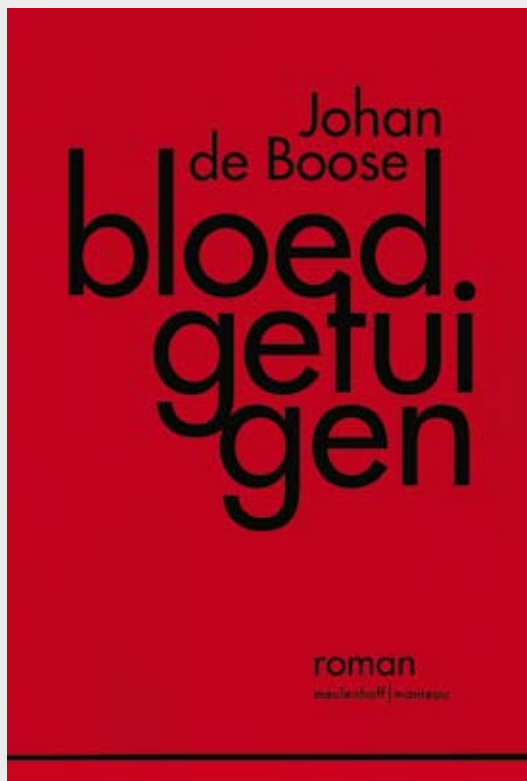
Glasgow is just going on. I found it intriguing to see how they would interact."

Despite tackling meaty topics such as identity, truth and migration, Beck insists that it's the characters who are at the heart of the story. "They were very outspoken from the beginning, so in a sense I had to follow them. I wanted this world to move as organically as possible. It was especially interesting to see this girl...finding her own way because her parents want to keep the news of the war away from her, which of course doesn't work. She has to find out herself by learning English, which offers her an entrance into the real world."

Due to her simple style, the diversity of topics and detailed depictions, Beck has created a convincing microcosm of 20th-century history and adolescence. It's an admirable transition into fiction. ♦

Fresh fiction

Every year Flemish bookstores join forces for the **Litteraire Lente** (Literary Spring). Thirty recently released titles from Belgian and international authors (including Annelies Beck) are selected for special promotion. Besides worthy recommendations and discounts on titles, Litteraire Lente also sponsors a book tour of many of the writers throughout April. Here's a sample of the Flemish books you'll find prominently displayed in bookshops next month.



Bloedgetuigen (Blood Witnesses)

Johan de Boose

Earlier this year, Johan de Boose was nominated for the Herman de Coninck Prize. This spring, this man of all literary trades, with a love for all things Slavic, returns with his third novel. Robust and bright red, it's about idealism, war and the unbridled frustration that consequently follows. Flanders' contribution to the Eastern Front during the Second World War is the backdrop for his characters' struggle to survive a situation, while systematically destroying each other.

Machteloos (Powerless)

Steven Crombez

Documentary filmmaker Steven Crombez's fiction debut is a wry commentary on power and status, as his Italian character "Silvio B", once a rich, international political leader, suffers a lonely existence after being banished to a remote island. Scarce contact with the local population is his only consolation, while he slowly comes to terms with his own downfall (and impending impotence). Longing for his former lifestyle and to return home, he must make peace with himself and with the fact that it's a short step from fun-loving criminal to solitary loser.

Helena

Geert de Kockere

Children's book author Geert de Kockere takes the plunge into adult fiction with *Helena*, a novel in which our Creator gets a second chance. Humankind is still as fickle and annoying as ever, so what was He or She thinking? In this refreshing and relevant novel, de Kockere uses his trademark philosophical puns and poetic language to unlock several mystical questions, such as how influential is the Almighty really? To us as a species and to Helena in particular?

De kunst van het wachten (The Art of Waiting)

David Nolens

David Nolens' third novel explores what would happen if we left the hustle and bustle of everyday life behind us. His protagonist Jack joins a drifter called Roman on a voyage from Brussels to Tangier, ultimately ending up in Greenland, where they hope to find awareness, tranquillity and joy. But can things really be that simple? Along the way, several people join their quest for inner peace, a concept that is on the verge of extinction in the Wild West. (RB)

All these authors will appear in bookshops across Flanders in April. Check the website for details → www.boek.be

Self preservation

Digitising may not be the storage saviour we once imagined

LISA BRADSHAW

Now that precious filmstrips are being transferred to digital files, we tend to think they are perfectly safe for future generations. In fact, this isn't true, says Nicola Mazzanti, head of collections and digitisation for Cinematek, home of the Cinema Museum and Royal Belgian Film Archives, in Brussels.

Mazzanti, a world-renowned film archive and restoration specialist, has been asked by the European Commission to produce a report on "the challenges of the digital era for film heritage". In 2005, the Commission produced recommendations for all EU member states for preservation, digitising and storage of film stock. The Commission now wants to update those recommendations, particularly as digitising in the 21st century isn't as black and white as it once seemed to be.

"The big question now is how do we make sure that digital files get preserved," says Mazzanti. There is a misconception that once something is digital, it lasts forever. It's the opposite, in fact. As people know from dealing with their own files, hard disks can fail, the next version of Windows might not open them." This is a problem with digital storage of everything, in fact. A book might last 200 years before it crumbles, but a digital file could fail to open next week. "There is value in making it possible to show film from the 1930s, '40s and '50s," says Mazzanti. "What if in 50 years we can't show anything that was made in 2010?"

An example of Mazzanti's point is the fantastic story of Dawson City.



Located in the far northwest of Canada's Yukon territory, "Dawson City was at the end of the film trail," says Mazzanti. In the first half of the 20th century, it was too expensive to ship reels of films back from the remote location, so they just sat there. In the 1970s, excavation work on the town's Grand Hotel uncovered more than 500 reels of old nitrate film stock, which had been preserved in permafrost. "It was an old swimming pool filled with films," says Mazzanti. "Dawson City is never going to happen in digital. If you find hard drives in a pool after 50 years, they're not going to work anymore."

The meaning is clear: "The files on

the hard drive will not last, while the film reels on the shelf will last."

Which is not to say that film stock should not be digitised. But the film industry has to realise that shooting films in digital does not come with a built-in preservation guarantee. And preservationists need to continuously monitor and update files. Preservation is, therefore, an ongoing process.

Mazzanti is on his way to Los Angeles this week, where the Italian previously lived and worked as a consultant before being brought to Brussels by Cinematek in 2009. He'll be discussing these issues with Hollywood film studios for a comparison of European and

American preservation techniques, which the Commission specifically requested be part of his report, due at the end of this year.

Cinematek, says Mazzanti, not only began the discussions around digitising and storage back in 2002, it is also one of the five largest film archives in Europe. Bottom line, says Mazzanti, "you store everything twice, on two different media, so that if one goes obsolete, maybe the other one survives. That is what you should do with your photos of last year's holidays anyway. So we are doing what everyone should do." ♦

→ www.cinematek.be

The last tile standing • Ancienne Belgique bids farewell to the groundbreaking music festival Domino

PM DOUTRELIGNE

And so we reach the last Domino. Launched in 1999, the Domino Festival has become a real cult phenomenon, showcasing the best in alternative music. For "alternative", read: unusual, oblique, surprising, left field. No genre is out of bounds, with the possible exceptions of Bon Jovi-style stadium rock and German *schlager*.

Every year offers an inspired mix of established heavyweights, underground cult figures and virtual unknowns. And so recent editions gave us the opportunity to discover South African sensation Blk Jks, to rediscover white funk pioneers A Certain Ratio, to enjoy cold-wave fetishists Interpol and even to witness the great Lou Reed play an hour of improvised white noise.

Minimalist electronic music has featured heavily over the past few years, explained by the close links between Domino and the world champions in that field, Warp Records. This year,

the avant-garde British label will be represented by American post-rock outfit **Battles** (pictured), displaying the same open-mindedness as the festival itself.

It's not because it's some kind of unlucky number — this being the festival's 13th year — that Domino is coming to an end. In fact, it could be considered good news: tour schedules for artists are so packed that it's difficult to get the best and brightest in one place in the same week anymore. Rather than let it deteriorate in quality, the AB is ending on a high.

A familiar face returns to Domino this year: **Blixa Bargeld**, leader of Einstürzende Neubauten and former member of Nick Cave's Bad Seeds, will introduce his latest project, **ANBB**, which sees him team up with fellow German **Alva Noto**. Fans of jangly 80s pop are already licking their lips at the prospect of welcoming Glaswegians **Belle & Sebastian** back to the AB;

their headlining slot on 10 April sold out almost immediately.

Much is also being made of Christopher Dexter Greenspan, whose stage name **oOoO** is pronounced "oh" and who spearheads the "witch house" scene, a spooky cousin of dubstep. His DJ set will curry favour with readers of avant-garde music bible *The Wire*, as will the appearance of "one man and his laptop" Japanese experimentalist **Merzbow**. Most thrilling of all is the return to these shores of industrial/techno outfit **Meat Beat Manifesto** (led by the *über*-influential Jack Dangers), supporting ANBB.

With more than 30 artists performing over eight nights, this final edition of Domino is a bumper crop. The organisers at the AB are already working on new festival ideas for next year — whatever the outcome, Domino will be a hard act to follow. ♦



6-12 April

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110, Brussels

→ www.abconcerts.be

CULTURE NEWS

The International Film Festival of Flanders in Ghent has appointed Flemish composer **Dirk Brossé** as **Music Director** of the festival. Brossé already has a close relationship with the festival, home of the World Soundtrack Awards, and will now lead the programming of the many festival-related concerts and CD recordings.

Bronks children's theatre in Brussels has been nominated for the 2011 Mies van der Rohe Award, the **European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture**. The building on Varkensmarkt, striking for its glass facade, was designed by Brussels-based Martine De Maeseneer Architects. The winner is announced in June.

Leuven-based vocal and instrumental ensemble **Capilla Flamenca** is taking part in a cultural exchange with Piffaro, The Renaissance Band in the US city of Philadelphia. The two ensembles have been collaborating for 15 years, and this latest will see Capilla travelling to the US next month, and Piffaro coming to Flanders in May for concerts featuring the music of 15th-century Flemish composer Heinrich Isaac.

The **19th- and 20th-century collections of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts** in Antwerp (KMSKA) will from 29 April be on display in the city's centrally located Koningin Fabiolazaal. KMSKA is closing for an extensive six-year renovation, but much of its collection will be on view elsewhere. The exhibition in the Koningin Fabiolazaal, titled *The Moderns: Highlights from the Royal Museum*, will include work by Emile Claus, James Ensor, Rik Wouters and Gustave Van De Woestyne, and runs until early 2012. Some of the museum's masterpieces from its Rubens and Flemish Primitives collections, meanwhile, will be part of the first exhibition of Antwerp's new city museum, MAS, which opens in May.

The Vooruit is home to the fifth-ever **Nacht van de Poezie**, or Night of Poetry, on 2 April. First staged to a sell-out audience in Brussels' Vorst Nationaal nearly 40 years ago, the event ran twice in the 1970s and twice in the 1980s. It begins at 20.00 and goes for 12 hours straight, with 50 poets each taking the stage for 10 minutes. Not a bad way to spend the night.

→ www.nachtvandepoezie.be

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© Claire Leleu

The big blossom

Catch some cherry tree pollen in your *sake* at Hasselt's Japanese Garden

DENZIL WALTON

During these days and weeks when the human tragedy resulting from the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan are still very much in our minds, an invitation to visit the beautiful Japanese Garden in Hasselt might seem inappropriate. The wonderful oasis of tranquillity with its connection with Japan makes it a highly poignant place where you can offer up your thoughts, meditations and prayers for those suffering in the aftermath of this terrible natural disaster. The Japanese see a special connection between the seasons and human life. Spring is the time of birth, summer of peak vitality, autumn the time of waning and winter of death. And of course the cycle repeats itself. After the cold winter, the delicate blossoms of the cherry trees are Japan's first

sign that spring is here once more. The *sakura*, or cherry blossom, is also the symbol of fleeting beauty. No matter how impressive a tree full of bright pink blossom may look, it only takes one strong gust of wind or a heavy downpour to bring it to an end. Recent events merely emphasise the truth of this. But while the cherry trees are in blossom – a period called *o-hanami* – it's time to celebrate by enjoying a picnic, a tea ceremony or a glass of *sake* under the trees. On Sunday, 3 April the Japanese Garden is open all afternoon so you can experience *o-hanami* under the garden's 240 cherry trees. And don't worry if pollen from the cherry flowers drops into your glass of *sake* or cup of tea – the Japanese believe that cherry pollen helps them stay healthy.

The Japanese Garden hosts several more events this spring and summer.

8 May • Koinobori
Koinobori literally translates as "carp streamer". On this day – a national holiday in Japan – carp-shaped paper or cloth wind socks are made and hung up to flutter in the wind. They signify strength and vitality for children. A range of other craft activities and games for children will also be provided.

19 June • Bonsai exhibition
Marvel at the diversity of these miniature trees grown in containers. *Bonsai* from local suppliers will be available for purchase.

9-10 July • Tanabata Star Festival
Tanabata is a Japanese tradition when people write their wishes on colourful strips of paper and

hang them on bamboo branches. It originates from an ancient Chinese tale about two lovers who were separated by the king on either side of the Milky Way. They were only allowed to meet once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month – Tanabata night.

10 August, 20.00-23.00 •

O-bon nocturne
O-bon is an annual Buddhist event for commemorating one's ancestors. It is believed that each year the ancestors' spirits return to this world to visit their relatives. Traditionally, lanterns are hung in front of houses to guide the spirits, *o-bon* dances are performed, and food offerings made. The Japanese Garden will be transformed with lanterns and candles to make this a unique experience. ♦

→ www.hasselt.eu

MORE BLOSSOMS IN LIMBURG

April is definitely the month to visit the Haspengouw, an area in the south of Limburg. It's Flanders' main fruit-growing area, and the sight of millions of fruit trees in bloom is a superb spectacle. Here are some tips for a day out.

Libert-Monard Fruit Farm

Gelindenstraat 75, Heers
Walk around a blossoming orchard, picnic under the apple trees and enjoy local fruity delicacies
Sunday 10 April, 10.00-17.00

Porreye Fruit Farm

Naamsesteenweg 439c, Sint-Truiden
Ever wondered what happens to the fruit after it's plucked? Now's your chance to find out. Enjoy the blossom and a guided tour around a working fruit farm
Sunday 17 April, 10.00-18.00

SOLV Horticultural School

Diestersteenweg 146, Sint-Truiden
Join the blossom blessing ceremony, then enjoy a traditional rural garden party with local entertainers, children's animation and lots of fruity drinks
25 April (Easter Monday), 13.00-15.00

Hardelingen Castle

Sint-Hubertusstraat 40, Hoeselt
An all-day celebration of everything fruity! Music, market, art exhibitions, horse-and-cart trips to the nearby water cannon and windmill, clowns, children's activities and, of course, plenty to eat and drink
25 April (Easter Monday)

→ www.bloesemfeesten-haspengouw.be

In the round • Can Cancellara keep his crown in the famous Tour of Flanders?

LEO CENDROWICZ

Swiss time trial specialist Fabian Cancellara will hope to retain his Ronde van Vlaanderen, or Tour of Flanders, title at the one-day cycling classic on Sunday, when he lines up against Flemish rivals Tom Boonen and Stijn Devolder. Cancellara is a world time-trial champion and has dominated the early stages of the Tour de France in recent years, so his victory in Flanders last year came as a surprise – especially since he changed his bike twice because of mechanical problems. But he is still the favourite to claim the 261.5-kilometre, Bruges-to-Ninove epic.

Yet, two-time winner Tom Boonen, runner-up last year, is aiming to seal his comeback to the sport after a series of interruptions and drug-related incidents that have blighted his career recently. Likewise, Stijn Devolder, who won in 2008 and 2009, is keen to re-establish his reputation with a victory in the race that first announced his talent to the cycling world. However, the Tour of Flanders is such a tough race that it remains relatively open for all comers. Just good legs are not enough; most, not to say everything, is about tactics. If it rains on Sunday, its

infamous hills – like the 1.1 km Kluisberg or the Koppenberg with its 22% inclines – will be even more demanding because of the slippery cobbles. First held in 1913, The Tour of Flanders was the brainchild of Karel Van Wynendaele, co-founder of *Sportwereld* newspaper. Initially a devilish tour of 330 km, it only gathered 37 participants, who fell to just 10 the following year. Only in the 1920s did it catch on and establish itself. Thanks to some fierce weather over the years, and the fearsome cobblestones, it is now seen as a vital test for the world's greatest cyclists. ♦



Tom Boonen (left) and Fabian Cancellara neck-and-neck at last year's Tour of Flanders

→ www.rondevanvlaanderen.be

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The showgirls must go on LARIVA FOLLIES

COURTNEY DAVIS

Historian, artist, performer and dancer: meet Lady Flo. A graduate of the Sorbonne with a Master's in Research, specialised in the image and lifestyle of women from the early to the mid-19th century, Lady Flo isn't your typical intellectual. Not least because she does most of her job in the nude. She's quick to point out that it isn't about the nudity, but the teasing and art of seduction. She is a burlesque dancer and the artistic director for LaRiva Follies, a dance and dinner theatre just launched in Belgium. Held at the retro-styled La Riva event centre in Antwerp on the first Sunday of the month until June, each show centres on a different theme. The shows feature a crooner duet from Brussels, the Flemish burlesque duo Rebelles, an international performer and, of course, Lady Flo. She serves as your host – singing, dancing and presenting with her stage kitten Mademoiselle Ô from Paris. LaRiva Follies is the brainchild of Ben Mouling, driving force behind the swing dance parties of Radio Modern. He wanted to premiere in Belgium a dinner

show à la Paris' Folies Bergère or Moulin Rouge. While Ben might be the engine, Lady Flo is the gasoline that gets the party moving. Her passion for the retro scene is evident: It isn't simply a job but a lifestyle. "Lady Flo is my stage name and Neo Retro is an association I created to promote retro culture," she says. "It's a big family of passionate artists, historians, collectors and more across Europe, who participate in a number of shows, parties, exhibitions and workshops all related to this lost lifestyle. It is a period of elegance and glamour, a mix of nostalgia, energy and beauty." For her, this lost lifestyle is closely linked to fashion. "At the end of the 19th century, showgirls were starting to be better known because of the evolution of photography and printing. It's a turning point in the history of show, fashion and women," she says. "Today, there is no more style. Everybody dresses the same, and there is a strict beauty code. Getting inspiration from the women of the 1900s offers every type of woman a style adapted

to her natural shape. You've got curves? Be a '50s pin-up! You're skinny? Be a '20s flapper!" She also recognises that it isn't just the clothes (or the removing of them) that makes the dinner theatre so appealing. "There is a worldwide trend with retro," she says. "The world seems nostalgic and in search of traditions, roots. People want more human relationships, which includes going out with the possibility of talking. In dance clubs, music is so loud that you cannot have a conversation." This Sunday, titled *Années Folles!*, is focused on the "elegant but decadent era of Prohibition and Charleston" and showcases UK starlet Vicky Butterfly. ♦

3 April, 1 May, 5 June

LaRiva
Londenstraat 52, Antwerp
→ www.lariva.be

LaRiva Follies includes a three-course meal, champagne, coffee and show for €82 or show only for €25



Antwerp

Arenbergschouwburg
Arenbergstraat 28; 070.222.192
www.arenbergschouwburg.be
APR 6 20.15 Stef Bos

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40
www.deroma.be
APR 2 20.30 Buscemi featuring Squadra Bossa Cultura

Lotto Arena

Schijnpootweg 119; 070.345.345
www.sportpaleis.be
APR 3 19.00 James Last

Rataplan

Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
www.rataplanvzw.be
APR 1 20.30 My Little Cheap Dictaphone
APR 2 20.30 The Tribe Band

Trix

Noordersingel 28; 03.670.09.00
www.trixonline.be
APR 1 20.00 Chase & Status
APR 2 20.00 The 69 Eyes + Hardcore Superstar + Crashdiet
APR 3 19.30 Cee Lo Green + Buzzov-en + Your Highness + Last Legion Alive

Ardooie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82
www.deschaduw.net
APR 2 20.30 Funksister

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
www.abconcerts.be
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 30 Axel Krygier + Benito Band.
The Twilight Singers + Deadseats **APR 1**
Les Ogres de Barback. Chapel Club + De Staat **APR 2** And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead + Rival Schools + Fugo
APR 3 The Low Anthem + The Head and The Heart

Beursschouwburg

August Ortsstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50
www.vkconcerts.be
APR 2 21.15 The Coathangers + The Thermals

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15
www.cirque-royal.org
APR 5 20.00 Adele
APR 6 20.00 Archive

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
www.forestrnational.be
APR 1 20.00 AaRON

Hasselt

Ethias Arena
Gouv. Verwilghensingel 70; 070.34.50.50
www.sherpa.be
APR 3 20.00 Enrique Iglesias

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
www.hetdepot.be
MAR 31 20.00 Yevgueni

DON'T MISS

Kopstukken

Until 10 April

Het Firmament, Mechelen

It's the final days of this charming exhibition in the home of Flanders' figure theatre educational centre. In Dutch, a *kopstuk* is the person in charge or a protagonist. *Kopstukken* showcases the most important figures – puppets and other non-human actors – of Ghent's Theater Taptoe and also refers to Taptoe's prestige in Belgian figure theatre. Taptoe had to shut last year when it lost its government funding.



→ www.hetfirmament.be



Antwerp

Buster
Kaasrui 1; 03.232.51.53
www.busterpodium.be
MAR 30 21.30 Flavio Silva

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40
www.deroma.be
APR 1 20.30 Peter Hertmans Quintet featuring Richie Beirach

Rataplan

Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
www.rataplanvzw.be
MAR 30 20.30 Christian Mendoza Group

Trix

Noordersingel 28; 03.670.09.00
www.trixonline.be
MAR 31 20.00 Jaga Jazzist

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
www.abconcerts.be
APR 5 20.00 Avishai Cohen

Beursschouwburg

August Ortsstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50
www.beursschouwburg.be
MAR 31 20.00 Mixtuur

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
www.jazzstation.be
MAR 30 20.30 Stéphane Mercier Quartet
APR 2 18.00 Gilles Repond Quintet
APR 6 20.30 Rassinfosse, Pierre and Wiernik

Musical Instrument Museum

Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30
www.mim.be

MORE ON STAGE THIS WEEK

Compagnie Flak → *De Spil, Roeselare*

Theater Zuidpool → *CC Belgica, Dendermonde*

Ontroerend Goed → *België Kunstencentrum, Hasselt*



APR 5 12.30 Roby Glod + Jacques Pirotton

Sazz'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78
www.sazznjazz.be

APR 1 21.30 Trio Alla Turca

APR 2-16 21.30 Sazz'n Jazz Quartet

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
www.soundsjazzclub.be

Concerts at 22.00:

MAR 31 Mess Trio **APR 1** 22.00 Augusto

Pirodda Quartet **APR 2** 22.00 Gino

Lattuca Quintet **APR 4** 22.00 Master

Session Michael Blass **APR 5** 22.00

Borderline Quartet

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
www.themusicvillage.com

MAR 30 20.30 Joachim Caffonnette

Quintet **MAR 31** 12.30 Lies Lefever **APR 1**

21.00 Johan Clement Trio **APR 2** 21.00

Fanny Bériaux **APR 6** **20.30 A3**

Ghent

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060
www.vooruit.be

APR 5 20.15 Bilal, Title & Delvis

Kortrijk

De Kreun

Conservatoriumplein 1; 056.37.06.44
www.dekreun.be

APR 1 20.00 Jaga Jazzist



Antwerp

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40
www.deroma.be

MAR 31 20.30 Maria De Fátima

APR 3 15.00 Jan Vermeulen

Zuiderpershuis

Walse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00
www.zuiderpershuis.be

MAR 31 20.30 Polyphonic singing by

Batwa pygmies

Ghent

Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.91.65
www.handelsbeurs.be

APR 2 20.15 Muntagna Nera

Leuven

Het Depot

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
www.hetdepot.be

MAR 31 20.00 Yevgueni



Antwerp

Amuz

Kammenstraat 81; 03.292.36.80
www.amuz.be

APR 2 21.00 Claire Chevallier, piano;
Joris Verdin, harmonium: César Franck,
Alexandre Guilmant, Charles-Marie

Widor

APR 3 15.00 Gustav Leonhardt: Michel

Forquaray, Jacques Duphly, more

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
www.desingel.be

MAR 30 20.00 Le Concert Spirituel

conducted by Hervé Niquet: Handel,

Corelli

APR 2 20.00 Mojca Erdmann, soprano;

Rudolf Jansen, piano: Mozart, Debussy,

Schumann, more

APR 6 20.00 Ferran Savall, guitar;

theorbo, voice; Jordi Savall, viola da

gamba; David Mayoral, percussion:

Tobias Hume, Marin Marais, more

Bruges

Concertgebouw

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
www.concertgebouw.be

APR 1 20.00 Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart:

Stockhausen (part of Ars Musica)

APR 2 20.00 Grauschmacher Pianoduo:

Stockhausen (part of Ars Musica). 22.00

Markus Stockhausen, trumpet; Arne

Deforce, cello; Daan Vandewalle, piano:

Markus & Karlheinz Stockhausen (part of

Ars Musica)

Brussels

Bozar

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00

DON'T MISS

Party in the Palace

3 April, 10.00-18.00

Bozar, Brussels

The annual open door day at the Palace of Fine Arts, otherwise known as Bozar, is your chance to discover Brussels' arts stalwart in a family-friendly atmosphere of music, circus, dance, film and general merriment. For a day pass of €10, you wander freely through the building, decide what you want to see and to which workshops you'll send your kids. The ongoing exhibitions (Tuymans, Venetian Masters, Hungarians) are open, too.



→ www.bozar.be

www.bozar.be

MAR 31 20.00 Tallinn Sinfonietta conducted by Andres Mustonen with Laura Mikkola, piano; Yuri Bashmet, viola: Charles Ives, Erkki Sven Tüür, more (part of Ars Musica) **APR 1 & 3** 20.00/15.00 Belgian National Orchestra conducted by Stefan Blunier: Fauré, Korngold, Debussy **APR 3** 11.00 Ferenc Vizi, piano: Schubert, Rachmaninov, Bartók, Liszt **APR 6** 12.40 Tatiana Samouil, violin; Justus Grimm, cello; Daniel Blumenthal, piano: Dvorák

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20
www.flagey.be

APR 1 12.30 Trioenix: Beethoven, Leó

Weiner

APR 2 19.00 Finals of the Koor van het

Jaar choral competition

APR 6 12.30 Trioenix: Beethoven,

Leó Weiner 20.15 Vlaams Radio Koor

conducted by Bo Holten: Hendrik Isaac,

Josquin Des Prez, Adriaan Willaert, more

Miniemenkerk

Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84
www.miniemen.net

APR 5 20.00 Namur Chamber Choir

conducted by Peter Phillips: Sebastián de

Vivanco, Alonso Lobo, more

Ghent

Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.91.65
www.handelsbeurs.be

MAR 30 20.15 MetA4: string quartets by

Jouni Kaipainen, Haydn, Zemlinsky

Hoeilaart

Maison de la Musique

Edgar Sohiestraat 33; 02.657.96.52
www.maisondelamusique.be

MAR 31 20.00 Sonja Volten, soprano;

Stéphanie Proot, Philippe Riga, piano:

Mahler, Schumann, Chopin

Leuven

30CC Schouwburg

Bondgenotenlaan 21; 016.23.84.27
www.30CC.be

MAR 31 20.00 The Brodsky Concerts:

musical performance by LOD, written

and acted by Dirk Roofthoof with music

by Kris Defoort, based on poems by

Joseph Brodsky



Brussels

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
www.demunt.be

Until MAR 30 15.00/19.00 Mozart's

La Finta Giardiniera with De Munt

Symphony Orchestra conducted by

John Nelson/Peter Tomek, staged by

Karl-Ernst & Ursel Herrmann (in

Italian with French and Dutch surtitles)



Bruges

Magdalenazaal (MaZ)

Magdalenstraat 27; 050.44.30.60

www.ccbrugge.be

MAR 30 20.00 Ultima Vez in Radical Wrong, choreographed by Wim Vandekeybus

Brussels

Bozar

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00
www.bozar.be

APR 2 20.30 El final de este estado de

cosas, redux, choreographed by Israel

Galván

APR 5 20.00 Abhinava Arts Centre

presents Umang: Traditional Echoes

of Bharata Natyam & Kathak,

choreographed by Nirupama and

Rajendra (www.indiandance.be)

Kaaitheater

Saintelettessquare 20; 02.201.59.59
www.kaaitheater.be

Until APR 8 Rosas Early Works: Four

pieces from the 1980s by Flemish

choreographer Anne Teresa de

Keersmaecker

Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30
www.wolubilis.be

APR 4-5 20.30 To the Ones I Love,

choreographed by Thierry Smits

Ghent

De Bijloke

Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2; 09.269.92.92
www.debijloke.be

MAR 31-APR 3 20.00 Gnosis,

choreographed by Akram Khan (Belgian

premiere)



Antwerp

Arenbergschouwburg

Arenbergstraat 28; 070.222.192
www.arenbergschouwburg.be

MAR 30-31 20.30/22.00 Het Zesde

Bedrijf and Laura van Dolron in

Existential Make-over (in Dutch) **MAR**

30-31 22.00/20.30 Het Zesde Bedrijf

and Laura van Dolron in Iemand moet het

doen (Somebody Has to Do It; in Dutch)

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
www.desingel.be

MAR 30-APR 2 20.00 Societas Raffaello

Sanzio in The Minister's Black Veil, based

on a chapter in Nathaniel Hawthorne's

Twice Told Tales, directed by Romeo

Castellucci (in Italian with Dutch

surtitles)

HetPaleis

Theaterplein 1; 03.202.83.11
www.hetpaleis.be

Until APR 13 15.15 Walpurgis and

HetPaleis in Prinses Turandot, written

and directed by Hans Schmidt (in Dutch;

ages 3 and up)

Monty

Montignystraat 3-5; 03.238.91.81
www.monty.be

APR 2-3 20.30 La Coma in Queens,

directed by Michel Schweizer (in French

with Dutch surtitles)

Toneelhuis/Bourla

Komedieplaats 18; 03.224.88.44
www.toneelhuis.be

MAR 30-APR 2 20.30 Gregoria by

Maurice Gilliams, directed by Bart

A Touch of China

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Series of 8 sessions of 2,5 hours on several data:

12 till 21 April (easter break), 3 May till 21 June (tuesday evenings),
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GROUP T

INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LEUVEN

Meuleman (in Dutch with French and English surtitles)

Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02 www.vlaamseopera.be
APR 6 20.00 SKaGeN and Octopus Solisten in Almschi by Annelies Verbeke, with music by Alma Mahler (in Dutch)

Brussels

Bozar

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00 www.bozar.be
Until APR 16 14.00/19.30 Le Journal d'une femme au Kosovo (The Diary of a Woman in Kosovo) by Zenel Laci (in French with surtitles in English and Dutch)

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25 www.demarkten.be
Until APR 2 20.00 Woyzeck written by Georg Büchner, directed by Nimfa Tegenbos (in Dutch)

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
APR 6-9 20.30/19.00 tg STAN & guests in Oogst (Harvest), new scenes, short extracts and one-act plays from the company's repertoire (in Dutch)

The Warehouse Studio

Waelhemstraat 69a; 0471.62.56.34 www.irishtheatregroup.com
Until APR 2 20.30 Irish Theatre Group in

The Beauty Queen of Leenane by Martin McDonagh (in English)

Ghent

Arca Theatre

Sint-Widostraat 4; 0485.31.38.91 kate.macdonald@ugent.be
APR 1-3 20.30 Ghent University's English Theatre Company in Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors, directed by Wesley Deschryver (in English)

NTGent Schouwburg

Sint-Baafsplein 17; 09.225.01.01 www.ntgent.be
Until APR 30 20.30/15.00 Een bruid in de morgen (A Bride in the Morning), written by Hugo Claus (in Dutch)



Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (M HKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60 www.muhka.be
Until MAY 22 Liam Gillick and Lawrence Weiner: A Syntax of Dependency, double portrait of the New York-based artists

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 03.677.16.55 www.extracity.org
Until MAY 1 Museum of Speech, works by contemporary artists, including performative script, film and architecture

Fashion Museum (MoMu)

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70 www.momu.be
Until AUG 14 Unravel: Knitwear in Fashion, a wide variety of knitted garments and accessories from across the centuries, with a focus on high fashion pieces and their vernacular interpretations

Plantin-Moretus Museum

Vrijdagmarkt 22; 03.221.14.50
APR 2-JUNE 5 Playsante huysinghe op eenen hof, prints, drawings, topographic views and books provide a glimpse at the numerous country homes bought up outside of Antwerp in the 16th century

Brussels

Atomium

Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72 www.atomium.be
Until APR 25 10.00-18.00 Cosmos: Be a Star: The Universe in 3 Dimensions, study of the solar system from the scientific and geopolitical to the philosophical and artistic

Beursschouwburg

August Ortsstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50 www.beursschouwburg.be
Until MAY 27 Waiting and Watching: South African Moments, four young photographers' photos of ordinary South Africans

De Elektriciteitscentrale

Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.45 www.deelektriciteitscentrale.be
Until AUG 21 Jane Alexander: Security - Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope), sculptures, installations, photographs and videos by the South African artist

Design Vlaanderen Galerie

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60 www.designvlaanderen.be
MAR 30-MAY 20 This is Humin, innovative design projects by 30 companies and 20 designers from across Flanders

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11 www.fine-arts-museum.be
Until JUN 5 Walter Leblanc, kinetic and optical works by the Belgian artist

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23 www.museumdd.be
Until JUN 5 Christopher Williams, photographs by the American photographer
Until JUN 5 Thomas Bogaert, film projects by the Belgian director
Until JUN 5 Picture This: Sophie Kuijken, paintings by the Belgian artist

Ghent

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99 www.designmuseumgent.be
Until JUN 13 L'Objet Sublime, over 300 ceramic works from 1875-1945 France

MIAT

Minnameers 9; 09.269.42.00 www.miat.gent.be
Until APR 23 Viva Vélo, photographs by Ghent natives Steven Geirnaert and Heidi Renwa of their 20,000 km bike trip from Hungary to China (www.foto-velo.be)

Museum of Contemporary Art (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03 www.smak.be
Until JUN 5 Joy and Disaster, group show featuring contemporary Hungarian artists
Until JUN 5 Carlos Rodríguez-Méndez: Agua Caliente, Hot Water, gigantic minimalist sculpture by the Spanish artist
Until JUN 5 MARCEL: The Marcel Broodthaers Room, work by the Belgian artist
Until JUL 3 Michaël Sailstorfer: Raum und Zeit, sculptures by the German artist

Hasselt

Fashion museum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21 www.modemuseumhasselt.be
Until JUN 5 Alter Nature: The Future That Never Was, a look at the year 2000 from the point of view of designers from the 1960s and a glance at new possibilities in fashion

National Jenever Museum

Witte Nonnenstraat 19; 011.23.98.60 www.jenevermuseum.be
Until JUN 5 De kunst van het drinken (The Art of Drinking), paintings of drinking scenes by 19th- and 20th-century Belgian artists

Leuven

Museum M

Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28; 016.27.29.29 www.mleuven.be
Until MAY 15 Freek Wambacq, installations by the Belgian artist
Until MAY 22 Pedro Cabrita Reis: One After Another, A Few Silent Steps, sculpture, paintings, photos and installations by the Portuguese artist

Tweebronnen

Rijschoolstraat 4; 016.30.08.69 www.leuven.be/bibliotheek
Until MAY 1 Geert De Smet, sketches and sculptures by the Flemish artist

Mechelen

Het Firmament

Brusselpoort; 015.34.94.36 www.hetfirmament.be
Until APR 10 Kopstukken (Protagonists), relics from the 42-year history of the now-defunct Flemish figure theatre troupe Theater Taptoe

Ostend

Venetian Galleries

Corner Zeedijk and Parijsstraat; 059.80.55.00 www.oostende.be/cultuur
APR 2-MAY 15 Oostende: (ge)zichten (Ostend: Faces/Views), photographs by Daniël de Kievith and Jef Van Eynde



Brussels

Brontë Weekend: Literary event organised by the Brussels Brontë Group on the occasion of Charlotte Brontë's birthday, featuring talks, guided walks, lunch and more
APR 1-3 in Room P61 of the Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, Kruidtuinlaan 43 www.thebrusselsbrontegroup.org

Buddhism in Everyday Life: Lecture by Wojtek Tracewski (in English)
MAR 31 20.00 at Le Cercle des Voyageurs, Lievevrouwbroersstraat 18 02.514.39.49, www.lecercledesvoyageurs.com

Eurantica 2011: Fine Art and Antiques Fair

Until APR 3 at Brussels Expo, Heysel 02.474.89.81, www.eurantica.be

On Y Danse Tout En Rond: Theatre, dance, film, video and music festival
Until MAY 28 at Beursschouwburg, August Ortsstraat 20-28 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be

Scharnaval: Annual 6.5 km long carnival parade
APR 2 13.30-16.30 across Schaerbeek, from Cambierlaan to Helmetsplein www.schaerbeekladynamique.be

Ghent

Courtisane Festival: 10th annual film, video and media arts festival
Until APR 3 at venues across Ghent www.courtisane.be

Nacht van de Poëzie (Poetry Night): Overnight poetry festival featuring 50 poets, including Leonard Nolens, Gerrit Komrij, Johan Joos, Remco Campert, Delphine Lecompte and Ramsey Nasr
APR 2 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23 www.nachtvandeepoezie.be

WEEK IN FILM

LISA BRADSHAW



Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival

7-19 April

Tour & Taxis

Lest you think that a film festival that includes a Vampire's Ball, a Zombie Day and a body painting contest isn't thinking about its film programme, you just think again. The Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival (BIFFF) may wear its gore on its sleeve, but there's some thought put in to its political-social agenda. And this year it's: We've met the enemy, and it is us.

The fantastical genre (horror, sci-fi, various levels of paranoia) has generally been overrun by Big Brother bad guy, whether it's environmental waste creating monsters (*The Host*, *Cabin Fever*), powerful aliens (*Independence Day*, *War of the Worlds*) or conspiracies perpetrated by authorities (*Minority Report*, *Strange Days*). BIFFF has set out this year to investigate the horrors right inside of us.

This opens the door to psychological thrillers and psychotic killers, like in the opening film, *The Last Circus* by master of the political-message-through-mutants film Álex de la Iglesia (*Crimen Ferpecto*). Fully

aware of man's general aversion to clowns, he sets up a good clown/bad clown dichotomy in a 1930s circus, against the backdrop of Franco's advancing army.

A little more intimate is Jeong-ho Lee's *Bestseller* (pictured), which finds a moody mom and her daughter off to a cabin (why is it always a cabin?) after mom, an author, is accused of plagiarism and needs a change of scenery for inspiration. Will it help when an imaginary friend whispers stories into her daughter's ear?

And then there are plenty of your basic teenage-peril slasher kind of things, your best bets being *Prowl*, in which a gaggle of hitchhiking teens are dropped off in an old warehouse full of vampires, or *The Ward*, in which several young women are trapped in a haunted psychiatric ward. The latter is by John Carpenter, which will bring in the crowds, whether it's any good or not. Let's say it's better than his last two films and leave it at that.

⇒ www.biff.net



Brouwerij Kerkom

Naamsesteenweg 469

Sint-Truiden

Among the bicycle trails crossing Limburg's Haspengouw region, the "local beers" loop leads past fruit orchards to Kerkombij-Sint-Truiden, where a sign points to a nearby brewery. Regardless how far you've come, it's time for refreshment.

Down a village lane, past high brick walls, imposing double doors lead into a suddenly cheerful, whitewashed courtyard. This farmhouse has been a brewery off and on since 1878. The latest incarnation dates to 1988 but retains a flavour of old traditions.

Brouwerij Kerkom, while small in scale, exports to connoisseurs globally. Yet its Bink beers are still best enjoyed within its irregular walls. Tourists and families on weekend outings fill the cafe tables in the cobblestoned courtyard when the sun shines. When it doesn't, they crowd around the snug wooden tables in the tasting room. Inside, the walls are busy with flowered paper, old photos and bric-a-brac, evoking the ambiance of a grandma's country kitchen.

An ornate ceramic tap attracts attention to the bar, where customers can ask for the brewer to chat about recipes or perhaps take an impromptu tour of the production line, scattered through the hodgepodge of connected buildings. Group visits can be organised in advance.

The townsfolk of Sint-Truiden easily identify with Bink, since the brand refers to their nickname, akin to "guy". The beer aficionado from anywhere appreciates the brews just as well. Best known are the blond and brown ales, smoothly balanced between an almost fruit-like sweetness and an herbal hop bitterness. The brewery has also issued a series of special concoctions, including Alardus, a brown touched up with spices and candy sugar.

Bloesem Bink, enlivened with a touch of honey and pear, is another attractive option when fair sunshine fills the terrace. By the hearthside in chillier weather, the Winterkoninkske warms from the inside with a deeper, molasses-like complexity, not to mention an 8% alcohol content. It's another reason not to get back in the saddle and leave this cosy rest stop.

⇒ www.brouwerijkerkom.be

ROBYN BOYLE

bite



De Verborgen Tuin

The name "The Hidden Garden" calls to mind a fantastical place tucked away behind high walls, a green paradise brimming with life. The reality is not so far off. De Verborgen Tuin, set at the end of an arched entranceway on one of Geraardsbergen's central streets, is an oasis in the middle of the city, its lovely terrace waiting patiently for warmer days.

Inside is equally cosy, with dim lighting and a tastefully sober, earth-toned interior with wood-beamed ceilings, antique wine racks and a grand open hearth, complete with roaring fire. It's hard to imagine this was once a stuffy old tobacco factory. It appears as if the new owners, chef Steven Van Snick and his wife Lotje Moerman, waved a magic wand over the building, transforming it into this refined gastronomic restaurant.

Before, when I heard the word "gastronomic", I immediately thought: small portions, high prices. Now I equate gastronomic cuisine with a multi-sensory experience – a discovery tour along surprising combinations of textures and flavours. Our first pleasant stimulus comes from the house cocktail, lemony sweet and potent. Next to this, four small glass dishes are neatly placed in a line in front of each of us. Our young but very professional server announces all the various ingredients, though we get lost along the way.

So we bravely place our mini spoons into the first glass and taste something that can best be described as a celery smoothie, so icy and salty it makes you long for a neutraliser. That's what we get with the next teaser: a shot glass filled with warm, buttery, slightly sweet parsnip soup. The next glass contains a solid slice of blood sausage and the next a refreshing green pea puree topped with a thin layer of goat's cheese.

We let our server choose our wine and are not sorry. First, a bottle of crisp Spanish white perfectly cleans the palate in between bites. To accompany our main dishes, he again serves a Spanish wine, this time red, which combines two grape varieties and has everybody's cheeks going a bit rosy. The Japanese-inspired starter consists of three sushi-like rolls of white fish wrapped in a thin slice of cucumber with a spot of coriander at the centre. Accentuating the plate are a block of

ginger ice, shoestrings of earthy black radish and some puffed rice.

Two of my dining companions opt for a second starter: *bouillabaisse*, but a very modern version, with hearty chunks of lobster tail and baked clams spread out methodically across a deep dish, here and there a drop of ginger mayonnaise and some succulent purslane leaves. The broth, served separately, is dark reddish-orange and tastes of the sea as much as it does a bunch of sun-ripened tomatoes.

The mains, as expected, are yet another work of art. A crispy piece of calf's sweetbread and a juicy veal fillet make up the centrepiece. Around the meat, soft young carrots and broccoli provide a splash of colour next to a geometrically shaped potato wedge, slightly fried, with a smattering of white sauce and granular coffee. Yes, coffee, a truly daring ingredient but one that definitely seals the deal for this successful marriage of flavours.

Afterwards a slate platter arrives carrying a foursome of selections from master Antwerp cheesemonger Van Tricht and a homemade brioche. At this point, you start to understand why the portions are indeed a bit on the small side – there are just so many of them.

Finally, the finale arrives: tangy beet sorbet served in a glass tube so that you can admire its pink-burgundy colour. It's topped with sweet yoghurt that has been fluffed into white snow that melts on your tongue. Then the coffee comes, with little homemade meringue-filled pastries, pralines and chocolate lollies.

As it happened to be Restaurant Week, we ended up paying around €50 per person, for what would normally be closer to €75.

→ www.deverborgentuin.be

📍 Lessensestraat 28, Geraardsbergen (East Flanders); 054.41.23.43

🕒 Tue-Fri, 12.00-14.00 and 19.00-21.00; Sat, 19.00-21.00; Sun, 12.00-14.00

€ Multiple-course menu: lunch €35, dinner €40-€120

★ Elegant setting, inside and out, and inventive dishes with surprising flavour combinations

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

TALKING DUTCH

PHILIP EBELS



Don't shoot the teacher

The other day I saw *Rundskop*, the celebrated film that made it to the Panorama section of the Berlinale this year, the first Flemish film in 10 years to do so. No comments here about the film itself – I wouldn't dare – just some musings about the language.

First, the title. The official English translation is *Bullhead*, which is not at all wrong, but not exactly spot-on. *Rund* is bull, no problems there. It is with *kop* that things go astray.

You and I have a *hoofd*, a head, and *benen*, legs (as do *paarden*, horses, because they for some reason are special). Animals, though, have a *kop* and *poten*. Use the bestial form for humans, and you reach the realm of colloquialism. *Hou je kop!* is a popular way of telling somebody to shut up. *Poten thuis!* is equally popular to tell the touchy-feely to keep their hands where they belong.

Rundskop is set in rural Limburg, the Flemish Far East, and tells the dramatic story of a traumatised, hormone-addicted cattle breeder. He doesn't say much, but the things he does say are as thick as the skin of his *runderen*, the irregular plural for *rund* (just like *kind*, child – *kinderen*, children). In Flanders, the film is subtitled – in Dutch. The Flemish are notorious dialect-speakers, and our hormone hero is no exception. Contrary to the Dutch, to whom any deviation

from the ABN, *het Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands* – the standard, civilised Dutch – equals a deviation from standard, civilized IQ, the Flemish are proud of their regional roots. And not just the cattle breeders.

The *Limburgs* dialect is among the most difficult to understand. Its two million speakers in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany change the meaning of words and phrases by changing their pitch, not unlike the Chinese. The result is melodious but, to the untrained ear, not unlike Chinese.

Only those who speak West Flemish may be considered worthy contenders, when it comes to weirdness. Theirs is a language that, when spoken among natives, sounds like something JRR Tolkien might have imagined. (Whether for elves or for ogres, I leave up to you.)

Both languages are recognised by *het Europees Bureau voor Minderheidstalen*, the European Bureau for Minority Languages, and enjoy some official protection. Not a luxury, considering that both are on the brink of extinction, according to a 2009 UNESCO report.

But they seem very much alive today. So the next time you have difficulties understanding your neighbour, don't blame your standard, civilised language teacher.

→ www.rundskop.be

THE LAST WORD...

Inconspicuous

"Europe has a tradition of hesitating, doubting and looking the other way."

Former prime minister Guy Verhofstadt, now a member of the European Parliament

Good question

"Why should a top banker not be able to perform well with just a fixed salary? Some bankers have lost their sense of reality."

Luc Versele, CEO of Landbouwkrediet cooperative bank, on bonus culture (see p7)

Too much, too soon

"Most children start school at two-and-a-half, and schools won't take children who are still in nappies. Potty training often starts too soon, and that sort of pressure can lead to constipation."

Professor Ilse Hoffman of the Catholic University of Leuven, on seeing more constipation among small children

Reality check

"Cobblestones are hard, and cardboard stinks."

A group of young people in Ghent spent the night sleeping on the streets in sympathy with the homeless

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #174

Feature

To marry or not to marry? That is the question in Flanders, where more and more couples are opting for domestic partnership arrangements. We find out why

Focus

Meet our new column "In the House", where we'll tell you what's being discussed, debated and argued in the Flemish Parliament

Living

When the sun comes out, the clothes come off: don't miss our spring lingerie special