



English education

Ghent gets international school

2

Disappointment in Durban

Schauvliege hoped for more from climate conference

7

Welcoming winter

Celebrating the season both indoors and out

9

All you've got to do is call

De Lijn's on-demand bus service has been providing a vital lifeline to rural Flanders for 20 years

ANKE VAN ESPEN

For residents of many rural communities, the prospect of getting anywhere by public transport can be a daunting one. Not so in Flanders: In November of 1991, the Flemish public transport operator De Lijn introduced the concept of the *belbus* – a bus service that only runs when passengers book their ride in advance. The *belbus* is now celebrating its 20th birthday.

So what's in a name? You call for a bus (*bellen* is "to call" in Dutch), preferably a day ahead and no less than two hours in advance. The call centre agent helps you make your reservation, and the bus will pick you up at the planned time, at the planned *belbus* stop. Based on reservations, a computer decides the most efficient itinerary for the bus assigned to this area, instead of it following a scheduled route as a normal bus would. Flanders has 131 *belbus* areas divided over the five provinces.

Twenty years ago, when the first *belbus* started its engine in Veurne, West Flanders, De Lijn began saving time and money. A bus that shows some similarities to a taxi service: The company saw the potential in the financial and ecological efficiency of this simple idea. The *belbus* system was introduced to connect sparsely populated areas in Flanders, where a regular service would be an unprofitable one, with buses being empty most of the time. The *belbus* is a cost-efficient solution for local public transport and also keeps empty buses from filling the air with carbon dioxide for no good reason.

For passengers, it has meant transport where there once wasn't any and no more waiting at the stop for an hour because they missed the last bus by 30 seconds. Moreover, the *belbus* can connect you to small towns directly without driving to the nearest big city first.

It might seem an exclusive, and therefore expensive, service, but a *belbus* ticket costs the same as a normal De Lijn bus ticket.

The *belbus* doesn't stop at people's doors. Just like normal buses, the white-and-yellow *belbuses* stop at designated, marked stops within their area. They are shorter and more streamlined, however, with a capacity for only about 15 passengers and are adapted to wheelchair users.

The passengers

In Aarschot, Flemish Brabant, a province in which the *belbus* is used less frequently – certainly in comparison to Limburg and West Flanders – the *belbus* stops in front of the railway station more or less every 20 minutes. Not because it follows a set schedule, but people use it so regularly to get to the station that you can almost count on it.

"I know that the *belbus* is not supposed to be a taxi, but to me it is," says *belbus* passenger Jessica, 24. "The stop is right in front of my door, so even if I forget to call, then I am almost sure to have a bus anyway. Isn't that a luxury?"

→ continued on page 5

Ekeren wins *Mijn Restaurant!*

This year's television series *Mijn Restaurant!* was won last week by chef Amber De Wispeler and her partner Elodie Coenen. The pair started off awkward and inexperienced, but ended up beating another couple from West Flanders who already run two other businesses and who made their way to the final without ever being nominated for elimination.

De Wispeler, 23, and Coenen, a 22-year-old emergency room nurse, opened Restaurant Alaise in Ekeren, a district of Antwerp, as underdogs, lacking business experience and unable at times even to look the show's judges in the eyes. Over the five months of the competition, however, De Wispeler (*photo, right*) showed herself to be a skilled and audacious chef – she even dared serve Flemish culinary legend Roger Souveryns a dish of his own devising.



The two faced off in the live finale against Michael De Ridder and Eef D'Haene, who had proved themselves capable of running a successful restaurant, despite having no culinary experience. "We still haven't grasped what's happened to us," commented Coenen following the announcement.

→ www.vtm.be/mijn-restaurant

Powers move over to Flanders

Employment, health and justice among new regional responsibilities

ALAN HOPE

The new federal government accord, finalised by the six negotiating parties earlier this month, contains a number of areas in which Flanders receives new responsibilities, among them the treatment of young offenders and the question of economic migration.

The Flemish government will from now on be responsible for measures to be taken in the case of minors involved in criminal acts, including when and in what circumstances a young offender will be placed in detention or if circumstances warrant being tried as an adult. The region will also be responsible for detention centres. Youth magistrates themselves will

continue to be under the authority of the federal justice ministry.

The regions will also take over responsibility for the justice houses, of which there is one in each judicial area: Flanders has 13 and Brussels two – one Flemish and one French speaking. The justice houses are responsible for civil matters such as parental visitation rights, mediation in criminal cases, the administration of probation and parole, penitentiary leave, victim support, community service and electronic surveillance of offenders.

→ continued on page 3



FACE OF FLANDERS

ALAN HOPE



© Bepa

Flemish federal ministers

The new federal government brings a number of new faces to the corridors of power.

Monica De Coninck (sp.a), the new federal employment minister, was chair of Antwerp's social aid agency (OCMW) for a decade and city alderwoman for social policy. According to her website, De Coninck (*pictured*) is considered "a tough lady who says what she thinks". That included a personal quest to make sure everyone receiving the agency's help was willing to work. "Anyone who has hands and ears has to work" was her policy. That included volunteer work, if necessary.

Maggie De Block (Open VLD), the new secretary of state for asylum, migration and social integration, greeted her appointment with the unfortunate pledge that the first thing she would do in office was "be silent and observe". It was admittedly not a bad plan for a rookie, until the press pointed out that the approaching winter combined with the numbers of asylum-seekers on the streets would permit no such luxury. De Block, a liberal, now finds herself in charge of two dossiers that her party chairman, Alexander De Croo, insisted be paired, and which he stated would be a priority for his party.

John Crombez (sp.a), secretary of state for social and fiscal fraud, is an economist who was extremely highly rated for his effectiveness as a member of the Flemish parliament, and whose appointment for the federal job came as no surprise. He's known for a formidable command of dossiers (he was Johan Vande Lanotte's cabinet head) and his economic grasp. He also plays guitar in the band Sezzero, thinks the Pixies are the best band of all time and adores football; he remains chairman of club VG Ostend.

Hendrik Bogaert (CD&V), secretary of state for the civil service and the modernisation of public services, will be the hardest of the new intake for cartoonists to nail down, according to a poll by Flemish daily *De Standaard*, thanks to his "everyday face and unremarkable features". The qualities that got him the job, on the other hand, derive more from his MBA at Harvard, his successful chocolate business and his time as mayor of Jabbeke, West Flanders. Ironically, Bogaert gave up that latter post in October 2010, stating that he wanted to "live a more peaceful life".

→ www.belgium.be

News in brief

An **English-speaking primary school** for the children of international employees working in East and West Flanders will open its doors in September of 2012, a group of business supporters has agreed. An exact location has not been decided, but it is expected the school will share facilities with an existing school. The city of Ghent supports the idea as a means of attracting international researchers and managers to the area, while most international schools are currently concentrated around Brussels and Antwerp. "The school is needed to attract talent," said Sofie Bracke, Ghent alderwoman for innovation. Supporting companies include Barco, Bekaert and Volvo.

The Catholic University of Leuven is **selling rolls of toilet paper** towards this month's Music for Life campaign by Studio Brussel. The toilet rolls have been specially designed by campus newspaper cartoonist Joris Snaet and feature caricatures of university rector Mark Waer and Leuven mayor Louis Tobback. The joke reflects this year's campaign target of raising money to combat diarrhoea, which kills 1.5 million children a year in the developing world.

→ www.kuleuven.be/musicforlife

Vlamingen in de Wereld, the organisation that represents Flemings abroad, is holding a forum in the Flemish Parliament on 15 December to hear members of the parliament debate regional voting rights and Dutch-speaking education for those living in other countries. Attendance at the free forum, called **The Forgotten Flemish Province**, can be reserved at info@viw.be.

Brussels Region transport minister Brigitte Grouwels last week handed over **1,000 free public transport tickets** to Samu Social, the

organisation that helps the homeless in the capital.

Babysitters employed via the Gezinsbond (Family Union) can look forward to a pay rise in February, after a decision last week to increase the minimum hourly rate from €3 to €4. The rate for an overnight stay goes up from €15 to €20.

Jan Beirlant, rector of the Catholic University of Leuven's Kortrijk campus expressed "shock and sadness" at the news that **missing student Waldo Van Raemdonck**, who vanished on 29 November, had been found dead in Austria after apparently committing suicide. Part of the proceeds of this month's Christmas Ball at the Kortrijk campus will go to a fund in Waldo's name.

Two Indian **rhinoceroses** at **Planckendael** animal park in Mechelen will receive extra security after a wave of thefts of rhino horns from local museums. Earlier this month the park lost 40-year-old Zutuma, the oldest Indian rhino in Europe. Her horn was destroyed as a precaution against thieves.

Flemish cycling legend **Eddy Merckx** will receive the **Legion of Honour** from French president Nicolas Sarkozy on 15 December at a ceremony in Paris. Merckx will hold the rank of Commander. He was previously awarded the rank of Knight in 1975.

The Flemish government last week agreed to fund **80% of the restoration of "The Adoration of**

the Mystic Lamb" altarpiece, the 15th-century masterpiece by Jan and Hubert Van Eyck housed in Ghent's Sint-Baaf's cathedral. The cost of the restoration is estimated at €1.4 million. The restoration will take place in a workshop in the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent, where visitors will be able to follow the progress.

The city of Mechelen and telecom group Belgacom are developing a pilot project to allow motorists to **find a free parking space** using a mobile phone, smart phone or GPS. Similar projects are already under way in New York and San Francisco. If all goes well, the project should launch to the public in about 18 months.

The Flemish government has granted accreditation to the **Brussels School of International Studies (BSIS)**, part of the University of Kent in England. The approval allows the school's diplomas to be recognised in Flanders. The BSIS offers post-graduate diplomas in politics, law and economics, and many of its students pursue jobs and internships in Brussels and Flanders.

Parties of the majority in the Flemish Parliament have proposed a bill to allow open ground in the port area of Antwerp to be developed into **motocross courses**. The government pledged in 2002 to find 12 to 15 suitable terrains to prevent motocross in areas close to housing or nature, but most of the proposed sites ran up against local protest. The sites in the port area would be in temporary use until required for other port-related functions.

OFFSIDE

ALAN HOPE

Wish you were here

What would a Flemish person miss most if he or she had to live somewhere else? The answer: *frietten*.

Nearly 17% of Flemish living abroad said they miss *frietten* (fries) the most of everything back home. Family and friends, meanwhile, came eighth on the list, which is in fact made up nearly entirely of food. The survey was done by BVN, a satellite channel that provides Dutch speakers across the world with Dutch and Flemish TV and radio programmes.

In second place comes bread and other baked goods, followed by shrimp, beer, sandwich fillings and chocolate. In seventh place we find humour, which expats miss even more than their loved ones, who wait forlornly

at number eight for a letter or a postcard.

At number nine is cheese and the top 10 closes out with markets, which is presumably just a way of saying "all other foodstuffs we haven't mentioned".

The full list of individual suggestions can be seen on the BVN website, including "a bike-ride followed by a *terrasje*", "the typical Flemish work ethic" and even "clean toilets". Someone missed the Scheldt, another Sunlight soap, yet another the mountain bike routes in the Flemish Ardennes. As many of our readers already know, the longing for the things of home takes many forms; most people would be more inclined to think of "the juicy



© Shutterstock

Flemish dialect" or "the green nature and woodlands of our country" than a horn of chips. But if you had to choose just one thing? Perhaps that's when the primal urges come to the fore.

→ www.degrottemisverkiezing.com

FLANDERS TODAY

Flanders Today, a free weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.

The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

Editor: Lisa Bradshaw

Deputy Editor: Sally Tipper

News Editor: Alan Hope

Agenda Editor: Robyn Boyle

Art director: Michel Didier

Prepress: Corelio P&P

Contributors: Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Sabine Clappaert, Courtney Davis, Philip Ebels, Nicholas Hirst, Stéphanie Duval, Andy Furniere, Anna Jenkinson, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Monique Philips, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton

General manager: Joske Plas

Publisher: Corelio Publishing NV

Editorial address:

Gossetlaan 30

1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

Tel.: 02.373.99.09 – Fax: 02.375.98.22

editorial@flanderstoday.eu

Free subscriptions:

subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

Advertising: Evelynne Fregonese

02.373.83.57

advertising@flanderstoday.eu

Verantwoordelijke uitgever:

Joske Plas





More control over work permits

→ continued from page 1

The regions also take over responsibility for the issuing of work permits A and B. Permit A gives unlimited freedom to work in any sector of the economy and is usually issued to those who have worked for four years under a B permit. The B permit is employer-specific and valid for one year, with the possibility of renewal. These are usually only issued if there is no Belgian or EU national to fill the vacancy.

Both of those permits, as well as the professional permit for the self-employed, are now regional responsibilities, effectively allowing Flanders to decide what category of economic immigrant it wants to attract to the region. A Permit A granted by one region can be used to work in the other two. Someone who is self-employed, however, with a professional permit from one region, cannot set up the business in the other regions.

The government accord also includes a range of other areas where

responsibilities and powers are handed over to the regions:

Employment: Checks on the availability for work of people claiming unemployment benefits and any possible sanctions; programmes for reintegrating the unemployed into the labour market

Health: Policies on the care of the elderly, especially long-term care, on the mentally ill and on psychiatric hospitals; aid for the handicapped; establishing standards required for a health-care establishment to obtain official recognition as a hospital (subject to federal and European laws)

Traffic: Setting of speed limits (except on motorways); rules on road signs; rules on safety of loads and maximum permissible weights for freight vehicles; guidelines for sanctions for traffic offences; control over driving lessons and examination centres ♦



Flanders now has more control over what kind of workers it wants to attract to the region

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Cartel Mania

Cartels – two or more parties joining forces at elections – seemed something of the past in Flanders. The two most notable cartels are no longer around. Spirit, the party of Bert Anciaux that teamed up with the Flemish socialists in 1999, has been absorbed by them – as was predicted. The Christian-democrat CD&V and nationalist N-VA succeeded in putting an end to the Verhofstadt years in 2007, but their alliance burst into smithereens shortly after – as was predicted, too.

These days, cartels are back. In recent weeks, one cartel after the other pops up, for the 2012 local elections around Flanders. In Ghent, greens collaborate with the socialists of mayor Daniël Termont. In Mechelen, those same greens join mayor Bart Somers' Open VLD list. The Antwerp Christian-democrats have declared their love for mayor Patrick Janssens (SPA), while in Tongeren, CD&V will present themselves on a joint list with Patrick Dewael's Open VLD.

Cartels are characteristic of local politics. Especially in small rural towns they are instrumental in ousting traditional and seemingly untouchable mayors. For this reason, even ideological opposites unite without much hesitation.

The new cartels are different, though. For one, they are not some quirky demonstration of small town politics, as they are being created in major cities. Moreover, they are all initiated by the sitting mayors, prominent politicians the lot of them.

Some people believe that fear is the main motivation: the nationalist N-VA is becoming more popular every day. Up to now, N-VA is anything but a grassroots party: Its success is largely attributable to its leader, Bart De Wever. Local lists might benefit from that national success and remain a force to be reckoned with for years to come.

In Ghent for instance, the N-VA list will be headed by Siegfried Bracke, former TV journalist, former socialist sympathiser and one of the most prominent nationalist politicians. Daniel Termont, the folksy Ghent mayor, claims he fears nothing and no-one. Still, he knows that with one player extra, the votes become more divided. This means that a couple of votes more or less may decide his fate as leader of the city.

Above all, this new trend illustrates once again an old wisdom in Flemish politics: mayor is the best job to have, preferred even over ministerial posts. This explains why mayors like Termont, Janssens, Somers and Dewael look for support – wherever it may come from these days.

KU Leuven drops "Catholic" from its name

Say no more "Catholic University of Leuven". Say instead "KU Leuven - University of Leuven".

After 586 years, since its founding by John IV, Duke of Brabant, and approved by a Papal Bull from Pope Martin V, the Flanders' oldest institution of higher education is dropping the word "Catholic" from its name. The letters "KU" remain, but they simply refer to the tradition of the university, still known throughout Flanders by the initials KUL.

The university has been engaged in reflection and discussion for some months on its role in a modern society and the place to be given to its Catholic tradition. The biggest upset came last year, with the revelation of widespread abuse of children by Catholic priests. Marc Waer told *Flanders Today* then that those shocking reports were not the reason for the rethink, but did provide an opportunity for discussion. The word "Catholic" in the university's name was a source of confusion abroad, Waer explained. It gave the impression, he told the university newspaper *Veto*, that the institution was connected formally with the church. "We wanted to make the nuances clear. We're not denying our roots in the Catholic tradition; we just

want to be more open to other points of view.

A proposal before the governing committee on 22 December will include a motion for Archbishop André Léonard, the senior prelate in Belgium, to remove himself from the post of chairman. He will, however, continue to act as the university's chancellor.

"The presence of the archbishop as chancellor and chairman hasn't hindered our progress over the last five decades," Waer said. "We are independent of the church, and that's what we now want to stress."

Another change that's likely to come is a revision of the course, obligatory for all students, titled "Religion, Meaning and Philosophy". Waer prefers the idea of a course called "Mankind and World Image", which would place the Christian narrative on an equal footing with other ways of seeing the world. Last week the university held talks with its Dutch counterpart, the Radboud University Nijmegen, formerly itself a Catholic university, which changed its name in 2004. The reasoning then given was concern over the university's (an in particular the medical school's) ability to attract students from abroad. ♦

Milow and Selah Sue big MIA winners

Milow and Selah Sue each walked away with three awards from last weekend's Flemish Music Industry Awards MIAs). Milow won for best pop artist, best male solo artist and best live act. Instead of making an acceptance speech in the latter case, he and his band played a number by Bruce Springsteen.

Selah Sue (*pictured*), who Milow had a hand in discovering, took best album, best-selling artist and best female solo artist, which she dedicated to her grandmother.

Rock band dEUS was nominated six times and picked up two awards, for best rock/alternative act and best musician for the band's guitarist Mauro Pawlowski. Hit of the year (voted by the public) and video of the year went to the Bruges-born Australian Gotye for "Somebody That I Used to Know". Other MIAs went to Raymond van het Groenewoud for best composer,



Bart Peeters for best Dutch-language performer, Intergalactic Lovers for best breakthrough and Hooverphonic for best band. ♦

Minister angry over planting of trees

Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits has reacted angrily last week to the clandestine planting of 2,750 trees by the organisation Association for Woodland in Flanders on ground in Oudenaarde, East Flanders. "This cannot be allowed, especially not where an industrial estate is concerned. It's possible there may be water-related industrial activity there. This is just not possible, and certainly not in such an underhand way," Crevits said.

The plantation, on a 1.5 hectare stretch of ground belonging to the waterways and sea-canal agency,

which is part of Crevits' portfolio, was intended as a protest against Flanders not planting enough trees. The government's programme from 2000 calls for 1,000 hectares of woods to be added every year. Instead, the area planted with trees is shrinking, by a total of 232 hectares in 2010 for a negative balance of 42ha for that year.

According to Crevits, the association went about things in the wrong way and should have contacted the waterways agency openly. "There may well be grounds that could be used to plant trees," she said. ♦

New Flanders office in Budapest

The Flemish government has opened a new representative office in Budapest, in the historic Ferencváros district on the Pest side of the Danube. The office, a single open-plan floor featuring design by Flemish names like Maarten Van Severen, Pieter Leemans, Sven

Goemaere and Miel Cardinael, will be the single meeting place for anyone in Hungary doing business with Flanders. It also has a library and reading room dedicated to Flemish literature and is open to students and the general public three days a week. ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€15,000

in cash found in the possession of four people suspected of picking pockets in the Brussels metro. The four were also holding €1,500 in gold, 73 laptops, 56 cameras, 31 mobile phones and two bicycles

40,000

jobs possibly in danger across the country due to the financial crisis, according to labour specialists

4.5%

increase in the price of tickets for public transport in Brussels from 1 February. The biggest increase comes for single-trip tickets bought in the bus or tram, which go from €2 to €2.50

€4.5 million

in aid from the Brussels Region to build new crèches overturned by the Constitutional Court. Child care is a responsibility of the communities, not the regions, the court ruled

€25,000

in false euro notes found in the possession of four people from Latvia in Dendermonde. The four were released by police when it was discovered that the notes had the words "souvenir money" printed on them in Latvian

004154
3016619

A home away from home

A Brussels residential centre for troubled youngsters gets a fresh look in a brand new building

ANJA OTTE

“That my shoulders slowly become broader and the world my size again.”

This statement appears on the front wall of the new buildings of Espero, a residential centre for children and adolescents with behavioural and emotional problems that helps its residents do just that.

“We always involve the parents. They have to be quite committed”

From a large whiteboard, Super Mario and other familiar characters gaze out at the living room, which looks like an Ikea catalogue interior. “On this board, the children in this group can see how much time they have spent here,” social worker Sara

Baro explains. “Three months is a long time for children between the age of six and 14, and this helps them grasp it.”

Three months is the initial stay for all children and adolescents at Espero, an observatory and treatment centre in the Haren neighbourhood of central Brussels. “During the week they live in the centre. We try to keep them in the same school they went to before, and at weekends they go back to their parents,” Baro explains. “We do our best not to cut them off from their backgrounds. It would be a shame to take someone out of school if that is the one area of his or her life that still functions well. Some of our adolescents even go to football training twice a week.”

At Espero, the young people are monitored closely and receive treatment: speech, psychomotor, dance therapy or whatever suits their needs. Baro tells of a six-year-old girl who behaved as if she were three.

“She found it hard to accept limits, and eventually her foster parents were unable to cope with her. She also had attachment problems. She would hug everyone within sight. On the street, she would clasp total strangers, which was a danger to her personal safety. Gradually, we taught her what was socially acceptable and safe.”

Filling an imminent need

The buildings of Espero are brand new and can accommodate up to 20 youngsters, aged six to 18. “We moved here from Opwijk, because this is more central,” Baro explains. “We have kids here from all over Brussels and Halle-Vilvoorde. Some even travel from East Flanders because they believe in the way we work. We always involve the parents. They have to be quite committed and drop off their children every week and attend the family sessions.”

Espero is a haven in the Haren area,



Espero is a care centre for troubled youth but has the feeling of a home rather than a clinic

which has a rather post-industrial feel to it. The living areas resemble family living rooms, with toys, grey sofas, lime fleece blankets and large tables at which to eat and do homework. All residents have their own room, too.

Only the so-called tava, a room in which youngsters can be placed in isolation, gives away the fact that these children are dealing with serious problems. “The tava is not used as a penalty,” Baro explains. “Only when a resident poses a danger to himself or to others is he or she brought in here to calm down.

Some kids themselves even ask to spend some time in here.”

The Flemish Community provides half the budget for this new building’s costs. “The numbers prove how successful this project is,” says Brigitte Grouwels, Flemish Community minister responsible for welfare in Brussels. “A large majority of the young people here go back to their homes after a short stay. The Brussels Region has few provisions for young people with problems of this kind. These youngsters and their parents should not have to travel too far to receive the care they need.” ♦

→ www.obc-espero.be

Material world

A collection of centuries-old textiles is on display at a remarkable venue in Antwerp

MARC MAES

The marvels of ancient Egypt meet the rich history of an Antwerp port operator, thanks to the passion of the husband and wife at the company’s helm. With the opening of *3500 Years of Textile Art* at their HeadquARTers museum, Fernand and Karine Huts of Katoen Natie have created a unique permanent exhibition evoking the ancient history of Egypt. Through this venture, they want to emphasise the link between culture and economy and give an extra boost to Antwerp’s northern area.

The exhibition is housed in the beautifully restored old Katoen Natie warehouses next to the company’s international headquarters; today’s technology ensures the best climatic conditions to preserve the valuable textiles. Each of the five exhibition halls was carefully designed and focuses on different aspects of Egyptian history. One holds the world’s largest collection of Roman tunics. Interactive displays invite visitors to learn more about Egypt and the history of textiles.

“In the end, the building will remain the headquarters of a company and not a real museum,” explains Fernand Huts, Katoen Natie’s CEO. “But there’s a link with our company history, referring to cotton handling in the port of Antwerp when we started in 1854.”

The basis for the unique

combination of a company employing more than 9,000 workers in 28 countries with the intimate and cross-cultural aspect of ancient textiles dates back some time. “My wife and I are very interested in history, anthropology, culture and sociology,” says Fernand. “We attended classes about antiques and were struck by the enthusiasm of Professor Antoine De Moor with regard to ancient textiles. He had been collecting textiles since the early 1950s, and it was great teaming up with such an expert – studying the history, visiting museums and gradually building our collection.”

Where art meets science

The couple set up a team of experts dealing with ancient textiles. Today six people take on the scientific care of these precious items. “Professor De Moor decided to transfer his collection to our headquarters,” explains Karine, the vice-president of Katoen Natie. “He became the scientific head of the combined collection. His expertise in certifying the authenticity of art pieces is very valuable; he is the driving force behind the collection.”

Every two years since 2005, Katoen Natie has hosted an international symposium on ancient textiles, gathering professionals from leading museums, such as the Louvre and New York’s

Metropolitan Museum of Art, and from university research labs in Antwerp. The company provides facilities and logistics and financed the publication of a book summarising research results.

Although the textile exhibition, with some 600 objects in five rooms, focuses on ancient Egyptian history, the Huts’ first acquisitions date from a more recent past. “The first pieces we bought are not in the collection – six 18th-century rugs from Anatolia,” he remembers. “But we judged it more interesting and challenging, from a historical point of view, to concentrate on objects from the pharaoh era, Hellenistic, Roman and Islamic textiles.”

Running a port warehouse and distribution business might seem worlds away from such an endeavour. “We’re happy that Katoen Natie has a unique and strong culture and a skilled staff to rely on,” notes Fernand. “When we travel abroad we take time to visit textile collections. It’s an ongoing exchange of ideas and cultures, broadening our view.” ♦



Detail of a fifth- or sixth-century decorative textile with centaur

3500 Years of Textile Arts
Katoen Natie HeadquARTers
Van Aerdtsstraat 33, Antwerp
Reservation required to visit the
collection, which includes a guided tour

→ www.headquarters-katoennatie.com

Cover story

All you've got to do is call

The *belbus* service marks 20 years of on-demand public transport

→ continued from page 1

Standing at the *belbus* 36 stop in Lissewege, West Flanders, Maria Keersman is the first to appear in the morning. Maria, 70, takes the bus to Bruges every Friday to play cards with friends. "It is the only possible transport for me," she says. "I'm sure to have a seat and, on top of that, the driver and I have known each other for 10 years now; so it's my weekly visit with him as well."

Others take the bus to visit relatives who live in the area but further afield, or they go shopping in the nearest village. Vincent Pitoors, 38, uses the *belbus* because it's the only way for him to get to work on time. There's no suitable train connection, and a normal bus would take him two hours because of the long routes – often past stops where no one is waiting. The *belbus* takes him there directly, within the hour. And because of the computerised itinerary, the *belbus* is hardly ever late.

Celebration and innovation

During the festivities to mark 20 years of the *belbus*, Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits announced that people used the *belbus* 2.1 million times in 2010. The time had come to look at its weaknesses. In order to be efficient, the busses need to be booked 50% of the time.

Some buses operate 80% of the time, but others do not reach the 50% mark, which is why De Lijn came up with a new idea: the *beltaxi*.

In November 2010, a pilot project was launched in Limburg province. At weekends, when generally fewer people need the bus, it is not cost-efficient for De Lijn to have a *belbus* on standby all the time. So when Limburg passengers called the reservation line, a computer decided whether to send a *belbus* or a *beltaxi*.

"The driver and I have known each other for 10 years now"

The *beltaxi* – which is not chauffeured by De Lijn but is a taxi company – picks up passengers at the normal *belbus* stops. The driver charges the passenger the price of a bus ticket, and De Lijn pays the difference to the taxi company. Despite this financial compensation, De Lijn still saved €177,000 during the pilot year and was able to put three *belbus* drivers on other buses during the weekend. This showed that cooperation with private

industries can sometimes be easier than thinking out a whole new transport system.

Kurt Gyselinck, the mobility advisor at Crevits' office, points out that part of the aim of the 2011-2015 management agreement of De Lijn is the extension of the *beltaxi* to other provinces. This is part of De Lijn's discussions this year with trade unions, operators and the private taxi sector. No other outcomes have been published by De Lijn so far.

For a lot of people, it might still seem a bit odd to call for a bus. It's not a flexible or last-minute solution for your trip. But the concept is winning popularity and, as the results in Flanders show, after people use it the first time, they tend to use it repeatedly. The *beltaxi* concept is unique in Europe and is getting attention from abroad.

Why shouldn't it go abroad? says passenger Ingrid proudly, as she sits on the *belbus* on her way to work in Bruges. "It's something other than waffles that we can be proud of!" ♦

→ www.tinyurl.com/belbus



The *belbus* will take you from your country lane to a nearby town or city, and back again

EXPO

DINNER'S SERVED!

From field to plate

TOUR & TAXIS | BRUSSELS |
11-11-2011 → 03-06-2012

www.expo-a-table.be

Presented by
Libramont **DEMIETER**
ASBL / VZW





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

 www.tvbrussel.be 

We have a new face



After an extensive redesign, The Bulletin is back with a brand-new look and renewed focus on everything the international community needs to know about what is happening in the capital of Europe. Published every two weeks, The Bulletin is packed with exclusive interviews, expert analysis and your definitive guide to lifestyle & culture in Brussels and Belgium. From politics to culture, business to travel, food to fashion, if it's happening and you need to know about it, you'll find it in The Bulletin.

TRY IT OUT !

Request a free trial of three issues by visiting www.thebulletin.be/ft

THE
Bulletin

Schauvliege “disappointed” in climate conference

No new commitments made on Kyoto Protocol in Durban last week

ALAN HOPE

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege said she is “disappointed” with the outcome of the recent United Nations climate conference, which finished last weekend in Durban, South Africa. The 190 countries gathered at the conference agreed to an extension of the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases, which is due to expire in 2012. In addition, they will come to a binding agreement on emissions by 2015, to be introduced by 2020.

The Kyoto Protocol applies to only 40 countries, and for major polluters like Brazil, India and China, it contains no reduction targets. The United States, another major contributor to climate change, declined to ratify the protocol, which amends the 1992 Framework Treaty on climate change. Those countries were largely behind the failure of the Durban conference to achieve any fixed aims.

The fact that there is an agreement at all is, Schauvliege said, “a positive point. The process didn’t completely fail.” However, she added that “the agreement contains little that’s concrete, and it contains no new commitments. It mainly consists of agreements to be made at future climate conferences. We will not be able to hold global

warming to two degrees Celsius with this agreement”. The EU delegation had hoped Durban would put in place a “roadmap” of future measures to be taken, but that escaped them in the end.

Kristof Calvo, a member of parliament for Groen!, attended the conference. “The climate was not saved by this agreement, but the negotiations were. And these climate negotiations are still essential if any progress is to be made.”

The Durban conference put into action the Green Climate Fund, a financial mechanism agreed at the last climate conference in Cancún in Mexico in 2010. The Fund exists to help developing countries cope with the effects of climate change and will from 2020 be funded by the richer countries at €100 billion a year.

This agreement came down to the efforts of the EU to make sure the conference did not close without a result; the proceedings were extended by a day and a half to allow an agreement to be reached. Minister Schauvliege praised the EU for its united approach but said that “even if we in the EU cross over to a low-carbon economy, that won’t be enough if other countries go on



“We’re going around in circles”: Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege

emitting greenhouse gases in the same quantities. Europe can’t combat climate change on its own.”

The Flemish minister has now taken part in Copenhagen in 2009, Cancun

in 2010 and now Durban, “and I get the feeling we’re going around in circles,” she said. “Maybe we need to ask ourselves: Can it go on like this? Will we ever get anywhere at this rate?” ♦

Christel Verschaeren wins gender balance award

Christel Verschaeren, director of the Europe Integration & Global Change Management section of computer giant IBM, has won this year’s Wo_Men@Work award for executives who work to ensure a balance of men and women in management teams. The award is sponsored by Axa insurance and the JumpForum for professional women.

“Balanced teams perform better,” said Verschaeren. “That’s really important because it’s not competitive, it’s complementary.” Verschaeren started by chairing the Women Leadership Council in Belgium and Luxembourg, and since 2005 has co-chaired the European version on a voluntary

basis. In 2007 she began to develop a programme of cross-company mentoring between IBM and Danone. “I’m very much focused on mentoring,” she says. She also runs the Blue Talent programme within IBM, which selects key women executives and defines for each a “detailed personal roadmap”. “Working on gender balance is a journey,” she says. “It’s not something you do only once by making a speech or by signing a charter. It’s something that has to become part of your overall governance; it has to become part of business-as-usual, and it has to become part of the behaviour of every manager in the organisation.” ♦

→ www.womenatworkaward.be



Legal wrangle could put off Opel investors

Candidate investors ready to take over the site of the former Opel car factory in Antwerp could be scared off by an ongoing legal procedure over a price dispute, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has warned. This week marks exactly a year since the last car rolled off the assembly line at Opel Antwerp. The closure led to the loss of nearly 2,600 jobs.

The Port of Antwerp has the right of first refusal on the 95-hectare site and has offered a price of €30 million.

General Motors, the parent company of Opel, claims to have a buyer waiting who is willing to pay €90 million. The port has started legal action to have a court-appointed surveyor determine a proper price for the site.

Peeters’ government intends for the site to remain industrial, but now fears the legal dispute could discourage investors from following up on the interest they showed last year, when the government had contacts with 36 potential investors. ♦

MIVB hires the autistic for systems analysis

The Brussels public transport authority MIVB has contracted members of an Antwerp workshop that have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) for intensive IT checking work, taking advantage of their unique attention to detail and ability to focus.

Passwerk, based in the Berchem district, specialises in putting people with ASD into software testing jobs such as system tests, user acceptance tests and regression tests, as well as quality assurance assignments (user instruction manuals, data and text migration, etc). Passwerk is a social cooperative, and in 2010 distributed profits of €50,000 among six beneficiaries, including the Flemish Autism Association and the Centre for Family and Orthopaedagogics, which works with learning-disabled children.

The Passworkers, as they are called, are all normally to highly gifted on the ASD scale, which allows them to take on the complexities of a task and use their specific skills, such as a structured approach to work, perseverance and pattern thinking.

The new electronic-access doors at metro stations in Brussels were one of the projects taken on by Passwerk, whose workers tested the software as well as the chip cards that operate the doors. “Their work is of very high quality, and everyone is extremely happy with the four Passworkers who are working with us,”



People with autism tested the software and chip cards for the new access system in Brussels’ metros

said Kris Lauwers, deputy CEO of MIVB. The Flemish government, too, was happy with Passwerk’s performance on a project involving study scholarships. The project “was principally about handling simple dossiers automatically, without the interference of a file handler,” said Marleen Deputter, head of the scholarships department at the Flemish education ministry. “The Passwerk workers turned out to be wizards in drawing up test scenarios. They made test scenarios of complex business processes for automatic file handling. We had hoped to get the work done in three weeks, but they managed it in one.” ♦

→ www.passwerk.be

Running for business

Is your business interested in sustainable development? Then don your running shoes on 21 December for the first Flemish greenENERGYRUN at Ghent’s Blaarmeersen sports park. The event – a team race followed by a walking dinner – is open to all

companies engaged in protecting the environment and reducing their own environmental footprint. The run starts at 18.00, and there’s a special guest: the Flemish Marathon Man Stefaan Engels. ♦

→ www.runningnation.eu

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Autos • Car City

Antwerp city authorities have agreed to transform the site of the former Opel Antwerp assembly plant into Car City shopping complex devoted to showrooms and maintenance facilities for five car companies: Audi, BMW, Renault, Jaguar and Land Rover. Meanwhile, the car market is headed for a bumper year with sales significantly higher than the previous record of 547,000 vehicles registered in 2010. The reason is that government grants for “clean” vehicles stop on 1 January, causing an end of year rush.

Autos • Landwind

China-based Jiangling Motors is to launch its best-selling Landwind mono-space vehicle on the Belgian market early next year. The company expects to sell up to 500 cars here annually.

Catering • Award

Wim Vandermotten, a 19-year-old student and cook working at the Arenberg restaurant and banquet hall in Leuven, has won the best business plan award at the European Network for Training Entrepreneurship competition in Vienna. He impressed the jury with his business plan developed for De Pastinaak brasserie in Herenthout, Antwerp province, and his with his personable take, he said, on “the virtues of the *pastinaak*” (parsnip).

Chocolate • Erik Goossens

The Antwerp-based chocolate firm Erik Goossens has been selected by the Paris-based US Ambassador to develop a range of end-of-year business gifts to be sent to the world’s grantees. Goossens was already a supplier to the Brussels-based US mission.

Fast Food • Exki

Brussels-based fast food company Exki, specialised in natural and fresh dishes, has confirmed its plans to open up to three outlets in New York in 2013. The company’s immediate development projects include franchised operations in Germany. Exki already has 60 outlets in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Italy and the Netherlands.

Materials • Umicore

Non-ferrous materials group Umicore, based in Olen, Antwerp province, plans to transfer its germanium production to its Quapaw plant in the US state of Oklahoma. The company is also phasing out its “optics” activities on the site.

Plastics • Deceuninck

Plastic frames and building products group Deceuninck, based in Hooglede, West Flanders, has acquired the Bruges-based PVC recycling company Verpola to become the largest rigid plastics recycler in the Benelux. The acquisition brings the group’s recycling capacity to some 20,000 tonnes a year.

Supermarkets • Delhaize

Brussels-based supermarket group Delhaize has confirmed its plans to open up to 25 new stores across Belgium in 2012. The company, with extensive investments in the US and south-east Europe, is also seeking to boost its growth with an additional 450 outlets worldwide over the next three years.

Special Edition

THE Bulletin Newcomer

BRUSSELS
BELGIUM
EUROPE

AUTUMN 2011
€5

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO EXPAT LIFE IN BRUSSELS AND BELGIUM

Welcome home

LEISURE

Bars, books and
what's on the box

WORK

Employment
and retirement

HOME

A guide to
and settling

Newcomer is published by The Bulletin twice a year to give you all the information you need to start a new life in Belgium. Our writers know the country inside-out — so we know the sort of questions people ask and the answers that can make all the difference as you settle away from home.

Preparing . Formalities

Getting legal

Before settling in Belgium for more than three months, it's important to make sure all the right paperwork gets filled out. This can be the most complicated part of the move.

visas

To simplify travel in Europe, 13 countries, including Belgium, have signed the Schengen agreement, which allows for free movement across borders. However, there are still documents to be obtained and rules to be followed if you plan to stay in Belgium for substantial periods of time.

For European Union citizens who come to Belgium for a period of less than three months (90 days), obtaining a visa is not necessary. These individuals can stay based on their national passport or identity card, provided they report their presence to the local municipal administration within eight days of moving to their new home. This is only necessary if they are not staying in a hotel, hostel or similar lodging. Certain non-EU citizens — such as those from Canada, the US and Japan — do not need a visa for stays under 90 days in any six-month period.

non eu

Non-EU nationals must have a visa if they intend to stay in the country for more than 90 days. The specific type of visa to apply for is a "temporary residence permit" or Type D. There are only a small number of reasons for which Belgians and non-EU citizens can obtain a visa. These are: to study, for employment for self-employment, family reunification, cohabitation and marriage. The documents required are a passport valid for at least 18 months, a certificate of good conduct issued no more than six months earlier, a medical certificate and a work permit or other documentation explaining why a visa is necessary.

work permits

Obtaining a visa is important if you are going to be working and living in Belgium for extended periods of time. For EU citizens, EEA nationals and those of Switzerland and similar countries, work permits and professional cards are not needed, although formalities must be followed. Visit the websites below for details of the procedures for each region, and see also our explanation of Belgium's regions on p.92.

FLANDERS
www.wor.be
ALLONIA
www.allonia.be
BRUSSELS-CAPITAL
www.brussels-capital.be
WALLONIA
www.walloniamag.be
www.walloniamag.be



Settling down . Moving in

Renting and buying property

deposits

The lease will require you to put down a security deposit, normally equal to two months' rent, against any damage caused to the property during your lease. On moving in, tenants are generally responsible for a detailed examination of the property, called an état des lieux/état van het huis. Be sure to record all defects in the property so you don't get charged for them when moving out.

If you want to renovate a rented place, it's possible to draw up a 'renovation lease', where the landlord agrees to the transformations being made and pays the tenant by reducing the rent. It's best to get legal advice while drawing up this contract.

buying

Buying a home is another viable option if you plan on settling in Belgium on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. The first step is to find a notary, as they will need to spring into action the second you find your house. This is a legal requirement. It is typically the seller's notary that drafts the sale agreement. This is a legally binding document for both the buyer and the seller. Upon signing, the buyer becomes responsible for the property, and therefore must insure it. At this time, a down payment is also required from the buyer (usually about 10 percent of the total cost). Closing follows within four months' time.

The remainder of the money changes hands at this point. Unfortunately, the price agreed upon in the contract and the amount you end up paying can be quite different. As well as legal fees, most properties require a 12.5 percent registration tax to be paid to the state. However, if

you don't own any other properties in Belgium, you are eligible for a rebate.

mortgages

Mortgages can be fixed for the term of the loan, variable annually, or renewed every three or five years, with options on the type of interest payment. The fairly common practice of using a mortgage broker can be helpful.



We can help you find the ideal neighbourhood and the right schools, and point you in the direction of where to learn a language, so you can really integrate into Belgian society. We also talk you through the social scene, getting married — or divorced — and finding a bank or health insurance policy. Not forgetting, of course, our guide to TV, books and bars.

Welcome to Belgium — we hope you like it here as much as we do.

The Autumn 2011 edition of
Newcomer is on sale at newsstands

THE
Bulletin
Newcomer

This winter guide has been brought to you by Katrien Lindemans, Alan Hope, Courtney Davis, Pierre-Michel Doutreligne, Marie Dumont and Sally Tipper

Cold comfort

Keep the winter blues at bay with our guide to the best of Flanders, both indoors and out



Wrap up warm to explore Antwerp's Christmas market this winter

Markets and merriment

From hot cocoa to caramel-flavoured shots, mulled wine to hot cherry beer, pancakes sprinkled with sugar to dried reindeer meat... Christmas markets all over Flanders are the place to discover winter delights from around the world. They're also the only time and place you can wear a Santa hat without anybody asking questions.

Winter Wonders · Brussels

Over the years, Brussels' Christmas market has grown from a few stalls to an entire Christmas village, including a winter bar, an ice-skating rink, a Ferris wheel and a food plaza with about 250 choices. For this 10th edition, **Greece is the guest of honour**; you can taste Greek specialities in the eight chalets on Sint-Katelijneplein.

→ www.winterwonders.be

Christmas Market · Antwerp

From Handschoenmarkt to Grote Markt and Suikerrui to Steenplein, you can't miss the Christmas market on Antwerp's central squares. The main attractions are the **nostalgic carousel on Grote Markt** and the Ferris wheel. Radio station Studio Brussel will broadcast from their glasshouse on Groenplaats between 21 and 23 December; support their **Music for Life** campaign by requesting a song in exchange for a donation. On Boxing Day, watch the living nativity scene on Handschoenmarkt.

→ www.antwerpen.be

Warm up

When it's cold and dark outside but you've got cabin fever, get out and find a café that will keep you warm by the fire. **Het Spijker** (Pensmarkt 3) near the Graslei in **Ghent** has candles everywhere, with puddles of wax fighting for table space with your beer. If it's extra cold, the stove next to the fire is filled with logs, adding even greater atmosphere to the wooden-beamed café. Or head to Hotsy Totsy (Hoogstraat 1) to while away the winter hours with board games and an always-interesting selection of jazz.

The **best coffee in Brussels** – really? A bold claim, but the regulars at **Moka** (Rijckelarenstraat 5) sing the praises of its espresso, made on a truly antique machine. Besides the authentic coffee, the gourmet paninis and the interesting wine selection, the Moka crowd (artists, DJs, scooterists) enjoy the cosiness of this matchbox-sized place, the comforting soul and jazz sounds (vinyl of course) and its informal, retro vibe. If only the opening hours – and days – were as reliable as the coffee.

Int'l Christmas Market · Ostend

With regional products from **Lapland, Poland, Hungary and Germany**, the international Christmas market on Ostend's Wapenplein is an excellent occasion to treat your taste buds to something new. If you're looking for last-minute gifts, you'll find handmade jewellery and interior objects as well. This year, the city is holding a second Christmas market, on Groentemarkt. Besides food and drink, you can buy your Christmas tree as well. Be sure to check the other stalls for decorations!

→ www.eindejaarinooostende.be

Winterdroom · Ghent

For six weeks, Sint-Pietersplein in Ghent is transformed into a Winter Dream. Think skating rink, hall of mirrors, trampoline... and the highest Ferris wheel in Europe. If you fancy something special, you can book breakfast on the Ferris wheel and enjoy your croissants from high in the sky. Or how about disco ice-skating? For even more, hop on the shuttle to Sint-Baafsplein, where you'll find the traditional Christmas Market with handicrafts, food, drink and live music.

→ www.winterdroom.be

Cool down

Get some fresh air in your lungs without really leaving the city: A brisk walk through **Brussels' Ter Kamerenbos** gets the blood flowing as you wander its endless paths. Warm up with a hot drink at Chalet Robinson, on an island in the centre of the lake reached by a gentle two-minute boat ride. Watch out for wildlife while you're there – rabbits and the odd chipmunk have made the wood their home.

The seawater in Ostend rarely exceeds a couple of degrees at this time of year, but that doesn't stop thousands of people in swimsuits and fancy dress (Polar Bears, they call themselves) from running screaming into the sea every year during the first week of January. Join them and get a bracing start to the year, then treat yourself to a *warmer chocolademelk*, preferably fully clothed, at the very posh Thermae Palace beach hotel. The **New Year's Dive** is on 7 January; sign up online.

→ www.nieuwjaarsduik.be

Child's play

There'll be no time for kids to get bored thanks to the vast number of events going on during the holiday break in Flanders' museums.

The VRT series *De Bedenkers* (The Inventors) was aimed at adults, but it brought into the world a children's delight, *speculoos* paste. An exhibition at **De Wereld van Kina in Ghent** based on the series will explain to young entrepreneurs how an idea is brought from the imagination to the marketplace. For kids aged six to 10 there's a scavenger hunt, while the over-10s get to take part in an invention workshop.

→ www.dewereldvankina.be

The prolific 20th-century Flemish author Felix Timmermans once said that all his work revolved around Christmas, and his story *De Ster van de Fee* tells of three tramps who dress up as the Three Kings. The City Museum in Timmermans' hometown of **Lier** has built an exhibition around the story, good for kids aged three and over.

→ www.bruegelland.be

The **Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences** in Brussels, better known as the Dinosaur Museum, is invariably a success with kids, for its permanent collections (those dinosaurs!) and its temporary exhibitions, such as the current *Prikkels* (Sensations), which explores the five main senses and one or two you never suspected you had. For kids over six, with a special circuit for ages three to six.

→ www.naturalsciences.be

Even the stony ground of modern paintings can be made accessible to children with a bit of imagination, and the **Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp** is offering a free workbook for children based on its exhibition *De Modernen* (The Moderns). While the kids are busy, grown-ups can enjoy the exhibition, which features the work of artists such as Theo Van Rysselberghe, Emile Claus, James Ensor and Gustave Van de Woestyne.

→ www.kmska.be

Nothing gets kids interested in art more than being able to pick it up, and that's what the travelling exhibition *Raak* (Touch) in Ghent's museum for contemporary art SMAK allows them to do. With works by Panamarenko, Johan Tahon and clothing designer Christophe Coppens, the exhibition is designed by the group RASA, which specialises in making art accessible to children.

→ www.smak.be

The **Tivoli Domain in Mechelen** is offering two outdoor trails for kids aged five and over. Eat and Be Eaten looks at the food chain from up close, and From Budding Tree to Falling Leaf examines the effects of the seasons on plants and wildlife. Visits last about 90 minutes, and both run until 31 December. Bring boots and raincoats.

→ www.mechelen.be/tivoli



Hands-on culture at Ghent's contemporary art museum

Greetings from the past

Walter Van den Broeck's *Groenten uit Balen* catapults us 40 years back in time

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

The new Flemish film *Groenten uit Balen* doesn't have an English title yet, and it will be a hell of a job to find one that guards the pun. Literally it translates as *Vegetables from Balen*, Balen being a municipality in the east of Antwerp province. But *groenten* in this case is a misspelling of *groeten*, which means greetings. "Groenten uit Balen" is the valediction of Jan Debruycker, one of the main characters in the film, at the end of his many letters to world leaders (such as presidents of the United States or the Belgian king).

It's taken from life; the father of screenwriter Walter Van den Broeck (pictured) used to send missives to world leaders with good, solid advice. Or so he thought. Because, as does Jan's wife in the film, Van den Broeck's mother used to throw the letters in the stove.

Van den Broeck, now 70, has inherited his father's imagination, but he channels it artistically. With more than 20 novels, short story collections and novellas, and almost as many theatre plays, he's one of Flanders' most prolific writers of the past 45 years.

And one of the most important ones, documenting the metamorphoses of Flemish society and tackling the somewhat surreal underpinnings of Belgium and its dynasty in novels like *Brief aan Boudewijn* (*Letter to Boudewijn*) and his magnum opus *Het beleg van Laken* (*Laken Besieged*). The scope and importance of the latter matches Hugo Claus' *Het verdriet van België* (*The Sorrow of Belgium*) and Louis Paul Boon's *De Kapellekensbaan* (*Chapel Road*).

Do-it-yourself strike

Van den Broeck, who published his debut in 1967, rose to fame in 1972 with the play *Groenten uit Balen*. It told the story of the turbulent strike in 1971 – not supported by the trade unions – in the Vieille-Montagne zinc factory in Balen. After striking for a few months, the labourers' demands were granted almost in full.

A hugely popular production, *Groenten uit Balen* has been performed in Flanders more than 1,000 times. It also has been filmed as a television play twice before, but the idea to make it into a movie germinated just a decade ago. Flemish television director Peter Simons contacted Van den Broeck, and the two started working on the screenplay. Tragically, in 2005 Simons died in a traffic accident. "We decided to continue the project, as a tribute to Peter but also because we really believed in this film," says Van den Broeck.

1970s immersion

Enter Guido Van Meir, the screenwriter of one of Flanders' most lauded television series, *Terug naar Oosterdonk* (*Back to Oosterdonk*). Enter also Frank Van Mechelen, who directed two of the most popular Flemish films of the last decade, *De indringer* (*The Intruder*) en *De hel van Tanger* (*Hell in Tanger*).

Van den Broeck is delighted with Van Mechelen's adaptation. "He's a director who lets the story do the work. It's not a film about 1971, he really guides you into that epoch."

But how relevant is this story, 40 years later? Van den Broeck:



© Koen Broos

"I think the film comes right on time. That's a coincidence, since the project started a decade ago. But still, it teaches us that it's worth never losing heart and, if necessary, to take matters in your own hands, even in what looks like a dead-end situation."

It's a film about solidarity, says Van den Broeck. "Since the strike wasn't supported by the trade unions, the labourers didn't get strike pay. But the families with financial problems received food parcels, doctors worked for free, and banks didn't foreclose on mortgages."

Though solidarity is a timeless subject, the film also "makes it possible to measure the distance between 1971 and 2011," says Van den Broeck. "The father in the film slaps his 18-year-old daughter. Sadly, that was no exception

back then. Life has gotten a lot better, surely, but we also lost things along the way – the most important being solidarity."

"Every detail had to be correct"

The facts about the strike and all its consequences are extremely accurate. "I went to the workers, who carefully read the text. And believe me, every detail had to be correct." The film is told, as was the play, through the eyes of the Debruycker family: father Jan, mother Clara, daughter Germaine and the grumpy grandfather, living together in a small house. Van den Broeck chuckles when he thinks back to the play in 1972: "Within a few weeks after opening night, everyone in Balen was convinced they knew a family that was the model for the Debruyckers. I created that

family because I needed three generations, representing the past, the present and the future. But they're not based on real people." *Groenten uit Balen* is a good example of the social awareness that's omnipresent in Van den Broeck's work. "It's never a goal," he stresses. "I'm not trying to illustrate the programme of a political party. But it almost always seeps in. It's who I am. When I read about a political decision, I always ask myself: Who benefits from it? I'm not interested in writing about the human condition because it's simple what that is: In the end, we all die. Period. I'm interested in what happens before that. And how we live is strongly influenced by a factor we cannot choose: the world in which we live."♦

→ www.waltervandenbroeck.be

FILM REVIEW ★★☆☆

IAN MUNDELL

Groenten uit Balen

Back in the mists of the 1970s, there was a strike in Balen, a small town in the Kempen region that lies to the east of Antwerp. Walter Van den Broeck, a young Flemish teacher who helped the strikers of the zinc factory, wrote a hugely successful play based on his experience, which 40 years on is now a movie. If that suggests a cry from the barricades that echoes down the years, then think again.

The best way to approach *Groenten uit Balen* is as period fluff, played for laughs by an attractive cast. Eighteen-year-old Germaine Debruycker (newcomer Evelien Bosmans) is intent on enjoying herself and dreams of escaping to a better life. Her chance comes when she catches the eye of Luc (Bart Hollanders), a student who has come to Balen to show his solidarity with the strikers. The problem is getting his mind off politics and on to her.

Her father Jan (Stany Crets) is one of the strikers. He's not keen on taking part, but lacks the courage to follow the

advice of Grandpa (Michel Van Dousselaere) and cross the picket line. As the weeks pass, money becomes increasingly tight, but Jan and his wife Clara (Tiny Bertels) begin to appreciate being part of a community that pulls together. There's a chance here to mock everyone concerned in the strike, from the squabbling union officials who won't back the action to the ultra-militant students pursuing their own agenda. Jan is also a figure of fun, naively firing off letters to the king, while Clara demonstrates a tangy mix of vulgarity and social pretension. The film's one laugh-out-loud moment is when she sacrifices her principles for deluxe chocolates proffered by Luc's uptight, middle-class parents, a nice double-act cameo from Koen De Bouw and Veerle Dobbelaere.

Director Frank Van Mechelen (*De Indringer*, *De Hel van Tanger*) maintains that the film also has a serious message about solidarity, but I'm not so sure. The strikers win a



victory of sorts, and the community pulls through, but the Debruyckers keep their heads down and look after number one. That's not what I call solidarity.

Headmaster of a cool school

With a full tour schedule and a new album, the Flemish fivesome lives up to its Rock Rally win

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

“Some days I loathe the name, other days I love it,” says Johannes Genard, the lead singer of School is Cool. “I know it may sound silly, but it also has a sarcastic ring to it.”

Honestly, when I first heard of the band School is Cool, I found its name ridiculous. But, as it goes with silly band names (The Beatles, anyone?), once you like the music, you forget the meaning of the words and connect them solely to the sound. “School is Cool has proven to be a catchy name,” Genard admits. “Once you’ve heard it, it seems to stick with you.”

The Antwerp fivesome rose to fame in the spring of 2010 when it won the Humo Rock Rally, Flanders’ most influential rock’n’roll contest. In the past, this biennial has launched the careers of Das Pop, Goose and The Van Jets.

School is Cool immediately became a favourite of top rock and pop radio station Studio Brussel: It saw three songs topping De Afrekening (The Reckoning), the top songs chart voted by the station’s listeners. Two months ago, School is Cool released its debut album *Entropology*, which went gold within a few weeks.

How would Genard, 23, have reacted when someone predicted all this two years ago? “I’d have taken the Mickey out of them.” Though he clarifies: “Of course, I hoped for all of it. But it sounded utterly impossible.”

The philosophy of music-making

Dreams do come true, the band proves. But their realisation comes with a price: Genard (airborne in the photo, right)

has had no time in the past year to follow his philosophy studies. “I fear that at one point in the near future, I’ll have to choose. That’s gonna be hard,” he sighs.

But really, he’s already made the decision. “Music! It has the best outlook. Not that I started making music because I wanted to earn money with it. Nor did I choose philosophy for that reason. But I admit that in the end, that economic aspect does play a small role.”

“Entropology” is a concept that pops up in thermodynamics as well as in philosophy. It was coined by the French structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Genard, of course, is aware of this, but he had chosen the title “before I discovered its meaning. I like the sound of the word. And the inherent link with anthropology, since as a songwriter I feel like an anthropologist: I describe the world around me.”

That’s an interesting view, considering that most songwriters get inspired by what happens to them personally. “I am not one of them,” the headmaster of School is Cool stresses. “I don’t think my life is enthralling enough to write about. Look at Tom Waits – not that I want to compare me to him, mind you! But he’s a prime example that a wild imagination is a much richer source for great songs than one’s autobiography.”

Advice for Rock Rally-ers

Strikingly, School is Cool combines mostly upbeat, carefree music with, in general, fairly dark lyrics. “That grew naturally,” clarifies Genard, who’s the lyricist of the band and writes the music with his cohorts. “But now I’d like to stick to that. I like the contrast.

Especially when during concerts people joyfully sing along with bleak lyrics.”

He ponders for a moment. “Or maybe they do realise what they’re singing, which makes it even cooler.”

Entropology is one of those albums still worth buying physically, since the 32-page booklet contains some amazing, gloomy etchings made by Antwerp art and design collective Afreux. They look mysterious, but Genard explains that the mostly surrealistic images “were inspired by the songs on the album. Though I still have to meet the person who understands all the hidden meanings.”

The next edition of the Rock Rally starts its cycle in January. Has Genard some swinging advice for the freshly selected competitors? “I’ve heard people comment that you only have to prove that you’re a good *live* band to win the contest. Not! The jury first and foremost weighs the quality of the songs. Of course, you shouldn’t mess them up live. But believe me: It’s all about the songs.” ♦

15 December, 20.00

Muziekodroom

Bootstraat 9, Hasselt

→ www.muziekodroom.be

17 December, 19.30

Glimps Festival at De Centrale

Kraankindersstraat 2, Ghent

→ www.glimpsgent.be

See website for a complete schedule of shows

→ www.schooliscool.be



© Jimmy Keijs

“School is Cool has proven to be a catchy name. Once you’ve heard it, it seems to stick with you”

New music

Admiral Freebee

Wreck Collection: The Singles · Universal

If Neil Young wasn’t still alive and kicking, I’d swear he was reincarnated as Admiral Freebee. In songs like “Living for the Weekend” and “Ever Present”, the Antwerp musician sounds eerily like The Loner. The Admiral (Tom Van Laere) has released four albums so far, filled with both jagged rock songs and intimate ballads. All of them topped the Flemish album charts, quite a feat for a domestic rock artist. *Wreck Collection* brings together 13 singles, plus “Coming of the Knight”, the 2006 duet with queen of country Emmylou Harris. Apart from Neil Young we also hear Bob Dylan’s influence (the mouth harp!) and the proto-Americana cult band Giant Sand. And of course just some great songs like “There’s a Road (Noorderlaan)” and “Rags ‘n’ Run”.

→ www.admiralfreebee.be

Raymond van het Groenewoud

De laatste rit · EMI

Finitude reigns on *De laatste rit* (The Last Ride), the new album by Flemish singer Raymond van het Groenewoud, whose impressive career spans four decades. The feeling results in a few melancholic songs, but RvHG (as his name is commonly abbreviated) likes loads of different tunes: He rocks and swings, even injects a song with some funk, but also adopts *chanson* and folk. The idea of this being a last hurrah is infused with both acceptance and humour. And he doesn’t shy away, in the amazing “Moedertaal” (Mother Tongue), from self-mockery. Let’s hope it’s not Raymond’s last ride, but if so, he’s reached a glorious acme.

→ www.raymondvanhetgroenewoud.be

Daan

Concert · PIAS

After reworking about 20 of his songs for *Simple* a year ago, Daan toured with an acoustic trio: he himself on guitar and piano, cellist Jean François Assy and Isolde Lasoen, who played drums, percussion and a Moog synth. Their concerts in Flagey last April and May have been compiled on the DVD and album *Concert*. But Daan isn’t just repeating himself: The arrangements have been toned down even more, and the set list of those concerts wasn’t just the track list of *Simple*. All in all, a vulnerable and bold release, but I hope 2012 will finally bring an album with new songs by the Flemish singer.

→ www.daan.be

Gabriel Rios

Two Compilations · PIAS

Puerto Rican singer Gabriel Rios launched his career when he was based in Ghent, though nowadays he’s commuting between Flanders and Brooklyn. *Two Compilations* is – you guessed correctly – a double album. The first CD is composed of 17 singles Rios has released since 2004: from the still infectious “Broad Daylight” to “Tidal Wave”, a song influenced by both Ravel and Bizet. They document him changing focus from exotic pop songs to ambitious compositions. The second disc contains odds and ends: Outtakes, unreleased tracks from a Radio 1 session and loads of covers, ranging from Leonard Cohen and Randy Newman to Jimi Hendrix and even American punk rockers The Dead Kennedys. A charming extra to an interesting compilation.

→ www.gabrielrios.be





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

In a very calm street, a beautiful house from 1999 with very big garden.



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 floor, fully equipped kitchen

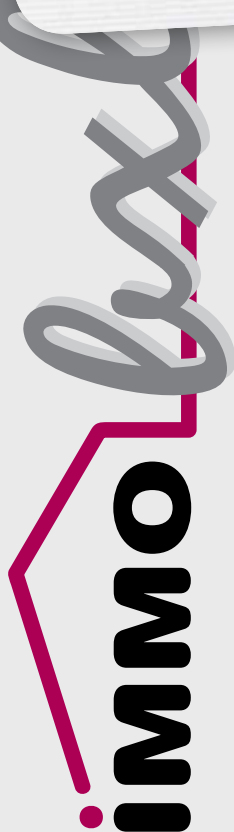
Expat? Visit ING first.

As an expatriate, would you like to invest or save in Belgium? For the purchase of a property in Belgium, our experts will set out the purchasing and taxation process for you. They can also deal with your mortgage loan, your outstanding loan balance insurance and even your fire insurance. If you

are interested in simple savings plans or more complex schemes such as investments in mutual funds, the ING Expat experts will guide you in your new fiscal environment, on the basis of your investment profile. To find out what ING can do for you, don't hesitate to call us on +32 (0)2 464 66 64.



www.ing.be/expat



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 apartments 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,...



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.

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,

A European Christmas

TONIGHT, DEEP IN THE WOODS

MARIE DUMONT

Have your kids stopped believing in Santa Claus? Time to introduce them to Russia's Ded Moroz (aka "Father Frost"), Sweden's queen of light Lucia, and the Italians' Befana, a harmless witch who distributes sweets to good children on 5 January – naughty ones get onions or lumps of coal. These, and other Santa avatars from around Europe, will be the true stars of *Die avond, diep in het bos...* (Tonight, Deep in the Woods), the Belgian National Orchestra's Christmas present to the young, and young at heart. Part concert, part shadow puppetry, part animation film, this pan-European Christmas fest at Bozar takes place the day before Christmas Eve and is sure to warm the hearts of even the most hardened Scrooges. Carine Ermans, the founder of the local children's Théâtre du Tilleul, has devised the plot, which also includes three wise men, a company of elves and a visit from Santa himself.

Dreamy winterscapes and wispy characters will be drawn live by Kitty Crowther (pictured) and shown on a big screen. The hottest children's book illustrator around since she bagged the über-prestigious Astrid Lindgren prize last year, Crowther is a typical product of cosmopolitan Brussels: Born to a Swedish mother and a British father, she crafts poetic and quirky books

peopled with talking insects and supernatural beings that owe a lot to Scandinavian lore.

This visual feast will be bathed in sumptuous seasonal music also gleaned from across the continent, including work by Prokofiev, Debussy, Mussorgsky and Janáček, plus the obligatory traditional carols.

It will be led by Flemish conductor Koen Kessels, who's mostly associated with contemporary sounds (he is the founder of the cutting-edge HERMESensembles), but seems equally at home amid jingling bells and billowing snowflakes, as proved by his recent and rapturously received performances of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* at London's Covent Garden.

Kessels will be joined by the Vlaamse Opera's children's choir, a group of 40 or so young singers who follow an intensive regimen of weekly rehearsals and individual voice coaching. ♦

23 December, 18.30
Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
Brussels

→ www.bozar.be

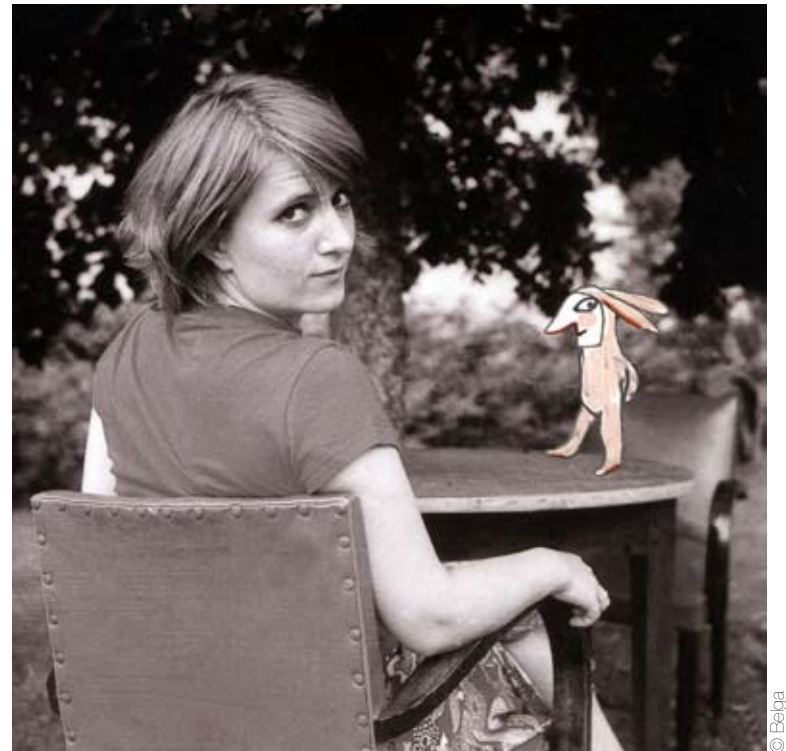
More holiday concerts

Schütz' *Weihnachtshistorie* is an elaborate nativity oratorio that's all rich harmonies and poised celebration. It's being presented on **15 December** at Brussels' Royal Conservatory, along with other works by Schütz and contemporaries, by Flemish baroque violinist and conductor Sigiswald Kuijken and his legendary ensemble *La Petite Bande*.

→ www.conservatoire.be

Roughly from the same period but poles apart in spirit is the programme performed at Antwerp's deSingel on **21 December**. *Villancicos* and other popular Christmas songs from Portugal and Spain will be brought to us by *La Hispanoflamenco*, a group of Flemish and Spanish musicians that explore their countries' intersecting musical traditions. The focus is on two little known 17th-century composers: the Portuguese **Duarte Lobo**, whose works were published in Antwerp, and the Spaniard **Pedro Rimonte**, who worked at the court of archdukes Albert and Isabella in Brussels for 20 years.

Jan Dismas Zelenka, who came from Bohemia but spent most of his career in Dresden at the turn of the 18th century, also suffers from inexplicable neglect; his



music always seems to be on the verge of a revival that somehow never happens. All the more reason not to miss the **Freiburger Barockorchester** and Collegium Vocale's joint venture on **23 December** (also at deSingel), which will air his astonishing nativity *Missa dei Filii*. Marcus Creed conducts the programme, which also includes Bach's first Brandenburg Concerto and his exhilarating Christmas cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*. Prepare to be swept off your feet.

→ www.desingel.be



BE Film Festival
19-23 December
Bozar, Brussels

Perhaps this comes as no surprise, but the Be is one of our favourite film festivals of the year. OK, yes, it's all about local cinema – a showcase of Belgian films both old and new – but it's also staged outside of traditional cinemas. Bozar lends it a touch of class, while Cinematek – a film museum and cinema – lends the selections a sense of place in film history. Most of the programme is made up of films already released, so this is your chance to see what you've missed this year. Highly recommended is *22 Mei* (22nd of May), Flemish director Koen Mortier's beautifully frightening and melancholy take on a suicide bombing in downtown Brussels. The director will be present, as will actors Titus De Voogdt and Jan Hammenecker. You also have a chance to see Bavo Defurne's *Noordzee Texas* (North Sea, Texas), a sensitive coming-of-age about gay adolescents on the Flemish coast.

There are also premieres at the fest: *Torpedo* by Brussels-based director Matthieu Donck finds a middle-aged man about to witness his dream come true. He has won a contest to meet his hero, former cycle champion Eddy Merckx. But he has to come up with an instant family first (pictured). Then there's *Little Glory* by Vincent Lannoo, another Brussels director, known for last year's clever mockumentary *Vampires*. His new film is his first in English and follows an American teenager as he tries to care for his little sister after their father dies. Lannoo will be present for the screening. (Lisa Bradshaw)

→ www.befilmfestival.be



MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Music@themovies: Flanders' Scora Quartet performs an original soundtrack for the 1920 Russian classic film *Aelita*, and French pianist Stephan Oliva joins the Francois Raulin Quintet to do the same for the 1911 American animated masterpiece *Little Nemo*.

DEC 16 19.15 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25
www.desingel.be

Brussels

Anthology of Polish Film: Poland's presidency of the EU is about to come to a close, but you've still got two weeks to witness the country's most brilliant cinema **Until DEC 28** at Cinematek, Ravensteinstraat 3
www.cinematek.be

PHOTOGRAPHY

It's haunting looking at old photographs of a city you thought you knew well. *Portrait of a City* is a collection of photos of Ghent by local photographer Edmond Sacré (1851-1921), who took them around the turn of the last century. At that time, not unlike today, the city was undergoing radical change. Rows of houses were finally removed from the historic monuments and churches upon which they had once been carelessly affixed. Buildings were torn down to make room for public squares, and new streets were constructed. Looking at these photos, my mind races to locate something I can recognise – the Belfry, the old port, St Peter's Abbey... These places are vaguely familiar, yet so starkly different; I'll never look at Ghent the same way again. (Robin Boyle)

→ www.stamgent.be



© Edmond Sacré, Stadsarchief Gent

Edmond Sacré: Portrait of a city

Until 22 April
STAM, Ghent

MORE PHOTOGRAPHY THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Photo View 2011: Travelling exhibition of a small collection of unconventional photographs selected by a jury
Until DEC 31 at SD Worx, Brouwersvliet 2
www.beeldexpressie.be

Ghent

Dirk Wolf: Triggerfinger, LA Recordings: Photos of Flemish rock band Triggerfinger, plus atmosphere shots of Los Angeles by the Dutch photographer
Until JAN 1 2012 at Zebra point, Zebrastraat
www.zebrastraat.be/agenda.asp

Hasselt

Denkmal: Collection of works by André Bertels, on the event of the Hasselt photographer's 70th birthday
Until JAN 15 2012 at CC Hasselt, Kunstlaan 5
www.ccha.be

EXHIBITION

Ferdinand Schirren

Until 4 March
Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels

You can recognise the work of a Brabant Fauvist by its vivid colours, simple subjects and short, blunt brush strokes. Similar to their French counterpart, the Brabant faction was clearly inspired by Impressionism. This informal group of artists, active in and around Brussels between 1910 and 1923 included Ferdinand Schirren (1872-1944). Although Schirren may not have received as much acclaim as fellow fauvist Rik Wouters he certainly was a master at watercolour, adept at capturing the beauty in ordinary objects, everyday people and imaginary gardens. One of the best examples of Schirren's remarkable use of colour is the 1921 oil on canvas portrait "The Lady in Blue" (pictured). But the evolution of Schirren's work is surprisingly diverse, from sculptures and watercolours to, in later life, oil paintings and charcoal drawings. (RB)

→ www.fine-arts-museum.be



© Sabam Belgium 2011, dja photo J. Geleyns/www.roscaan.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Brussels

4 X B - Four Times B - For Times to Be: Photos, images, words and more showing the link between Belgium, Brussels and Belgrade by Brussels artist Filip Van Zanduyck
Until JAN 14 at Bibliotheek Sans Souci, Sans Soucistraat 131
www.elsene.bibliotheek.be

Wunderkammer: Modern-day curiosity cabinets by more than 20 local artists
Until JAN 29 at Botanique, Koningsstraat 236
www.botanique.be

Voices and Visions: Masterpieces from the National Library of the Netherlands' Koopman Collection, including works by Miro, Matisse, Picasso and more
Until JAN 14 at Bibliotheca Wittockania, Bemelstraat 23
www.wittockania.org

WORLD

History of Rebetiko Bouzouki

16-17 December, 20.00
Art Base, Brussels

Imagine the sound of the bouzouki, that bowl-backed instrument with a long neck and few strings. Does it not conjure up images of happy, dancing Greeks, arms outstretched, fingers snapping? Clichés aside, the bouzouki has been producing very unique and alluring music since the early 1800s. This weekend's concerts focus on the instrument's heyday, between 1930 and 1960, when *rebetiko* (Greek folk blues) was gaining momentum towards a full-fledged revival. Come and hear talented bouzouki player Giorgos Padagogiannis and vocalist Efi Sarandi perform this tribute to the great bouzouki musicians of late, from Giovan Tsaous and Markos Vamvakaris to Manolis Hiotis and Giorgos Zambetas (pictured). (RB)

→ www.art-base.be



MORE WORLD MUSIC THIS WEEK

Antwerp

The Basily Gipsy Band: Instrumental gipsy jazz
DEC 16 22.00-1.00 at Buster, Kaasrui 1
www.busterpodium.be

Femi Kuti and The Positive Force: Jazzy, funky afro-beat with a message
DEC 17 20.30 at De Roma, Turnhoutsebaan 286
www.deroma.be

The Celts: Irish folk music
DEC 17 20.30 at L'Alphabet, Waversesteenweg 1387
www.lalphabet.be



PERFORMANCE

Nothing gets you in the Christmas spirit better than a seat at *The Nutcracker Suite*. Now's your chance to indulge in the whirling choreography and famous Tchaikovsky score, exactly 119 years to the day since the ballet's premiere in St Petersburg. The libretto, based on the ETA Hoffmann story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, takes place on Christmas eve at the Stahlbaums. The family paints an idyllic picture of the holiday – decorating the tree, handing out presents – when, suddenly, a mysterious figure appears. It's the toymaker, Drosselmeyer, and he's brought some most unusual gifts. Take in the magic as dancers dart across the stage as mice, dolls and gingerbread soldiers come to life. And revel in the romance as the nutcracker transforms into a handsome prince. This version is performed by the St Petersburg Ballet, with live musical accompaniment by The Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra, the oldest orchestra in Russia. (RB)

→ www.capitolegent.be



The Nutcracker Suite

18 December, 15.00-18.00
Capitole, Ghent

MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Cesena: Rosas and Graindelavoix perform in the new work by Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker
DEC 17-20 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25
www.desingel.be

Antwerp & Brussels

A Christmas Carol: A one-man version of the novella by Charles Dickens, adapted and performed by Sabastian Badarau (in English), plus mulled wine and mince pies (free performance)
DEC 16 19.30 at BATS Theatre, Paardenmarkt 111, Antwerp
DEC 21 20.30 at Théâtre La Clarière, Belvederestraat 20, Brussels
DEC 22 17.00 at Sterling Books, Wolvengracht 38, Brussels
www.lanciencomedian.com

Brussels

One/Zero: Choreographer Benjamin Vandewalle and artist Erki De Vries perform in this type of "delayed cinema"
DEC 17-18 20.30 at Kaaistudio's, Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81
www.kaaitheater.be



BLUES

Ian Siegal
22 December, 20.00
CC Nekkersdal, Brussels

I don't know about you, but these blustery winter days make me want to hole up inside a cosy pub and listen to some blues. So I couldn't be more pleased to hear that the Brussels Blues Society bagged British singer and guitarist Ian Siegal for a solo show. A child of the '70s, Siegal plays the real classic, nitty-gritty blues, influenced as he was by the likes of legends Tom

Waits, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. With his deep, husky voice and wailing guitar, Siegal takes the audience on a trip to another era. He proves that you don't have to be born in Chicago or the deep south to understand the blues or to write lyrics to songs like "Hard-pressed" and "I Can't Believe You Wanna Leave". (RB)

→ www.brusselsblues.eu

DUSK 'TIL DAWN

KATRIEN LINDEMANS

New Year's Eve

It's time to say goodbye to 2011 and gear up for 2012. Will you be spending the last day of the year with a nice family meal? Or will you and your friends dance the night away at your local club? Have a great night ... maybe at one of these events.

Brussels • New Year 2012

A smashing party in a stunning location. After Theatre Vaudeville in 2009 and Concert Noble in 2010, the organisers picked the huge, neoclassical La Tentation event hall to celebrate the end of 2011 in style. There will be lots of DJs, video projections, a special champagne bar and a photographer to snap the last pics of the year (and the first of 2012). Expect a bunch of surprises when the clock chimes midnight!

Doors open at 22.00, tickets are €39 (€139 for VIP package, including a meal in a nearby restaurant). Dress code: chic and eccentric

→ www.newyeareve.org

Antwerp • 1 Voor 12

Celebrate the new year at Zappa and spend the night on the dance floor with the electronic beat of Merdan Taplak, the sounds of the Partyharders Squad, the house and disco by duo Laston & Geo and the tropical rhythms of the Soul Shakers.

Doors open at 22.00, tickets are €15 in advance or €18 at the door. Dress code: none (everybody is a VIP at Zappa)

→ www.1voor12.be

Knokke • Sylvester Night

One big room, one big party. The big room is the casino in Knokke; the big party will be provided by a line-up of five DJs, including Nicolas and Nicolaz. There will be a cava bar, and the organisers promise all sorts of surprises throughout the evening.

Doors at 21.00, tickets are €25 (€75 for a VIP night). Dress code: gala

→ www.sylvester-night.be



© FreshPaint / SHUTTERSTOCK

Ghent • Studio Volanté

With a big party at the city's most popular clubs (Charlatan, Culture Club and Decadance), radio station Studio Brussel plans a big night out: DJ sets (including the station's finest, Jan Van Biesen and Sam De Bruyn) start at 23.00 and go on until lunchtime the next day. A party bus will take you from venue to venue, so no need to walk or wonder where the heck you parked your bike.

Tickets are €15. Dress code: c'mon, would anything in Ghent have a dress code?

→ www.charlatan.be

Hasselt • Just Chique

Dress up and head to Limburg's hottest night club Versuz for the last party of the year. A few tips for your outfit: gents wear "dandy and tie", ladies go for "diamonds and pearls" (fake ones OK).

Doors at 21.00, tickets are €30

→ www.versuz.be



© Sam Hare

MORE BLUES THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Blueskaffee: Blues evening featuring The Brough Superiors, a five-piece blues band from Limburg, and Blue B's & S, a rock- and country-inspired blues trio
DEC 17 20.30 at CC De Schelde, De Keyserhoeve 66
www.ccdeschelde.be

Geel (Antwerp province)

Gene Taylor Trio: Celebrated American blues-, rock- and boogie-woogie pianist
DEC 17 20.30-23.30 at Carte Postale, Winkelom 34
www.cartepostalegeel.be

Tielt (West Flanders)

Blues jam with Blacktone: Free blues jam for groups of three to five musicians
DEC 16 19.00-23.00 at Foyer de Scène, Sint-Michielsstraat 9
www.tinyurl.com/blacktone

bite

ROBYN BOYLE

Simon Says ★★☆☆

It's an average weekday, and a photog friend and I are scouring Ghent for a quick lunch spot. I knew Simon Says was a sure bet for coffee, but I'm surprised to see what's written on the chalkboard out front: light lunch, cakes and pastries.

The café's location is top, at the edge of the maze-like cobbled streets of the Patershol quarter and in the corner of a tiny square at the end of modish Oudburg. Housed in one of the city's only Art Nouveau buildings (by inter-war period Ghent architect Geo Henderick), it was opened in 2007 according to the vision of young Welsh/Brit-Flemish couple, Simon and Christopher. They've recently expanded the place into a B&B with two stylish rooms upstairs.

We step inside and take a seat at one of the retro chic tile-topped tables next to the window. The tables match the turquoise walls, upon which Antwerp artist Panamarenko has drawn futuristic flying objects in gold pen. But the real eye-catcher is the Faema espresso maker perched at the centre of the bar, a beautiful, shiny piece of machinery. Simon Says takes its coffee very seriously. Here, the house blend comes from Flemish coffee roaster Hoorens, run not coincidentally by Panamarenko's wife, Eveline Hoorens.

Within minutes, we are presented with two perfectly pulled café lattes, with lovely shapes worked into the steamed milk (mine is a heart, the other a leaf). It doesn't take long for us to decide on one *croque* Simon Says and one Patiron luxury quiche. The other lunch choices are ciabatta with red pesto, feta and chorizo, or fresh soup of the day with bread. Patiron refers to the shop across the street, where my hefty slice of artisanal, organic mushroom quiche comes from. The thick, warm egg filling is stuffed with chunks of mushroom and grated cheese and surrounded by a flaky, buttery crust. It comes with a light, tangy salad of rocket, sprouts, cherry tomatoes and goat cheese.

The *croque monsieur*, meanwhile, is also going down easy. It's made with thick slabs of roasted dark brown bread from Ghent's best bakery, Oud Huis Himschoot. In between, organic cheese from Ghent cheesemaker Het Hinkelspel melts onto a slice of Ganda ham (indeed, also from Ghent). It comes with the same light salad and a surprisingly well-paired sweet and cinnamon chutney. All this local goodness is served in a quick and friendly manner, and costs us a mere €11 each.

→ www.simon-says.be



📍 Sluizeken 8, Ghent; 09.233.03.43
🕒 Tue-Fri 9.00-18.00; Sat-Sun 10.00-18.00
💶 Lunch: €4-€8 Breakfast: €6-€17.50
👉 Hip B&B and coffee and lunch bar that showcases local, artisanal products

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

TALKING SPORTS

LEO CENDROWICZ

A hockey triumph!



There have been precious few moments of real glory for Flemish sports stars lately. But last week came an unexpected victory after a group of players came from behind to beat India 4-3 and take the Hockey Champions Challenge tournament in Johannesburg.

The victory comes on the back of the Red Lions' surprise run in the European hockey championships in Germany last August, when the national team reached the semi-finals.

The highly fancied Indians were comfortably sitting on a 3-1 cushion in the second half, but a resilient Belgium national team bounced back. Brussels-born Jérôme Dekeyser, who plays for Braxgata in Antwerp, scored twice; Gauthier Boccard added another, but Racing Brussel's Tom Boon (pictured) scored the winner in the last minute and in the process became the joint top scorer of the tournament with eight goals.

A few words of qualification: The 10-member Hockey Champions Challenge is actually the second tier trophy, like the UEFA Europa League in football. The top tier is the six-nation Champions Trophy. But this victory means that the Red Lions – who have already made it into the London Olympics – qualify for next December's

Champions Trophy in Australia.

For now, a win is a win, and beating India – long seen as one of hockey's giants, and winner of eight Olympic gold medals – will provide a welcome boost for the sport.

Antwerp hosts Futsal Euro 2014

Antwerp, meanwhile, has been named hosts of Futsal's Euro 2014 tournament. It will be the first futsal final tournament staged by Brussels or Flanders and ties in with Antwerp being the 2013 European Capital of Sport. Mayor Patrick Janssens greeted the decision and described futsal as "attractive for all sections of the population, and in Antwerp it acts as an important instrument for social cohesion".

Futsal is a five-a-side indoor football variant played with a ball that has 20% less bounce. Unlimited substitutions are allowed in the game that can claim Cristiano Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane as youth alumni.

Farewell, Genk

And finally, a farewell to Genk, which was ejected from the Champions League last week after coming last in their group with just three points. In their final match, 1-0 up, Genk were just 11 minutes from their first victory when Bayer Leverkusen equalised. The East Flanders side joins Manchester United and City, Porto and Ajax in missing the cut – but there's always next season.

THE LAST WORD...

Not so Silent Night

"I went to a Sinterklaas party for seniors and measured the noise. Even there the new limits were exceeded. That's also the sort of activity that's suddenly going to require a permit. Who pays for all of that?"

Jeroen Vereecke of Muziekcafe Video in Ghent, as discussions on noise limits reach a crescendo

Fire sale

"Absolute hell, but it was worth it. One wash, and the smell is gone anyway."

Clients stormed C&A in Brussels' Nieuwstraat last weekend when the shop sold off its entire stock at half-price following smoke damage

Armed conflict

"This is very bad for the image of the hunter."

Marc Van Olmen, chairman of the Flemish hunters' federation, after a dispute over pigeon shooting territory last weekend left one man dead

It's better to give

"I have to say, it takes a weight off to give your stuff away; and then you also give a good feeling to the people who get it. Most of us have too much stuff. It's just a question of sharing it."

Jan Roecx last weekend opened Flanders' first give-away store in Leuven, where the price of every item is nothing

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #211

Cover story

Sure, there was plenty to talk about in politics, but 2011 was peppered with fascinating characters doing strange and wonderful things. We take a look back at Flanders' 11 most interesting people of 2011

Living

It's the night before Christmas ... and you forgot to buy something for Aunt Clare?! Fortunately, Flanders Today is here to save you with the best in artisanal products that can be had at the last minute

Arts

You might have seen it in the bookshops and wondered at the title. We interview author Jan van Loy about his new novel *Ik Hollywood* (I Hollywood) and just how a Flemish author from Herentals knows so much about Tinseltown