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Flanders' most inspiring people of the year



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Clijsters and Gilbert sports stars of the year

Tennis player Kim Clijsters and cyclist Philippe Gilbert were named Belgium's Sportswoman and Sportsman of the Year by the country's sports journalists.

Limburg-born Clijsters continued her remarkable comeback this year with a victory at the Australian Open in January, claiming the top spot in the WTA world rankings before injuries forced her to pull out of Wimbledon and the US Open. She has announced that she will retire for good next year, either after the Olympic Games or after the US Open later in the summer. It is Clijsters' eighth Sportswoman of the Year award, making her the joint record holder with judo's Ingrid Berghmans.

Gilbert, the third-place sprinter in this year's Tour de France, also won the Amstel Gold

Classic in southern Holland, the Flèche Wallonne and the Liège-Bastogne-Liège. A member of Flanders' Omega Pharma-Lotto team, he topped this year's UCI WorldTour Ranking, was crowned IG Markets Pro Cycling Index Rider of 2011 and was named Flandrien of the Year by his fellow cyclists for the third year in a row.

Other winners of the annual awards were Flemish decathlete Thomas van der Plaetsen as Most Promising Athlete; the 400m men's team for Team of the Year; hand cyclist Wim Decler as Para-olympian of the Year; and athletics coach Jacques Borlée – father of runners Jonathan, Kevin and Olympic silver medalist Olivia Borlée – as Coach of the Year.

(Leo Cendrowicz)



De Lijn struggles with cost-cutting

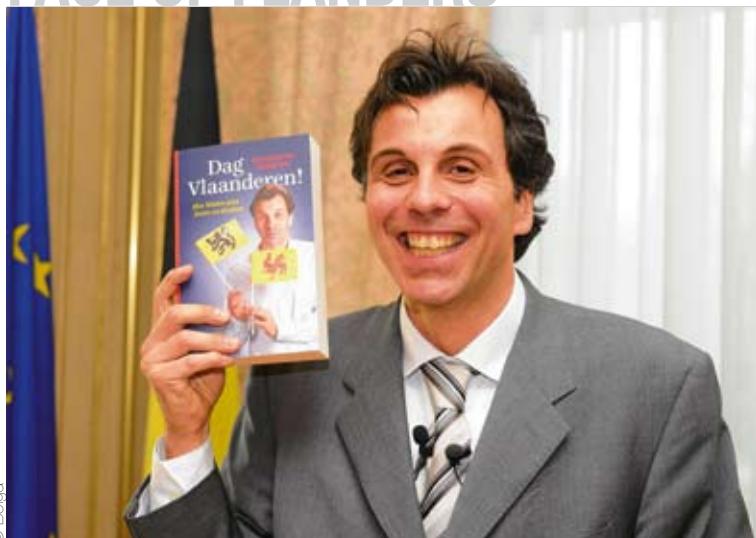
The Flemish public transport company must save more than €40 million next year

ALAN HOPE

News reports concerning an increase in fares by the Flemish public transport authority De Lijn are "premature", the authority's chief executive Roger Kesteloot said last week. Articles in newspapers that stated that the hike in fares planned for next year would particularly affect young people and the elderly were based on figures from a "working paper",

the proposals of which have not yet been decided. The proposals contained in the working paper include scrapping the free pass allowed to pensioners, which would be replaced with a season ticket costing €30 a year, or restricting the use of the free pass to off-peak hours.

➤ continued on page 3



News in brief

Ghent University professor Guy Smagghe has been inducted into the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science for his work on the role of insects in agriculture. Smagghe is only the second person ever from Flanders to win membership to the 137-year-old institution, after the Nobel prize-winning biochemist Christian De Duve. Smagghe's work concentrates on insect physiology and pest control.

The city of Brussels last week officially launched **TagTagCity**, a new tourist application using QR-codes and Near Field Communication (NFC) tags to make available historical and cultural information to visitors equipped with smartphones or other devices capable of reading the codes. The application will also be able to offer specials from businesses taking part, such as restaurants and museums. It is expected to become active in the spring of next year.

Animal rights organisation GAIA has launched its annual campaign **against the consumption of foie gras**, with a travelling bus showing a video of how the year-end delicacy is produced by force-feeding geese. GAIA also used the tour to promote its alternative: the vegetarian "faux gras".

Two surgeons from the Sint-Basius hospital in Dendermonde are facing prosecution after a **39-year-old woman died the day after being discharged** after a gastric by-pass operation. The woman was found to have had part of her liver and her entire gall-bladder removed by mistake.

The first **Duvel Collection competition** has received nearly 800 entries from artists in countries selected by the

Flemish brewery to participate: Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the UK. A call for designs for a limited edition Duvel Collection of glasses was put out in September by the company, based in Puurs, Antwerp province. The competition is now closed, and members of the public can vote on the website for their favourite entry from their own country. (Scroll right and click on "like" to vote. No Facebook account required.) The top 20 winners in each countries will be judged by a jury, who will select three for the final at the end of January. The company is already known for its Duvel Collection, which sports designs by well-known personalities, like Flemish singer Daan and artist Arne Quinze.

Telecommunications company Telenet will launch its own version of a scheme that allows its internet subscribers to **piggy-back on the broadband** of other users when away from home. The new Wi-Free service, similar to a plan launched by Belgacom recently, will provide Telenet customers with a network of up to half a million free wifi hotspots by the end of next year.

The Neerhof children's farm in Dilbeek, run by the Flemish community in Brussels, last week welcomed a new arrival: a 40-kilo **calf of the Belgian White-Blue variety**, born to mother Thelma. The new calf's name is Di Rupo I. He will remain at Neerhof for a year before being sold, as he will present a risk to the other animals. His fate at that point will depend on the buyer, according to coordinator Jan Pill.

The hospital of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) last week opened its "end of life clinic" for **information on euthanasia** and palliative care. The clinic is a first in Flanders, said its

director, Professor Wim Distelmans, but will not carry out euthanasia procedures. Patients will be free to consult the centre on their own behalf; they or their families may also be referred by treating physicians.

Mobile phone coverage in Brussels is getting worse and represents a threat to the economic development of the capital, according to Brussels Enterprises, Commerce and Industry (BECI). Increasing numbers of users are finding their **communications being interrupted**, particularly in tunnels, major buildings (like the EU Commission) and low-density areas like Ukkel and Bosvoorde. The organisation criticised the Brussels Region for failing to approve more GSM masts after having introduced stricter norms for masts that reduced the coverage provided by each one.

The army bomb disposal unit Dovo was last week called in when an archaeologist on a dig in Geetbets near Sint-Truiden in Limburg province uncovered a **35-centimetre grenade** dating from the Second World War. The device was removed and disabled.

The presence of **lead and mercury** in the air of Flanders over the last 20 years has greatly improved, with reductions of 64% and 48% respectively, according to the Flemish Environment Agency (VMM), which last week celebrated its 20th anniversary. Industry and agriculture have both made enormous investments and progress in that time, the VMM said, though there are still advances to be made. The VMM also launched a new website that lists measurements from 60 stations in the region.

→ www.luchtkwaliteit.vmm.be

Christophe Deborsu

Last week saw the annual ordeal of the Groot Dictee der Nederlandse Taal (The Great Dutch Language Dictation) take place in the stately setting of the senate chamber in The Hague. The annual spelling contest requires the invited participants to dictate on paper lengthy texts read to them by both Dutch and Flemish presenters.

This year there was a tie for first place between Marret Kramer from Haarlem, the Netherlands, and Freek Braeckman from Flanders, a VRT journalist, already known for winning the Flemish TV show *De slimste mens ter wereld* (*The Smartest Person in the World*) in 2009. But the "moral winner", according to Flemish daily newspaper *De Morgen*, one of the competition's sponsors, was Christophe Deborsu, the only French speaker ever to take part. Once again, Deborsu was in the spotlight as Flanders' favourite Walloon.

The Dictee is shown live by the VRT and the NOS. About 40 Dutch guests take part and 40 Flemish, including well-known personalities. The text is traditionally fiendishly difficult; the average number of mistakes last year was 32. This year's text was a little simpler, with an average of 13 mistakes.

Deborsu made only 10, which would have been a good result for anyone. But Deborsu was born in Namur and works for the RTBF, where he made an international name for himself in 2007 when he asked Yves Leterme to sing the national anthem. Leterme accidentally sang a few bars from La Marseillaise, the French national anthem.

Deborsu, 46, went on to present a weekly segment on Wallonia for the Flemish weekend political show *De zevende dag*, he writes a regular column for *De Standaard*. He recently published a book in Dutch to explain the Walloon way of thinking and working to Flanders.

Deborsu studied law at the University of Leuven, at a time when his father's business was going through difficulties. "It was now or never. I only had one chance. ... It stimulated me. I passed that on to my own children. My oldest son was at boarding school in Mechelen. My youngest is still there."

Deborsu has been described as "a living hyphen" between the two communities in Belgium, and his alma mater will present him with its VRG alumni prize next March for "his efforts to foster understanding between the communities".

FLANDERS TODAY



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OFFSIDE

Tracking field

Brussels currently has its own holiday season ski run and, like many other towns, an ice skating rink. But what if your sporting preferences extend to activities where the facilities are not so easy to come by? Suppose, for example, your beach volleyball team is looking for practice grounds in, say, Dentergem.

Now it's possible to find a space for your needs, using a new database set up by the Flemish sports agency Blos. There's an open-air sports field suitable for beach volleyball, for instance, right there in Markegem, a part of Dentergem in West Flanders. You'll also find that the adjoining sports hall is used for aerobics for seniors, jogging and sports camps

during the holidays. Oh yes, and there's an ice skating rink, for the time being.

The Sportsdatabank lists 19,000 sports venues and 17,000 organisations in Flanders, from aikido to swimming, and including American football, circus techniques, power lifting, high jump, polo, twirling, windsurfing and yoga.

The information is useful if, for instance, you want to know where it's possible to practice *liggende wip* – the Flemish term for the sort of longbow archery associated with Robin Hood: archer standing upright and aiming at a target in the horizontal distance. The database will find the nearest club to you, as well as steer you away from

those practising *staande wip* – a quite different discipline in which the archer doubles up and aims at a target 28 metres above in the stratosphere. Clearly, the two disciplines are not to be confused: one is for hunting high-flying birds (presumably) while the other is for defeating French armies at Agincourt.

You'll find athletic tracks, open-air and covered swimming pools, horse riding stables, cycle tracks, skating rinks and the more general indoor sports halls with a multiplicity of uses. Fancy some discus in Deinze? No problem: the Brielmeersen athletics centre in Stadionlaan awaits your call.

→ www.blos.be/sportdatabank

ALAN HOPE

End of the line

The city of Grimbergen has scrapped a telephone tip-line that allowed members of the public to report cases where a shopkeeper spoke to a client in a language other than Dutch



De Lijn one of Europe's most efficient transport networks

→ continued from page 1

The price increases are intended to cover savings of €40 million De Lijn has to make for the coming year, as well as its commitment, contained in its governing agreement, to increase the extent to which it covers its own operating costs by 0.5% on a yearly basis. At present, De Lijn covers less than 16% of its operating costs through the money raised by fares. In 2012, De Lijn faces increased costs including not only fuel prices but also an increase in the number of school buses in service. The response to that increased demand could be to adjust its Buzzy season ticket for young people to make a distinction between young people attending school and others – an effort which would raise an estimated €1.3 million, or exactly the increase in costs expected next year.

The paper also promises an increase in ticket inspections to drive down the incidence of fare-dodging and floats a possible 16% increase in the cost of the normal season ticket, as a one-off fund-raising move. The paper also proposes cutting back on

night services, reducing the availability of the *belbus* during the weekend and scrapping lines that are already covered by train services.

The proposal has been approved by the De Lijn board and now has to be considered by Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits. She also stressed that any conclusions drawn from the working paper are "premature". Discussions are expected to continue in the coming months.

But the plans have run up against opposition from Groen! and the socialists (SP.A). "Savings are necessary, but linear savings made at the expense of families, young people and pensioners are absolutely not what we want to see," said socialists Bart Van Malderen and Jan Roegiers in a statement. The pair pointed out the Flemish government's policy agreement, which states that De Lijn's prices will not be allowed to rise by more than the annual index increase. "The story of De Lijn in recent years has been one of success," said Groen! parliament member Dirk Peeters. "More and more people are taking



© Belga

the bus and tram. To punish them now would be inconsistent." According to international research, De Lijn is one of the most efficient transport authorities in Europe.

Okra, an organisation representing the elderly, did not reject the proposal to do away with the free pass for pensioners, though they suggested that free passes could still be provided

to those with low incomes. "We think it would be better if the bus and tram were free for everyone on a low income or pension. That could then be compensated for by those who are able to pay, including the better-off pensioners," said an ACV spokesperson.♦

Road works in 2012

Flanders can look forward to half as many major roadworks on the motorways in 2012 as there were this year. The bad news is that individual works are more extensive, making the total of 138 kilometres affected substantially larger than 2011, when there were only 75 km of works.

Antwerp province:

E34 Lille-Turnhout: Surface repairs; 8km; 1 March to 5 April
E313 Massenhoven-Herentals direction Antwerp; 7km; 1 April to 6 August
E19 Loenhout-Meer direction NL; 7km; 1 to 10 July

East Flanders:

E34 Wachtebeke-Zelzate and Kaprijke-Eeklo direction coast; 24km; 1 March to 20 June
E34 Eeklo-Kaprijke direction Antwerp; 8km; 1 September to 20 October
E40 Erembodegem-Vlekkem direction Ghent; 12km; 2 to 30 April
E40 Vlekkem-Erembodegem direction Brussels; 12km; 1 to 21 July
E17 Kruishoutem-Deinze direction Ghent; 11km; 15 July to 15 October
E40 Aalst direction Ghent; 5km; July to October

Flemish Brabant:

Brussels Ring R0 Dilbeek-Zellik; 15km; 1 May to 31 June
E40 Kraainem viaduct; 1km; 1 July to 31 August

West Flanders:

E40 Middelkerke-Nieuwpoort direction France; 4km; 1 to 31 May
E17 Waregem-Kortrijk direction France; 17km; 15 May to 15 July
E17 Aalbeke-French border both directions; 18km; 15 May to 15 July
A17 Roeselare-Aalbeke direction Tournai; 9km; 15 August to 15 October

New governor for West Flanders

The Flemish government last week confirmed the nomination of Carl Decaluwe as the new governor of West Flanders, taking over from Paul Breyne in February when he retires. Decaluwe, 51, currently sits in the Flemish parliament for CD&V, where he has gained a reputation as something of a bulldog, particularly when it comes to the government's handling of the media and public broadcaster VRT. He was also reputed to have a formidable command of dossiers such as energy and housing. Most recently, he chaired a working group on the question of the payments made to members when they leave parliament.

Decaluwe was born in Kortrijk and his role as governor is to represent West Flanders at a federal and regional level, as well as to oversee municipalities and social assistance councils (OCMWs) in the province. In particular, the governor has responsibility for the maintenance of public order and for disaster readiness, which involves coordinating emergency services in the event of a major rail accident, for instance, or industrial disaster. "After so many years in the parliament, this will be a new challenge," Decaluwe said. "I don't believe it's a boring job, though obviously a lot of the tension will be gone."♦



Crowds brave the winter weather on the Martelarenplein in Leuven in support of Music for Life, the annual charity event organised by Studio Brussel. Three of the stations' DJs, Tomas De Soete, Siska Schoeters and Sam De Bruyn, will spend seven days in the traditional all-glass studio, subsisting on nothing but fruit juice. The public pays to make a song request, which all goes to the station's charity of choice. This year funds raised go to helping fight diarrhoea in the developing world, which kills at least 1.5 million children under five every year. The glass studio and its inhabitants have already moved on to Ghent's Woodrow Wilsonplein and on 21 December pack up again for Antwerp's Groenplaats, where they call it a year on the evening of 23 December.

→ www.stubru.be/musicforlife

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

General cuts

"This is funny. All of this year's contracts date from before 28 November – not just in my business, but in those of my competitors, too." The double-glazing salesman smiles as he talks about the impact of politics on his trade and the creativity with which he and his colleagues are responding to it.

Until recently, placing new double-glazed windows was tax deductible as part of a large packet of "energy saving investments", which also included water heaters and solar panels. Tax deductions have been a part of the federal housing policy since the Second World War. It has made Belgium one of the countries with the highest percentage of home ownership – a recipe against poverty and a motor for the building trade. The energy-saving measures of recent years had other goals, too: making our economy greener and stimulating the renovation of our aging housing.

So far so good ... until the money ran out. Scrapping tax deductions for most energy-saving investments was one of the first acts of the new federal government under Elio Di Rupo. As if to make sure that there is no doubt about the government's intent to cut spending, the measure went into effect the day it was announced: 28 November.

The retroactive repeal of tax deductions is just one of the measures the federal parliament debates this week. The end of the year is usually a busy period for MPs, voting an annual bill with "general provisions". Often these provisions are technical matters grouped in together – the bill is therefore known as "rubbish bin law" – but this year, with a new government just installed and a financial crisis on our hands, it includes many cuts.

A 15% reduction on the price of "green" cars is scrapped. Company cars will be taxed higher, as will certain savings products, digital TV, licence plates, tobacco and official acts by notaries. There are new rules for service cheques, with which household jobs can be purchased; for career sabbaticals; for early retirement and for unemployment benefits for those fresh out of school.

The government wants to get its retirement reform voted by the end of the year, as well. After more than a year of doing very little but awaiting the new government, MPs now have plenty of work on their hands. As do the double-glazing salesmen, with their creative bookkeeping techniques.

€710,000

invested by Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits in *fietsstraßen*, or cycle roadways, in Antwerp province, along the Dessel-Schoten canal and railway lines in Ekeren, Kontich and Duffel

40,000

new blood donors sought by the Red Cross of Flanders in the next year to make up for the loss of regular donors who reach the age limit of 70

878

requests for a legal name change in Flanders in 2010, about evenly divided between changes in first names and changes in surnames

6%

of businesses in Flanders expect to take on new staff in the first three months of the new year, according to a survey by Manpower for the Flemish chamber of commerce

5

fellowships offered by the Flemish government to American students to come and study for 10 months in higher education institutions in Flanders. The closing date for applications is 31 January

→ www.studyinflanders.be

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11 in '11

Flanders' most inspiring people of the year

cultural trendsetter **Peter de Caluwe**

Brussels opera house De Munt has been going from strength to strength since the 1980s, and the ultimate accolade came this autumn when German magazine *Opernwelt* named it Best Opera House of the Year. The distinction is in no small part due to Peter de Caluwe, the Dendermonde native who has held the venue's reins since 2007. Courteous and cerebral, De Caluwe is a lover of Mozart, Verdi and contemporary music. He started his career at the Munt in the 1980s, then held various jobs at the Amsterdam Opera before coming back to his home turf. "I believe De Munt is not really a traditional house, but a young, edgy, innovative place," he says. Who's to disagree with him? (Marie Dumont)

rabble-rouser **David Van Reybrouck**

In the beginning of 2011, when Belgium was in the midst of its deepest political crisis ever, many felt a sparkle of hope in the birth of the G1000. The initiative, in which 1,000 ordinary citizens gathered to discuss the future of the country, was the idea of Flemish writer and historian David Van Reybrouck. Over the past few years, Van Reybrouck has become a well-known voice in the media as a opinion maker on topics like the gap between politics and ordinary people and the inefficiency of the democratic system. But his biggest achievement was the huge tome that he published about the history of Congo. It not only won several literary awards but was, quite surprisingly, a bestseller. (Senne Sterckx)

→ www.davidvanreybrouck.com

young sherlocks **Neveneffecten**

Comic foursome Neveneffecten (Side Effects) shook Flanders to its core this year with *Basta*, a television series mixing investigative journalism with satire. In the legendary first episode, Jelle De Beule, Jonas Geirnaert, Lieven Scheire and Koen De Poorter hid themselves in a container blocking the parking lot of mobile phone operators Mobistar to protest against the terrible service at Mobistar's call centres. The YouTube version of the sketch with English subtitles has been viewed more than one million times. Neveneffecten went on to uncover the scams in call-in TV quizzes, putting them effectively out of business. The format was sold to American network Fox but, despite the desperate calls of fans, Geirnaert recently declared there will not be a second series in Flanders. (Daan Bauwens)

star power **Matthias Schoenaerts**

Flemish actor Matthias Schoenaerts went global in 2011. Well-known at home thanks to TV series *De smaak van De Keyser* and films such as *Loft* and *My Queen Karo*, he began the year with a career-defining role in *Rundskop*. This dark thriller had its international premiere at the prestigious Berlin Film Festival and went on to win around 20 prizes in festivals around the world. It was also selected as Belgium's candidate for the 2012 foreign-language Oscar. Meanwhile Schoenaerts claimed his first substantial English-language role the US remake of *Loft*, due in cinemas next year, and was chosen by fashionable French director Jacques Audiard for a leading role in his next film. (Ian Mundell)

stage presence **Thomas Blondelle**

Flanders cheered last spring as 29-year-old tenor Thomas Blondelle strode up the Bozar stage to receive the Queen Elisabeth Competition's second prize. A towering figure with a radiant voice and consummate acting skills, Blondelle studied musicology in Leuven and singing in his hometown Bruges. He made his De Munt debut in the role of Hans Scholl in Udo Zimmermann's opera *Die Weisse Rose* and has since been heard in a wide range of styles from Mozart to Kurt Weill. Expect to hear more of him, as a singer but not only: He also dabbles with composition and libretto writing. (MD)

→ www.thomasblondelle.com

local heroes **Jan Van Doorn & Rudi Blockx**

Jan Van Doorn and Rudi Blockx win the prize for most indomitable spirit of 2011. Last summer, these 40-somethings left their home port of rural Arendonk in their trusted – if small – sailboat The Flying Arrow. Their destination? Amsterdam. Their route? Rivers and canals of Flanders and the Netherlands. Their ambition? Keep afloat. That was something they failed

to do two years ago on a similar expedition, when a capsiz in the Eastern Scheldt sent the helmsmen swimming. This year, Dutch police openly questioned the 4.77-metre Arrow's seaworthiness, but the duo powered through and cruised into the Amsterdam canals paragons of Flemish enterprise. (Joris Verdonck)



11 in '11

social observer **Chika Unigwe**

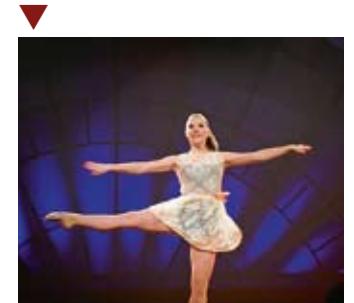
Chika Unigwe was born and raised in Nigeria but married a Fleming and moved to Turnhout in the mid-1990s, where she has lived ever since. One of Flanders' major literary talents, the translations of her books in Dutch often appear before being published in their original English. Writing largely about the social problems of migration, her 2011 novel *On Black Sisters' Street* "marks the arrival of a latter-day Thackeray, an Afro-Belgian writer who probes with passion, grace and comic verve the underbelly of our globalized new world economy," wrote *The New York Times*. Her novel *Night Dancer*, published in Dutch last year, is scheduled for publication in English next year. (Toon Horsten)

roadrunner **Kevin Borlée**

There is not much difference between 400m runners Kevin and Jonathan Borlée, the fastest twins in the world. But it's Kevin who's hauling in the medals for the moment. After becoming European champion in Barcelona last year, the 23-year-old Brusselaar took the bronze medal at the world championships in South Korea this year. The brothers are trained in the US by father Jacques, a former sprinter, and have a sister, Olivia, who is fast on the 100m. Let's say it runs in the family. (Andy Furniere)

songbird **Selah Sue**

That Sanne Putseys, the young singer-songwriter from Leuven, won three awards at the Flemish Music Industry Awards (MIAs) earlier this month didn't surprise anyone. Since she was discovered five years ago at the age of 17 by fellow Flemish singer Milow, the musical prodigy gradually conquered the music scenes of Belgium and its neighbours. In 2011, the mixture of soul, jazz, reggae and even Jamaican rhymes on her self-titled debut album was in heavy rotation on all Flemish radio stations, and she was invited to all the big (and small) festivals. Also famous for her extravagant bird's nest hairstyle, an imitation of her was a star act on the comedy sketch TV show *Tegen de sterren op*. Now that's success. (AF)

tiny dancer **Nina Planefève**

Nina Planefève is like the little engine that could. The 19-year-old from Gooik, Flemish Brabant, auditioned for the Dutch-Flemish television show *So You Think You Can Dance* with ballet. That already made her an underdog. But as the show continued to whittle down its contestants, Planefève passed muster every time – performing hip-hop, modern, rumba or jazz all equally well. She studied ballet in Antwerp but, despite having the talent and then some, is too short, at 1m52, to become a ballerina. But the jury and then finally the voting public found her quite big enough to win the prestigious title. One local newspaper dubbed her "Grote Nina". *Grote* in Dutch means both great and tall. (Lisa Bradshaw)

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Autos • Beherman**

The Bornem-based car import company is close to signing a deal with Japan's Mitsubishi group to become its sole importer for the local market. Beherman is the historic distributor of Saab vehicles and has been seeking alternatives in the wake of the financial troubles of the Swedish car company.

Banking • ING

The local operation of Dutch bank ING has won the contract to become the official bank of the Flemish government. Dexia Bank and KBC were the incumbents but lost the tender.

Chemicals • Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group has acquired the 50% it didn't own of Orbeo, a joint venture with the French banking group Société Générale, specialised in greenhouse gas reduction projects. The company has also signed a strategic alliance with China Rare Metals and Rare Earth company to develop new technologies.

Economy • Jobs

Some 20,000 new jobs have been identified for 2012, with Dutch supermarket group Albert Heijn expected to hire some 2,500 workers in Flanders. The forecast is confirmed by the National Planning Bureau, which names employment as one of the few economic bright spots of next year.

Energy • EDF Luminus

French-owned energy group EDF-Luminus has invested €25 million in its Ghent gas-fired power station to boost capacity and cut its carbon footprint. Meanwhile, German energy company E.ON has cancelled its decision to build a 1,100 megawatt coal-fired power plant near Antwerp after opposition from public authorities on pollution grounds.

Hotels • Motel One

The German-based Motel One group is to build a 490-room budget hotel on Koningstraat in Brussels. The new facility, expected to open in 2014, will be the largest hotel in the city. Meanwhile, a five-star hotel project is taking shape in the former headquarters of electricity giant Electrabel on Troonplein in Brussels. The Kempinski and Ritz-Carlton groups are rumoured to be potential operators.

Transport • Van Hool

Lier-based bus and coach manufacturer Van Hool has been contracted to supply 140 double-decker buses to the US Stagecoach company.

Steel • Bekaert

Steel wire producer Bekaert, based in Zwevegem, West Flanders, has signed a €13 million agreement to acquire 50% of the steel springs and Aluclad activities of China's Xinyu company.

Cruise liners coming to Brussels

The port will develop a new terminal for passenger ships

ALAN HOPE

The Port of Brussels will build a new passenger terminal for cruise ships, which will be greeting visitors by 2015. Last week representatives of the port signed an agreement for the development with Brussels regional minister for harbours Brigitte Grouwels and Brussels city aldermen Christian Ceux (town planning) and Philippe Close (tourism). The new site will be in the Neder-over-Heembeek neighbourhood of northern Brussels, on the waterfront by Meudon Park. The development will make use of two gatehouses that once belonged to the Meudon Castle, built in 1770 and occupied at one time or another by Napoleon, Pope Leo XIII and Prince Charles Alexander of Lorraine. The work will involve the installation of a 240-metre pontoon, renovation of the gatehouses, a new car park and works on the surrounding roads, for a total investment of just over €4.5 million. Most of the cost will be shouldered by the port, with

some €987,000 from the Brussels Region and €220,000 from the city of Brussels.

The decision to build a terminal follows a feasibility study that showed passenger traffic from cruise ships visiting Brussels had grown from 1,200 visitors in 2006 to 10,000 in 2010. The terminal will be operational by 2015 and estimates that visitor numbers will reach 35,000 a year by 2035, with an annual increase in income for the city of €5.2 million. The vessels able to use the terminal will be limited to river-cruise boats with a draft of less than six metres. Those are capable of carrying 500 to 1,000 passengers, port director Fons Moens said. In addition, the terminal will attract pleasure cruises to the canal.

"Passengers can expect to arrive in comfortable, architecturally attractive surroundings," Grouwels said. "The visitors' centre will have a reception area, toilets and perhaps a cafeteria. Outside will be a parking place for



A new cruise liner dock will be ready to greet passengers on the canal in northern Brussels just off the Vilvoordsesteenweg within four years

© Port of Brussels

shuttle buses to bring the passengers to the city centre."

Brussels parliamentarian Jef Van Damme criticised the choice of Neder-over-Heembeek. "Industry in the middle of the city and a passenger terminal on the edge is like the world

has been turned on its head," he commented. His socialist party (SPA) had proposed the Vergote dock close to North Station, echoing calls from cruise line operators, who had made requests for a terminal closer to the city centre. ♦

Flanders forges economic ties with new Libyan government

The city of Tripoli in Libya is ready to send 500 to 1,000 young people to Belgium for training and education, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters was told at the weekend during his official visit to Libya.

Peeters spent three days in the north African country, accompanied by a trade delegation of 16 senior representatives of Flemish industry. The group visited the capital of Tripoli, as well as the port of Misurata. Peeters was representing Flanders in the country that recently saw the assassination of Muammar Gaddafi, in a revolution aided by Nato air forces, including Belgian F16s.

"This is the first time that Flanders, rather than the federal government, has been the first to visit a country where the regime has recently been overthrown," he told reporters.

Flanders' exports to Libya grew from €107.4 million in 2007 to €158 million in 2010, shortly

before the revolution started. Exports, which helped towards a trade surplus of €114 million with Libya, consisted mainly of minerals, machinery, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and food. When the revolution began in February this year, trade came to a virtual standstill for eight months, cutting off an important market for companies already doing business there.

According to Peeters, Flanders has the know-how in a number of specific sectors to help the country get back on its feet: infrastructure, energy, ports, air transport, telecommunications, food and health care.

Reconnecting business interests

Following a meeting between Peeters and Tripoli's mayor, one of the mayor's advisers said: "I see a lot of opportunities for cooperation with Belgium. We are looking for ways to reintegrate the [anti-Gaddafi] rebels into society."

Peeters stressed the importance of cooperation to the Libyan economy. "I want this mission to Libya to help Flemish businesses make the right contacts with the right commercial opportunities," he said. "Our goal is to step in with immediate help with the reconstruction of the country and bring the economy back on track."

On Saturday, Peeters was accompanied by Libyan troops as he walked through the former Green Square in Tripoli, where Gaddafi often addressed the public, and where it's reported that the revolution was sparked off in February when soldiers fired on a crowd of demonstrators.

It has been renamed Martyrs' Square – the same name as the square in Brussels where Peeters has his office. In related news, Peeters finalised a policy document last week to be sent to the Flemish parliament intending to place human rights concerns at the centre of Flanders'



© Belga

foreign policy. The document sets four priorities: the right to personal integrity, including freedom from the death penalty, torture and forced disappearances; the right to protection from discrimination, particularly on grounds of gender and gender identity; the rights of the child; and the right to decent working conditions. ♦

No quotas for Jobpunt

Geert Bourgeois, Flemish minister for integration and government enterprises, last week told the Flemish parliament he does not intend to impose quotas on Jobpunt, the employment agency for the public sector in Flanders, following reports that the agency was failing to provide enough candidates for jobs from immigrant backgrounds. Rather than make language requirements more flexible, Bourgeois said, he was prepared to look more closely at life and work experience outside of academic diplomas as qualifications for suitable jobs. ♦

Jobs fair pays off for Limburg

Fruit growers in Haspengouw and Hageland regions in Limburg and Flemish Brabant provinces were able to fill 97% of the 945 available job vacancies for seasonal pickers this year, thanks to jobs fairs organised by the employment and training agency VDAB. The agency plans to repeat the approach in 2012. ♦

Pukkelpoppers respond to deal

Nearly 80,000 ticket holders for the Pukkelpop music festival last August, which was cancelled after the first day due to a freak storm that blew over tents and caused the death of four people, have taken the festival up on its offer of compensation. Rather than reimburse ticket prices, which could have bankrupted the organisation, Pukkelpop is offering free food and drink vouchers to be used over the next three years at the festival. The response counts for nearly 90% of all ticket holders. ♦

International VIPs visit Flanders Care

Flanders last week welcomed six international opinion and decision makers as part of the Flanders International Visitors Programme, an ongoing programme of five-day visits focusing on different sectors. The theme this time was Flanders Care: Focus on Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Health Care in Flanders. The six opinion makers were Dr Alan Christoffels from South Africa, Catharina de Jong Julius from the Netherlands, Dr Ilesh Jani from Mozambique, David Jones from the United Kingdom, Yuk Han Sun from Hong Kong and Biruta Kleina from Latvia. ♦

The chocolate factory

A new technique just made making that famous Belgian chocolate a whole lot easier

ANDY FURNIERE

Researchers at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) have developed a way to optimise the fermentation of cocoa, creating chocolate that is perfect every time using less cocoa beans. And it's still as pure as nature intended.

Barry Callebaut, world leader in producing chocolate, funded their work and recently won a European award for chocolate based on this concept. The company has its roots in Lebbeke, East Flanders, where the largest chocolate factory in the world is still located.

About five years ago in Ghana, VUB doctorate student Nicholas Camu found out which micro-organisms were responsible for the fermentation of cocoa. Since then, the VUB and Barry Callebaut have worked on creating an optimal starter culture, a biological basis, to control the cocoa bean fermentation and perfect the chocolate's aroma and taste.

"Sometimes I had to drink the liquid starter culture to prove that I wasn't going to poison their cocoa"

In the meantime, the Barry Callebaut brand, where Camu is now innovation manager, launched Terra Cacao. This chocolate, made with the revolutionary fermentation technique, won the European Food Ingredients Excellence award for



the most innovative ingredient of 2011.

"Essential to our method is the discovery that the fermentation of cocoa beans follows the same process everywhere in the world, if it is done with proper care," explains Camu. "Starting from there, we created a liquid that forms the basis for fermenting cocoa. The great advantage is that we can create superb chocolate with beans from one country, while in the past beans from different continents had to be blended to get the right aroma and flavour. We can guarantee that the chocolate is pure, without deficiencies or 'off' flavours."

Professor Luc De Vuyst is chairman of the department of bio-engineering sciences at VUB. "This principle is also used to make cheese," he says. "A culture of bacteria is added to the milk to prepare for the ripening." De Vuyst now coordinates experiments to



© Barry Callebaut

The Barry Callebaut plant in Ivory Coast, where local cocoa producers are learning a new method of cocoa fermentation create chocolate with different aromas and flavours. "In the future, we hope to make chocolate with banana flavour without banana additives," Camus says. And still, "it should be completely natural."

Several thousand farmers sign up

It's not only chocolate gourmets who benefit from the breakthrough; so do local cocoa bean growers. "Because there will no longer be cocoa beans affected by disease or fungi, the farmers will be able to produce more cocoa. Furthermore, the quality is sure to be better, with a higher selling price as a result," says De Vuyst.

About 4,000 farmers are currently participating in Barry Callebaut's programme of implementing the new technique, mainly in Ivory Coast. But Camu remembers the earliest days of the project almost four years ago: "Sometimes I had to drink the liquid starter culture to prove that I wasn't going to poison their cocoa. Their scepticism was logical, since they had been

producing cocoa their way for about 50 years. Now farmers are coming to us to ask if they can join."

The starter cultures are prepared in labs here and transported to Ivory Coast, which is a costly affair. Local farmers are taught to ferment cocoa according to the new method. Camu: "Our dream is to make every farmer self-sufficient in Africa and other cocoa-producing regions, but we have a long way to go to fulfil that goal. Still, we are on the right track."

Dominique Persoone, Bruges' famed chocolatier, hopes the new technique will become the standard manner of fermenting chocolate. "Cocoa is a fantastic, but delicate, ingredient," he says. "To control the fermentation while keeping the process completely natural is a big step forward for the whole sector, and also for me as a chocolatier. Hopefully it can also help to solve the shortage of cocoa beans now that the demand for cocoa is soaring in growth countries such as India and China."♦

→ www.terracacao.com

What's in store

Maya Van Leemput is a professional futurist, an occupation between science and art

Do futurists predict the future?

No. I encourage people to think about the future by asking them key questions. Based on conversations, I construct desirable or probable scenarios, never utopian or apocalyptic ones. Futurists work in the grey area between science and art; the scenarios are a mixture of logic and intuition. With my work, for example, I help decision-makers develop policies that reach further than the period of their own mandate.

What are some of your projects?

Agence Future is my long-term project, for which I travel around the world with photographer Bram Goots, asking ordinary people and experts about their vision of the future. I also finished a "foresight programme" about the Flemish cultural field in the next 15 years. Clearly, the sector always aspires to reach a bigger audience, and it needs to find an economic balance. But culture shouldn't be required to prove that it is valuable for the economy: It's legitimate because it's good for people's minds and hearts. Creativity

is essential in tomorrow's societies; it can improve cooperation. It can, for instance, help us to use alternatives for consumer capitalism, such as sharing.

What challenges lie ahead for Flanders?

The challenges are related to global issues such as the ecological problems and the inequity of the current socio-economic system. Flanders has the advantage of being in the centre of Europe and of being a small, flexible and open society. If Flanders succeeds in taking the best of all its influences, it can be an exemplary creative network society.

What do you look forward to in technology?

I'm curious to see what will happen when the prediction comes true that, by around 2035, it will be impossible to make computer chips smaller and more powerful. Until then, a look at the difference in scale and power of computers in the 1990s and today's smartphones is enough to form a vague idea of what might lie ahead.



What could 2012 bring us?

The *indignados* in Europe and the Occupy movement in the United States could strengthen their challenge to the current socio-economic system, providing that their ideas reach more policymakers. (Interview by Andy Furniere)

→ www.farfetched.be

WEEK IN SCI & ED

Kurt Baeten, a Flemish researcher at the University of Hasselt, has developed a **revolutionary blood test** that makes breast cancer easier to trace. The test would take only seven minutes and show with 91% certainty whether a woman has breast cancer. The test would cost €360, while a mammogram costs around €60. Baeten's business partner, Dutch management consultant Teun Grooters, justifies the high price by pointing out that the test is user-friendly and very efficient. It is also without risk, unlike radiation, which itself can cause tumours. Grooters wants to launch the new method in February.

From September 2014, students of the Flemish Community education network GO! will no longer study religion or ethics in the third grade of secondary school and will instead be taught an overview of different ideologies. Coordinator Luc De Man feels this is necessary because society has changed since the basis of the current system was laid with the school pact of 1958, when there was a great divide between Catholics and cultural liberalists. With this decision, GO! goes beyond the proposal of the parties Open VLD and Groen! in the Flemish Parliament to replace one of the two hours of religion or ethics with a comparison of other religions or ideologies.

Flemish students doing Bachelor studies in primary education don't have the level of French required by the Common European Framework of Reference. That is the conclusion of a report by the Catholic College of Leuven. To improve the French of, among others, these future teachers, the Flemish liberal party Open VLD proposes to make French obligatory from the third grade in primary school. Currently, primary school students learn French from the fifth grade.

Two Flemings will participate in a simulated space mission to Mars in the desert of the US state of Utah. During the simulations, regularly organised by the Mars Society, six people live together for two weeks in a small exploration habitat closed off from the world. Trips outside the Mars-like terrain can only be undertaken in a space suit.

The number of students in Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels has risen again this year, with 800 more students, taking the total number to almost 40,000. There is also an increase in secondary school pupils, after years of decline. Brussels education minister Jean-Luc Vanraege feels the building of more schools and classes since 2010 is paying off.

(Andy Furniere)



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THE
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Practice bakes perfect

Simple design meets complex patisserie at Tom Van Loock's new shop

WORDS AND PHOTOS: ANKE VAN ESPEN

The heart of Bruges is a challenging place to stand out from bakeries and chocolate shops in attracting tourists, let alone locals. But through a healthy combination of enthusiasm and talent that powers their six-month-old shop, Tom Van Loock and Mathilde Madon have convinced their audience.

Even from a distance there is something quite special about Patisserie Academie. Two large windows light up the darkness around the Christmas markets, especially around tea time. The left window is filled with colourful pastries, against a backdrop of black walls and floors. It's a clever design: There is nothing to distract the eye from the pastries themselves, which deserve your full attention and turn this window into a modern, mouth-watering shrine.

The other window lights up a scene of action and work in progress. You see the chef flying around his workshop, once in a while accompanied by little helpers, as he pulls delicious croissants or apple meringue pies out of the oven or wields a pastry bag bursting with some fruity, creamy or chocolaty delicacy. "People generally don't mind waiting a bit before it's their turn to order because then they get to see how the things they're about to buy are made," says Van Loock.

Looks matter, but taste matters more

As his wife artfully places the lemon tarts, macaroons and chocolate éclairs in front of the window, 33-year-old Van Loock explains that he chose to become a baker because he loves eating sweets himself.

He learned the trade at school and in many local bakeries, gaining high-level and refined experience working for big pastry names such as Gunther Van Esche at Del Rey in Antwerp and Pierre Marcolini and Marc Debailleul in Brussels. He finally worked his way into the enviable position of pastry chef in the three-Michelin-star restaurant De Karmeliet in Bruges.

His main motivations for leaving that to open Patisserie Academie were ultimate artistic freedom and the independence it would mean for him and his wife. She was the one behind the design: The black continues throughout the shop and in details such as the boxes that transport the cakes. Van Loock is proud that not just the look but also the baked goods stand out from the other patisseries in Bruges. He strives to present light and flavourful creations, each one containing the exact amount of sugar the dessert asks for and no more, so all flavours come through the way they should.

He has turned a simple thing like orange or lemon zest – normally thrown away – into



Passersby can see chef Tom Van Loock at work through the window of Patisserie Academie in Bruges

a vital element of his, say, brownies. These simple products have become bestsellers. He says it means people appreciate this way of working.

Last-minute Christmas gifts

This Christmas, even those family members who are always saying they are "not into sweets" are bound to discover that they are talking nonsense. It may be their first holiday season, but Academie's menu does not contain your traditional *bûche de Noël* with whipped cream and a pink sugar Jesus on top.

The name *bûche* is present, but the six confections bearing the name serve up six different tastes: chocolate-soaked profiteroles; tropical mango and passion fruit; mocha; caramelised apples and calvados on a crispy *millefeuille*; champagne with lychee. And the *crème de la crème* – a *bûche* with four different textures of chocolate.

Other classic desserts are given a makeover as well, such as a chocolate mousse with

cassis or a baba with mascarpone. "The best choice of dessert or *bûche* depends on people's Christmas menu," says Madon. "Is it a light walking dinner; do you want little *mignardises* or cups; or is it the cosy and warm family dinner table you're planning? Just come in and tell us what you are planning; we love to give the right advice."

So what will the two of them eat as dessert for Christmas? I expected some sort of dream-like cake, with different textures and layers of chocolate, mousses and 50 little details, with maybe a small light show on top. But the answer suggests that everyone wants to separate work from their holiday: "Good ice cream".

Patisserie Academie will be open on 24 and 25 December and 1 January. The shop will be closed from 9-19 January

→ www.patisserieacademie.be



STREEKPRODUCT SERIES

ALAN HOPE

Grijze garnalen and Rodenbach

Since it's the last issue of the year, let's take on a classic combination of two products from West Flanders with a slightly luxurious twist.

I recently came across someone who thought pink *garnalen* were the cooked version of the grey ones, so let's be perfectly clear: Grey shrimp are the species *Crangon crangon*, native to the North Sea. You're extremely unlikely to see one that hasn't already been cooked. The pink shrimp sold in supermarkets is another species, of the genus *Penaeidea*, and comes from India and thereabouts.

Grijze garnalen, or grey shrimp (which can in fact appear pinkish in colour) live at the bottom of the sea, where they can quickly dive into the sand for cover. In season, they can be fished by simply dragging the sand in the shallows along the foreshore. You can still see today the horseback fishermen of Oostduinkerke as they

walk back and forth – going in as high as the horses' shoulders – in the icy surf. That's been the tradition for 600 years, though nowadays it's kept up mainly for tourists, and because the fishermen love it.

Otherwise, the shrimp are fished by boats out of Zeebrugge, all the way up to the coast of Walcheren island in the Netherlands, or out of Nieuwpoort, as far south as Dunkirk in France. As soon as the nets are emptied, the shrimp are washed thoroughly, then boiled in seawater with a hefty dose of salt.

Whether you buy them peeled or unpeeled is a matter of choice, but the unpeeled shrimp have come straight from the sea as fast as modern transport can carry them. Peeled shrimp will most likely have been trucked from the coast to Morocco, crazy as it may seem, where they're peeled by low-cost workers, then trucked back to us.

Not only do they lose freshness, they also have a massive environmental footprint.

Besides, there's nothing so pleasant as sitting around the table peeling shrimp together, keeping the leftovers to make some nice fish stock after. The shrimp need no accompaniment: some thin buttered brown toast, maybe a squirt of lemon. The tendency is to smother them in mayonnaise and stuff them into a tomato. Classic or not, it's a relationship that doesn't consider the interests of the *garnalen*. Each tiny shrimp is a taste-bomb in itself. The classic accompaniment for these North Sea delicacies up and down the coast is a glass of Rodenbach, a sour-sweet, red-brown beer brewed in Roeselare and aged 18 months in vats made of oak, the smallest of which holds 10,000 litres. The beer type, as well as the Rodenbach brand, is a recognised *streekproduct*,



or regional product.

But one doesn't have to go to West Flanders for Rodenbach: The Beer Temple in Brussels found me a Rodenbach Grand Cru 2007 in a champagne-corked bottle, which retains the palate-cleansing sourness but balances it with a warm, round

fruityness reminiscent of port. The beer has to accompany the flavour of the food without overwhelming it, and the Rodenbach does just that.

→ www.streekproduct.be

The Golden Age

A history of Hollywood through the eyes of Jan Van Loy

REBECCA BENOOT

The premise of Jan Van Loy's fourth novel *Ik, Hollywood* (I, Hollywood) is simple yet uncharted territory for a Fleming: In 1909, 17-year-old Louie Peters moves to Hollywood with his brother Charlie. Enticed by the popular short films known as nickelodeons and unsure about his future, he decides to build a studio and try his hand at movie-making. Fast-forward to the year 2000, where journalist Dirk Jansen is asked to write the life story of one of the pioneers of the film industry, who is now living in Brussels: the 108-year-old Louie.

"I grew up watching Hollywood movies, so it was a big part of my childhood," says Van Loy (pictured). "I've always wanted to create a story about Hollywood – its history and the period." The result is a 640-page epic spanning six decades of film history and covering a wide array of topics such as the studio system, civil rights, McCarthyism, the Wall Street Crash and even polio, which are intertwined with the lives of dozens of larger-than-life characters.

Ik, Hollywood is Van Loy's second book set in the US. In 2005, he published *Alfa Amerika*, a collection of short stories about Flemings trying to attain the American Dream. But his fascination isn't with the US in general: "I don't regard Hollywood as a part of the US, but more as a colony," he explains. "It's an international melting pot filled with different races and religions, where anything goes. You can be whatever you want to be, and that intrigues me."

While *Ik, Hollywood* is historically accurate, the stories and the characters are fictional. Some, however, were based on real people, so movie buffs will enjoy the references to their favourite former stars. "I've been interested in the period for quite some time," Van Loy continues, "so the research has been going on for years, until I reached a certain point where I felt comfortable enough to create the story based on such an elaborate historical background."

Nothing is as it seems

The fine line between fiction and reality is not only a crucial theme in the novel, which is actually a biography of sorts, but also in Hollywood itself, where nothing is ever as it seems. "I like blurring this line," Van Loy says. "*Ik, Hollywood* is about the largest factory of fiction in the world but also about the atmosphere that surrounded it, which was prone to scandal and intrigue. Then the third layer is about a man who created stories in an environment where people simply created themselves."

The main character Louie is a man who reinvents himself and becomes one of the first movie moguls. His drive and charisma are intoxicating, proving that anything's possible if you're willing to work hard. "Hollywood has always been a place that attracts people who want to start over and dream big," say Van Loy. "It's easy to forget your past or to simply create a new one – because if you wanted to be part of the business, you had to have an identity that fit the bill. Or you had to be willing to become someone that fit the bill."

Art vs entertainment

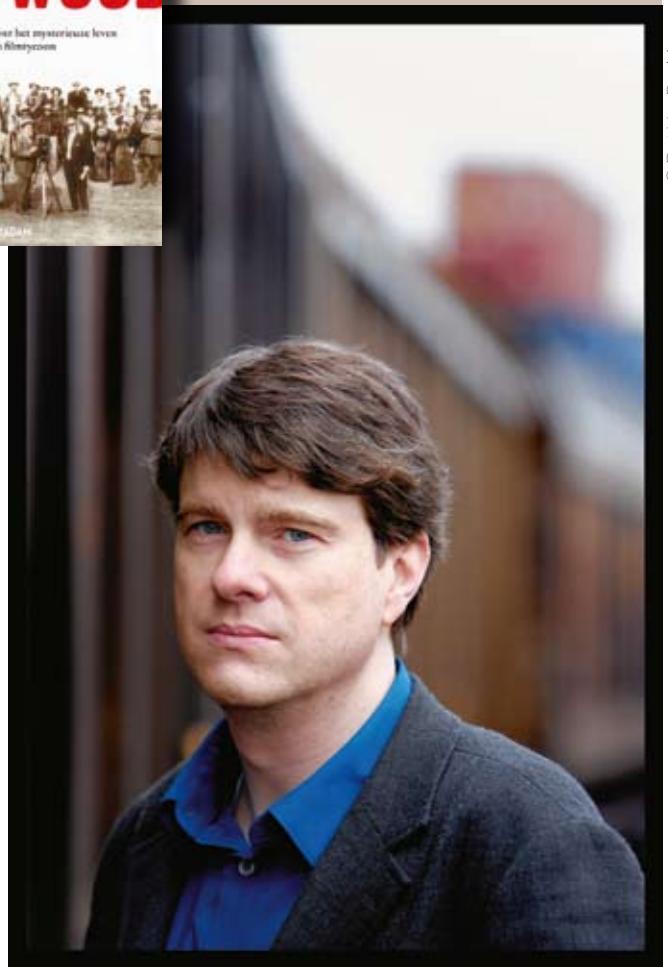
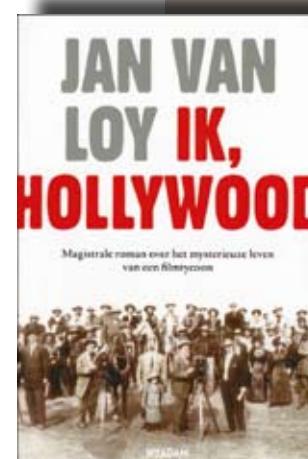
There is no other industry where the clash between high art and low art is as visible as in the movies. Some consider it a business that merely aims to entertain; others turn it into an art form. Louie initially just wanted to make a quick buck but ultimately longs for recognition.

"If you make a movie, it's important to be able to reach a large audience," says Van Loy. "Movies cost a lot of money and are expected to make a lot of money in order to create a viable industry. It's different in Europe, but in the US, movies are a business first and foremost."

Whether we're talking movies or books, the one thing they have in common is that they tell a story, which is also the essence of writing, according to Van Loy. "To me, movies and literature are both narrative arts," he says. "It doesn't matter if you are using words or images; the story is what it's all about. As a writer, you have to try and bring the story to life in the mind of your readers; they have to be able to create their own movie."

Van Loy has succeeded in that, creating the literary equivalent of a blockbuster, aided by a filmic style full of poignant images and snappy dialogue. The twist at the end, ironically, falls victim to the same flaw as its cinematic counterpart: you see it coming a mile off. But it's an entertaining page-turner nonetheless, an ambitious novel filled with intricate detail evocative of the Golden Age of Hollywood.♦

→ www.ikhollywood.com

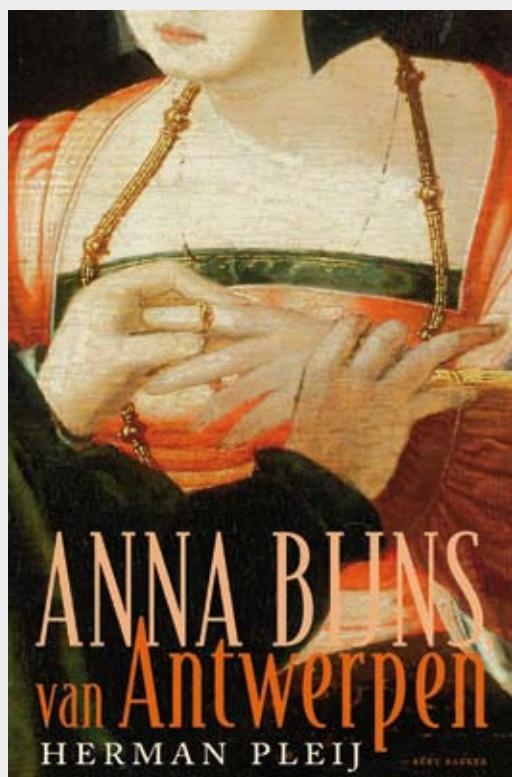


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The books page

"If you wanted to be part of the business, you had to have an identity that fit the bill"

Fresh fiction



C: Honderd notities van een alleslezer (C: One Hundred Notations from an Avid Reader)

by Paul Claes · De Bezige Bij

Paul Claes is a Flemish novelist, poet, translator and essayist and has just published his 100th book, C, a collection of notes made "by an avid reader" and focuses on classic works of European literature such as *Ulysses*, *Madame Bovary* and, naturally, *The Sorrow of Belgium* by the late Hugo Claus. Claes offers us insightful anecdotes, some sharp literary criticism and interesting inter-textual titbits in his uniquely eloquent way. C is a very accessible and compulsive read, highly recommended for both the well-read and inquisitive novices.

Diggers

by Gaea Schoeters · Manteau

For her first book, Flemish screenwriter Gaea Schoeters recorded her experiences driving through the Middle East with her partner on a motorcycle. She has now turned her hand to fiction, with an inches-thick thriller about the First World War and its secrets that are still buried in the Westhoek. *Diggers* started out as an idea for a television series but became an ambitious novel about three people searching for war artefacts who discover the body of an army officer. Filled with musical references, deception and some nail-biting cliffhangers, *Diggers* is a powerful and captivating book.

→ www.gaeaschoeters.be

Anna Bijns van Antwerpen (Anna Bijns of Antwerp)

by Herman Pleij · Bert Bakker

In the 16th century, Antwerp-born Anna Bijns was a fearless and modern woman who wrote passionate prose about love, heresy and the suffocating nature of marriage. She was an inspiration – loved and loathed in equal measure. Dutch professor Herman Pleij revives her ruthless and restless spirit with this convincing and engaging biography that proves that Bijns was not only a force to be reckoned with, she was also one of the great early writers of Dutch-language literature.

De Liefhebbers (The Lovers)

by Brecht Evens · Oogachterend

Brecht Evens is an award-winning 25-year-old graphic novelist whose previous book *The Wrong Place* has been translated into English. His latest work exudes his characteristic vibrant and dream-like style with a wide array of multi-layered characters. *De Liefhebbers* focuses on wannabe artists in the fictional village of Beerpoele, who paint, draw or sculpt after hours and organise a biennial so they can convince real artists to visit their quiet world. Evens is an uncanny talent and has once again created a beautiful and poetic work of art.

→ www.brechtnieuws.blogspot.com

Lost in translation

Flemish literary translators are honoured in Brussels, as a survey starkly reveals trouble in the industry

ALAN HOPE

Earlier this month, Flemish literary organisation Het beschrijf hosted a public tribute to literary translators at Flagey as part of the PETRA literary translation conference. And such a tribute, which included a literary talk show, performances, panel discussions and special guest appearances by world-renowned authors such as Michael Cunningham and Dubravka Ugrešić, was desperately needed. The Flemish literary translation industry is in crisis. Already in 2007 Karel Verhoeven, now co-editor of *De Standaard*, described the situation as "stifling" and "humiliating". That's despite half of all books in any bookshop in Flanders being translations. Take away the cookbooks, and the proportion is higher still.

Nobody could have guessed just how bad it was until the Flemish Authors Association (VAV), inspired by a survey on earnings carried out by the European Council of Literary Translators Associations (CEATL), decided to poll its own members.

VAV sent a survey to 88 literary translators and got answers back from 31 of them. They then followed up with in-depth interviews of 10 of those. "We realise the sample is a small one, but we're confident the findings are indicative of the situation as a whole," says Patrick De Rynck of VAV.

"The Netherlands dominates the market, but Flanders dominates the upmarket"

A broad picture of the typical translator: fairly evenly split between men and women; 61% are aged between 45 and 64; 80% have a partner; 90% are university graduates; 58% graduated in languages, with 32% going on to further training in translation.

Just under half published their first translation in a literary periodical and 42% as a book. Literary magazines are important; a work published there makes a translator eligible for subsidies from the Flemish Literature Fund (VFL).

Just over half listed prose as their main field, with 13% naming children's and young adult literature, 19% poetry, 6% crime fiction and 4% for the rest, including opera libretti and non-fiction. Most translators work out of French, English and German, followed by Italian and Spanish. One in four have only one source language. That's particularly common among translators of poetry, many of whom, De Rynck explains, think it impossible to work adequately from more than one foreign language.

Approximately four in 10 consider translation their main money-making activity (compared to 70% in the Netherlands). That's not to say, however, that they make a living from it. The average income for those who said it was their main activity was about €7,000 a year.

Most translators also produce reviews and literary articles, lead workshops and give lectures. Eight out of 10 would be unable to get by on translation alone, and of the ones who said they could, 83% had received a subsidy in the past



Though it's not commonly done, translators achieve more of a profile if their names are included on book covers along with the original authors, such as in the *De mooiste* series

three years. The VFL and the Dutch Literature Fund together pay about €2 million a year in subsidies for translators. Finally, 55% have a job such as teacher or civil servant, 13% are retired on a pension and 26% rely on the income of a partner.

Dutch dominance

The situation in Flanders is worse than in the rest of Europe, as shown by the CEATL survey, and there's not much hope of improvement. The Flemish quite simply have trouble competing against their Dutch counterparts – though not because of the quality of their work, which in literary translation is considered very good indeed. Carlo Van Baelen, director of the VFL: "The Netherlands dominates the market, but Flanders dominates the upmarket."

Flemish translators practise a different form of Dutch from those in the Netherlands, and their variant is actively discouraged by publishers, which follows the tastes of Dutch readers. Dutch readers outnumber Flemish by more than two to one and buy more books per capita. "It's very hard for a Flemish person to break into the market," says Hilde Keteleer, a translator, poet and novelist. This is largely because all the big Dutch-language publishing houses are in Amsterdam. But also, she says, "books have to be translated into standard Dutch, which for a Flemish person requires two steps – from the original language to our own language, and then into standard Dutch."

Griet Van Raemdonck translates mainly young adult novels from Swedish to Dutch, with names

such as Sven Norqvist, Mats Wahl and Bengt Arne Runnerström to her credit. Lately, though, she's found little demand for her skills. "I've had hardly any commissions in the last few years," she says.

Flemish translators have always had problems being accepted by Dutch publishers. Not only have the Flanders-based publishers on whom they once relied increasingly been bought up by Dutch publishing houses, Van Raemdonck explains, even Flemish independents these days tend to prefer a Dutch translator because they have their eyes on the larger market.

"We grow up in a different language context, and there's a difference in how we express ourselves," Van Raemdonck explains. "I used to have to keep a list beside me when I was working of what to say and what not to say. But the problem isn't only among Flemish translators. It's basically a problem for anyone outside the Randstad," she says, referring to the part of the Netherlands bounded by Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.

As a result, Van Raemdonck doesn't make a living from translations. "There was a time when I could just about make it," she says. "But that was back in the 1990s." Now she teaches for a living.

"The results were to be expected," says De Rynck. "The results in themselves are not shocking, but the numbers are." ♦

→ www.auteursvereniging.be

What could improve the situation for Flemish translators? The VAV survey concludes with a number of recommendations

- More attention to literary translation in education and training, with an eye on the new Master's in the subject due to start in 2012 at the universities of Leuven and Utrecht and the University College Lessius in Antwerp
- More mentoring young translators, particularly those working from niche languages
- Duo-translations carried out by Dutch and Flemish translators working together to overcome the language prejudice
- More visibility for translators on book covers and websites, as well as a translation prize incorporated into the annual Flemish Culture Prizes
- Better pay for the work of translators from subsidised literary magazines and culture houses such as Bozar, which work with literary translators regularly
- Training in entrepreneurial aspects, plus better information, via the VAV, for translators on rights, royalties and contracts. The annual VAV conference in January will, for the first time, have consultants available

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

A complaint filed with the media regulator by a Flemish mother about swear words in children's programming was thrown out on a technicality last week. Virginie Maene, whose four- and seven-year-old children are raised bilingual Dutch/English, was shocked at the use of the English words "fuck off" and "shit" in the otherwise Dutch-language VRT children's programme *De Elfenheuvel*, which airs on Ketnet. The VRT responded by saying that the words were OK because they do not carry sexual overtones. Maene's complaint was also rejected by the Flemish media regulator because of the inclusion of more than one time and date for the programme, when only one time and date are allowed on the complaint form.

The Flemish Audio-Visual Fund has awarded its annual **Wild Cards** to final projects of graduates from Flemish film schools. The money awards – two for fiction, one for animation (€60,000 each) and one for documentary (€40,000) – are given out to those with the most promising short films to help with the development of a first feature. Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah of Sint-Lukas in Brussels won in the fiction category with *Broeders* (Brothers), a fable about a youth worker and a drug dealer. The other fiction winner was Kenneth Mercken of Brussels' RITS Academy, whose film *The Letter* uncovers the darker side of professional cycling. Documentary winner Kenneth Michiels of the KASK school in Ghent also made a personal project: *In Eenenentwintig + Zeven* (Twenty-one + Seven), he investigates an unusual practice within his family. The winner in animation was Boris Sverlow, also of KASK, whose *Shattered Past* mixes animation with real sets to tell the story of a Russian man who suffers a brain haemorrhage while writing his memoirs.

The Flemish Institute for Visual, Audiovisual and Media Art has joined the Flemish Arts and Heritage Agency to launch **Visual Arts Flanders 2012**, which is working to promote the five major arts and culture events of next year in Flanders. The events are Beaufort04, an outdoor art parcours along the Flemish coast; TRACK, which also stages outdoor art but across the city of Ghent; the opening of a new pavilion in Antwerp's open-air Middelheim Museum, with an exhibition of sculpture by German artist Thomas Schütte; Manifesta 9, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, which is hosted by Genk this year; and Newtopia: The State of Human Rights in Mechelen, an exhibition that investigates the relationship between art and human rights. The curators of the five events recently took part in a talk at London's Tate Modern about cultural collaboration beyond borders.

→ www.visualartsflanders2012.be

Special Edition

THE Bulletin
Newcomer THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO EXPAT LIFE IN BRUSSELS AND BELGIUM

BRUSSELS BELGIUM EUROPE

AUTUMN 2011 €5

Welcome home

LEISURE Bars, books and what's on the box

WORK Employment and retirement

HOME A guide to moving, settling and settling in

Preparing . Formalities

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Renting and buying property

Settling down . Moving in

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.

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

Keeping Hoboken's home fires burning

WINTERVUUR

Lisa Roolant

If you thought the only way to ride out the post-holiday blues was by staying couch-ridden under a blanket, you presumably have yet to hear of Wintervuur (Winter Fire). This multi-faceted festival is an ideal occasion to warm up and ring in the new year with a dose of culture. After successfully overtaking the Scheldt docks, Deurne and Linkeroever in past years, the fourth edition takes place on the southern edge of Antwerp in the Hoboken district during the second week of the Christmas holidays.

Home base is Park Broydenborg, which will be cast under a cosy folkloric spell that nostalgically recalls times of nomadic circus villages and flirts with the district's mix of industry and nature. The festival boasts a strong line-up of theatre, international circus acts and live music from a travelling *spiegeltent*. A family affair, there's something on offer for all ages, from a quirky interactive kids concert to an eccentric self-reflective forest walk and poetic river boat tour.

The winter festival kicks off with a celebration of Hoboken's local talent, including fire installations by special effects experts Divi-Divi and a musical feast by the Rumble Jumble Orchestra. The week that follows offers a non-stop plethora of

performance on and around the blazing "Wintervuurplein". Most evenings, the circus tent is taken over by international acrobatic act Le Grand C (pictured), during which acrobats explore the boundaries of the human body in a modern take on circus techniques. The Crazy Cinématographe, meanwhile, takes you back in time with screenings of old short films accompanied by live piano.

An impressive range of theatre on location takes you to a parish hall, an industrial warehouse or to a narrative on the 16th floor of an apartment block. Flemish performers Josse Depauw, Eric Thielmans, Rudy Trouvé and Wim Lots put on *Rops, snare et les autres*, an act bringing an intriguing monologue together with sound and image from an orangery in Park Sorghvliedt. Hoboken-based Comp.Marius open their doors and invites the public to listen to their unique rendition of Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall* over a cup of onion soup, while local cultural centre Uithuis present a youth-theatre project of the powerful tale of King Gilgamesh from within a fort.

Back at Wintervuur square, the *spiegeltent* is the place to grab a bite to eat while it bursts with music. Thé Dansant presents nostalgic afternoon concerts



© Christophe Payaud de Lage

of jazz and swing, while Café Chantant takes over after 22.00 with free concerts, including the jazzy folk music trio Tape Cuts Tape and the melancholic melodies of The Bony King of Nowhere.

If coming from the heart of Antwerp, hop on the Festina Lente ship at the old fortress Het Steen for an hour-long ride along the river to Hoboken. It's a poetic adventure that continues with a guided walk to the festival grounds accompanied by live guitar.

Of course, such a programme wouldn't go out with anything but a bang. On Sunday evening, a free concert in the circus tent mixes up musical styles, with a

performance by retro lounge group The Valerie Solanas and a tribute to Frank Sinatra and his Rat Pack by Flemish singer Will Ferdy. After a guest poet, La Panika closes off the jam-packed week with infectious Balkan sounds, a last chance to get some fire in your heels and finish the holidays off in style.♦

2-8 January

Park Broydenborg
Krijgsbaan & Jozef Leemanslaan
Hoboken (Antwerp)

→ www.wintervuur.be

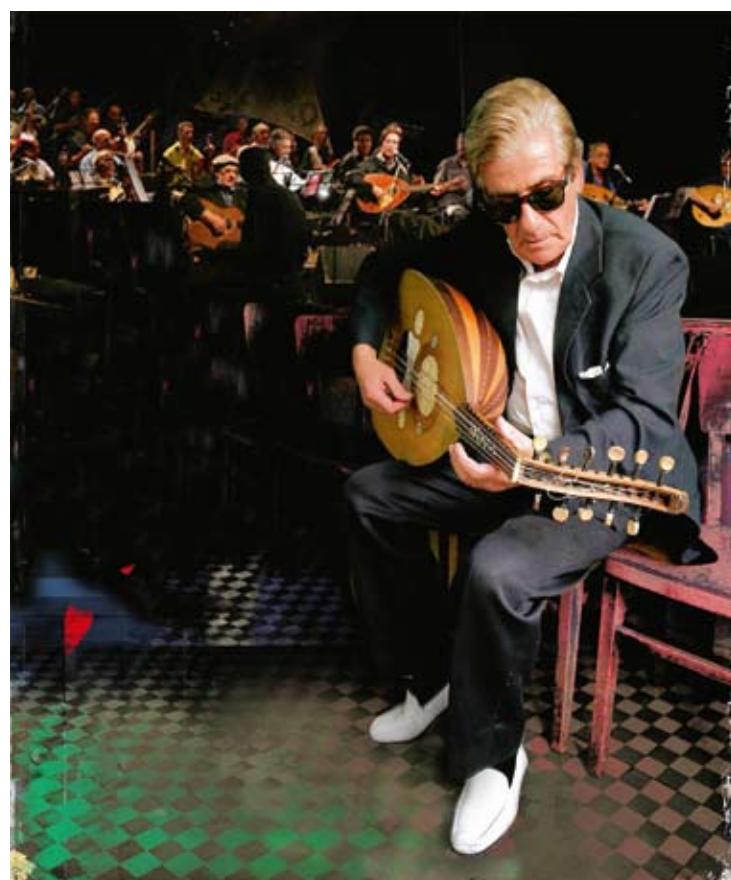
Some events are free, others require tickets.
Check the website for complete details

WORLD

If you're not from North Africa but you've heard of *chaabi* music, chances are it's thanks to a young woman named Safinez Bousbia. The Irish-Algerian filmmaker set out to make a documentary about a group of Muslim and Jewish musicians who played together in 1950s Algiers. Her inspiration came from a small photograph of the group hanging on a barber shop wall. All she had to do was track down as many of the members as possible – no small task, as most of them had already passed on or fled to France after the War of Independence.

But Bousbia succeeded, and the group's 2006 reunion concert in Marseilles turned out to be far more emotional and well received than she could have ever imagined. The resulting documentary, *El Gusto*, tells the story of the musicians getting back together and sharing their memories of life in the Casbah some 50 years ago (watch the local premiere on 12 January at Bozar). For their Brussels debut, the El Gusto Orchestra will perform with no less than 27 musicians, ready to introduce you to the intensity that is *chaabi*. This blend of musical influences from North Africa, Andalusia and the Middle East covers the entire gamut of human emotion, from suffering through loss to the joy that comes from community. (Robyn Boyle)

→ www.bozar.be



MORE WORLD MUSIC THIS WEEK

Ghent

Carlo Faiello: Traditional folk music from southern Italy
DEC 21 20.00 at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2
www.decentrale.be

Tongeren

Muntagna Nera: The legendary Italo-Belgian Music Club featuring the original veterans, South Italians who migrated to Limburg in the 1970s, singing and playing together with Graindelavoix's core musicians
DEC 23 20.30 at De Velinx, Dijk 111
www.develinx.be

Turnhout

Goran Bregovic & His Wedding and Funeral Band: Gipsy music by the creator of the soundtracks for films by Emir Kusturica, among others
DEC 22 20.15 at De Warande, Warandestraat 42
www.warande.be

Agenda



NEW YEAR 2012

Every year, at least 5,000 nutters gather at the Flemish coast to ring in the new year with a dip in the North Sea. With a mean temperature of 2 to 4°C, the water is bitterly cold but, according to some regular participants, "invigorating". Register now to take part in this wacky ritual or just come and cheer them on. After all, somebody has to stay back to keep an eye on the clothes, snap photos and feed jenever and hot chocolate to the courageous polar bears. (RB)

→ www.nieuwjaarsduik.be



MORE NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

New Year in Antwerp: Dance the night away at one of the city's hippest cafés to the sounds of DJs Patrick Schmidt, Bartholomeo, BP, Smos, Prinz and more

DEC 31 23.00-9.00 at Café d'Anvers, Verversrui 15

www.cafedanvers.com

Brussels

Archiduc 2012: Ring in the New Year at the classy jazz bar with resident DJs Romain and Landzar

DEC 31 23.00 at L'Archiduc, Dansaertstraat 6

www.archiduc.net

Ghent

Hindu Nights NYE: Fourth edition of the after-midnight party that's making rock 'n' roll fashionable again by spinning everything from the Beatles to the Arctic Monkeys, featuring DJs Paul Gallagher, Taous De Lille, Cherry Cola, Hindu Radio and Dilly Boys. Dress code: retro

DEC 31 midnight at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

www.hindunights.be



PERFORMANCE

24 uur van het podium

14-15 January, 12.00-12.00

Across Antwerp

Antwerp transforms into one giant stage for the first edition of this 24-hour festival that brings together local theatre houses, cafés, cultural centres, dance companies and concert halls. As the name suggests, the performances go on for an entire day and night as surprising acts take over a dozen different venues. Activities for children abound as well: pop in to Theater Froefro for *Koken Met Bosmans* (pictured) or take them to a sleepover in HetPaleis. Concerts

can be found around every corner, in Rataplan, Buster, De Roma and more. Don't miss the middle-of-the-night performance at Toneelhuis, party in Arenbergschouwburg, or breakfast and a film in CC Deurne Rix. Finally, end the night/morning with a performance at Amuz or the Flemish Opera. One ticket gives you a wristband for entrance to all locations. (RB)

→ www.24uurvanhetpodium.be



© Marc Mallard

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Urbanus Zelf: Songs and one-liners by Flanders' favourite comedian (in Dutch)

DEC 22-23 20.30 at Sportpaleis, Schijnpoortweg 119

www.sportpaleis.be

Ghent

Twist: Family musical (ages 6 and up) based on the story of Oliver Twist, directed by Johan De Smet and Kjell Moberg (in Dutch)

Until JAN 8 15.00 at De Kopergieterij, Blekerijstraat 50

Leuven

To Intimate: Contemporary performance by Rosas dancers Cynthia Loemij and Mark Lorimer, with live musical accompaniment by cellist Thomas Luks

DEC 21-22 20.30 at Kunstencentrum STUK, Naamsestraat 96

www.stuk.be



PUNK



Dropkick Murphys

26 January, 19.30

Forest National, Brussels

They're loud and maybe even a tad bit mad, but the Dropkick Murphys are a guaranteed good time. The Irish-American punk band made a name for itself in the late 1990s playing St Patrick's Day celebrations in and around Boston. But their popularity grew immensely when people discovered their talent for getting a crowd on its feet with pints swinging in their hands. You could compare them to their greatest influences – British punk sensations like The Clash and Sex Pistols. Yet the seven-member posse has a sound all its own, too, thanks to the bagpipes, tin whistles and banjos. Get your tickets and dancing shoes now for this Brussels leg of their European tour. (RB)

→ www.vorstnationale.be



MORE ROCK & POP THIS WEEK

Brussels

Arid: The Flemish pop sensation presents its "Best Of"

DEC 23 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110

www.abconcerts.be

Ghent

Douglas Firs: Flemish singer-songwriter (real name: Gertjan Van Hellemond) with a penchant for Ryan Adams and James Taylor

DEC 29 22.00 at Charlatan, Vlasmarkt 6

www.charlatan.be

Psycho 44: Flemish electronic rock band

DEC 22 22.00 at Charlatan, Vlasmarkt 6

www.charlatan.be

L'Oiseau bleu: Chasing Happiness

Until 22 April

Sint-Pieters Abbey, Ghent



A new exhibition on the seminal work of the great Flemish writer Maurice Maeterlinck reminds me of Harry Potter. Please bear with me.

Fifteen years ago when the literary agent of Joanne "JK" Rowling was desperately trying to find a publisher for her first book, it was turned down time and again. Her work was simply too difficult to market. Not exactly for adults but with themes – such as kids in horrifyingly scary situations – that could be disturbing to children, no one wanted to touch her admittedly engaging story. When someone finally did, she enjoyed cult status for awhile, until Harry went global. And the rest is history.

Well, the same thing could be said about Maurice Maeterlinck's theatre piece *L'Oiseau bleu*, or *The Blue Bird*. If the turn-of-the-20th-century poet and playwright hadn't already been famous, he would have had trouble getting anyone to perform this story, which was about children but had decidedly adult themes. In *The Blue Bird*, a brother and sister set out on a quest to find the eponymous creature at the behest of a fairy queen. In their fantastical journey, they meet the ghosts of dead family members, the souls of children who have not yet been born and all kinds of mystics, including one boisterous king who snaps off his own fingers – apparently made of sugar – as snacks for the children. It's a dark fairy tale that gets at the heart of adult fears around longing, searching, death and facing the truth.

Maeterlinck's play, first performed in Moscow in 1908, was a resounding success, travelling next to London, then New York, then Paris. When the playwright won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911 – the only Fleming to ever do



© Illustration, The Blue Bird, Frederick Cayley Robinson

so – the committee cited that their decision was largely based on *The Blue Bird*. This exhibition in Ghent, which is in the middle of centenary celebrations of Maeterlinck's win, evokes that same dark and mysterious quality – that idea that this dream-like state could switch into a nightmare if you take a wrong turn. You are led with the children through the Land of Memory, the Kingdom of the Future and everywhere else they were destined to go, while discovering the facts and legends behind this timeless story, the one for which Maeterlinck would always be remembered. (Lisa Bradshaw)

→ www.loiseaubleu.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Belgian Racing Legends: Anecdotes, photos and vintage sports car make up this history of the sport in Belgium, which began just after the Second World War, when a group of inexperienced young men with only a passion for speed founded pro racing in Belgium

Until JAN 15 at Autoworld, Jubelpark 11
www.belgian-racing-legends.be

Brussels

Moments of Writing: Camera Obscura: The Flemish photographer uses her camera obscura technique to photograph hundreds of writers in residence at her home
Until JAN 29 at Passa Porta, Dansaertstraat 46
www.passaporta.be

Ghent

John Constable: Works by the British Romantic painter, considered the father of modern landscape painting
Until JAN 29 at Fine Arts Museum, Fernand Scribedreef 1
www.mskgent.be



Esthétique Moderne

Until 9 April

Sterckshof Silver Museum, Antwerp

Everyone is aware of the great scientific and technological advancements made during the Belle Epoque. But what is less known is the effect this period had on design. Belgian gold- and silversmiths were particularly active during the time, collaborating with sculptors, architects and glassworkers to create some of history's most exquisite objects and interiors. Silver from the Belgian Art Nouveau and Art

Deco periods (1885-1945) is known the world over for its aesthetic and innovative qualities. The Silver Museum has brought together a striking array of these polished works, displaying them alongside drawings, photos, moulds and posters from the glory days of Belgian silver design, including the 1903-1906 kettle with spirit burner (*pictured*) by the famous Wolfers brothers of Brussels. (RB)

→ www.zilvermuseum.be



© Silver Museum Sterckshof / Photo: Hugo Maertens

MORE DESIGN THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Walter Van Beirendonck: Dream the world awake: The playful and colourful collections created over the decades by the maverick of Antwerp fashion design
Until FEB 19 2012 at Fashion Museum, Nationalestraat 28
www.momu.be

Brussels

Design Brazil: Works by contemporary Brazilian designers the Campana brothers from their collaborations with famous European labels such as Alessi, Cappellini, Lacoste, Edra and Vitra
Until FEB 5 2012 at Design Flanders Gallery, Kanselarijstraat 19
www.designvlaanderen.be

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

PM DOUTRELIGNE

Le Fonograf

Violetstraat 32, Brussels



© Delta Kapadia

Art is great, art is magic. I love art, me. In a museum. In a book. On my beloved BBC Radio Four. On TV, even. But not in a bar. This irrational dislike is possibly caused by previous experiences in London's insufferably pretentious Notting Hill and Shoreditch areas.

And then, along comes Le Fonograf, and not only do I find myself actually loving an arty bar, I now realise that this is the kind of place that Brussels had been missing for much too long. Violetstraat is an unfortunate street, tucked away behind the Grote Markt and devoid of any landmarks of note, despite its most central location. This is something that Seb, Ilaria and Fred, the triumvirate in charge of Le Fonograf, are acutely aware of. To remedy this, they have made sure that their new venture offers reasons numerous enough to warrant more than a hasty detour. Visually and conceptually (it's ok to use such a word, seeing as we're talking about an "art cafe"), Le Fonograf is based on the idea of a workplace, or even army, canteen. A place where you can get a drink and a decent plate of food for a very reasonable price, and

where you feel a kinship with the people around you. The art on the walls – at the time of writing, by a South American collective by the name of Rostros Sudamericanos – is so sparingly distributed, it borders on the unobtrusive. Other "arty" credentials include poetry readings, acoustic concerts (from Afro-jazz to flamenco to Russian folk), book launches and DJ sets. Food-wise, Le Fonograf offers bar staples such as sandwiches, salads and the ubiquitous spag-bol, but also clever (and cleverly priced) wine-and-tapas combos.

Having been open for just over two months, Le Fonograf is quickly – and quite correctly – acquiring a reputation as a "mates hangout" – not just for arty types, but for people who enjoy life's simple pleasures: having a drink, grabbing a bite, chewing the fat, taking it easy. Who knows, you might even enjoy the art all around you. But rest assured, it won't be rammed down your throat.

Thank God for that.

→ www.lefonograf.be

bite

ROBYN BOYLE

De Bretoen ★★★

Bruges is more magical than ever this time of year. Walking around the city at night, all the Christmas stalls alight, there's choice aplenty when it comes to warming drinks: hot chocolate with rum and whipped cream, coffee with jenever, sweet and spicy *glühwein*. As for food, take your pick between things like *oliebollen* (fried dough balls) and colossal bratwurst sandwiches.

But if you want to escape the crowd and sit down for something more hearty, take the five-minute walk north from the Markt to Ezelstraat.

De Bretoen is oozing with old-world charm – lots of brick and wood and, at the centre of the room, a large round worktop with two traditional cast-iron griddles. As my friend and I make our way to the back of the room, we pass one griddle just as a ladle of batter is being poured onto it and spread thin in a circular motion with a long, flat spatula. Crêpes, the regional dish of Brittany in northern France, are made here right before your eyes. And they come with a wide variety of unexpected fillings.

My friend orders hers with *vol-au-vent*, the creamy chicken stew that's usually served in a puff pastry. But stuffed inside of an

ultra-soft, folded crêpe, the stew really holds its own with thick chunks of chicken breast and flavourful mushrooms.

As a big spinach eater, I order the Popeye crêpe, which doesn't look like a crêpe at all as it comes in an oven dish with a crusty golden cheese *au gratin* topping. Sinking my fork and knife into the dish reveals layer upon layer of doughy crêpes, creamy spinach and cheesy Mornay sauce. I devour half of it and take the rest home with me for lunch the next day.

The perfect refreshment to go with crêpes is cider, so we order a bottle from Normandy. The tart fermented apple juice is lightly carbonated and contains little alcohol. At De Bretoen, and true to tradition, you drink the cider out of bowl-like earthenware cups.

If we had any space left, we wouldn't hesitate to order one of the many sweet crêpes on the menu, filled with anything from mint and fresh whipped cream to Nutella and strawberries.

It must be said that you should come here for the atmosphere and heavenly crêpes, but certainly not for the surly service. We pay the €24 bill and head out the door with so little as a nod, but with very contented bellies.

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com



Ezelstraat 4, Bruges

Wed-Mon, 11.30-22.00

Crêpes: €5-€8

A bistro with more than 60 types of belly-filling sweet and savoury crêpes

TALKING DUTCH

Zalig kerstfeest en een gelukkig nieuwjaar

I fully understand that I am the last person you need to wish you a Merry Christmas, let alone a Happy New Year.

But since the postman, the newspaper carrier and the traffic warden will surely do the same, here it is: *Zalig kerstfeest en een gelukkig nieuwjaar*.

Zalig is like merry: an old-fashioned adjective that people don't really use anymore, except for in combination with a particular noun. (Although I've heard local youngsters use the word *zalig* as a substitute for cool, so maybe it has come back into fashion).

Other, perhaps more commonly used substitutes, include *vrolijk*, which literally means happy (the ancestor of the English "frolic"), and *prettig*, pleasant. *Prettige feestdagen* is often said, pleasant holidays.

Kerstfeest, of course, is one of those famous Dutch compounds of *kerst*, a derivative of *Christus*, Christ, and *feest*, party, or feast.

There's *de kerstboom*, the Christmas tree, *het kerstdiner*, Christmas dinner, and in most churches across the country there will be *kerstnachtdiensten*, Christmas evening services.

City centres have been invaded by the smell of sausages and mulled wine coming from the stalls of *de kerstmarkt*, the Christmas market – a celebration of kitsch, as the Germans say, and *gezelligheid* (that rather untranslatable word we learned earlier this year – roughly cosiness).

Many squares also boast a *kerststal* of some sorts, a depiction of the birth of Jesus (*stal* means stable). The one on the Grote Markt in Brussels is particularly big and attracts almost



as many "oohs" and "aahs" as the Manneken Pis – who, by the way, is currently dressed as the *kerstman*, or Christmas man, better known in the anglophone world as Father Christmas or Santa Claus.

In Flanders, as in most of the rest of Europe, he looks essentially like his American counterpart, who in turn seems to have taken his looks from the Dutch and Flemish Sinterklaas, an older tradition that is celebrated earlier in December (see Talking Dutch, two issues back).

Nieuwjaar is for most people an occasion for *vuurwerk*, fireworks, champagne and fancy dresses. For children in Flanders, however, it's all about *de nieuwjaarsbrief*, the New Year's letter. This is a letter addressed to parents, grandparents or godparents (*de meter*, godmother, and *de peter*, godfather), in which the kids tell them what they wish for in the new year. It is custom on 1 January that they read the letter out loud, after which they receive, of course, gifts.

PHILIP EBELS

THE LAST WORD . . .

Soldiering on

"I'm physically and mentally capable enough, and I'll let the people of Leuven decide."

Leuven's veteran mayor Louis Tobback, 73, intends to be re-elected and go on to the age of 80

You never call

"My mother is happy I'm in the glass house. 'Then at least I'll get to see you,' she says."

DJ Sam De Bruyne gets locked up for a week for charity (see p3)

Shellfish pleasures

"In a little less than 10 days, three million will go out the door. That's about 225,000 kilos. Ten years ago we didn't sell half as much."

Guy Denon of Delhaize, as consumers forget the crisis in their quest for holiday oysters

Mirror image

"I feel just like Natalia, but without the make-up."

Comedian Urbanus appeared for the first time in his 40-year career at the Sportpaleis last week

NEXT YEAR IN FLANDERS TODAY

Flanders Today is taking a little break and will be back in your post box on 11 January

Happy holidays, and we'll see you in the New Year!

2012