

On the edges

Language issues in the Brussels periphery



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A giant's life

The fascinating history of Flanders' parade characters



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Chillin' with chant

The Gregorians gather in Watou



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Crafting the future of sound



A training centre in Antwerp province is producing some of the finest musical instruments in the world

Andy Furniere

For 34 years, the Centre for the Crafting of Musical Instruments in Puurs has been attracting a large number of international students to this little-known area of Antwerp province. To ensure an innovative future for the ancient art of hand crafting instruments – from violins to harpsichords – the centre is also creating a knowledge network with the help of the European Commission.

Silence is not golden in the “classrooms” of the Centrum voor Muziekinstrumentenbouw (CMB), or the Centre for the Crafting of Musical Instruments, in Puurs, a town tucked into the southwest corner of Antwerp province. Instead, you hear the buzz of sawing machines, the scrape of planes shaping wood and animated discussions between students and teachers. A staff of 11 highly qualified teachers advise 255 students of mixed ages and nationalities in the making of all kinds of instruments, from guitars to harpsichords. “There are no real lessons here,” explains coordinator Peter De Rop, as he guides me between workbenches full of special tools and instruments in the making. “Beginners and more experienced students work side by side aided by the teachers.”

The activity at CMB is supported by the Centre for Adult Education (CVO) of Rivierenland, the region in the southwest of Antwerp province. For one year of practice, students pay €500: €240 to the CVO Rivierenland and €260 to the CMB. On the normal programme of working one day a week, students take four years to complete the education. But they can choose to follow intense studies, up to five days per week. Each student has to complete the building of at least one instrument a year.

In principle, course members don't need any previous knowledge or experience. “The first assignment is a basic instrument, such as a backpacker guitar,” explains teacher Ralph Bonte, “which soon makes clear whether the student has the manual skills to continue the study.”

Students are evaluated on the quality of the instrument, their logbook, in which they record their progress, and a paper they have to hand in with each completed instrument.

The world in Puurs

One in five students at the centre is of foreign nationality, mostly from the Netherlands, France and Italy, but there is also currently an American and an Ecuadorian at work in Puurs. Frenchman Simon Basler, who is in his first year, shows me the lute he is currently working on. The small rosette around the sound hole in itself has taken him 35 hours to complete, but Basler clearly enjoys every minute of shaping the wood.

Last year, the 32-year-old interrupted his career at the French ministry of Finances and moved from Strasbourg to the village of Terhagen, near Puurs, to fulfil his dream of building musical instruments. “I was tired of working in an office and wanted to work with my hands,” he says. “A friend who studied here a few years ago and became a professional musical instrument maker

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



The Flemish teenager

Flemish teenagers eat too little fruit, don't get enough exercise and drink more alcohol than their contemporaries in other regions. They also find it hard to communicate with their parents (especially Dad), consider themselves overweight and are overwhelmingly fed up with school. On the positive side, young people smoke less than they used to and consume less soft drinks. They're also less likely to be involved in early sexual behaviour compared to young people elsewhere. Those are some of the conclusions of a study just released by the World Health Organisation. The study "Social Determinants of Health and Well-being Among Young People" included people aged 11 to 15 years in 39 countries. The Flemish group was made up of 4,180 pupils interviewed by researchers from Ghent University. Flemish youngsters have an overall positive view of their own health, with only 14% of girls and 12% of boys aged 11 rating their health as fair or poor, a lower number than in Norway, the US and Denmark. By the time they

reach 15, however, the proportion has gone up to 32% for girls and 21% for boys. Those figures do not match the actual figures for health among the age group in the region. Actual figures show that one in 10 Flemish youths are considered overweight at 11, and 9% of girls and 14% of boys are overweight at 15. When asked about their own feeling of being overweight, however, 37% of girls and 24% of boys aged 11 said they were. Among the 15-year-olds, 52% of girls said they were overweight – almost six times as many as actually are – and 28% of the boys, double the actual figure. The study, almost 300 pages long, offers a detailed portrait of Flemish youth. The kids' own conclusions are pretty positive: Life is good for Flemish 11-year-olds, by their own account, with more than 90% expressing satisfaction. That feeling of well-being drops off just a little by the age of 15 to 89.5%, a figure that puts Flanders at the top of the list, behind only the Netherlands.

www.euro.who.int

News in brief

Up to **30 electric taxis** will be on the streets of Brussels by this time next year, the city's mobility minister, Brigitte Grouwels, announced. The new taxis look identical to their diesel counterparts but will be marked by a special logo. Electric taxis are already commonplace in some European cities like Utrecht, Amsterdam and London.

More than 50,000 people in East Flanders have signed up for a group purchase of **green electricity and gas**, according to organiser iChoosr. Previous group purchases in West Flanders and Antwerp brought 44,000 and 40,000 interested householders.

www.ichoosr.com

The arrivals level of **Brussels Airport** in Zaventem was closed last week to traffic for renovation work, which will continue until the spring of next year. Arriving passengers can now be picked up at a temporary zone on the departures level.

Eleven yacht harbours and nine swimming lakes in Flanders have been awarded a **blue flag of water quality** by the environmental organisation Bond Beter Leefmilieu. The awards, handed out last week at the Willemdok in Antwerp, aim to encourage environmentally aware tourism in Flanders.

www.blauwevlag.be

The Flemish government is to simplify the procedure allowing teachers to continue **working past the retirement age** of 65 from next year, education minister Pascal Smet said. At present, teachers over 65 can be re-employed on a temporary contract, something only 41 teachers in the region's schools have obtained.

The 14,000 employees of the government of Flanders can now

make use of **electronic meal vouchers** following a system test, administrative affairs minister Geert Bourgeois said. Every year some €150,000 worth of the existing paper vouchers is lost, he said, as vouchers go missing or pass their deadline. The new system will also save about €110,000 in administrative costs.

Unions representing EU functionaries have sent a **letter of protest** to EU Council president Herman Van Rompuy expressing dismay at leaflets attached to cars in the EU quarter of Brussels calling on employees of the institutions to hang themselves with their own neckties. The unions say the leaflets are the latest in a series of incidents of intimidation of staff, including anti-European graffiti in Schuman metro station.

None of the violinists from Flanders or Brussels has made it through to the semi-finals of the prestigious **Queen Elisabeth Competition** in Brussels. The only Belgian who made it through is French-born Marc Bouchkov, who now lives in Hamburg. The first round, which took place last week, reduced the 78 total contestants to 24 semi-finalists. The semi-finals continue this week, and the finals begin on 21 May.

www.cmireb.be

Supermarket chain Colruyt has announced that by the end of this year it will **ban the use of eggs from battery-cage hens** as ingredients in its store-brand products. This affects its brands sold in Colruyt, as well as its subsidiaries, Okay and Spar. "This is a major step forward for the welfare of laying hens," said Michel Vandenbosch, president of local animal rights group GAIA, which has made the same request to all supermarket chains in Belgium.

The Flemish government will not be

sending official representatives to the **European Championship football** events in Ukraine and Poland next month, minister-president Kris Peeters told the Flemish parliament last week. European leaders, including EU Commission president José-Manuel Barroso and foreign affairs representative Catherine Ashton, have already said they would boycott the event because of the situation of former Ukrainian prime minister and presidential candidate Yulia Tymoshenko, currently on hunger strike in prison where she is being detained on what critics describe as political charges. "Flanders takes respect for human rights very seriously," Peeters said. The Belgian national football team has not qualified for the championships.

A group of parents of children at the Sint-Pieters College in Blankenberge have lodged a complaint against a decision by the school to oblige all 800 students to use **iPads in lessons** next year. Children who do not own an iPad will be asked to hire one for three years at a cost of €160 a year.

The best word in **West Flemish dialect**, according to listeners of Radio 2 and viewers of the Focus-WTV station, is *zurkeltrutte*. It literally means "sour plum" but is used to refer to a naïve woman.

The Brussels-Elsene police zone has apologised for its response to an emergency call last week when two Leuven men were **attacked and robbed** at Brussels Central Station. A witness called the police and was told a patrol would not attend the scene because such incidents are too commonplace. The federal interior minister later said a patrol had shown up, but the victims had gone. The men filed an official complaint when they returned to Leuven.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Potluck for farmers

If you saw a lot of otherwise cheerful people in Flanders going around with long faces last week, it may be because the Dutch authorities in towns close to the Flemish border have closed access to their famed coffee shops to all but local residents who have registered at the town hall as cannabis users. Only they, armed with their so-called "weed pass," may henceforth purchase their raw materials in the open. On this side of the border, however, the cultivation of cannabis has never been more in vogue, and there are even official sources of advice on how best to grow the crop. But don't get too excited: The latest plant that's all the rage is *cannabis sativa* all right, but it's not marijuana. It's hemp, a cousin to the *cannabis sativa indica* but virtually devoid of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, the

active ingredient that makes you go all woo-woo. Last year in Flanders hemp was being grown by 22 farmers, all of them approved by the authorities. Hemp has historically been grown for its fibres, seeds and oil, and one of the crop's main champions is Wervel, the "workgroup for fair and responsible agriculture". They're behind a campaign to publicise the use of hemp in the manufacture of products ranging from paper to soap to building materials. According to Wervel, there are more than 20,000 different products made using hemp. Flemish farmers are discovering the crop, which can also be used as a protein-rich animal feed, and which grows well in this region with hardly any need for pesticides or fertiliser. Some farmers, like the bio pick-it-yourself farm Antaboga in Tessenderlo, Limburg province,



says to plant hemp with other crops because its distinctive smell helps keep insects away. Inagro, the agriculture research and advice centre in West Flanders, has issued a booklet for farmers on how best to grow hemp, from planting to harvest. All that's missing at the moment, Inagro says, is the industrial capacity to process the crop into its many forms.

www.wervel.be

Crafting the future of sound

Musicians from around the world use instruments made by hand at the CMB

► continued from page 1



recommended Puurs over schools in France or Germany.” Basler spends five days a week in the workshops, six to eight hours a day. He has already built two guitars this year, and his lute is almost finished as well. Next year, he can graduate. That also applies to Jonathan Gelinne, 22, who travels to the school three days per week from Brussels. After following a course in Scotland, he came to study at the centre on the advice of his Scottish teachers and other music instrument craftspeople in the Belgian capital. “This is one of the best places in the world to become a professional

music instruments builder, they told me. I am lucky to find it in my own country.”

Listening to the wood

But how much of a future does one have becoming a professional builder of musical instruments? De Rop admits that most of their work will be in repairing instruments, but a lot of professional and even amateur musicians want a hand-made instrument. “Which is logical,” adds Bonte. “The sound of a hand-made instrument is incomparably better than one industrially made.



A musician checks out the product during the Open Door Days at the Centre for the Crafting of Musical Instruments in Puurs

A craftsman ‘listens’ to the wood to make the instrument perfect instead of producing as many as possible. It can also be made to fit the personality of the musician by adding figural elements such as special curves or images of an animal, for example.”

Not everyone goes to the school with the aim of turning professional. Emile Verwimp, 63, a retired furniture maker, just wants to keep in practice with shaping wood. Another student, who preferred not to give her name, has no immediate plans of becoming a professional but started the courses as a hobby early this year. An Italian, she has played the violin for five years and is now making her own. “It is a fun occupation, although sometimes it is hard to keep working with maximum precision,” the 30-year-old laughs. “There are moments when I lose my patience, but I am sure that will improve in time.”

Leonardo da Vinci programme

Apart from assuring the future of this ancient craft through its students, the centre also offers workshops and lectures and maintains a library, with about 2,500 books, studies, magazines and building plans. During the annual

“This is one of the best places in the world to become a musical instruments builder. I am lucky to find it in my own country”

Open Door Days, visitors can hear concerts and check out finished and in-progress instruments in the workshops; public concerts and talks also make up the biannual Cordefactum festival (see sidebar). The school works together with other institutes in Flanders such as the secondary vocational education ILSA in the provincial technical school of Boom and the School of Arts at the University College Ghent. Teachers at these schools often follow courses at CMB for extra training. This year a teacher from each school is working on building harpsichords at the centre. The centre is also expanding its influence outside the regional borders via the Leonardo da Vinci programme of the European Commission. Part of the commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme, it funds practical projects in the field of vocational education and training, including “mobility” initiatives enabling people to train in another country, co-operation projects

to transfer or develop innovative practices and networks focusing on topical themes in the sector. The centre has applied to the commission for subsidies to start up a cooperation with a school in Finland concerning building guitars with non-tropical wood, “which is very rare in our area but common over there,” notes De Rop. “We want to send students and teachers over there to learn their techniques, and using non-tropical wood would be ecologically friendly.” A Finnish delegation would in turn visit the workshops in Puurs to learn their work methods. The final goal is to start a European and international network of knowledge exchange on musical instrument crafting. “We can’t all be on our little island,” says De Rop. “To improve global expertise on the craft and adapt it to ecological needs, for example, we need to learn from each other.”

► www.cmbpuurs.be

CORDEFACUM FESTIVAL

From 18-20 May, the Centre for the Crafting of Musical Instruments (CMB) hosts its fifth annual Cordefactum music and instruments festival at Castel d’Ursel in Hingene, just north of Puurs. This edition focuses on the violin, lute and viola da gamba (an early sister of the cello). Throughout the weekend, which is open to the public, are concerts, lectures, master classes and group sessions. As part of the festival, the Sint-Stephanus church in Hingene hosts a free fair and exhibition on Saturday and Sunday, where teachers and students of CMB will showcase their work.

Musicians can play the instruments and talk to the craftspeople behind them. Visitors also have a chance to see the largest string instrument in the world, the octobass, made by three generations of the Flemish Faes family and instrument maker Henri Toté. It has three strings and is essentially a larger version of the double bass. The octobass is 3.6 metres high, weighs 50 kilos and took 2.2 kilometres of sheep gut to make the three strings. It can produce close to the lowest possible musical tone of 16 Hertz, which you will not be able to hear but will definitely feel.



© photos: Jacky Walraet

The greening of Flanders

New proposals should encourage businesses to make more ecological investments

Alan Hope

A plan by the government of Flanders to make its support for a more ecological economy will encourage more companies to make energy-efficient investments, says Jo Libeer, chairman of the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka. The plan, announced last week, has two parts: making existing ecological support for investments more flexible and providing new strategic support with a budget this year of €35 million.

"These two actions should make our opportunities for greening the economy more attractive again," said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. "Making business more sustainable is a golden opportunity for the economy, as entrepreneurs come to realise that natural resources are not endless. An environmentally aware and energy-efficient industry will help bring about the realisation

of our New Industrial Policy."

The maximum subsidy for energy-saving and other ecological investments will be raised from 40% to 70% of the cost. Strategic support, meanwhile, deals with technologies that are so advanced or multi-faceted that they do not fit the criteria for the sort of projects able to receive ordinary subsidy.

"The Flemish government is thus creating an extra stimulus for businesses to invest in greening and sustainability," Libeer said. The strategic support will tackle the problem of companies that were reluctant to take financial risks in a difficult economic climate. "We expect more companies to invest in energy-efficient production technologies," he said. "That sort of integrated investment project is often extremely specific to the individual company, so that in the

past it was not eligible for aid. That obstacle now falls away."

The proposal now goes to the Flemish social and economic council for discussion and to the environment and nature council for advice. Finally, the council of state will be asked to give a legal opinion on the new draft. Voka, meanwhile, will provide consultants to small businesses hoping to find a way of cutting energy costs, as well as a brochure on energy savings and cooperation on business sites.

Also last week, Peeters promised a breakthrough in the impasse among his ministers over green energy certificates. The existing system is in need of reform and a deadline of last December has come and gone. But the coalition parties are not agreed on the extent to which energy-intensive businesses should finance the system. The government



also needs to agree on how much of the national quota of green energy production will be shouldered by each of the regions.

Touring advises visitors to avoid Brussels

Visitors from other parts of the country still have every reason to visit Brussels for a more sustainable, more liveable and more economically attractive capital, according to Brussels mobility minister Bruno De Lille. He was responding last week to advice issued by the motoring organisation Touring advising visitors to stay away from Brussels and "pursue their recreations and shopping elsewhere" as a result of the city's new mobility plan.

Touring criticised in particular the government's proposals for parking. "In the last five years, the

city has dismantled more than 1,000 parking places without the slightest vision as to compensation in the form of safe, accessible and affordable spaces. At the same time, roads have been made narrower or closed to traffic."

De Lille argued that studies have shown reducing the number of cars in a city has a beneficial effect for commerce, including a study that showed that people did not like to use their cars to go shopping. "The mobility plan for Brussels will make the city a good deal more pleasant for residents, visitors and businesses," he said.

Port expands into two more districts

Two tiny neighbourhoods of Beveren, Ouden Doel and Rapenburg, with a total of 57 inhabitants, will disappear within seven years to make way for the extension of the Port of Antwerp, the government of Flanders decided last week. The decision forms part of the government's plan to create a development zone on the left bank of the Scheldt of about 1,000 hectares to allow for the expansion of the port, described by minister-president Kris Peeters as "the motor of the Flemish economy".

The decision was criticised as "a complete waste of money" by the Flemish green party Groen and was condemned by the community group Doel 2020, which has been active for several years in protesting a similar decision affecting the town of Doel. Like Ouden Doel and Rapenburg, Doel was a part of the municipality of Beveren in East Flanders. Doel is still being occupied by a handful of local and imported protestors and engaged in a battle in the courts.

Beveren mayor and Flemish member of parliament Marc Van de Vijver said he was "terribly disappointed" at the decision, which he said was a result of "pressure from the Antwerp port lobby".

Flemish planning minister Philippe Muyters acknowledged that "most of the people who live there want to stay. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, that is no longer an option." The government has promised a social support plan for residents and for farmers whose land in the area will be

Hof van Cleve tumbles down Restaurant list

Flanders' top chef, Peter Goossens of Hof Van Cleve in Kruishoutem, saw his international reputation take a tumble last week when *Restaurant* magazine's much-anticipated annual list of the world's 50 top restaurants was announced. Hof van Cleve, holder of three Michelin stars and a score of 19.5/20 from Gault-Millau, dropped from 15th place to number 42. The decline of 27 places is by far the biggest drop on the list of any restaurant this year. Goossens has been out of the public eye for some months now, reportedly suffering a burn-out brought on by his many media activities. The British *Restaurant* magazine did not respond to requests asking for an explanation for Hof van Cleve's loss of rank.

The list goes on from its top 50 to a less-publicised 100 names. Bruges' restaurant De Karmeliet of chef Geert Van Hecke slipped out of the top 100 this year, but chef Kobe Desramaults' In De Wulf in Dranouter, West Flanders, found a place on the list for the first time, at number 92.

The list was topped for the third year in a row by Noma in Copenhagen. Yannick Van Aeken, the sous-chef at Noma who was born in Antwerp province, announced that he will soon open his own restaurant either in his native Kempen area or in the city of Antwerp. After graduating from Ter Duinen hotel school in Koksijde (former students also include Goossens and Van Hecke), Van Aeken headed for the Basque country before turning north to Denmark. When he arrived at Noma, the restaurant was 35th in the world.



Chef Kobe Desramaults has premiered at 92 on *Restaurant* magazine's new list

► www.theworlds50best.com

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

191,395

unemployed people in Flanders, an increase of 3,568 over the same period last year

€15,000

a year to attend a new school in Antwerp for gifted children, the first in the country. Successful candidates need to have an IQ of at least 130

50,000

people visited last weekend's Irisfeest in Brussels. The celebrations, organised by the capital's tourist agency, included free concerts and other entertainment on traffic-free streets

400

participants signed up for Brussels' third Bike Experience campaign – twice as many as previous editions. The campaign pairs experienced cyclists with those wanting to start cycling in the capital

2,500 m²

minimum needed for a new Diamond Museum in Antwerp, according to the director of the current museum, which was forced to close because of renovations to the Elisabeth Hall, where it was housed. There is no immediate plan for the museum to re-open elsewhere

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Moustaches not obligatory

In the "social elections", held in all large companies these days, employees decide who will represent them in talks with their employers. The elections, organised every four years, are part ritual, part direct democracy. They illustrate how the Belgian consensus model works: Unions and employer's organisations are part of the system, rather than opponents, resulting in "social peace".

There are many issues at stake for the upcoming years. How will, for instance, the new rules on retirement work in practice? Will the differences in employment contracts between blue and white collar workers be eradicated? And in times of crisis, classic themes such as job security and purchasing power are more relevant than ever.

Social elections do not generally make for a hard-fought battle. The only campaign that stood out were posters stating "moustaches not obligatory" – calling for more female candidates. The three national unions, the Christian ACV, the socialist ABVV and the liberal ACLVB, do not confront each other directly, as they differ in style rather than points of view. ACV believes more in dialogue, ABVV is more militant, while ACLVB presents itself as an alternative to the other two. Once the elections are over, the three of them regroup into what is known as the common union front.

Unions remain real strongholds in Flanders, but there is a shift in their popularity. While blue collar workers still firmly believe in a common stance, more and more white collars shrug at the idea, preferring individual remuneration talks, with a company car or attractive retirement plan at stake, rather than employment or a wage packet in itself.

Unions have been getting bad press, too: increasingly, they are seen as defenders of the status-quo, holding back rather than contributing to economic prosperity. Many people, not in the least commuters confronted with yet another train strike, believe that they have lost touch with reality.

Particularly damaging in this respect was the news about Rudy De Leeuw, the unbending president of the socialist ABVV. That union has for years opposed the notional interest deduction: a tax system that attracts foreign investments, but also results in companies paying little or no tax at all. Recently, it was revealed that De Leeuw himself had used the very system he attacks, with a small company that manages an inheritance.

Whatever the results of the social elections may be, De Leeuw will not be one of its winners.

Towers of babel

The question of learning Dutch is back on the table, as the Brussels periphery becomes ever more internationalised

Anja Otte

Are you an expat living in the Flemish periphery around Brussels? Then this article is about you. In general, you have a positive attitude towards Dutch. But you'd rather not be forced to learn it. The municipalities of Flemish Brabant that circle Brussels, known collectively as *de Rand* (the periphery), are becoming more international every day. They are home to people from no fewer than 114 countries. Four out of every 10 children under the age of 11 in *de Rand* have foreign roots; more than one-quarter of all pupils speak no Dutch at home. These are just some of the numbers presented at a recent colloquium on the internationalisation of the periphery. This internationalisation is caused by two major movements: People moving in from abroad to work in the European institutions or one of the many large companies in and around Brussels, and people moving out of the capital. It is also very diverse: While the so-called facility communes attract many French speakers, the area to the south of Brussels sees many northern and western Europeans moving in, often attracted by the international school there. Southern Europeans, Moroccans, Turks and eastern Europeans dominate to the northeast of Brussels.

English, please

"Many of these people see no difference between Brussels and the periphery," says Rudi Janssens of the Brussels Free University (VUB) research institute Brio. There is a difference, though: Brussels is officially bilingual, but, as the periphery is in the Flemish region, its



An aerial view of Wemmel, a popular commune in the Brussels periphery for international expats

official language is Dutch – no matter how many languages its inhabitants may speak.

Janssens has studied the attitudes of the traditional expats – the wealthier sector of *de Rand's* new inhabitants – extensively. "These attitudes hardly differ from those of the expats in Brussels. The main difference is that in the capital, expats tend to use French in the public sphere, while in Flanders this is mostly English. Many of them appreciate the fact that they can use English here."

So where does that leave Dutch? "Most expats have a positive attitude towards Dutch," says Janssens. "They believe it is important to speak the language of the area where they live.

People who take Dutch courses do so of their own free will, not because they need Dutch for work or because the government asks them to."

The distinguishing factor as to whether an expat will learn Dutch, he says, "is the length of time they have been living here or think they will stay. With the exception of the older generation, people who have been here for more than five years tend to be the most likely to learn Dutch." Does this help them blend in to their cities? Janssens has his doubts. "People who know Dutch will attend cultural events more often, but the reality is that most expats do not *need* Dutch to get around. They often meet up with people who speak their own

language or use English or French. In fact, they are not all that different from the Flemish in that: They keep to themselves."

Competing languages

At the Leuven colloquium, Geert Bourgeois, Flemish minister for integration and for the *Rand*, stressed the government of Flanders' intention to preserve and even strengthen the Dutch-speaking character of the periphery. "This is just as obvious as it would be for Paris and Berlin to assume that the presence of a foreign population will not detract from their French and German character respectively," he stated. "Our starting point is mutual understanding, which

begins by comprehending each other. The easiest way to do this is with Dutch as a *lingua franca*. But we must admit that it is darned hard to compete with languages that are more international, such as French and English."

Interestingly, when Janssens did find negative attitudes towards Dutch, it was in response to official attempts to impose its use. The *wooncode*, for instance, which asks a commitment from tenants of social housing to learn Dutch, has not been well received, and neither have signs at the town hall indicating that only Dutch is spoken.

"Expats find information on measures like these mostly from the French-speaking press, which reports on them in a negative light," says Janssens. "Also, many of these people have learned English so they could function in an international environment. They see no reason to learn Dutch, too, especially because the European Union has different rules on language use. Many of them live here only temporarily."

Except for the communes with facilities for French speakers, Dutch is still the language to use in any official contacts, but Janssens found that there is a way around that. "Many expats say they use English at their communes. Strictly speaking, civil servants are only allowed to use Dutch, but most of them speak other languages if they need to. It is a public service, after all. Somehow, they always find a middle ground." And that *plantrekkerij*, or making things work, makes the expats more Flemish than they would ever have imagined.

Antwerp hosts first Diamond Academy

Virgin's Richard Branson launches new online diamond trade at event

Marc Maes

Last Sunday, the Antwerp World Diamond Centre (AWDC) hosted the first Antwerp Diamond Academy. The academy was part of the day of entrepreneurial talks co-sponsored by Flanders DC and featuring British billionaire and Virgin Group founder Richard Branson, who launched a new electronic trading platform for the diamond industry. With the Antwerp Diamond Academy, AWDC wants to provide expertise and tools to local diamond companies to help strengthen their position globally. The academy is one of the key issues in the Antwerp Diamond Master Plan, presented earlier this year.

The academy master classes and seminars took place at the city's Stadsschouwburg and dealt with topics such as a paperless desk,

diamond traders on the road, social media, web sales and ICT security. More than 150 representatives of Antwerp diamond companies attended one or more of the six classes.

With Virgin founder Branson as guest of honour, AWDC ensured both public and media attention for the academy and the launch of Diamdax, the world's first online diamond exchange, offering a continuous flow of auctions for buyers and sellers to trade in a variety of polished diamond categories, based on real-time market prices.

"Every industry has to move with the times," said Branson. "Today the Antwerp diamond industry is making the announcement that they will use the internet for trade. I think some of the diamond industry companies don't like that; they feel the business

should be very personal, and the internet is not personal at all. The positive thing is that the diamond industry realises that they have to ensure their credibility is kept intact and pure – like diamonds. If you can create products that are exceptional and don't take people for a ride, business will always succeed."

According to the AWDC, the Diamdax online platform is a more efficient way of doing business and will attract new financing channels for the capital-intensive industry. Some 2,000 people attended the panel discussion with Richard Branson on innovative entrepreneurship. In addition to diamond industry professionals, the audience was a mix of business owners, students and other Branson fans. "They all came to hear Richard Branson talk about his recipe for success, about

corporate social responsibility, innovative entrepreneurship and how to improve life on the planet," said Karen Rentmeesters of AWDC. The AWDC will host more academies

in the future, some for diamond industry delegates only and some, like this one, open to the public.

► www.diamdax.com



Local TV presenter Marlene de Wouters talks with Sir Richard Branson at last Sunday's event

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS

Air

► Abelag

Flemish private aircraft operator Abelag has won a four-year, €12 million contract to supply flight services to the European Commission.

Air

► Germanwings

The low-cost airline, an affiliate of flag-carrier Lufthansa, will launch a daily flight between its Stuttgart hub and Brussels Airport next month.

Banking

► Citibank

The sale of Citibank's local retail banking and credit cards operations to the French Credit Mutuel Nord Europe (CMNE) was finalised on 30 April. The local affiliate of CMNE, the BKCP bank, will integrate and rebrand the 194 Citibank branches, 700 employees and 500,000 clients over the next 12 months.

Banking

► UBI

Mumbai-based Union Bank of India will open a subsidiary in Antwerp to participate in the growing diamond trade between the two cities. Three other Indian financial institutions already operate in Antwerp, the State Bank of India, the ICICI bank and the Bank of India. Diamond exports from Antwerp to Indian clients reached €6.4 billion last year.

Construction

► BNP Fortis

The 95,000 square-metre BNP Fortis bank headquarters on Warandeborg in Brussels will be redeveloped between 2015 and 2020 to increase usable space by up to 70% for some 4,500 employees. The bank has about 15,000 staff in Brussels, spread out over 600,000 square metres of office space throughout the city.

Energy

► BRC

The BRC oil refinery, located in the Port of Antwerp, restarted its operations this week after closing due to the bankruptcy of its Swiss parent company Petroplus. The refinery has been acquired by the Russian Gunvor oil trading group.

Energy

► Electrawinds

Ostend-based green energy producer Electrawinds, operator of 27 wind farms, is to merge with the European Cleantech investment fund, quoted on the Frankfurt stock market, to help finance its development. The move will allow the company to raise some €95 million and paves the way for a Brussels stock market quotation in June.

Policy helps get new products to market

Report reveals both strengths and weaknesses in Flanders' innovation policy

Alan Hope

Flemish businesses that receive government support for innovation are exceptionally successful in bringing new products to market as a result, according to a new report on Flemish innovation policy delivered last week to innovation and government investment minister Ingrid Lieten. The report was compiled by a group of experts under the chairmanship of Luc Soete (*pictured*), a Flemish economist and professor of economic relations at Maastricht University. The report was commissioned by Lieten as a chance for the government to review its policy five years after Soete's first report.

One of the most important points made in the document is that companies making use of the various forms of support for innovation manage in seven out of 10 cases to turn ideas into profit by bringing successful new products to market. However, the report warns, the support structure is too fragmented, involves too much duplication of effort and seems unable to reach

small businesses in particular, which could greatly profit from its help. Soete's first report in 2007 made 19 recommendations, and three were considered priorities: make it less complicated to obtain support; open up innovation policy to an international view; and find a way of targeting smaller businesses. Those three goals have not yet been reached.

The Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and the nanotechnology centre imec in Leuven are given as prime exemplars of the intersection of academic research, market innovation and government subsidy. At the same time, industry in Flanders is suffering a chronic shortage of skilled technical staff, a situation partly created by the large demand from business.

Among the other recommendations included in the new report are:

- gather innovation policy and economic policy together under the responsibility of one minister (currently that is divided between Lieten and Kris Peeters)

- make Flemish support instruments complementary to those coming from the EU

- introduce better support for all academic levels, as well as technical workers, to improve their mobility within the system and between systems

- carry out a fundamental review of policy priorities in order to reduce the fragmentation and overlaps

- include a sunset clause in each existing and new initiative so that ineffective structures do not go on existing from inertia alone

- while the fundamental review of existing procedures is going on, implement a 20% cut in their budgets to free up money for new projects

Lieten welcomed the report's suggestions to combat the reluctance of small businesses to innovate – what she described as a “head in the sand” policy. “It's not easy to find a way through the many financing programmes,” she continued. “It's clear that not all small businesses have the same needs. Companies who are more



at home with innovation could be better helped with account management. A second group finds its way to support, but buckles under the administrative load. Then there is a third and very important group of small businesses who remain to be convinced that innovation is important. That's going to take a change of mentality.”

Eandis must cut dividends, orders minister

Flemish energy distributor Eandis has been told to cut back on advertising and hospitality spending rather than impose a price increase on customers once the federal price freeze is lifted at the end of the year. Speaking in the Flemish parliament last week, energy minister Freya Van den Bossche warned she would take steps to prevent such an increase.

Eandis is an energy network company that operates in 234 Flemish municipalities, or 80% of the region. It is 79% owned by the municipalities themselves, with the remaining 21% owned by Electrabel – a share that Electrabel will divest by 2018, according to a Flemish government decree.

In 2015, Eandis will become the responsibility of the Flemish government. Van den Bossche also criticised the return of 6-7% on investment paid by Eandis to its shareholders, for what she said is a virtually risk-free investment. Eandis paid out a total of €169 million in dividends in 2011, while its smaller counterpart Infrax

paid €89.7 million. That, according to Van den Bossche, represents money taken from Flemish customers and paid into the municipal coffers. The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) nuanced the figures, pointing out that the dividends represent to customers 3.3% of their electricity bill and 4.5% of the gas bill. By contrast, VAT on energy bills, which goes to the government, amounts to 18.3% and 18.7% of the bills respectively. Eandis made a turnover last year of €1.3 billion, and a spokesman said publicity and hospitality – Eandis sponsors the Waregem Koerse, a series of horse races, and regularly books business seats at events such as football matches – amounts to €1.2 million, or one-thousandth of the company's total income. Almost the same amount, €1 million, is spent on the magazine provided three times a year to customers across Flanders. The company's costs, the spokesman said, had all been inspected by the energy regulator and approved.



Hackers commit virtual hold-up

Clients of the financial institution Elantis, a subsidiary of Belfius bank, have been warned to change their online passwords after a group of computer hackers last week obtained customer data and threatened to make it public unless Elantis paid €150,000 in ransom, or an “idiot tax” as they put it. Hackers said that the stolen data includes serial numbers of client identity cards and salary information. The group has not identified itself, but one expert last week said that the incident is unlikely to be unique. Companies that deal with confidential data are very quiet about hacking incidents, he said. Police are investigating the Elantis case. When last week's Friday deadline for payment of the ransom passed without incident, the group surfaced again, to lower its demand to €35,000.



Flemish climate fund set up

The Flemish government has approved a Climate Fund to finance “an ambitious long-term climate policy,” environment minister Joke Schauvliege said. The fund will be financed

by the auction of EU emissions certificates for the period 2008-2012, held in reserve by the government for new businesses but never used because of the slowdown in economic activity.

One of the first targets for the new Fund will be Schauvliege's Climate Plan for 2013-2020, which she is due to present to her colleagues later this year and which will include a number of measures to combat climate change in the fields of energy, mobility, agriculture and industry.



The life-saving plaster

Researchers in Leuven have come up with a heart patch that could have a big impact on athletes

Senne Starckx

Remember those nose strips that footballers started wearing 15 years ago? It was said that they improved players' breathing and thus their performance on the pitch. Today, those nose strips have disappeared. But underneath the football shirt, the strip could be about to make a discreet comeback. Only now its purpose wouldn't be to improve the player's performance, but to help him survive the match. Leuven-based nanotech research centre imec recently introduced its innovative ECG plaster, or "heart strip". Recent events suggest that athletes might be interested in wearing one during training and matches.

Saturday, 14 April was a black day for Italian football. In the 31st minute of the match between Pescara and Livorno in Italy's second division, midfielder Piermario Morosini of Livorno suddenly collapsed. The referee stopped the game, and medical staff used defibrillators to restart Morosini's heart, without success. The official cause of death: heart failure. Morosini was 25. Before he collapsed, nothing had indicated that he might carry a rare type of heart disease.

Morosini is just the latest in a series of professional footballers who have died suddenly on the pitch, in front of thousands of fans and hundreds of thousands of TV viewers. In 2003, Cameroon international Marc-Vivien Foé collapsed during a game against Colombia and later died, and, in 2004, Hungarian Miklós Fehér died while playing for Portuguese club Benfica.

In March this year, Bolton Wanderers midfielder Fabrice Muamba was technically dead for 78 minutes after he collapsed during an English Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur. Muamba survived, but it's still unclear if he will ever play again.



Imec's new ECG patch measures heart activity and alerts doctors if an athlete's heart rate becomes irregular

When heart problems go undetected

Italy is one of the few countries with mandatory cardiac screenings for young people engaged in organised sports. Since the screenings were introduced 30 years ago, the incidence of sudden cardiac death in the country's population of young people fell by an astonishing 90%. Sadly for Piermario Morosini, his heart disease slipped through the net.

Of course, sudden cardiac arrest is not only a threat for international stars. In January, a youth player at Flemish club SC Merksem

collapsed on the pitch, also due to heart failure. He survived but is still recovering. In the same period, a 15-year-old Flemish basketball player collapsed and died during training. Now the Royal Belgian Football Association has decided to make cardiac screening mandatory for its youth members – about 400,000 people.

It's a lottery, of course, and it's thought that only one in 20,000 people have a detectable increased risk of sudden cardiac arrest. But if a promising footballer has a problem flagged up during cardiac screening, should he just hang up his boots and look for another, less

strenuous pastime?

Not necessarily, if someone keeps a close eye on his heart activity during training and matches. That someone could even be a device. Imec's newest invention: a lightweight adhesive strip that measures heart activity continuously. The ECG plaster is attached to the player's chest and transmits an electrocardiogram (ECG) to a receiver – that can be a smartphone or a computer monitored by a doctor or emergency services. In case of heart-rate disturbances, the receiver is warned immediately.

Constant vigilance is key

Does that mean guaranteed protection for the person who wears it? It's hard to say, but the fact is that in most cases, sudden cardiac arrest is preceded by a much weaker disruption of the heart function – which goes unnoticed by the victim but not by the heart strip.

The big difference between regular heart monitoring systems and imec's heart strip is its comfort. Because it's small and lightweight, the wearer won't be hindered in his movements. The strip has a 3D speed monitor to precisely measure when the player is walking, jogging or sprinting, and, thanks to Bluetooth technology, no wire is needed to connect it to a battery or antenna. There's one more advantage: It consumes little energy, so its battery can run for a week without changing or recharging. For Piermario Morosini, imec's patch could have been a life-saver. Morosini's heart disease – it's still unknown which disease it was – wasn't detected in the Italian screening programme. So maybe, just like the nose strip 15 years ago, it's a good idea that as many football players as possible start wearing imec's heart strip on their chests.

► www.imec.be

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The Flemish minister for innovation and government investment, Ingrid Lieten, has signed a **new agreement with the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB)**. The allocation for the VIB will be raised by 10% for the period 2012 to 2016, to a total of €43.8 million per year. Lieten said that the VIB provides essential scientific solutions to issues such as qualitative care and the ageing population. She also laid the first stone of the second bio accelerator, a 6,000 square-metre service centre for the growing Flemish biotech sector.

The Provincial University College Limburg, the University of Hasselt, the Catholic University College Limburg and Group T University College Leuven **have developed three educational computer games for secondary education** via the project GameHub. In *Unizo*, the game created with Unizo, the Flemish organisation for the self-employed, children learn to manage businesses such as an ice-cream parlour. *New Belgica* takes students on the legendary 19th-century expedition of Belgian polar explorer Adrien de Gerlache to Antarctica. The puppet theatre training centre Het Firmament in Mechelen helped with the game of the same name based on the world of marionettes and other dolls.

► www.gamehub.be/games

Flemish students looking for internships in the north of France **can find interested companies on the new website of the European project KESS** (Knowledge centre to Enterprise Services through Students). For the initiative, the University Colleges Ghent and West Flanders collaborated with the West and East Flemish branches of chamber of commerce Voka and the French schools Groupe Sup de Co Amiens and Université de Technologie de Compiègne.

► www.kessproject.eu

Figures from the Flemish Interuniversity Council show that only 11 of the 2,221 lecturers at Flemish universities **are of non-western descent**. The rector of Ghent University, Paul Van Cauwenberge, pointed out that this was the result of the low number of non-western students. More information sessions and open class weeks should improve the situation in the next two generations.

► www.vlir.be

In his doctoral thesis, researcher Joris Soons of the University of Antwerp analysed for the first time the **mechanical importance of the beaks of Darwin's finches**. This bird species was discovered by the founder of the modern theory of evolution and played an important role in his famous *The Origin of Species*. Soons found, for example, that the shape of beaks of birds that eat hard nuts are much sturdier than those of insect-eaters. His research helps to explain the natural selection in the evolution of Darwin's finches. **AF**

Q&A



How did you win the title of biggest technology talent in Flanders?

After a qualifying round with a questionnaire about different technical and scientific subjects,

Axel Vlamincx, 18, won the second Flemish Technology Olympiad, a scientific competition held every spring for students in the third year of secondary education

I was one of the 44 out of 1,251 students who reached the final. In the final, we were given a technology exam and four practical engineering projects in informatics, electronics, chemistry and mechanics. The practical tasks definitely suited me best; experimenting with electronics and mechanics is my strong point.

Have you always been an inventor?

Yes, although my family and friends more often call me an absent-minded professor! When I was little, I spent a lot of time playing with basic electronics boxes – lighting little lamps with switches, for example. More recently, I put together my own 3-D printer with

a do-it-yourself kit. I have now finished building a quadcopter, a remote-controlled helicopter. The quadcopter is my final work for school, but it feels more like a hobby than an assignment to me.

You're studying at the Free Technical Institute Sint-Laurentius in Lokeren. Was it an easy choice?

Technical education was an obvious choice to me because I looked forward to experimenting with technology. But I have noticed that many people underestimate the education level in technical schools, probably because they have never been in contact with the

construction side of technology. The fact that two other students from my school finished in the top 20 of the Technology Olympiad proves that Sint-Laurentius has a high standard.

What will you study in college?

I am fairly certain that I will take on engineering studies. That education should prepare me for my dream career in the development of new products, preferably in the field of electronics or electronic mechanics.

Interview by Andy Furniere

► www.technologieolympiade.be

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Tall tales

Traditional giant processions are as big as ever in Flanders

Toon Lambrechts

One of the most spectacular traditions in Flanders is the giants parade, when huge figures of papier-mâché and wood are carried through the streets and sometimes dance or perform a play. It's an old tradition, but also one that is still very much alive today.

The origin of the *reuzenommegang*, or giant procession, lies somewhere in the late 15th century. The huge figures emerged in the spring and were carried around in celebrations for months all across Europe. The first giants were inspired by characters from the Bible, but later their religious significance decreased. That development was not well received by the Catholic church, which branded the parades as pagan. The French reign at the end of the 18th and early 19th century was also hostile to the giants and destroyed many of them. In most of Europe, the giant tradition has not survived,

but it has in Flanders, as well as in the rest of Belgium, northern France and Spain. It was in the 1950s that the tradition was revived, but never before have there been as many giant processions as there are today. Each month, a new giant is born somewhere in Flanders. And they are indeed "born", because a giant's life looks like ours: They are born and baptised, they marry and have children. And all these events should be celebrated. Several giants are based on historical or famous local figures. The oldest in particular carry many traditions with them and are often managed by *reuzengildes*, or giant guilds. Some giants may not leave their city, while others tour around the whole of Flanders.

Giants are family

One of the many Flemish giant guilds is the Reuzengroep Debbauts from Evergem, near Ghent. Ronny Van Den Bossche has been a "carrier" for nine years. He talks about the giants of his guild as if they were his family. "The oldest two giants, Dokus and Isabella, are originally from the Muide, a neighbourhood near the port of Ghent. In 1936, the founder of our guild, August Debbaut, bought them from a group

over there. The two giants married in 1949 and, a year later, two children were born, James and Jacobina. These also have a grandchild, David. Then there are the servants Slisse and Cesarine and the flower sellers Sabbas and Pierken. That makes eight giants and a giant child." The Reuzengroep Debbauts take part in perhaps four parades each year. Sometimes they even go abroad, to northern France, for example. "Going out with our giants is quite a happening," smiles Van Den Bossche. "You can imagine, to transport eight giants, you need a truck. It is also really a folk affair. We in the Reuzengroep Debbauts are all working people who like to take a trip together and appreciate a pint of beer. *Reuzenommegangen* are a folk tradition *par excellence*." Isn't it heavy, a giant on your shoulders? The largest specimens weigh about 50 kilos. "As long as there is no wind, there's no problem," laughs Van Den Bossche. "The skeleton of the giant, which is made of reed, is balanced so the weight is right on the shoulders." The biggest giants need two carriers to switch now and then and to assist each other along the march.

A folk dance from the past

"You see very little under the skirts of the giant," Van Den Bossche continues. "And we do not simply walk; occasionally we make our giants dance in rounds and in pairs opposite each other, a kind of folk dance from the past. Sometimes we surprise the audience by bending towards them a little. The reactions of the people, that's really fun. Children and old people can be really astonished sometimes when they see our giants. That's why I do this in the first place."

The birth of a giant demands a lot of work. Usually, the local associations build their own. Traditionally, the skeleton is made out of reed or willow branches, but now aluminium and Styrofoam are also used. Another option is to contact Lieve Lieckens, one of Flanders' few giant-builders.

"It is certainly not easy" to build a giant, says Lieckens. "Each figure takes a few weeks of work." She is a basket weaver by profession, and most techniques used in

building giants come from the weaving craft. "In the beginning, it took a lot of research because there was nobody left to learn the techniques from. But now I have built maybe 40 giants. And every giant is different. *Reuzengildes* come up with their own plans or sometimes they ask to copy old giants."

Part of something big

How many giants there are exactly in Flanders, nobody knows. But their number is estimated to be as high as 1,500. Volkskunde Vlaanderen, an association that works around contemporary traditions, started a project to map Flemish giants. Their aim is for *reuzengildes* to put their giants on a website and

create an interactive database. "We want to work from the bottom up," says Laure Messiaen, who co-coordinates the project, called Rond de Rokken van de Reus (Around the Skirts of the Giant). "Processions with giants are an important heritage, but also a living tradition. We hope to preserve that tradition, but not as a relic of the past. Our project should make clear that the giant really lives in Flanders. In addition to an inventory database, the project is also a way to put the various *reuzengildes* into contact with each other and make them aware that they are part of a broader tradition."

► www.volkskunde-vlaanderen.be

THE RECORD-BREAKERS



Giants are, by definition, large. However, there can be only one winner when it comes to being the largest, and that honour is reserved for Jan Turpijn II of Nieuwpoort. Turpijn is a stunning 10.4 metres tall and weighs about 750 kilograms. This makes him not only the biggest giant in Flanders but also in Europe. Twenty-four carriers are needed for him to be put in motion (*pictured*). But not all giants are necessarily large. Since the 18th century, Borgerhout has had a family of little "giants", barely larger than a human.

Where the oldest giant lives is less clear. The tradition began in the late 15th century, and both Ros Beiaard of Dendermonde and Gouyasse of Ath in Wallonia date from that period. The oldest giant family, however, definitely comes from Mechelen. The Giant of Mechelen dates from 1492, his wife Giantess from 1549, Grandfather from 1600 and the children, Janneke, Mieke and Claesje, from 1618. The city that lays claim to having the most giants is Turnhout: Its guild has 31 giants.

A GIANT AGENDA

There are several giant parades every month in Flanders throughout the summer. Here's a selection of upcoming events

- 13 May** Deinze (Canteclae, Roede and others)
Ypres (Goliath, Cieper and Minneke Poes)
Tielrode (Den Toeter and others)
- 20 May** Blankenberge (Korno, Collette and others)
- 3 June** Meulebeke (Catelina, Jules-Oscar and others)
- 17 June** Anderlecht (Erasmus, Onulphe and others)
- 24 June** Koksijde (Kos, Stiene and others)



Uncle Octaaf of Lochristi, East Flanders, represents the horticulture sector. He was "born" in 2002 and is the project of local neighbourhood committee 't Kasseitje



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“Music is our life”

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Antwerp band Internationals burst into song for the first time

Christophe Verbiest

Starting out as a ska group but quickly embracing other ardent musical genres like calypso and afrobeat, the Antwerp band Internationals gloried, during the previous decade, in a strong live reputation. But after the 2006 album *Wonders of the World*, they faded from the public eye. Six years later, they're finally back, with a third album. *Mousetrap* marks the start of the second chapter in the band's history: Not only has their producer Marc Tee joined the band as a guitarist, they've added a singer in the form of Lize Accoe, who used to front Delavega and who released the solo album *Me, Versatile Me* in 2010. “Making instrumental music has never been a choice,” explains drummer Lieven Declercq. “We were always looking for someone to sing. We collaborated with a lot of people, but we never found the right one.” He calls Accoe “the perfect match”. She sings “very intuitively, without trying to sound American or Jamaican. She has a very soulful voice, warm and with loads of power. That's necessary, if you look at the band: We have three brass players, two guitarists, a bass player, a pianist and a drummer. You can't add a vulnerable voice to that mix.” The band has had to adapt their music, in fact, to allow for even a strong voice. “When making instrumental music, we tended to fill up the place of the voice,” explains Declercq. “Now the players have to leave room for it. Moreover, it's important to listen very carefully to the lyrics and adapt the arrangements to them.”

Between two stools

Five of the 11 songs on *Mousetrap* are still instrumental. Strikingly, the six songs with Accoe are the first six on the album. “We spent a considerable amount of time discussing the running order of the album,” Declercq says with a smile. “Placing the vocal songs at the start of the album is a statement. We're proud of them.” Adding a voice is also a way, Declercq admits, of “reaching out to a broader audience. We can't complain about the lack of attention for our music in the past 10 years, but instrumental music is a bit less accessible. So we put the more accessible songs at the front.” With Accoe on board, the Internationals sound more and more like a soul ensemble. It seems quite a stretch from their ska origins, but it isn't, according to Declercq. “The Jamaican music has been fed by Afro-American genres like soul and rhythm & blues. We drink from both sources.” Isn't there a danger of falling between two stools? “There is, and indeed we do!” he says. “For hardcore ska fans, we're too weird, and for a pop or soul audience, we sound too Jamaican.” They never perceived that as a handicap, though. “It's a relief not to belong to a specific niche. The benefit of it was being asked to play Pukkelpop, Feest in het Park or other big rock festivals.” Despite their name, the Internationals mainly play in the Benelux. “We toured twice in South Africa, in Spain and France. But all of us have jobs which makes

it a logistical hell to set up tours.” They can't live from the band, but Declercq, who works at the Antwerp music centre Trix, notes that “the professional activities of the different members are music-

related. And we all play in other bands, too. So, we *do* live from our music. I'd even say: Music is our life.”

► www.internationals.be



Internationals play the Ancienne Belgique in Brussels on 19 May

You have until 15 May to vote for your favourite entry in **Tourism Flanders' Festival Express Contest**. International entrants have the chance to win two tickets to more than 100 summer festivals in Flanders, a groovy van to drive around in, free wi-fi, €5,000 spending money and all the fries they can eat. Those who entered had to submit their favourite road trip or music fest photo and a statement as to why they deserve to win. Ten finalists will be whittled down via public vote and then have to submit videos to a jury showcasing their rock'n'roll personalities. Vote via the Facebook page by searching for “Flanders is a festival”.

The VijfTV reality show *Astrid in Wonderland*, which follows the exploits of Flemish model-turned-Hollywood wife Astrid Bryan, has been renewed for a third season. Season two runs until 8 June, and season three will begin sometime in September. Approximately 250,000 people a week tune in to watch *Astrid*.

► www.vijftv.be

Tickets are now on sale for the 12th edition of the **World Soundtrack Awards** in Ghent on 20 October. The awards are part of the Flanders International Film Festival. Guests at the ceremony this year include James Newton Howard, composer of *The Hunger Games*, *The Sixth Sense* and *The Fugitive*, and Pino Donaggio (*Carrie*, *Don't Look Now*, *The Howling*), who will receive a Lifetime Achievement Award.

► www.worldsoundtrackacademy.com

“We know that it goes along with it...but it's certainly tiresome,” was co-organiser Jan Moeyaert's response to the first act of **vandalism against an artwork in Beaufort04**, the outdoor art parcours of mostly monumental works along the Belgian coast. Vandals sprayed graffiti on the side of “Many Dreams”, the sculpture by Martine Feipel and Jean Beschameil of a holiday bus with luggage on top that sits on the sand in Blankenberge. The vandals also jumped on top of the work, denting in the roof.

► www.beaufort04.be

Amsterdam-based author David Pefko has won this year's **Golden Book Owl** (previously the Golden Owl) for his novel *Het voorseizoen* (*The Preseason*), which tells the story of a depressed British police agent who falls in love with a prostitute. “I totally didn't expect this, but of course I deserved it,” joked Pefko, as he accepted the prize in Ghent's Handelsbeurs concert hall last weekend. Pefko was indeed the underdog in the prestigious prize for Dutch-language literature that included nominees Jeroen Brouwers, Stephan Enter, Herman Koch and Dimitri Verhulst.

► www.goudenboekenuil.be

MUSIC REVIEWS

Hooverphonic

Hooverphonic with Orchestra • Sony

Hooverphonic has used orchestral arrangements on most of its albums, but a whole CD with a symphonic orchestra – that's a first. Apart from the single “Happiness” (not the most impressive page in their songbook), there's no new material on *Hooverphonic with Orchestra*. Since it contains mostly hits (“Mad about You”, “The Night Before”), it can be seen as an alternative best of. But they're of course all new versions, and successful ones at that. But you won't be tempted to forget the originals, partly because Noémie Wolfs, who replaced iconic Hooverphonic singer Geike Arnaert in 2010, still has some work to do to allow us forget her predecessor.

► www.hooverphonic.com

Flying Horseman

Twist • Unday

“There's too much love,” Bert Dockx hypnotically repeats in “T.M.L”, the song that opens *Twist*, the second album of his band Flying Horseman. It sets the tone for what's to follow: ominous, eerie, utterly mesmerising music. At times, the Antwerp fivesome lashes out with frenetic songs, but mostly opt for a subdued tension that leads to a feeling of unease, as if they're creating a soundtrack for an impending apocalypse. Weirdly, this dark music has, in the end, a soothing quality. Though some might argue this says more about the reviewer than about the music. Anyway, too much love? Maybe. But there's never enough Flying Horseman.

► www.myspace.com/flyinghorseman

Aroma di Amore

Samizdat • Onderstroom

A quarter of a century after

their last LP, *Aroma di Amore* makes a strong comeback with *Samizdat*. Apparently the band sees itself as an outsider in the Flemish music scene, since the title refers to the act of dispersing censored texts in the Soviet Union. *Samizdat* is no radical change from the band's 1980s sound, and that's OK: Don't fix it if it ain't broke. The trio mixes forbidding, unruly guitars with electronic rhythms (they don't have a



drummer). Elvis Peeters, also a lauded writer, has written some of his most poignant lyrics here.

► www.aromadiamore.be

Fence

Fence • Fons

The Limburg threesome Fence reunited in 2010 after a hiatus of four years, resulting in their fourth, eponymously titled album. You thought they couldn't get more Beatles-esque than they were before? Think again! Not that I care, because the result is beautifully crafted pop songs with celestial harmonies and a slight psychedelic edge. *Fence* is a record that is intriguing right from the start and yet becomes more captivating with every listen. Ooh ooh, summer's here, thanks to Fence.

► www.fence.be



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Going Gregorian

Even hardened cynics have their hearts and minds changed at Watou's international festival

Emma Firmin

Not being religious and having musical ability that manages to make any kind of hummed notes conform to the same tune, it would be fair to say that I wasn't the most likely audience member for the International Gregorian Festival of Watou.

But because of a connection to the organiser that came through a couple of degrees of separation, I found myself listening to voices that would make even cynical doubters consider, if not the existence of angels, at the very least the possibilities of mediation. After then witnessing the camaraderie of the international choirs, who post-performance are not averse to some Gregorian jammin' in the canteen, I was officially converted in my cultural prejudices.

The triennial Gregorian chant festival attracts professional and semi-professional choirs from across the world, as evidenced by the list of participants and the sight of a girls' choir from South Korea bedecked in Miss Kitty outfits waiting in line for the performers' BBQ.

Watou, a district of the city of Poperinge, is situated in West Flanders on the border with France, with all the necessary chequered history of border and beer disputes, both more than tinged with religious wrangles. Not conforming to conventional chocolate-box prettiness, over the years the city has developed credentials as an arts village.

Since the early 1990s, poet Gwy Mandelinck has spearheaded poetry summers that invited local and international artists to respond to the written word, and the event has now evolved into a vibrant three-month visual arts festival. This year sees Flemish artist Koen Vanmechelen (of Cosmopolitan Chicken Project fame) present the monumental *Coming World* among the village landscape.

A global benchmark

For expert and amateur enthusiasts of Gregorian choirs, Watou is no backwater event but a global benchmark in the music's practice. From the festival's beginnings in 1981, when just six national choirs sung to a total audience of about 1,000, the 2012 programme has expanded to 28 ensembles from 18 countries, performing a range of works from the Gregorian repertoire in services and concerts.

Most performances takes place in the Church of Saint Bavo in Watou, but also in eight partner locations in other cities, including Haringe, Koksijde and even over the border in Dunkirk, as well as the Saint Michael & Saint Gudula Cathedral in Brussels.

If your handle on all things Gregorian doesn't extend past film soundtracks for *The Omen* or *The Name of the Rose*, fierce debate at musicology congresses on rhythm might be supplanted by immersion in the music's – scientifically tested

– meditative qualities. But, spiritual or otherwise, what the festival describes as an experience "where emotion surpasses theory" is one that any lover of music sung with passion can recognise.

Chant as Bible lesson

With a tradition that extends back 15 centuries, Gregorian chant is inextricably linked to the history of both the Catholic church and oral and written musical notation. Regional and national variations – of which only the Milanese Ambrosian chant remains officially recognised by the Roman Catholic Church – combined with new manuscripts being discovered has provided scholars with lifetime pursuits of authenticity.

For Bernard Deheegher, organiser of the festival, Gregorian chant can be most simply explained as the unaccompanied sung theology of the bible. Most pieces are taken from psalms and were intended as meditations and explanations of the texts. To call them the pop music of their time would be pushing it, but while its origins may have been in cloisters, the message was intended for a wider public.

Deheegher was born in Watou and started a local Gregorian choir in 1976. As a Catholic, his fascination for the style of music is mutually bound to his faith, but he likens its appeal for non-believers to the constancy of tides: powerful, mystic and eternal. Singing Gregorian



The Leuven-based Psallentes chant group will be on stage in Watou

chants takes commitment, he says. "It's technically very demanding and can't be learned from one day to the next."

This year, the festival expects to attract around 10,000 visitors. Aside from the performances, the programme also includes talks on the development of the Gregorian

repertoire, music inspired by its traditions and improvised compositions. And whatever one might think of the Catholic church's attitude towards women, it's a pleasant note to see that the three Belgian choirs taking part in the 2012 edition are all female. Girl power goes Gregorian.

12-20 MAY

Gregorian Festival of Watou

Sint-Bavo Church Kerkhofstraat, Watou and other cities across Flanders

► www.festivalwatou.be

Mission: Guimarães

Filip Dujardin lends his trademark hyper-reality to the European Capital of Culture

Courtney Davis

Having recently had works purchased by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Filip Dujardin is now also one of four photographers selected for one of the key exhibitions of Guimarães 2012, this year's European Capital of Culture.

For *Photographic Mission: Transgenic*

Landscape, photographers were challenged to interpret the Guimarães area of northern Portugal through the cultural and architectural use of its landscapes, particularly in the light of a polarisation between city and rural populations.

Such an assignment is perfectly suited to the Ghent-based Dujardin, whose

website chronicles his affection for buildings and other man-made structures. In the series *Chimneys*, he went from apartment to apartment in an abandoned building in Ghent that was scheduled for demolition. "Originally they all had the same layout and concept, but over the years, inhabitants customised the rooms to their own tastes, including the chimneys. You could read the personality of the residents by looking at part of the interior."

For the series *Sheds*, Dujardin travelled the Flemish countryside in search of self-made structures, or "architecture not built by architects". These sheds, constructed with leftover materials by farmers, felt honest and familiar. Dujardin, 40, likens his work in photography to farmers putting up sheds in their fields. "It's intuitive. I'm making designs without a preconceived plan." As an architectural photographer, he says, "you have to reproduce, in some ways, the work of others. That means that the subject can come across as less interesting or the context very

confining, so I want to redefine those concerns with digital series. It was very interesting to me that I could really make my *own* images, altering the light, shadow, form. That's where I began to explore the sculptural elements of architecture."

His best-known series, *Fictions*, takes familiar buildings and adds surreal elements until it is difficult to perceive what is real and what is not. "That thin line between making hyper-realist and science fiction photos is where I want to work," he explains. "I'm looking for the balance in reality and abstract – too real to be fictional, too abstract to be real." He employed this same method for the *Photographic Mission* project in Guimarães. Once a centre of textile production, the city and surrounding areas are peppered with abandoned industrial complexes, says Dujardin, "witnesses of a disappearing economy that changed the landscape dramatically."

He went to Portugal twice to take photographs for the exhibition. "Big infrastructural works developed in

the 1980s there – such as toll highways that cross the landscape on viaducts – were supposed to encourage economic activities, but they changed local communication between the villages drastically and are a visually dominant feature in the landscape. These aspects, together with the local architectural heritage of building with stone and my fascination with the natural phenomenon of the rocky landscapes, were an inspiration for this series."

The results are wholly new architectures that still seem to fit into the landscape. "All the images are digitally manipulated to a greater or lesser extent," explains Dujardin. "Some of them are even conceived from scratch. I designed a structure with 3D software and could digitally stick on parts of photos. I took pictures of all kinds of walls, windows, factories, stone rocks and so on. Then I mixed them together and poured it into a new condensed hyper-reality."

► www.filipdujardin.be



"GMRS 08", part of Filip Dujardin's photo series at Guimarães 2012

Restoring one's reputation

Airbag Festival

Alan Hope

The accordion is generally considered a faintly ridiculous instrument, but only by those who look no deeper than polkas in village halls or Scottish country dancing classes in church basements. In reality, the instrument is a key component of many different musical styles, from Celtic folk to zydeco and tango to the hugely popular Balkan sound.

The rehabilitation of the accordion's reputation is one of the goals of the Bruges' biennial Airbag Festival.

One of the highlights of the festival is a concert given by Sergei Grachev, a virtuoso on the bayan, a Russian variant on the accordion, with two sets of buttons instead of keys. Grachev graduated in Antwerp and still teaches in the city and in Brussels, but his music is nonetheless deeply Russian, and he's able to coax sounds from his instrument ranging from solo melancholy flute to a full church organ.

Grachev will be accompanied by Frank Deleu, the city carillon player

for Bruges, performing on the newly restored carillon in the *belfort* tower along with another Russian, Elina Sadina, who studied at the Lemmens Institute in Leuven and now teaches at the Royal Carillon school in Mechelen. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the death of Roger Danneels, whose accordion school helped make Bruges an international centre for the instrument, and the anniversary is being marked by an open competition for players that takes place in the Magic Mirrors *spiegelteent* set up along the Kruisvest canal on the edge of town. Danneels is also the subject of an exhibition in the Biekorf café attached to the Bruges Culture Centre. Headliners from far and wide include a klezmer evening with Kroke from Krakow and the French Arnaud Van Lancker Quartet, who fuse klezmer with everything from *csárdás* to *musette*, the East European stylings of the flamboyant singer and violinist Emilia Kirova and her group Tzigani and the Belgians of Jaune Toujours (they're like the Madness of roots

music) in concert with the Gangbé Brass Band from Benin.

There's also the more romantic music of Altan, a folk group from Ireland featuring fiddles, bouzouki and mandolin as well as a history of working with the likes of Dolly Parton and The Chieftains. They're supported by Sagapool from Montreal (*pictured*), which plays folk with influences of jazz, ska and the French gypsy style known as *manouche* (the group's former name).

Finally, as if to dispel the accordion's naff image once and for all, the instrument is given the accolade of a performance in the high temple of culture in Bruges, the Concertgebouw, of a new oratorio by composer Jan Van Outryve based on *Orlando Furioso*, a Baroque masterpiece by the Italian poet and diplomat Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533). The soloist, returning to the Airbag Festival for the fifth time, is accordionist Anne Niepold, a graduate of the Brussels Conservatory and a previous winner of the Toots Thielemans Award.



11-27 May | Across Bruges | ► www.airbagfestival.be

FESTIVAL

TIK Festival

This international ecological art festival is the culmination of a three-year programme titled "Time Inventors' Kabinet (TIK)", in which three main organisations and more than 40 media artists worked together around one novel concept: experimental art that demonstrates a creative attitude towards the environment. TIK brings together a collection of the works created and ideas explored during this unique collaborative project. Watch a beekeeper help swarming bees find their way out of a maze-like sculpture, marvel at life-like machines and take a guided tour of Brussels' "open greens", unused spaces-turned-urban gardens. Visit the OKNO (an artist-run organisation for art and media technology) Market Place to participate in discussions and a series of free workshops where you can learn how to make hanging gardens or your own solarbot creature. The future of ecology may very well be rooted in technology. **Robyn Boyle**



11-13 May, from 13.00 | OKNO, Brussels | ► www.timeinventorskabinet.org

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Boom (Antwerp province)

Mano Mundo: Free festival featuring music, a world market and a series of workshops centered on culture, ecology and climate

MAY 12-3 at Provinciaal Recreatiedomein De Schorre, Schommelei 1

► www.manomundo.be

Leuven

Vaart Creation Festival: Featuring works and performances by artists between the ages of 15 and 25, including circus acts, photography, slam poetry, film and painting

MAY 10-12 at OPEK, Vaartkom 4

► www.vaartfestival.be

EXHIBITION

Natalia Stanfield: Made In Argentina

Although Natalia Stanfield has been living in Brussels since 2004, all the Argentine artist needed to do with a bout of homesickness was pick up her paintbrush. Clearly inspired by a love for her country, her works are warm and rich reflections of Argentina, its culture and the people. An old couple, still in love, embrace in dance, Mercedes Sosa appears to belt out an Argentine folk song, and the famous tango composer Astor Piazzolla squeezes his *bandoneón*. Stanfield's portraits and scenes, mostly acrylics, represent her love for Argentina, but also for its musical history and the intense emotion it provokes. **RB**



Until 20 May | Art Base, Brussels | ► www.art-base.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Ghent

Between the Lines: Group show of photography and film on the third gender, with works by French photographer Tiane Doan Na Champassak and local photographers Max Pinckers, Quinten De Bruyn and Marc De Clercq. Indian dance performance by Laura Neyskens on opening night

MAY 12 - JUN 10 at CROXHAPOX, Lucas Munichstraat 76/82

► www.croxhapox.org

TRACK: First of a planned annual summer art parcours with more than 30 works by international artists staged in dialogue with public places across the city. One of the five major arts events that make up Visual Arts Flanders 2012

MAY 12 - SEP 9 across Ghent

► www.track.be

Kruishoutem

Jiri Sliva: Works by the international prize-winning cartoonist/illustrator from Prague, known for his humour and play on words

Until JUN 24 at Europees Cartoon Centrum, Brugstraat

► www.ecc-kruishoutem.be

PARADE

Kattenstoet

Ypres is most often associated with the battles of the First World War, but did you know it is also the “cat city”? Since cats were thrown from the tower of the town hall in Mediaeval times as a way to ward off demons, the city has known an eternal connection to felines. The Kattenstoet, or Cat Parade, is a way for locals to keep the tradition alive, thankfully not by throwing real cats but by dressing up like them and parading through town. It was originally a way for the population to get back to a feeling of unity and celebration following the traumas of war. This 43rd edition is a folkloric fun fair filled with intricate costumes, flag swaying, music, a symbolic tossing of toy cats from the belfry tower and a witches’ procession later in the evening. **RB**



13 May from 11.00, parade starts at 15.00 | Grote Markt, Ypres | www.kattenstoet.be

MORE PARADES
THIS WEEK

Brussels

Belgian Pride: Annual gay pride parade and festival that brings 50,000 to the centre of the capital. This year’s theme is Visible Citizens, with an emphasis on convincing the queer community to vote in all levels of elections
MAY 12 across Brussels city centre
www.thepride.be

Mechelen

Hanswijkprocessie: 740th annual parade in honour of the Virgin Mary, quite possibly the oldest of its kind in Belgium, featuring more than 20 floats, 100 horses, musicians, dancers and choral groups
MAY 13 15.00-17.00 at Grote Markt 1
www.hanswijkprocessie.be

FILM

One World Brussels

One World is an initiative of the Czech humanitarian organization People in Need and focuses on documentaries that tackle human rights issues around the globe. For those of us who can’t quite make it to Prague, a selection of the One World Festival travels annually to Brussels. The tagline for this year’s edition, Youth Quake, refers to the current protests in the Arab world. Opening film *Back to the Square (pictured)* by Petr Lom follows several Egyptians six months after the euphoria of the revolution in January 2011. Sofia Amara’s *Syria: Inside the Repression*, meanwhile, offers an inside view of the revolutionaries in a country sealed off from international press. The 18 films of the Brussels leg of One World deal with a variety of topics, from freedom of speech in Chechnya (*Who Killed Natasha?*) to protests in Japan (*Radioactivists*). In *Special Flight*, the jury winner in Prague, Swiss director Fernand Melgar (*The Fortress*), continues his examination of Europe and its foreigners with a look at the deportation of illegal immigrants in Switzerland. Films will show at Bozar, the Goethe Institute, the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU and the European Parliament. Screenings at the latter require registration by 9 May. Every film is followed by a discussion, often with the director. **Bjorn Gabriels**



14-23 May | Across Brussels | www.oneworld.cz/2012/brussels

MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Made in Belgium: Series that screens a recent Belgian film every second Saturday of the month. Coming up: comedy-drama *Hasta la Vista* by Geoffrey Enthoven
MAY 12 at 20.15 in Filmhuis Klappei, Klappeistraat 2
www.klappei.be

Ghent

For a Few Dollars More: The classic 1966 Sergio Leone western starring Clint Eastwood and Gian Maria Volontè screens in the MIAT Museum’s replica Art Deco cinema. Morning screening free to Ghent residents
MAY 13 at 10.15 & 14.30 in MIAT Museum, Minnemeers 9
www.miat.gent.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Fascination of Plants Day

As of this year, there is an international day dedicated to the wonderful world of plants. Botanical gardens and museums across Europe are unfurling their most bizarre, beautiful and boast-worthy plants for the occasion, and in Belgium it is no different. A broad spectrum of activities is planned, all designed to re-awaken a sense of awe for the mighty and indispensable flora that cover the planet. Be sure to visit the National Botanical Garden in Meise, which will stay open especially late for a nocturnal visit featuring carnivorous plants, massive floating lily pads and a giant asparagus. **RB**



18 May | Across Brussels and Flanders | www.fascinationofplantsday.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

De smaak van de stad (The Taste of the City): A six-part series of talks – three in Dutch and three in French – on the food culture history of Brussels, delivered by professors of the Free Universities. Next up on 11 May: “De wereld op je bord: de opkomst van etnische restaurants in Brussel, 1900-2000”
Until JUN 8 at A la mort subite, Warmoesberg 7
www.tinyurl.com/smaakvandestad

EU Commission Open Day: Chance for the public to visit the Berlaymont building, view the Commission’s meeting rooms and enjoy music and entertainment
MAY 12 10.00-18.00 at Archimedesstraat 73
www.eu4Be.eu

Open House Brussels: Collaborative event by artists featuring debates, guided tours, an art parcours, performances, exhibitions, documentaries and workshops
MAY 17-19 12.00-20.00 at Vanderborght building, Schildknaapstraat 50
www.openhousebrussels.be

BITE

Robyn Boyle

A Food Affair

There are some names that come up regularly in conversation, and A Food Affair is one of them. For me, word of mouth remains the strongest indication of a restaurant's worth. So two friends and I head to this popular spot in downtown Ghent for a lunch filled with high expectations. Owners Laurent and Ellen opened the restaurant nine years ago, a bit ahead of their time, at least for Asian fusion cuisine in East Flanders. It's Ellen who runs the service, which is friendly and professional. A note in the menu reminds customers to expect a bit of a wait on their food, as every dish is prepared fresh. Fortunately, we have a complimentary bowl of edamame (salted soybeans in the pod) and glasses of Chilean and Portuguese wine to tide us over. Four spring rolls are our first experience and turn out to be representative of the place as a whole: super fresh, light, tasty and beautifully presented, but a bit on the pricey side at €10.90. The spring rolls are stuffed with glass noodles and chicken and come with a tangy dipping sauce of spring onions and spicy chilli peppers. One friend lucks out with the daily suggestion, as the Japanese-style chicken proves to be the most delicious meal of the three. Her bowl is brimming with stir-fried carrots, cucumbers, courgette, leeks, peppers, mushrooms, bean sprouts, paksoi and delicate white chicken breast in a dark, salty-sweet soy sauce. All dishes come with a bowl of aromatic jasmine rice. A generous portion of stew is the next order, made up of milk-fed Pyrenees lamb shoulder, oven-roasted potatoes and

spinach in a nice thick, spicy tomato sauce topped with fresh coriander. It's packed with flavour, and the meat is succulent. My dish is another nod to the lovely spice-infused cuisine of India: beef meatballs in a curry of tomato sauce, cumin, cardamom, mint, coriander and spinach. The cardamom seeds are still in their pods, which requires some finagling, but they're well worth it for their explosive effect. All the herbs and spices are fresh and pungent, adding so much character to an otherwise simple dish. We still have room to share an order of crème brûlée, which has been uniquely prepared with lemongrass and tonka beans for an extra fresh and exotic touch. Our three coffees come with glasses of *speculoos* sabayon on the house. It's all these little details, plus the relaxed, warm and stylish atmosphere that make A Food Affair well worth the €100 bill for three.

► www.afoodaffair.be

- 📍 Korte Meer 25, Ghent; 09.224.18.05
- 🕒 Lunch: Thurs-Fri, 12.00-14.00; Dinner: Tue-Sat, 18.30-21.30
- 💶 €20-€30
- 📖 Trendy address for inventive, modern Asian cuisine



CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Tom Peeters

De Libertad
Muntstraat 28-30, Leuven

It used to be one of our favourite spots after graduating, this laid back brown café right in the middle of Muntstraat, the lively restaurant street in the centre of Leuven. Over the past decade, visits became more rare, but at least once a year, we still dive into nostalgia, looking for our share of freedom that comes along with visiting this long-time survivor of the glutted Leuven bar scene. Back in the old days, the chairs didn't have holes in the shape of musical instruments, but beside that, once inside, it feels like time has stood still. Attracting a mixture of (everlasting) students and locals, the music always comes first here. Entering on a Wednesday afternoon, John Cale welcomed us, and he would stay for the next hour. Indeed, De Libertad is a café

that still plays albums from start to finish, a pleasant thought in this age of short attention spans. No need to ask for food, there simply is none. Not that it is troubling anyone, since the bar not only offers a large selection of appetite-retarding beers, it is also surrounded by a dozen restaurants and only a few steps away from Fonske, Leuven's celebrated spot for fries. Last year De Libertad celebrated its 30th anniversary, and this year, for the 27th consecutive time, you can visit the Libertadfeesten, a concert series that runs until 18 May. Artists appreciate the informal and small-scale atmosphere but also the acoustics, which are surprisingly good. Ask Kevin Ayers, Elliott Murphy, John Watts and any other

of the international artists that shared the tiny stage with an array of local heroes. Big Bill, who sings in regional dialect, is a regular. This year bar owner Ricky Evers invited singer-songwriter Pieter-Jan De Smet and the swing jazz combo Along Comes Mary. The festivities come to an end with the Night of the Veterans, when former bartenders take over the place. When we leave after two Stellas, Radiohead's *OK Computer* is halfway through. Taking a look at the annual top 100 (composed by customers), we see that at other moments we could have heard Tom Waits, Neil Young or Bob Dylan. Just like 20 years ago. We will be back.

► www.libertad.be



The last word...

Mean streets

"I love my job. I didn't become a cop to pull cows out of a ditch somewhere out in the country." An inner-city policeman interviewed in *DMMagazine*

Hat's off

"I've tried everything, but the price is too high. Difficult is okay, but inhuman isn't. I have to find myself again." High-fashion Brussels milliner Christophe Coppens has announced that he is loaded with debt and closing his *haute couture* business

Read all about it

"Not a soul alive believes the media anymore." Bart De Wever, newspaper columnist, quiz-show contestant and president of the N-VA party

Little sprout

"An unfortunate misunderstanding. Our greenest Groen is a little too green." Mike Van Acoleyen of Groen, whose planned "youngest candidate" for the coming municipal elections was three days younger than the legal minimum

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

The new Novo Vida birth house in Antwerp is a novel idea: train nurses by giving them real patients, while providing a much-needed medical service to those who can't afford it. We take a peek behind the scenes

News

Mostly in the local media we only hear about Muslims and Islam when there is some kind of conflict, or possibly if it's Eid. So we visited the MANA expertise centre for Islamic Culture, which is a non-profit that represents Islam in Flanders in a variety of ways, from talks to health to exhibitions

Living

You've no doubt heard about stevia, extracts from the sweet-leafed plant that was recently approved to be sold on the market in Belgium. It's now available for use in the place of sugar, and we visited a chocolatier in East Flanders about to launch the country's first fine pralines using stevia