

Dress to impress

A Ghent tailor is making waves from Flanders to New York



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Theater Aan Zee

The annual theatre festival taking the coast by storm

► 11

Olympic flames

Meet the Flemish athletes set to compete in London



► 8

Heal the world



Peter Piot (second from left) arrives in Zaire, now Democratic Republic of the Congo, in October 1976, to continue a life's work fighting deadly viruses

From the field in Africa to a desk in Geneva, and from Ebola to Aids, pioneering Flemish doctor Peter Piot has led the global fight against deadly diseases

Senne Starckx

Firstly as a microbiologist in the field in central Africa, later as a UN policy maker in Geneva, Peter Piot has fought against Aids for almost 30 years. Now he has published his memoirs. *No Time to Lose* is an extraordinary account of the biggest epidemic of modern times.

Since the development of the first antiretroviral treatment in the mid-1990s, Aids has slowly transformed from an unrelenting fatal disease into a more or less controllable one. But Aids can only be fought if the patient takes his medicines on a daily basis – and that's where the shoe pinches.

The Aids epidemic is far from over, particularly in Africa, where only one in two patients have access to antiretroviral treatments. This year, two million people will die from Aids. The situation is particularly grave in sub-Saharan Africa, and experts wouldn't venture to say that things will improve in the near future.

On the other hand, things have improved a lot during the past 12 years. In 2000, only 200,000 patients in the developing world had access to antiretroviral treatments (almost all of them lived in Brazil). Also that year, only one in a thousand Africans with HIV received treatment.

So the numbers indicate that strong progress has indeed been made. And that's all due to one big evolution: the sharp decrease in the price of antiretroviral treatments, from \$14,000 (€11,400) per patient per year in 1995 to less than \$100 (€82) now. That's still a lot of money for most patients in Africa, but with the help of governments setting up national programmes to give (almost) free access to Aids medicines, things are finally moving in the right direction.

Merit goods

The international effort for delivering access to antiretroviral treatments to as many Aids patients as possible – especially to those in developing countries – is one of the most drastic changes public health has ever seen. During the past decade, big pharmaceutical companies like Merck and GlaxoSmithKline, who develop the treatments, have changed their business model completely.

When nowadays a new medicine comes on the market, prices for developing countries are immediately put in place. Aids treatments have been transformed from exclusive goods for people in prosperous countries

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



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Thomas More

Thomas More – author, Renaissance humanist, Lord Chancellor and thorn in the side of Henry VIII of England – is not someone you immediately associate with Flanders, so it came as some surprise to learn last week that three colleges – the Catholic University College Kempen and the Lessius Colleges in Antwerp and Mechelen – are to merge under the common name of Thomas More college. But More did have close connections with Flanders, and one man in particular.

More, born in 1478, is best known for two things: the coining of the word Utopia, the title of his 1516 book on an imaginary perfect land; and his execution by Henry for refusing to recognise his divorce from Catherine of Aragon and split from the Catholic Church.

More was among many things a diplomat, and that brought him to the Low Countries on several occasions, when he visited Mechelen, Brussels, Bruges and Antwerp. It was on his visit to Antwerp that he met, through a letter of introduction from his friend the philosopher Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, Pieter Gillis, a printer, town clerk, humanist and admirer of Erasmus. The two men became close friends – so close that More prefaced *Utopia* with letters to

and from Gillis, who also plays the character in the book who introduces More to Raphael Hythlodaeus, a traveller who tells the two friends the tale of the fabled land of Utopia.

Erasmus supervised the printing of the first edition of *Utopia* in Leuven by the printer Dirk Martens, after which both he and Gillis arranged to have a double portrait painted in Antwerp by Quentin Metsys, one of the leading painters of his day, as a gift for More. More's own portrait (*pictured*) was done by Hans Holbein the Younger.

More was canonised in 1935 for his work in opposition to the Protestant Reformation, including a polemic against William Tyndale, who was burned outside Vilvoorde the year after More's execution in 1535, for the crime of heresy. Since then he has lent his name (as Saint Thomas More) to many educational establishments, though not yet one in Belgium.

The honour for More, however, is a blow for Lenaert Leys, more usually known as Leonardus Lessius, the Jesuit priest best known as a principal advisor to Archduke Albert VII of Austria, installed with his wife Isabella as the Habsburg governor-general of the Netherlands (including Belgium) in 1559.

FLANDERS TODAY

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Hans De Loore

News in brief

The Brussels region has approved funding of €130,000 for the tourism agency VisitBrussels to advertise the city as a tourist destination abroad. Actions include presence at a travel fair in China in September and in Washington in December. Meanwhile, the region last week unveiled a new logo and web domain name: the logo be.brussels, with a stylised blue and yellow iris, and the domain extension .brussels. Use of the logo for business cards and stationery will be introduced gradually and the project is expected to cost up to €200,000. "That's small beer compared to the value of the name," said finance minister Guy Vanhengel.

A group of scouts from Aarschot in Flemish Brabant last week made an early return home from camp in Slovakia after one of their leaders died after being struck by lightning while climbing in the Tatra mountains. The group, all aged 17 or 18, were given psychological counselling.

Parents of children attending a pre-school in Ekeren in Antwerp have started a petition against the school's refusal to prolong the contract of a teacher because she is not a baptised Catholic. The teacher has worked at the school, part of the Catholic education system, for two years. Mieke Van Hecke, head of the Catholic network, supported the school's decision. "It's only logical that someone who teaches religion is a member of the club," she said.

The archaeology department of Ghent University will have the use of an unmanned drone for the next eight years to carry out surveys of archaeological sites, flying at low altitudes to take high-resolution photographs of sites including the Sint-Baafs abbey site, which will then be used to make a 3D model of how the abbey once looked. The

drone, provided by Dutch company Dioraphite, will also be available to other university departments.

More than 80 people have volunteered to appear in court to face charges of taking part in a protest against genetically modified potatoes in an experimental field in Wetteren, East Flanders, which led to clashes with police in May last year. Eleven people have been formally charged and the trial is due to take place in January next year. The volunteers include Bart Staes, member of the European Parliament for Groen, as well as representatives of environmental organisations. The application to appear voluntarily on charges is thought to be a first under Belgian law.

Flemish teenagers identify themselves first as Belgian, then according to their municipality and only then as Flemish, according to a study by the University of Leuven among 3,426 14-year-olds. The exception is teenagers from Limburg, who rank their identity as municipality, then Limburger, then Flemish. In all cases, Europe comes last on the list.

A man who climbed on top of a moving train and then threw himself into the water of the Ringvaart in Melle in East Flanders has been committed to a psychiatric institution. Emergency services were alerted by members of the public, but the man refused a lifebelt and was removed by police divers from the water and hospitalised for hypothermia. The reasons for his action are not clear, but investigators are not ruling out a suicide attempt.

Cyclists in Flanders can now use Google Maps to find the best route to their destination, in addition to directions for public

transport, cars and walkers. Google stressed the service was in an early phase and invited users to provide more information on routes to improve the service.

Police have suspended digging operations in the garden of a man in Haacht in Flemish Brabant, in connection with the long-running investigation into the crimes of the so-called Brabant Killers, who killed 28 people in a series of robberies in the 1980s. None of those responsible has ever been identified. The man, a self-professed Druid with extremist right-wing views, made several appearances in the investigation over the years, and police were hoping to find clues on his property. Work has been suspended for undisclosed technical reasons but will resume later, the magistrate investigating the case said.

Children in the sixth year of primary at Sint-Lambertus school in Heverlee near Leuven will no longer take part in organised ski trips, out of respect for the families of the victims of the March bus crash in Switzerland, when seven children from the school were among the 28 victims.

Correction: In our article Agricultural exchange in the Living section of 12 June, we described the organisation Veterinarians Without Borders (VZG) as "a spin-off of Doctors Without Borders" (MSF). VZG has asked us to point out that they are an independent organisation with no ties to MSF. In addition, their core mission is "to fight poverty and hunger in Africa by improving animal health and livestock rearing" rather than to arrange visits between professionals from the West and the developing world, as we said. We apologise for any confusion and have corrected the archived article on our website accordingly.

Alan Hope

OFFSIDE

Stormy weather

These are troubled times for the businesses of the Flemish coast. If the lousy weather in June and (so far) July weren't enough, there are the weather forecasters who insist on telling potential visitors how much more dismal it's going to get. And now the wildlife of the area has taken a turn for the worse. If the downpours don't get you, the seagulls might.

June was the wettest and least sunny month since 1966, but June is not a holiday month. It all started when the coastal tourism industry complained that weather forecasters were overstepping their authority by predicting miserable conditions well into July, far beyond the point at which scientifically valid forecasts are considered trustworthy. They even threatened legal action against Meteo België, a private sector organisation, which warns that its long-range forecasts

are more seasonal trends than strict forecasts.

They were joined by amusement parks, including Plopsaland and



Bobbejaanland, who complained that forecasts were too negative, using terms such as "clearing up" when they could say "sunny". One or two rainstorms doesn't necessarily, they said, mean the whole day is ruined.

Both groups are worried not that the weather will be awful, but that potential customers are discouraged from taking their chances and bringing their

holiday savings to spend on alternative facilities, such as cafes and restaurants where one might shelter.

But it appears the weather is not all that visitors are having to contend with. The seagulls, perhaps themselves annoyed by the weather and the lack of food-bearing tourists, are becoming more aggressive. Last week, workers for rail authority NMBS were even attacked in a most Hitchcockian way in the harbour of Zeebrugge, and one man had to go to hospital. There are plans to deploy hawk-shaped kites to scare the birds off, and to moor food-bins offshore to prevent them having to come to land looking for scraps. For the coastal food service industry, on the other hand, no solution is in sight.

▶ www.kustweerbericht.be

Heal the world

Flemish doctor Peter Piot looks back on an extraordinary career and his “life with Aids”

► continued from page 1

into “merit goods”, something available for everyone in need on the planet.

These are the words of Peter Piot, former director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and Aids, or UNAIDS for short. The 63-year-old Flemish microbiologist and doctor led the UN programme from its foundation in 1994 until 2009, when he was succeeded by the current director, Michel Sidibé. Piot was born in Leuven and raised in the village of Keerbergen in Flemish Brabant. He studied and graduated in Ghent before moving to Antwerp. He witnessed first-hand how Aids emerged as a new and strange epidemic at the start of the 1980s, after which it slowly but firmly gripped the world – particularly Africa. Now Piot has published his memoirs, *No Time To Lose*, in which he gives his account of his “life with Aids” – first as a microbiologist in the field in central Africa, later in the safe and clean Geneva offices of UNAIDS.

It's an extraordinary read, and even in the second half, where Piot talks about his bureaucratic life within the UN, he manages to keep the reader captivated. What sticks in one's memory is not just the remarkable story of Aids, but also Piot's determination to improve the lives of Aids patients wherever he could.

Unknown infection

From his first trip to Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) in 1976 until he left UNAIDS three years ago, Piot has fought infectious diseases. For the longest part of that period, his direct enemy was Aids.

But in 1976, it was not Aids that drew 27-year-old Piot, a microbiologist at Antwerp's renowned Institute of Tropical Medicine, to Africa. On a regular Tuesday in September, a package arrived at the institute: a blue flask containing two blood samples from a Flemish nun who was too ill to be evacuated from Zaire.

The accompanying note stated that the woman suffered from an unknown infectious disease, which caused severe hemorrhagic fever and life-threatening internal bleeding. When Piot opened the flask, he saw that one glass tube was broken and the blood had mixed with the surrounding ice water.

It's just one of the several frightening incidents that Piot mentions only briefly in his memoirs, but which make the reader's hair stand on end. (Later Piot will prick himself on a needle containing blood from a dying Aids patient, and in the remote jungle of Zaire he will only escape from a helicopter crash by coincidence. So it's a surprise that he ever survived to write his memoirs.)



Peter Piot receives the first Flanders-America Award from minister-president Kris Peeters at the inauguration of Flanders House in New York City, during Peeters' economic mission to the US in 2009

The nun didn't survive, and neither did thousands of people in central Africa. With colleagues from Belgium, the US and France, Piot flew to Zaire to investigate the first outbreak of a virus that would later be known as Ebola.

Encounter with death

Starting from scratch, he learned how to set up field laboratories and hospitals, and how to deal with patients who could not be cured. All these skills became crucial when he returned to Africa a couple of years later, when he found himself in the frontline of the battle against another new and unknown disease, caused by a far more sophisticated virus: HIV. That first trip to Africa changed Piot forever. “It was a straight encounter with death. We had to store bodies that were totally swollen because of the heat – even with a gas mask, the stench was unbearable. It was an unreal experience and it kept me awake for several nights. And when I returned after two months, I really needed time to get used to normal life,” he recalls.

But these horrible experiences in Africa also reshaped his personality. “Actually, the best that can happen to you is to be confronted with death – without dying. After that you won't lose any more time on things that don't really matter.”

You remember a lot of details of that first trip to Africa, and of the rest of your professional life. Did you keep a diary?

“I have been keeping notes, mostly for practical reasons, and not with the intention to write a book. During my time at UNAIDS, my collaborators kept detailed notes of all meetings and trips, as is the custom in the civil service. All that helped a lot for writing this book, but the strong emotional moments and the funny anecdotes were engraved on my memory.”

In 1979, you performed an autopsy on the body of a Greek fisherman who died from acute meningitis. You now suggest he could have suffered from Aids. Did you miss a chance to be the first to describe Aids?

“In 1985 we found – because we kept his blood samples – that the man had indeed been infected with HIV. He was one of several similar patients we saw before the first reports of Aids in the US were published. Yes, you might say we missed the opportunity to be the first to identify the new syndrome.”

When and where exactly did HIV originate in Africa?

“There is now strong genetic evidence that HIV jumped from

chimpanzees to humans in the early 20th century, possibly in central Africa – though probably in countries north-west of Congo. How the virus then spread across the Atlantic remains speculative.”

Aids has lost a bit of its deathly character due to the development of antiretroviral treatments. How do you foresee the future?

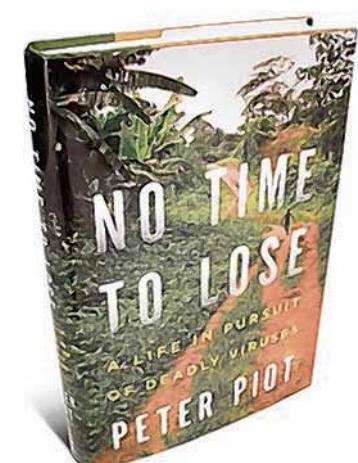
“Thanks to these treatments, people with HIV can now have a life expectancy similar to that of people without HIV. However, only half of people with HIV in immediate need of treatment have access to these drugs in developing countries. So we still have a long way to go, and continuing political and financial commitments will be key for decades to come. In addition, there are nearly two new HIV infections per year for every person who has new access to treatment, which means the gap between those who need treatment and those who have access to it is becoming wider. Aids is not over by any means, and we need to persevere with our efforts.”

At school, people are taught that Aids is one of the most dangerous diseases of all, and that you cannot take enough precaution. Isn't that exaggerated?

“It is correct that the risk for heterosexuals acquiring HIV in Belgium is, fortunately, small. But let us not forget that there are two to three new infections every single day in our country, and that new infections are on the rise among gay men. In addition, we are seeing an increase in other sexually transmitted infections.”

You are director of the London Institute for Tropical Medicine. Why London and not Antwerp?

“The London school is the leading institution in global and public health in the world, and I feel very privileged to have an opportunity to lead it.”



Peeters demands more say on Europe

“It’s only normal that we should plead our own case”

Alan Hope

Flanders should have more say in negotiations at a European level whenever its interests are being discussed, according to minister-president Kris Peeters, in his annual address marking Flanders Day on 11 July. At present, a Flemish minister often takes part in discussions in the EU’s council of ministers, when the subject under discussion – for example environment, education, culture or fisheries – is a matter of regional responsibility. Joke Schauvliege, for instance, chaired the meetings of environment ministers during the Belgian presidency of the EU.

Europe, he said, is not something that goes on in a land far away. “More than two-thirds of the legislation in this country originates with the EU. European and Flemish policy have to be complementary – Flanders and Europe have to grow in their alliance. Flanders needs to be directly responsible, at ministerial level, whenever Europe is discussing transport and energy. It’s only normal that we should plead our own case when it comes to road safety or car safety standards. Or when



Following Flanders Day on 11 July, Flemish ministers went on their annual informal outing, on board one of the new pilot boats in Ostend. Left to right: Jo Vandeurzen (health), Ingrid Lieten (innovation), Freya Van den Bossche (energy) and minister-president Kris Peeters

the discussion is about energy infrastructure to ensure that every family and every business has access to electricity at a fair price.

“That is not enough. We also want to be there when the ministers for foreign affairs and finance come together,” he said. “They, after all, prepare the European summits where discussions take place about economic growth, jobs

and budget discipline – in short about subjects which are of prime importance to Flanders.”

Federal foreign affairs minister Didier Reynders, who Peeters in his speech had said “must not be allowed to stand in the way”, did not agree.

Speaking on VRT radio, Reynders suggested “Flanders should perhaps solve its own problems before it demands a greater role

on a European level” – a statement Peeters condemned as “insulting”. “Reynders refuses to accept reality,” he said. He was backed by party colleague Steven Vanackere, the federal finance minister who sits on the economics and finance council. Reynders should show more respect for his colleagues, Vanackere said, although he added: “I’ve never had the impression in those meetings that the regions had to be defended.” Peeters also referred to the reform of the federal state, which was marked last week by the final decision in the federal parliament to split the electoral district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (see below). The reforms, he said, would bring “major new responsibilities in the fields of labour market policy, health care, entrepreneurship and energy policy. We have to be allowed to make our voice heard in those areas. At the same time, these reforms have to be carried out quickly and correctly in our own country. The reform of the state presents us with opportunities we must not allow to slip by. They offer us the chance of a strengthened Flemish policy.”

BHV finally split

After 48 years, or by some accounts since 1963, the electoral district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) was last week split by a vote in the federal parliament. The decision is the first major step in the sixth round of state reform launched when the present government was formed last December, but it has left some quarters far from satisfied.

BHV existed as an anomaly in the Belgian system: an electoral constituency that was not formed by a province’s boundaries – it included the Brussels Region and part of Flemish Brabant – and which was bilingual. The changes that will follow the split are many, but the main effect will be twofold.

Voters in the two resulting electoral districts – the Flemish Halle-Vilvoorde and the bilingual Brussels – will have no choice of whether to vote in one or the other. That means French-speakers in the periphery of Brussels (part of Halle-Vilvoorde) will find their votes

swamped by the Flemish majority. French-speaking parties may present a list, but they are unlikely now to gather enough votes to be elected.

Those in the six facility municipalities, on the other hand, will be able to choose between voting in Halle-Vilvoorde and in Brussels. That would allow French-speakers to vote for French-speaking Brussels parties, but they would essentially have no local representative. The Flemish in Brussels have the opposite problem. Estimates vary, but the Dutch-speaking population in the capital is certainly under 10%. Until now, they were able to have their own votes bolstered by the Flemish population of Halle-Vilvoorde so Dutch-speaking representatives could be elected easily – among them Steven Vanackere, now federal finance minister. But that is not likely any longer to be the case.

Last week Vanackere posted a photo of

himself leading members of his staff across a pedestrian crossing in front of Brussels’ Royal Palace. His staff are standing individually in October’s municipal elections. Vanackere is not. He is thought to be considering a move to Flemish Brabant, where he stands a chance of being re-elected in the next federal elections.



Parliament sits to give final approval to the splitting of BHV

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€10.14 billion 216h

debt owed by the 308 municipal authorities in Flanders, according to government figures, €423 million more than in 2010, and the equivalent of about €1,600 per person

of plenary sittings in the Flemish parliament in the session just ended, an absolute record, according to speaker Jan Peumans. Committees, meanwhile, sat for a total of almost 1,500 hours

80%

of family doctors in Flanders have come under pressure to make a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), according to a study by a researcher at Ghent University

73,016

passengers used the Antwerp airport at Deurne in the last six months, nearly 15,000 fewer than in the same period in 2011, according to the airport management company

19,269

speeding motorists caught by cameras on the Gentbrugge viaduct of the E17 in East Flanders, the equivalent of 26 every hour since the cameras came into operation on 8 June

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

A new haven

With elections coming up, there are always political hopefuls who switch parties, after falling out with their previous companions. These days, no fewer than 30 (local) politicians have traded in Vlaams Belang for N-VA.

Vlaams Belang is not just any party. It is the successor of Vlaams Blok, of which a number of organisations were condemned for racism. Vlaams Belang/Blok’s radical views on issues such as immigration have made the party the subject of a so-called *cordon sanitaire*: All other parties agreed they would not enter a coalition with it, for ethical reasons.

Vlaams Belang called the *cordon sanitaire* undemocratic; other critics suspected that it helped the party grow. The success of Vlaams Belang/Blok in the 1990s frustrated young Bart De Wever, now president of N-VA. That it mixed the Flemish nationalism he adhered to with racism troubled him so much that defeating Vlaams Belang became one of his political ambitions.

Vlaams Belang, who in 2004 received almost one in four Flemish votes, has become largely irrelevant now – not due to the *cordon sanitaire*, but because N-VA has become the new haven for the disgruntled. In a way, De Wever has made his dream come true, but that, he is finding out, never comes easy. Meanwhile, Vlaams Belang politicians keep flocking to his party.

A key factor in this is Marie-Rose Morel, a student chum of De Wever’s, who traded in N-VA for Vlaams Belang, only to be reunited with her old friend in the face of her early death. In the preceding years, Morel had tried to take over Vlaams Belang, along with her later husband Frank Vanhecke. Vanhecke may have been Vlaams Belang’s president, but true power escaped him and Morel and Vlaams Belang steered clear of the new course they set out. In the end Vanhecke, now an independent MEP, turned his back on Vlaams Belang, while the late Morel became an icon with almost saintly stature.

Shopping centre dispute goes on

Minister disowns Brussels Region's complaint, and Uplace hits back at Neo

Alan Hope

The controversy over the mega-shopping complex Uplace, planned for the former Renault car factory site in Machelen north of Brussels, continued with a complaint from Brussels Region that was immediately disowned by one of the region's ministers, and a complaint from Uplace against a rival planned site.

Last week the Brussels Region filed a complaint with the Council of State against the Flemish government's strategic plan for the area around Brussels, which includes Uplace and the widening of the Ring. According to Brussels minister-president Charles Picqué, decisions taken by Flanders have an impact on Brussels in terms of environment and mobility, yet none of Brussels Region's observations have been taken into account by the Flemish government. The plan is also in conflict with the Brussels Region's own strategic plan, which aims to reduce traffic.

Picqué joins a number of local authorities in Flanders, as well as Unizo, the organisation that



represents small businesses, in protesting against Uplace. However, he was met with a protest of his own, when Brigitte Grouwels, minister for among other things public works and transport in his government, issued a statement saying the decision to go to the Council of State was "not a government decision".

Picqué had acted on his own initiative, Grouwels said, as the case had never been discussed within the

government. "This is a matter which affects the relations between the regions," Grouwels said. "It concerns a number of aspects for which I am responsible as minister for mobility, and over which I have discussions with the Flemish region. Instead of attacking each other legally, the Flemish and the Brussels regions need to get around the table and start talking."

Later, Uplace, the subject of so many

complaints, filed a complaint of its own, against Neo, the shopping and conference centre planned by the city of Brussels on the Heizel site (pictured). Uplace claims the city breached its own rules in its call for contractors, in order to get it started sooner. Brussels started the bid procedure before the area had been rezoned to accommodate Neo, and before applications for permits had been lodged, Uplace claims. A complaint to the EU Commission is being prepared, Uplace said.

- Elsewhere, a 28,000-square-metre shopping centre planned for the former mine sites in Beringen in Limburg province was rejected by a decision of federal and Flemish ministers, citing problems with mobility, a clash with the development of the town centre and incompatibility with the Flemish government's own policy document on the retail sector. Contractors be-MINE said they would go ahead with those parts of the complex not related to shopping, and would consider an appeal against the refused permit to the Council of State.

European court attacks language rules

A Flemish law that makes it compulsory for all companies based in Flanders to have their official documents in Dutch is against European rules, the advocate-general of the European Court of Justice has said. The court is considering a case brought by a former employee of Antwerp-based PSA, which operates docking facilities in the city's port.

The problem dates back to 1973, and the Language Decree introduced by the government of Flanders to ensure the use of Dutch as a vehicular language in business, by obliging any company with premises in Flanders to have its working documents in Dutch – labour contracts, working conditions and communications between management and personnel. If any document, like a contract, is not in Dutch, it is considered void. That

rule is still in place.

However, according to advocate-general Niilo Jääskinen, the rule interferes with the free movement of labour enshrined in the EU's rules. The obligatory use of Dutch is an obstacle to foreign workers, and discourages them from coming to work in Flanders, he said. Businesses are also less likely to employ workers who are not Dutch-speakers, as the translation of documents brings administrative problems and extra costs. The advocate-general's advice is not binding, though the court tends to follow his advice. The Flemish government has so far declined to react. Labour minister Philippe Muyters said he would wait for the court's final judgement, expected in the autumn, before commenting.

Q&A



Stephane Vandervelde is CEO of Keyware in Zaventem, which is introducing terminals for contact-free card payments

we have out in the field already are now being used for credit and debit cards of different brands like Visa, MasterCard, Diners etc, and now they can be upgraded to accept the contact-free cards. It's a specific card, which right now is being issued by Belfius and Axa, but the other big banks like Fortis, ING and KBC have plans to start issuing them later this year. The card is specific in the sense that a normal card has no antenna, which is built into a card for no-contact transactions.

The card has no pin code. How safe is it?

Communication between the card and the terminal is by NFC – Near Field Communication. And it's a very secure form of NFC; it's not

like in America, where if you pass through an anti-theft barrier, your cards can be read and someone can use the information to go and transact business elsewhere. In Belgium that's completely impossible. Here, the software keys to the encryption change every couple of transactions, so whatever data was read before can't be used.

How long before this becomes generally available?

That's not entirely up to us. There have to be terminals, cards and customers to use the system. We've heard that Proton is going to disappear within two years, so I think we have a perfect alternative for sums under €25. It's fast, the business gets paid right away,

and your money is safe: Instead of being stored on the card, your credit here is stored on the server, so if the card is stolen or lost, your money is still safe.

Unizo has complained about the length of the contracts you offer

We have contracts lasting five years all the way down to one year; it's all a question of price. If someone signs a five-year contract then he can get a good price, but that's not the same for periods of six months or a year. You can certainly have a contract for a shorter period, but that costs more, and in my view that's a missed opportunity.

► www.keyware.be

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Advertising

► Boondoggle

Leuven-based digital advertising specialists Boondoggle have sold a 60% stake to the French-based communications group Havas, led by New York-based Brit David Jones. Boondoggle, which has won numerous awards and most recently handled the name-change of Dexia Bank to Belfius, is looking to Havas to develop its international clients such as frozen-food company Iglo.

Air travel

► Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport has blocked advertising at the airport for the website Cheaptickets.be, which offers links to cheap airline tickets, because of the predominance on the site of Ryanair, which uses the competing airport Brussels South in Charleroi. The publicity campaign was worth €50,000.

Biotech

► Tigenix

Biotechnology company Tigenix has started on a clinical trial for the drug Cx601 for the treatment of Crohn's disease, an intestinal disorder characterised by perianal fistulas. The trial will involve 200 patients in 46 centres in eight countries. Results are expected in 2014.

Chemicals

► Tessenderlo

Six fire stations attended a fire at the chemicals plant of Tessenderlo Chemicals in Limburg province last week. The plant is covered by the EU's so-called Seveso directive on the safety of industrial plants. The fire was quickly brought under control and no one was injured.

Payments

► Proton

The Proton portable cash-card is to stop operating at the end of 2014, Bancontact MisterCash Company has announced, following a constant decline in users over recent years. Proton was launched in 1996 as an electronic means of making small payments.

Supermarkets

► Carrefour

Supermarket chain Carrefour announced falling results in the second quarter, despite holding firm in Belgium, with sales up 1.2% to €1.06 billion.

Transmissions

► Punch

Sint-Truiden-based Punch Powertrain has won a major contract from Malaysian car-maker Proton to supply gearboxes, increasing production from 500 to 700 a day. The company is now looking to take on 45 new workers, including 30 engineers.



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ING

Dress to impress

Clothes make the man, so they say, and Ghent-based Belize has got tailoring down to a fine art

Lawrence DeGeest

Men were made for suits. The problem is making suits for men. If a man doesn't choose his bride off the shelf, then it should be the same for what he wears at the altar – because when he's waiting and wondering and sweating, he should still look like he was meant to be standing there. And even if, like most men, he knows little about suits and less about marriage, he knows that the reward for patience is detail. This is how you are made to feel about menswear after a chat with the gentlemen of Belize, a tailor from Ghent.

“People who come for a tailored suit for the first time are surprised by all the details that go in,” says Olivier Bauwens, founder of Belize, at a promotional event in New York. A friend lent Belize use of a gallery for the event, where men could reserve a fitting. Racks of sample coats and trousers and shirts stood

next to paintings and electric signs and a table with chilled Stella. Bauwens and two colleagues hold court on their philosophy while waiting for an appointment. “We want to show that you can have a great suit with great fabric at ungreat cost,” says Bauwens. “A European pattern with Italian looks.”

To demonstrate, he begins with me, a man who has not worn a proper suit since a high school graduation dinner in South America when his tie caught fire on a candle and all ties were off by dessert anyway. Fashion,

like all art, is about taking on a challenge. Give credit to those who take on the impossible.

Mirror on the wall

We stand by a mirror next to a painting that makes you look in the mirror with more imagination than usual, and while I imagine life in a suit, Bauwens explains Belize's made-to-measure process. It starts with a book of fabric samples. Bauwens turns the pages like it was Shakespeare and Hamlet must choose what to wear to dinner.

“First you choose what you want your suit to be,” he says. This is the only part of the process that resembles buying off a rack because you choose a style: double or single breast, one or two or three buttons, and so on. “It depends what you need it for. There are suits for everyday. There are suits for ceremony. What really matters is the fabric.”

Fabric quality is measured in the business by the “s number”, the number of threads per centimetre in the fabric. It is like pixels in a screen or dots per inch with a printer: The higher the better. Wool that is uncorrupted by synthetics starts at 100s. Other categories involve pure wool blended with finer fabric like silk or cashmere, but their fragility makes them for ceremony and not daily use. Bauwens explains: “At the office all day with your elbows on the table, if the fabric is too fine, it gets shiny.”

Word-of-mouth success

Managing partner Kristof Dekeukelaere and the gallery's owner play together in the local Flemish football team. When people on the team and off complimented his trimmings from Belize well before he was on board, he approached

Bauwens with the idea of bringing Belize to New York. This was the first event. They plan to have a few more to gauge public opinion before deciding to open a New York store. “Our marketing is word of mouth and nothing else,” Dekeukelaere says.

But Bauwens wants to get back to suits. He takes his wallet from his inside coat pocket and you can see cream and henna patterns in blue in the lining. The next step is choosing a lining and a pocket square. Then the buttons. Last is the collar felt, which keeps the collar's shape. All these

are available in styles and colours ranging from the plain to the flashy. It's a shame you can't choose more things in life like this.

Bauwens takes the tape measure round his shoulders and says, “And now the fit.” He shows how the sleeve is supposed to be close to the skin and the shoulder is supposed to be one finger away. How the hem should cover the seat but go no further than the knuckles. How the sleeve leaves one centimetre of shirt and the shirt must go to the base of the thumb, and how the shirt cuff can be made longer to accommodate a big watch. His colleagues nod throughout in silent approval. Being in front of a mirror creates insecurities and it is the tailor's job to show what you are and what you can look like – if he is honest, you will look good.

“When we fit the client, we tell them everything we are doing. They know what the tradition is. Then they know what they can do to customise. You can customise anything, even tradition,” Bauwens says.

Every Belize suit shows that it is made to measure in small details. A fourth buttonhole on the sleeve can be embroidered in a different colour. The name of the owner is embroidered in the inner lining above the pocket. Likewise a wedding date, which some clients prefer stitched in the collar. The suit is made to last. “Since we started, the goal has always been to look at the final product and feel, this is what we've done,” Bauwens says.

Belize began 10 years ago but Bauwens has worn a suit since he was 16. After university he worked in textiles in Portugal and Italy before moving back to Ghent. He bought fabrics at fairs in Milan and sent them to manufacturers. There was no store yet and no clients, but he always knew what he wanted, and he recognised quality.

A fashion authority

“Before you came, we went to look at shops in the neighbourhood, feeling the clothes, getting to know what is around,” he said. In 10 years Belize has become an authority. Nearly all the casinos in Belgium wear Belize. Restaurants ask them to fit dining rooms and kitchens. They dress CEOs and entire companies. They have also prepared women's suits, to be launched in August.

A tie is a passport and a suit that fits is a visa and though man expires, a tailored suit hanging in the closet when he is gone does not. “A suit is not how you look,” Bauwens says. The day's first client enters. His colleagues hand him a beer and speak to him in Flemish. “How you look is how you feel. A suit is there to support the feeling and change it when necessary.”

► www.belize.be



Founder Olivier Bauwens shows off some of Belize's wares at their flagship store in Ghent





The Flemish Olympic flames

With the Olympics just days away, we introduce the Flemings who'll be carrying the flag on the track, on the mat, on the road, in the field, on court and on the water

Leo Cendrowicz

They are sprinters and high jumpers, sailors and cyclists, gymnasts and judokas, kayakers and swimmers, horse riders and tennis players: They are the Flemish hopefuls tilting at Olympic glory in London this summer. From the Borlée runners to the Tan badminton pair to sailor Evi Van Acker to weightlifter Tom Goeghebuer and the two hockey teams, there are chances galore at the games.

But let's start with the biggest names. If nothing else during the London Olympics, Flanders will be striking a blow for sporting mothers. When the 115-strong Belgian squad marches out in the London Olympic Stadium for the 27 July opening ceremony, the two most recognisable figures will be Kim Clijsters and Tia Hellebaut. Remarkably, both have children, a fact that might once have spelt the end of their careers. And while both have known the triumph of high sporting achievement, they are today ready to return to the dust and sweat of the arena in their pursuit of Olympic glory. Clijsters, 29, who is due to retire from tennis after the US Open in September, has never competed at the Olympics. She is hoping to repeat Justine Henin's 2004

victory, which turned out to be Belgium's only gold medal at the Athens Olympics. Clijsters, from Bree, is one of the most popular tennis stars of recent years, and has already retired once, in 2007. That preceded an extraordinary turnaround: After marrying and having a daughter, Jada, she returned to the game three years ago.

Comeback queen

Clijsters' comeback performances have surpassed her first career: Retiring with just one major, the US Open, to her name, she has since notched two more, plus the Australian title. But the Olympics still represent a tough proposition. Injuries have piled up this year, forcing her to pull out of the French Open. Plus, the matches are being played at Wimbledon, and Clijsters has never been good on grass.

High jumper Hellebaut, from Antwerp, will carry the Belgian flag in the opening ceremony, becoming only the second woman to do so after judoka Ulla Werbrouck in Sydney in 2000. Hellebaut, 34, a former world indoor pentathlon champion, secured Belgium's

only gold medal in Beijing four years ago with her high jump. By the end of the year, she was pregnant, and retired from sport. Yet nine months after giving birth – and inspired by Clijsters' comeback – Hellebaut returned to training, targeting the London Olympics. She has since had a second child but has returned to fitness and last March came fifth in the World Indoor Championships.

However, perhaps the most promising medal prospects are the Borlée family: twins Kevin and Jonathan, 24. The family is based around Brussels' Stade Fallon but has spent time at Florida State University in Tallahassee, a prestigious athletics college where Kevin studied physiotherapy and Jonathan economics.

Kevin, the 2010 European 400m champion, is in the form of his life. At June's Belgian Championships, his 44.56 seconds beat the national record and was the fastest time by a European runner for almost five years. Jonathan, who was third in the European Championships in 2010, is running the 400m and the 200m. Jointly, of course, they will combine to help the Belgian 4x400m relay team: At the European

Get moving

Kids inspired by the forthcoming Olympics? Flanders has plenty of places where they can play at being mini Olympians themselves

Alan Hope

Since this week's issue is dedicated to Flanders' Olympians, we're turning our attention to sports activities for kids. Check the web version of this article for more links.

Basketball is popular in Flanders, but sadly Belgium won't be represented in the Olympics. Children from six to 14, on the other hand, can come to Hasselt for a free introduction, every weekday from 23 July to 10 August from 14.00 to 17.00. No reservation necessary, just turn up and shoot some hoops – it's all free. <http://tinyurl.com/HasseltBasketball>

Capoeira (*pictured*) isn't an Olympic sport but a popular martial art combined with music and dance from Brazil, invented by slaves brought over from Africa. It involves power, speed and awesome moves, and brings fitness and fun. The Brazilian association for the support and development of Capoeira art is offering hour-long lessons for children every Saturday at 12.00 in De Merode school in Berchem in Antwerp and every Wednesday in July and August (except 15 August) at 17.00 in the Kavka youth centre or Parkspoor Noord sports

hall. There are also lessons for adults on Saturdays and Wednesdays, and the whole thing is run by instructor Luquinha, who's taught all over the world for 25 years. The first lesson is free. www.abadacapoeiraluquinha.be



Shooting may not be what you want your child to grow up being good at,

but for some reason it's impossible to stop boys from seeing a rifle in every stick. A slightly safer variant is paintball, organised for kids from 10 upwards by the youth service of Torhout in West Flanders on 6 August from 9.00 to 17.00. It's not restricted to boys, of course, so if your own Calamity Jane feels like trying it, she's more than welcome. There's also air-rifle shooting and archery (under the strictest supervision, it goes without saying) for those who prefer playing Cowboys and Indians. It costs €11. www.jeugdторhout.be/kidsclub

Swimming is well-represented among the athletes heading for London, and if you think you may have a budding Brian Ryckeman or Kimberley Buys, take them to the municipal swimming pool in Tremelo in Flemish Brabant, where the pool has been converted for the day into a playtime paradise, with every sort of floating amusement you can think of. It's open from 13.30 to 18.00 for €2.50 for adults, €1.25 for kids. Tremelo has other activities planned for the summer, including a supervised playground, an omnisport week from 20 to 24 August and a day of water-skiing and wake-

boarding on 28 August. <http://tinyurl.com/TremeloSwimming>

Cycling, the Flemish sport *par excellence*, is only one of the sporting activities laid on by Terra Nova in Antwerp. On 1 August there's a BMX course in the provincial cycling centre in Wilrijk, an indoor track for cyclists and a parcours for skaters, from 15.00 to 18.00, with races at the end of the initiation. Kids aged eight to 12 pay €4, older kids and adults €6. Long sleeves and long trousers required for the cycle track. <http://tinyurl.com/TerraNovaCycling>

Finally, an **exhibition** at Ghent University's zoology museum explains how some of our Olympic heroes and heroines would have got on against the athletes of the animal kingdom. It's open from 15 to 22 July, from 9.00 to 12.00, with a guided tour at 10.50. Our runners, swimmers and jumpers might have met their match, but somehow we think Tom Boonen and Maaike Polspoel would do okay.

Contributions to this article were made by Olga Hope

Championships, the Belgian side won gold. Their relay teammates include Nils Duerinck, 28, from Grimbergen, and Jente Bouckaert, 22, from Edegem. Sister Olivia, 26, did not qualify, but she has a silver medal from Beijing in 2008 as part of the 4x100m relay team. Her 2008 teammate Elodie Ouédraogo, 31, from Kessel-Lo, is there, running the 400m hurdles. And newcomer Anne Zagré, 22, who has Burundian roots like Ouédraogo, is hoping to make a mark in the 100m hurdles after breaking the national record with 12.92 seconds at the National Championships.

Hans Van Alphen, 30, from Alken, is a rare Belgian decathlete; Simon De Cuyper, 26, from Leuven and Katrien Verstuyft, 22, from Antwerp are competing in the triathlon; while Almensh Belete, 23, from Leuven is running in the 5,000m.

Sister act

The Borlée sisters are not the only siblings competing: Lianne and Yuhan Tan – born to a Belgian mother and an Indonesian father – are both five-time Belgian badminton champions.

In gymnastics, Gaelle Mys, 21, from Drongen and Jimmy Verbaes, 18, from Brussels are taking part in the all-round individual discipline. At the other end of the power scale is Tom Goeghebuer, 37, from Heusden, who won weightlifting's gold medal in the 2009 European Championships.

Flanders has, of course, a glorious history of cycling and there are 18 Belgian cyclists competing this year. The best Flemish hope is Tom Boonen, 31, who has enjoyed a remarkable resurrection this year: Triumphs in the E3 Harelbeke, Ghent-Wevelgem, Paris-Roubaix and the Tour of Flanders suggest Tommeke is peaking. Philippe Gilbert, 29, was the third-placed sprinter in last year's Tour de France and is still in this year's competition. Gilbert, who moved to Aalst as a teenager, dominated the 2011 season, winning races from the Algarve to Liège-Bastogne-Liège while topping the UCI WorldTour Ranking, but is still looking for his first win this year. Boonen and Gilbert will ride the road race

and the individual time trial, as will Stijn Vandenbergh, 28, from Oudenaarde, and Jürgen Roelandts, 26, from Asse. Mountain biker Sven Nys, 36, from Bonheiden, near Antwerp, the 2006 Belgian Sports Personality of the Year, has also qualified.

In judo, traditionally a strong Belgian sport, there is Athens 2004 bronze medallist Ilse Heylen, 35, from Edegem; Dirk Van Tichelt, 28, from Sint-Lenaarts; and Dutch-born Elco van der Geest, 33.

Waterworks

Belgium is sending 13 swimmers to London and they include Ostend's Brian Ryckeman, 28, in the 10km marathon; Glenn Surgeloose, 23, from Ghent in the 200m freestyle; Peter Timmers, 28, from Paal in the 100m freestyle; and relay teams in the men's 100m and 200m freestyle.

In sailing, Flanders can boast Evi Van Acker, 26, from Zaffelare. She came eighth in Beijing and is the current number two in Laser Radial. Wannes Van Laer, 37, from Wijtschate is also competing in the Laser, while Sigrid Rondelez, 41, from Brugge is windsurfing in the RS:X. Also on the water are Olivier Cauwenbergh, 25, from Mechelen and Harelbeke's Laurens Pannecouke, sharing a kayak in the K-2 200m and 1,000m, and Tim Maeyens, 30, from Bruges, in the skiff rowing (he was fourth in Beijing and sixth in Athens).

In equestrian events, Belgium is sending eventing and jumping teams including Karin Donckers, 41, from Hoogstraten; Joris Vanspringel, 49, from Retie, near Turnhout; and Dutch-born Jos Lansink, 49.

And finally, in an unexpected double, Belgium's men's and women's hockey sides will both be competing. The men, who have adopted the nickname of the Red Lions, qualified when they reached the semi-finals of the European Championships in Germany last summer, while the women, the Red Panthers, booked their place this year after a qualifier play-off.

Neither has reached the final of a major championship before (the women have never even been to the Olympics), meaning that Belgium, once



4

non-contenders for hockey, can now look forward to cheering their red cats in London (see below).

► www.roadtolondon.be

Photos:

- 1 ▶ The 4x400m relay team of Jente Bouckaert, Antoine Gillet and Jonathan and Kevin Borlée take gold in the European Championships in Helsinki on 1 July
- 2 ▶ Young gymnast Gaelle Mys competes at the 2008 Beijing Olympics
- 3 ▶ Tour of Flanders winner Tom Boonen is one of the region's medal hopes
- 4 ▶ High jumper Tia Hellebaut, from Antwerp, will carry the Belgian flag in the opening ceremony in London on 27 July

Red alert

Belgium's women's hockey team faces a big challenge at the Olympics

Daan Bauwens

Even though this year's Olympics haven't started yet, Belgium has already broken a few records. First of all, last week the Belgian Olympic Committee decided to send 114 athletes to London, the most since the 1952 games in Helsinki. Then, the Belgians went to Finland with 135 athletes and came back with four medals, all of them won by Flemings.

Secondly, Belgium's women's hockey team is the first Belgian women's team ever to qualify for a team sport at the Olympics. In March, the Red Panthers booked their ticket to London by beating Ireland. They will join the men's team, which also made it to the Olympics. In total, there will be 32 Belgian hockey players in London. Among the 16 women, 11 come from Flanders.

"It's a unique moment in national history," says defender Anne-Sophie Van Regemortel, who was born in the Antwerp suburb of Edegem and plays for Oranje Zwart in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. "It is an honour to be part of the first Belgian women's team to ever enter the Olympics. It came quite unexpectedly, especially given the young age of our team."

Young guns

With a mean age of 22.5, the Belgian team is one of the youngest to be taking part. Four years ago, the team didn't make it to the Olympics, and Van Regemortel was part of that team. "I know where we're coming from and we know what we are working for, so it didn't completely come as a surprise to us that we qualified this time," she tells *Flanders Today*.

But at the Olympics, the Belgian team will face a much



Anne-Sophie Van Regemortel celebrates after Belgium's victory over Ireland seals their qualification for the Olympics

bigger challenge. Of the 12 qualified teams, Belgium holds the lowest position in the world rankings, at number 16. In recent interviews, team coach Pascal Kina explained that Belgium would have to play some of the world's best teams, comparable to Spain and Brazil in football.

The team will also play three Asian teams they have never played before. "We will compete with teams in the top ten, and that's a large step for us," says Van Regemortel. "I have

to admit there is a wide gap to bridge, especially with the world's top three. We will have to work on our physical speed, power and performance. Until now we have always played games where the tempo was lower and, yes, we lack experience at a high level. We will all have to play faster and stronger. The other teams have more talents in their ranks; they don't have any weak links."

Staying at home

What's more, the team will have to do without its strongest player. In April, the Royal Belgian Hockey Federation announced that Merksem-born Sofie Gierts would not be able to join the team at the Olympics, even though she scored the three decisive goals in that final qualification game.

The federation decided it would be best to leave her at home to assure "the positive and harmonious development of international women's hockey in Belgium". The news stirred up a storm of protest in the Flemish press and thousands of fans are still demanding via Facebook that Gierts be allowed to join.

The federation and the coach have declined to comment further. But even without Gierts, Van Regemortel thinks we could be in for a surprise. "We are going to London to win, not to be the underdog. It's completely impossible now to predict where we will finish. These last few years we have constantly been growing as a team and we demonstrated that at the qualification tournament. I have faith in our team and I know we're going to do great even though our adversaries are so strong. We're very curious about what will happen at the Olympics."



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TAZ team

Fifteen years old, Ostend's Theater Aan Zee is a heady mix of contemporary creations

Georgio Valentino

Theater Aan Zee began life in 1997 as a small but ambitious festival in the streets of staid Ostend. It was an unlikely marriage from the start. Conceived on the more adventurous end of the art spectrum, early editions of TAZ focused on an in-your-face brand of street theatre as well as experimental stage and video productions.

So provocative were those first performances – and so unsuspecting was Ostend – that one of the artists was arrested for disturbing the peace. There have, however, been no arrests registered in recent history. The festival has instead succeeded in becoming an Ostend institution. It has broadened its scope to include music, film and other art forms, and is organised these days less around themes than personalities, specifically those of its guest curators. This year's curator isn't a single person but, for the first time, an entire collective: Leuven's Braakland/ZheBilding. The building in question is the old customs warehouse at Leuven's canal port, a neighbourhood currently undergoing a full post-industrial transformation, and it is home to an alliance of four contemporary arts organisations sharing several converted spaces for performances and exhibitions, as well as a permanent on-site cafe. As a collective, BZB was last year awarded the Prize for Performing Arts by the Flemish culture ministry.

Perfect harmony

The collaboration between BZB and TAZ is a natural one. The former's focus on contemporary creation, be it theatrical, musical or visual, is completely in sync with the festival's founding principles. The latter has been purposely recruiting guest curators from different Flemish cities



A l'attente du livre d'or, part of the Bato Congo programme

every year. Last year's creative axis, for example, was Ostend-Brussels.

There is an important international dynamic to the festival, too. The Bato Congo programme, conceived in collaboration with Flemish activists 11.11.11 and international cooperation agency VAIS, explores the difficult post-colonial relationship between Belgium and its former holdings in the Congo.

Congolese artists are invited not

just to perform but also to enter into dialogue with their Belgian counterparts. So Bato Congo includes much more than simply performances, concerts and exhibitions. Workshops, debates and even a football match are all on the agenda. Two Congolese bloggers also join the TAZ community, reporting daily in the festival's bulletin, the *TAZette*. Another of the festival's objectives is to support arts education, to encourage

young performers to get involved, often through collaborations with schools and cultural centres. TAZ's Jong Werk programme presents the fruits of these collaborations. This year sees a former TAZ protégé graduate to the major league. Dutch performer Nick Steur's *FREEZE!* won last year's youth theatre prize. Now he is premiering his new installation/performance, *TRIP!* TAZ's Familiepark is a perennial favourite for festival-goers, especially

those with small children. Ostend's Leopold Park is transformed for the duration of the festival into a wonderland, complete with authentic circus caravan. Activities including concerts, story-telling and workshops run daily from 11.00 to 19.00. Most events here are free and suitable for toddlers, and there's plenty of space for a picnic. Finally, don't worry, parents: There are self-service facilities available for all your baby-care needs.

SEASIDE PICKS

House On Mars: Pixel Rave

Jong Werk invites Toneelacademie Maastricht's six-man performance troupe Urland, led by TAZ veteran Thomas Dudkiewicz, to stage a curious production. It's a straightforward story of sibling rivalry inspired by such archetypal pairs as Romulus and Remus and Cain and Abel, but the setting has changed. Indeed, the title *House On Mars* is meant literally. Urland's feuding brothers are space explorers whose costumes and mannerisms are modelled on the gloriously bad B-movies of decades past. Of course, that's the point. The deliberate kitsch of this "techno-science-fiction operetta" is a medium in itself. In English.

26 July-28 July, 22.00, VTI, €7/€8

Rencontre au pluriel

Toto Kisaku's *Rencontre au pluriel*, presented in the context of Bato Congo, is somewhere between dramatic monologue and stand-up comedy. Accompanied by a trio of musicians, the Congolese performer narrates his early life and training as an actor in the capital of the DRC. The one-man show is suffused with wit, irony and a strong sense of the absurd, all of which are kicked into overdrive when Kisaku describes the young African performer's first

impressions of Europe. In French, with Dutch subtitles.

29 July, 17.00, 30 July, 17.00 & 20.30, Club Terminus, €10/€11

Latin Lovers

Before becoming an acclaimed harp virtuoso, Andrea Voets was a student at a Bruges high school. Before becoming a world-famous calligrapher, Yves Leterme (not to be confused with the former Belgian PM) was a classical languages teacher. Chance had placed them several years previously in the same classroom, and Voets would remember the encounter. Years later she would invite her former teacher to collaborate on a multimedia performance, joining live musical performance and calligraphy. *Latin Lovers* incorporates Ovid's *Art of Love* and R Murray Schafer's *Crown of Ariadne*. This is not Voet's only appearance at TAZ. She also performs a solo programme of 20th- and 21st-century compositions earlier the same morning (11.30, to be specific) at Fort Napoleon.

3 August, 15.00, Cafe Koer, €7/€8

Hitler Is Dood

A courtroom drama with a contemporary

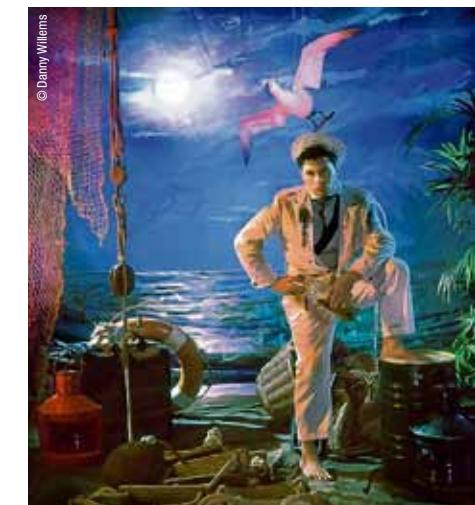
twist. Using the historical Nuremberg trials as a backdrop, Flemish writer/director Stijn Devillé makes a complex statement about crime and punishment. The usual suspects – Goering, Speer, Von Ribbentrop and the gang – are joined by four characters from the Allied side. These four have different roles and different perspectives, but all are trying to make sense of the destruction around them and make sure it doesn't happen again. An electronic soundtrack adds another contemporary touch. It's often creepy and gives the production an unsettling, anachronistic feel. In Dutch.

3 August, 19.00, Loods NMBS, €14

The Ship

Flemish musician Luc Van Acker got his start as a studio player for well-known Belgian chart acts. In 1984 he cut a legendary album of his own. *The Ship* featured collaborations with several New Wave celebrities, including Anna Domino (whose duet with Van Acker, *Zanna*, was a hit) and Tuxedomoon's Blaine L Reiner. EMI's re-release of the album this year has prompted Van Acker to return to the stage for a series of reprise performances of *The Ship* across Belgium (pictured).

4 August, 21.00, Cafe Koer, €12/€13



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Toys in the sandpit

Liesa Van der Aa is a promising new name on the Flemish music scene

Christophe Verbiest

Last week Liesa Van der Aa opened for Antony and the Johnsons at the Gent Jazz festival. The concert was the high point of a wonderful 2012 for the Flemish singer, musician and songwriter. At the beginning of the year she released her debut, *Troops*, one of the best albums I've heard this year.

Though music was her first love, up until *Troops* Van der Aa was mainly known as an actress. She was in *Zingaburia*, an absurdist television series for children. And you can still catch her in *De man zonder eigenschappen* (*The Man without Qualities*), the theatre adaptation of Robert Musil's monumental novel.

But it all started with music. At five years old, she picked up the violin and at 18 she was ready to continue her violin studies at the Conservatory. She didn't, though, and went to the Herman Teirlinck Institute instead, a famous school for actors that also has a musical section called *kleinkunst*, a mixture of cabaret, singing and song-writing.

As an adolescent, Van der Aa, born in 1986, was exposed to pop music and jazz. "By browsing in my parents' record collection I discovered the Beatles and the Velvet Underground," she remembers. "Not that it eclipsed my love for classical music, but practising eight hours a day on my violin wasn't my cup of tea. Probably one day I'll regret that I haven't carried on. But not yet."

Room to develop

Van der Aa, a torrent of words who

© Natacha Wally



grew up in Brussels but now lives in Antwerp, soon discovered that training at the actors' institute wasn't really what she wanted. Yet she persevered and doesn't regret it. "I met loads of interesting people," she explains. "More importantly, they let me have a room for myself. That's where I started writing songs and singing. To do the latter, I had to learn to play the piano, since the violin isn't an instrument you can accompany yourself with as a singer."

"During the same period I learned to treat my violin with effects; for instance to lower the pitch a few octaves, which makes it sound like a cello or a double bass." Laughing, she adds: "After a while I was sounding like an orchestra, all on my own." It wasn't exactly what her teachers expected. "The first year, they really tried to push me in another direction, but to no avail. And from the second year on they let me have it my way."

Some even encouraged her knack for experimentation. Ghent rock musician Pieter-Jan De Smet, for example, who doesn't shy away from some experimentation himself, told her: "You're in a sandpit and there are loads of toys. Play with them!"

That's what she did and it resulted, seven years on, in *Troops*. Listening to the album, I first had the impression I was hearing a full band. But in fact, barring a few guest musicians like the Antwerp chamber quartet DAAU, American trumpeter Jon Birdsong and a Berlin choir, Van der Aa played all the instruments herself – keyboards, melodica, percussion and, of course, violin. Loads of violin, even though it may not always sound like violin.

"It's great to play with others, because that lifts you up, makes you a better musician. But I have a problem with it," Van der Aa confesses. "I'm a poor

communicator; I've difficulty telling people what I want. So I decided to make *Troops* on my own, because asking for help felt like a burden."

Going it alone

"Sometimes I really feel bad for wanting to do everything by myself. During the recording of *Troops*, I often wondered what I had got myself into. But I didn't want to give in." She grins: "Don't get me wrong: I don't believe that I'm a better musician than all the ones I've played with... I'm not Prince!" To record *Troops*, Van der Aa went to Berlin, where she worked in the studio of German avant-garde rock band Einstürzende Neubauten. For two months, their sound engineer Boris Wilsdorf was her partner in crime. "I knew I didn't want to work with a producer who told me what to do because that would only end badly. I wanted to experiment, though, to try out loads of different things. Boris helped me with that. And I don't think the album sounds like Neubauten."

"I find *Troops* a highly romantic album," she continues. "But friends often tell me I play sad music. 'You're a happy, joyful woman. Why does your music sound so depressed?' Maybe because writing that kind of music is much easier than the sunny pop songs you'd associate with, let's say, Paul Simon. I wouldn't have been able to write such songs at the time of *Troops*." With a big smile, she adds: "All in all, I actually think it's quite a happy album."

► www.liesavanderaa.be

THE WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Author Tom Lanoye has been awarded the five-yearly prize for a stage work by the Royal Academy for the Dutch Language and Literature, for his 2008 play *Atropa: De wreak van de vrede* (*Atropa: The Revenge of Peace*). The prize is worth €6,250 and is awarded every five years, with prizes in the intervening years for prose, poetry, essays and studies of old Dutch works.

Crooner Eddy Wally, who celebrated his 80th birthday last week, is to retire from singing, although he will continue to make personal appearances, his daughter has announced. Wally, known for his outlandish dress sense, suffered a brain haemorrhage in March last year which has left him weakened on his left side, making it difficult to stand for long periods and robbing him of his vocal strength, she told *Story* magazine.

For the second time, a thief has stolen an artwork by the **Surrealist artist** Salvador Dalí from the permanent exhibition of his works in the Stadshallen in Bruges. The work, valued at €1,200, is a woodcut. Two years ago a bronze sculpture worth €120,000 was stolen and never recovered. Police are now investigating how the thief managed to escape being seen by 16 security cameras.

The King Baudouin foundation has paid €450,000 for the return of a Pietà by the 17th-century artist Jan Van Dele, created for a private chapel in the Sablon church in Brussels. The work was seized by French revolutionary forces in 1794 and vanished without trace until it was rediscovered recently in Paris. The foundation now intends to return the work to its original spot in the Sablon church, where it will be on view to the public.

The organisers of the **Pukkelpop festival** in Kiewit near Hasselt in Limburg are to hold a minute's silence on 18 August at 18.10, the exact moment last year when a severe storm hit the festival grounds, causing havoc in which five people died and hundreds were injured. Before then, on 5 August, a remembrance ceremony is to be organised including the unveiling of a monument to the dead designed by Hasselt artist Tom Vanuytrecht.

The funeral took place in Brussels last week of Cécile Muller, who organised the **Miss Belgium competition** for 36 years from 1969. Muller died last week of a stroke, at the age of 81.

MUSIC REVIEWS

Triggerfinger

Faders up 2 Live in

Amsterdam • Excelsior

It took Triggerfinger blood, sweat and tears, but with their third album, *All This Dancin' Around* (released in November 2010), the band gained massive success in Flanders. Moreover, thanks to some extensive touring, their popularity is speedily rising in lots of other European countries as well. To celebrate their success, they release the live album *Faders up 2 - Live in Amsterdam*. As all their fans will tell you, Triggerfinger have made good albums, but their sexy, high-octane rock is truly amazing performed live. Admittedly, I could have done without a drum solo of more than four minutes – that's typically something you have to experience live to really enjoy. On the plus side, it includes six excellent songs recorded during live radio sessions.

► www.triggerfinger.be



Benny Zen

Tony the Hindu and the Advocates of Science & Culture

Just when you think it can't get any crazier, there's Benny Zen, aka Peter Houben. Each of the 22 songs – none lasting longer than two minutes – on his new album is about musicians (Ringo Starr, Mark Everett of eels, Morrissey, Kate Bush), scientists (Daniel C Dennett, Stephen Hawking, Nikola Tesla) and sports heroes (Ayrton Senna, Jimmy White) with the odd film director (Terry

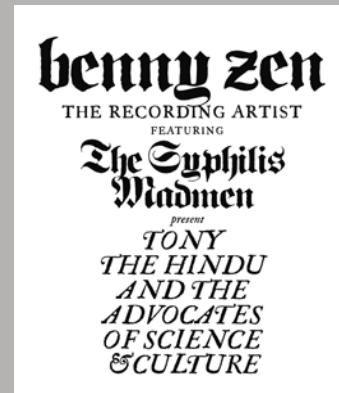
Gilliam) thrown in. They're small vignettes focusing, mostly, on one aspect of the subject's personality or work. Musically, the somewhat melancholic pop songs radiate a psychedelic aura. You can listen to them all on Benny Zen's website, where you'll find a clip for each song.

► www.bennyzen.com

Oscar and the Wolf

Summer Skin • PIAS

Recorded in a church in the



Limburg town of Lommel, *Summer Skin* by Oscar and the Wolf is a promising five-track EP: contemplative folk rock with lovely harmonies that's akin to (but certainly not a copy of) bands like Bon Iver and Isbells. The dismal beauty of "Wash Your Face" refers to new wave, whereas "Crossroads" shows that Oscar and the Wolf can brew some spicy rock if they want to. After two EPs, it's time for the bigger work. If they keep on growing, their debut album will put them definitively on the map.

► www.oscarandthewolf.com



On the right track pleinOPENair

Ian Mundell

There's a railway theme to this year's pleinOPENair, the outdoor festival organised in Brussels by the Nova Cinema. But rather than moving around the city, as it usually does, the 2012 edition has pitched its screen in one place, on a building site in the shadow of Zuidstation.

Over two weekends the festival proposes a mix of films, concerts, workshops and other activities calculated to explore the urban environment. One of the best ways of making the connection is to take a short walking tour around the neighbourhood with a pleinOPENair guide (one tour on each Saturday is in Dutch, the rest in French). Each walk takes in an exhibition of photographs and maps documenting the evolution of the Zuid neighbourhood over the past 20 years, since the station learned it would be welcoming the high-speed TGV from Paris. Since then the place has been dramatically transformed, with redevelopment calculated to create a modern business district around the station.

The location this year, where Ernest Blerotstraat meets Paul-Henri Spaaklaan, is part of this process. Reserved for the Victor project, it will eventually become, in the words of developer Atenor, "a large mixed urban project that will harmoniously emphasise the area

surrounding the Hortaplein". The festival sees things a little differently. It is no fan of the developers, but reserves its sharpest comments for the national railway company, NMBS. "Stations are now turned into cathedrals," the programme says, "their entrails veritable shopping centres, their surroundings zones of office space just so many showcases for tourists and investors."

Some of this year's films are equally militant. Ken Loach's *The Navigators* (2001) is about a group of British railway workers trying to survive privatisation, while in Antonio Pietrangeli's *Fantasmi a Roma* (1961) ghosts disrupt the plans of a Roman property speculator. More purely cinematic treats include Youssef Chahine's classic social thriller *Cairo Station* (1958) and Russian silent film *Turksib* (1929), about the race to build the Turkestan-Siberian railway. This is screened with a live soundtrack by British group Bronnt Industries Kapital, whose trance-like mix of electronica and shimmering world music is just perfect for the film.

Each evening also features short films, for example documenting the construction in the 1950s of the rail line that cuts Brussels in two, and concerts before and after screenings. Performers include French rappers Voodoo Clan and



Open-air screenings are just one part of the pleinOPENair festival in Brussels, which this year has a railway theme

MC Duval, plus local percussion collective Fanfakids. Meanwhile, those who want to express themselves can attend workshops on rap writing, screen printing (both 28 July) and poster art (2 August).

In between the two weekends the scene shifts along the tracks to

Noordstation and La Poissonnerie on Vooruitgangstraat. This former fishmonger's shop has been saved from demolition and reclaimed by the community. Here, on 1 August, there will be a screening of Thierry Michel's documentary *Métamorphose d'une gare*, about the building of Liège's monumental

new railway station, followed by a debate with union and passenger groups.

Screenings are free, with drinks and vegetarian food on offer at the Zuidstation site.

27 July-4 August

| Zuidstation, Brussels

| ► www.nova-cinema.org

EXHIBITION

Erwin Olaf - Exquisite Corpses

What a brilliant concept: Take a renowned Romantic-era canvas (Louis Gallait's "The Last Honours to Counts Egmont and Hoorn") and make a modern version of it. Such was the task of Dutch photographer Erwin Olaf, at the request of Gaasbeek Castle (which Count Egmont himself once owned). The shoot took place in the castle and called for the same arrangement of characters as in the original painting, plus a few extras, using models selected from a casting session earlier this year. Olaf's goal was not to create a literal translation, but a "rephrasing" of the painting's atmosphere and the blood-curdling romanticism of the era. Depicted in the photograph, as in Gallait's original, are the counts of Egmont and Hoorn greeted by members of the Brussels Crossbow Guild after being beheaded. The lighting and colours used in the photograph give it the character of a painting, but then far more sharp and life-like. Olaf also threw in a few tips of the hat to modern Belgian society, including a veiled reference to the last owner of the castle, the Marquise Arconati Visconti, a few striking women and fashion designs



by Delvaux, Ann Demeulemeester, Kaat Tilley and Dries Van Noten, among others. A copy of Gallait's canvas hangs

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Kamarama: Various works by artists who have in some way inspired, fascinated or influenced Flemish artist Kamagurka, including Jeroen Henneman, Kati Heck and Muzo

Until AUG 1 at Arentshuis, Dijver 16

► www.bruggeplus.be/nl/kamarama

Brussels

Un-Scene II: Platform for contemporary art featuring various media including photography, painting, sculpture, installations and video

Until AUG 26 at Wiels,

Van Volxemlaan 354

► www.wiels.org

De esthetiek van de fotoautomaat (Aesthetics of the photo booth): Behind-the-scenes look at paintings, photographs, collages and graphic design inspired by the invention of the photo booth in 1928

Until AUG 19 at Botanique,

Koningsstraat 236

► www.botanique.be

Until 19 August | Gaasbeek Castle, Kasteelstraat 40, Gaasbeek

| ► www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be

PERFORMANCE

Follie Follies

Burlesque beauties and charming crooners take over Antwerp's trendy 46-metre-high Skybar this summer in a series of steamy performances. Have a Japanese meal and a cocktail while lounging in the club on the 12th floor with its dazzling view of the skyline as Miss D, burlesque kitten Sayuri and DJ Boppin' Benvis Brothers provide seductive entertainment to the tune of swinging oldies. **RB**



19 July, 2, 16 & 30 August, from 16.00

Skybar Lindner Hotel & City Lounge
Lange Kievitstraat 125, Antwerp | www.skybarantwerp.be

MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

Ghent

Puppet Theatre Pedrolino in **Het Geheim van de Zingende Toren** (*The Secret of the Singing Tower*): Puppet theatre inside Ghent's castle, as part of the Gentse Feesten, for young and old (in Dutch)
JUL 23 15.00 at Gravensteen, Sint-Veerleplein 11

► www.gentsefeesten.be

Knokke

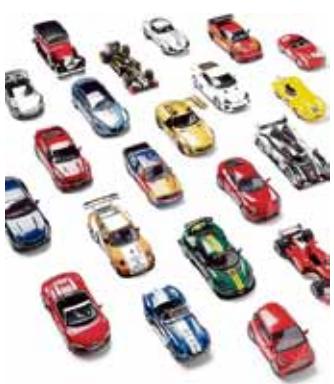
Opera on the beach: The best productions of De Munt's 2011-2012 season on the big screen, featuring Dvorák's Rusalka (27 JUL), Handel's Orlando (10 AUG) and Verdi's Il Trovatore (24 AUG)
JUL 27, AUG 10 & 27 on the beach

► www.demunt.be/nl/17/267/Opera-on-the-beach

SPECIAL EVENT

Model Car Festival

Motorheads, history buffs, kids and collectors alike should head to Autoworld from this weekend. Belgium's biggest automobile museum will be filled with no fewer than 5,000 cars! OK, they may be miniatures, but they are perfect scale models, illustrating the evolution of the car and the prominent role it has played from its very invention through to the present day. There are model cars for everybody's interests, from hand-built limited editions to mass-produced varieties, tin toy models to pedal cars. The exhibition is set up according to a number of themes, including Made in Belgium, The Automobile in the Movies, Cartoons and Comic Strips, Motorsport, Brand Names, Presidential and Papal Cars and Environmentally Friendly Cars, among others. **RB**



20 July-26 August

Autoworld, Jubelpark, Brussels | www.autoworld.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Belgian National Day: National holiday celebrations including free concerts, markets, entertainment for kids, military and civilian parades, fireworks and more
JUL 21 10.00-23.30 between Warandepark and Poelaertplein

► www.brussel.be

Ghent

Fireworks: Large fireworks display as part of the Gentse Feesten and in celebration of the Belgian national holiday, featuring music by a symphonic orchestra and Flemish jazz pianist Jef Neve
JUL 21 23.00 at Watersportbaan, Yachtdreef 1

► www.miramiro.be

FESTIVAL

Klinkers

With Cactus music festival behind it, Bruges doesn't intend to rest on its laurels. The Klinkers festival starts soon, with a long line-up of free open-air concerts by the Scabs (*pictured*), José James, Lady Linn and Babylon Circus, plus four more intimate performances by Spain, Gavin Friday and the Belgian premiere of My Sweet Canary, a tribute to rebetiko diva Róza Eskenázi. This cosy festival in Bruges's magical historic centre is not just about music, either. Think stand-up comedy with Kamagurka and Wim Helsen, family day in Astrid Park, open-air cinema and live bands playing gigs in pubs across the city. Klinkers ends in style on 11 August with Benenwerk-Ballroom Bruggeoise, 11 ballrooms fitted with danceable live acts and DJ parties featuring Discobar Galaxie, Gilles Peterson, Brassroots, Lefto and many more. **RB**



27 July-11 August | Across Bruges

► www.klinkers-brugge.be/2012

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Summer of Antwerp: Free riverside theatre and dance performances, concerts, open-air cinema and more
Until SEP 2 across Antwerp

► www.zomervanantwerpen.be

Bredene (West Flanders)

Greek Summer Fest: Festival celebrating all things Hellenic, including workshops, children's entertainment, Greek music and dance performances and more
JUL 21 12.00-23.00 at MEC Staf Versluys, Kapelstraat 76

► www.stafversluys-centrum.be

Ninove (East Flanders)

De Donderdagen (Thursdays): Free circus and street theatre festival
Until AUG 30 Thurs 20.00 across Ninove

► www.ninove.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Flamingo

Lakensestraat 171, 1000 Brussels

Lately, Brussels has seen the opening of a few great bars. The best-known ones have the same man behind them: Frederic Nicolay, responsible for among others Potemkine near Hallepoort in Sint-Gillis, Barbeton on Dansaertstraat and now Flamingo, a huge bar in Lakensestraat.

As with all his previous bars, Nicolay opted for a neighbourhood that needs a bit of TLC to establish Flamingo. While the first part of the street is home to a few nice restaurants and shops, the other end is infamous for its nightly drug deals and prostitutes. Flamingo is on the corner of the street, opposite cultural institute KVS. The large building has a stunning listed facade and used to house four shops. Walls were knocked down, but the original Art Nouveau plasterwork on the ceilings was kept. The result is a very large bar – the biggest in Brussels, 400 square metres to be precise – with dark and mint green walls and wooden tables and chairs. To provide the many visitors with drinks and food, there's a very long counter with myriad bottles and glasses in the background.

Flamingo is popular throughout the day, with peaks around lunchtime and apero time. Lunch comes in the form of salads (€6.50), sandwiches or soup (both €3.50) and is served in glass jars, just like you'll find at Nicolay's Bar du Matin in Vorst. To wet your whistle, there are plenty of beers to choose from. Nicolay's own beer, Volga, for instance, brewed by Saint-Feuillien, and other nice beers from all over the country: Brugse Tripel, De Koninck

Katrien Lindemans



BITE

La Paix ★★★★

Calf's brains, pig's cheeks and kidneys may sound like outdated dishes, fit only for consumption in times of war or famine, but they are in fact just the opposite. Delicacies such as these are best left in the hands of experts, such as David Martin of La Paix. When Basque Frenchman Martin married the daughter of the brasserie's owners, he stepped on board the family business with a most impressive history. Men from the livestock market and abattoir across the street have been coming to La Paix since 1892, especially for a freshly tapped pint and a good piece of meat. In that respect, not much has changed. The place still has an old-fashioned feel to it, with basic wooden tables and an airy, relaxed atmosphere: an elegant brasserie with the character of a cafe. Businessmen in suits fill up one table, casual-clad workers take up the next.

In the heart of Anderlecht, one of Brussels' most multicultural neighbourhoods, La Paix has a few modern touches now, including an immaculate open kitchen and a very creative menu. Even after La Paix was given its Michelin star in 2009, it didn't lose sight of its roots. The focus, after all, is on the food. It's a hot and humid Thursday afternoon when my companion and I arrive, so we start with a cold bottle of sparkling water. Our friendly and knowledgeable server points out the day's suggestions and lunch menu, but we've got our hearts set on ordering à la carte. It'll be one carpaccio of Breton langoustines and one *vitello anguilo* for starters, followed by calf's sweetbreads and *américain* for our mains.

Before the starters arrive, we are presented with a frosty glass of goat's cheese, whipped up into a light, foamy cream and poured over a bright green layer of radish leaf coulis

and topped with flakes of green tea. It's a refreshing combination of bitter and earthy flavours, and a promising indication of what's to come.

The *vitello anguilo* is a colourful variant of the classic *vitello tonnato*, but with eel instead of tuna. Corèze veal is thinly sliced and arranged in stacks on the deep dish. It has a very delicate, milky flavour, rivalled only by that of the smoked eel mousse and fresh chunks of tangy marinated squid. All around is a moat of hijiki algae and dashi bouillon, surprising tips of the hat to Japanese cuisine, plus some avocado to balance out the outspoken taste of the sea.

My silky carpaccio is served in its own bouillon, perfumed with bay laurel oil. A few blades of sea lavender, sea orache and salicornia titillate the senses with brine and crunch. Here and there a dot of bright orange sea-buckthorn berry puree adds some acidity, while cream of eggplant tones it down. Next to this is a side dish of baked, phyllo dough-encrusted white radish with a scoop of luscious buttermilk and goat's cheese ice-cream.

My companion, a butcher's daughter with high standards, has nothing but praise for her *américain*. The minced raw beef, extremely fresh and juicy, is wrapped in thin strips of West Flanders red polder beef with nice marbling. "Rarely have I eaten such a delicious steak tartare, with such perfectly balanced flavours, especially in combination with the beef wrapped around it," she raves on her culinary blog. It comes with organic romaine lettuce, cauliflower sautéed in bread crumbs and butter, fresh fries and a few dollops of mayonnaise. Both of us enjoy a dry, tart Geuze Boon with our meals.



Meanwhile I'm silently savouring my own dish of calf's sweetbreads, easily one of the finest creations I've ever had the joy of eating. The meat is almost melt-on-your-tongue soft with a slightly crispy, buttery outer layer covered in a braised mustard seed and organic lemon confit that pops in your mouth. Next to this, wild spinach, frothy potato mousseline and young carrots round off the ensemble's earthy character.

A bite of my companion's *tarte au citron* reveals why this is a La Paix favourite. Buttery cookies are topped with lemon cream and fluffy drops of wild fennel meringue. The masterpiece is complete with an icy scoop of lemon-buttermilk sorbet, deep red hibiscus coulis, fresh whipped cream with bits of Haitian vanilla bean and little crunchy dried

violet flower petals that can only be described as candy-like.

On this occasion, we are more than happy to pay the €160 bill.

► www.lapaix1892.com

- ➡ Ropsy Chaudronstraat 49, Anderlecht; 02.523.09.58
- ⌚ Mon-Thurs, 12.00-14.15; Fri, 12.00-14.15 & 19.00-21.15
- € Main dish: €23-45
- ⓘ Brasserie with a Michelin star, serving up refined versions of Belgian classics

TALKING DUTCH

Going Greek

Philip Ebels

I gotta say: Having spent the past two weeks in Athens, Greece, my sympathy for all you foreign language learners has multiplied tenfold – at least.

I guess I'd forgotten how difficult it is. Sometimes more than others, of course, but on the whole, learning a language is a hefty endeavour.

In the beginning, it was fun. It was new, exciting, and really not that difficult – or so I thought.

Soon, I knew how to count – *een, twee, drie, vier, vijf, zes, zeven, acht, negen, tien* – say *ja*, yes, *nee*, no, *goedemorgen*, good morning, and – naturally – *Waar is het postkantoor?* Where is the post office? This is easy!

I even came to a point where I used to walk down the street with my headphones on, repeating out loud like a madman phrases like *Ik wil graag een tafel voor twee*, I would like a table for two, scaring passersby in the process. (There are some decent podcasts available for free.) But then: reality check. At last, I got to practise what I had learned. All those hours of zen-like study would finally pay off. As soon as I got off the plane, I ordered a beer in the native barman's native language – *een bierje alstublieft*. Or I thought I had.

The native blinked. A second went by. Then another. Was that a grin? And then, instead of just reaching back to the fridge and getting a well-deserved cold beer, he let out a waterfall of syllables that sounded nothing like the nice lady on the CD. He was asking me something. But what?

Defeat. My cover was blown – if it had ever existed. *Spreekt u engels?* Do you speak

English?

Disappointment settled in. The same scene continued to unfold, time and time again. Nobody told me it would be like this – especially not the nice lady on the CD.

Natives, it turns out, don't pause after every word and don't confine their vocabulary to *Ik kom uit Brussel*, I am from Brussels. Stupid language. I didn't even want to learn it any more.

But then, after walking around for a week or two, listening carefully, I found myself picking up stuff – and this time, I knew. "Right, so that's how you order a beer!"

Now, when I order a drink, I get what I want – most of the time. I often still have to ask if people speak English – but at least I do so in Greek.



The last word...

Incommunicado

"I dread the day when he asks for his mobile phone"

Liliane, wife of art curator Jan Hoet, who is now out of a coma and speaking

Ten days of excess

"The Gentse Feesten bring people fatter together"

Prime minister Elio Di Rupo confuses *dichter* (closer) with *dikker* (fatter)

Fond farewell

"We've been friends since school. He was a big bear of a guy and we're going to miss him"

Singer Natalia sang Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" at the funeral of her friend, cyclist Rob Goris

Look on the bright side

"I don't understand the complainers. Surely there's a lot more to life than the weather?"

VRT weatherman (but also keen cyclist and astronomer) Frank De Boosere

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

A picture book and an exhibition in Ostend look back on the life of the most popular Flemish singer of the last half century, Will Tura. During his career, several younger local artists have tried to overrule him, but no one has really succeeded. Before he blows out 72 candles – on 2 August – he told us the secrets behind his biggest hit, "Eenzaam zonder jou" (Lonely without you), and a career that has lasted for more than five decades.

News

Limburger Joke Quintens, vice-chair of SPA, is currently trying her hand at a variety of alternative career options, as she takes part in a series of stages – with a therapist in a children's hospital, a baker, a nurse, a factory worker, a market stallholder, a kindergarten teacher and more. We talk to her about the reasons behind it and the lessons she's learning.

Living

Franco Dragone is the man behind the world-famous Cirque du Soleil. What's a little less well-known, however, is the training centre hidden away in the village of Lint, Antwerp province, where 80 artists and 50 crew members work and live around the clock to turn Dragone's dramatic vision into spectacular reality.