

Monumental

Mechelen opens Dossin memorial, while Flanders launches an integrated plan for heritage

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Pumping up the heat

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The new Utopia

A top-notch exhibition on the state of human rights is the final entry in Visual Arts Flanders

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The Devil and Terry Gilliam

Vlaamse Opera performs one of the world's most enduring legends with one of cinema's most endearing masters

Ian Mundell

Music lovers will think of it as Hector Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*, but when the Vlaamse Opera stages this piece, it will just as often be thought of as Terry Gilliam's *Faust*. The film director and former member of Monty Python brought the opera to the stage in London last year (*pictured*) and, after performances in Palermo, it ends its tour in Flanders. This will be your last chance to see one of cinema's most creative minds tackle one of the world's most problematic operas.

The *Damnation of Faust* is difficult because it involves a fantastic journey. Faust, an ageing and disillusioned scholar, is wavering between suicide and renewing his faith in God, when Méphistophélès appears. The demon offers to grant Faust's most profound desires if only he will follow him. Faust agrees, and the journey begins, jumping from one place to another, from a cellar tavern to a meadow, from a bedroom to the street, up into the mountains and finally down into hell.

The piece was first performed in Paris in 1846, but as a concert rather than a fully staged opera. Berlioz died in 1869, and it was only in 1893 that the work was presented in theatrical form. "I think Berlioz was very much ahead of his time," says Dmitri Jurowski, chief conductor of the Vlaamse Opera and musical director for this production of *Faust*. "You can see indications, even in the score, that he needs some sort of special effects that he couldn't describe because they were not possible at the time."

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui



© Chris Van Der Burgh/Eastman

The dancer and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui was recently awarded this year's Flemish Culture Prize for stage arts – prompting one newspaper to welcome the award as a sign that Flanders is finally catching up with the rest of the world in recognising his talent. Cherkaoui was born in Antwerp, the son of a Flemish mother and a Moroccan father. He says his first influence was watching a friend copy the movements of Kate Bush in her iconic *Wuthering Heights* video – he also cites her song "Running Up That Hill" as the music he would choose for the soundtrack of his life. He took dance classes and, in 1995, entered a competition for young dancers organised by Alain Platel, director of Les Ballets C de la B. Cherkaoui won for his solo routine, a mix of vogue, hip hop and African dance. He then wisely followed advice to train with Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker at the P.A.R.T.S. dance school in Brussels. He's been creating and dancing ever since, the list of his works impressively long for someone not yet 40. As is the roll-call of companies he has worked with, from Switzerland, Sweden and Denmark to New York and Monte Carlo. Not forgetting, of course, the world of Flemish dance, with

collaborations with Platel and Wim Vandekeybus. *The Guardian* newspaper once called him "Belgium's bendiest choreographer", and to anyone who's seen him onstage, it's obvious why: His body is both wiry and elastic, apparently endowed with more joints than the average human and capable of fits of strength that combine the athleticism of a gymnast with the grace of a ballet dancer. Cherkaoui, 36, launched his own company, Eastman (the literal translation of his name), two years ago. They are resident in Antwerp's Toneelhuis, where he has long worked, though he still collaborates all over the world with other companies and artists such as Flamenco dancer Maria Pagès and Indian dancer Shantala Shivalingappa. The awards continue to flood in, now joined by the Flemish government's annual recognition. The Culture Prize citation mentions his "dizzying productivity" and the diversity that runs like a thread through all of his work. Culture minister Joke Schauvliege, handing over the €12,500 award, described him as "the best Flanders has to offer the world".

► www.east-man.be

News in brief

Two of the four men accused of involvement in **the murder of castle owner Stijn Staelens** last February were released from prison last week pending trial. André Gyselbrecht, whose daughter was married to Staelens, and his son Peter gave a brief press conference in which they pleaded their innocence. Both are suspected of organising the shooting of Staelens using a string of criminal contacts, in an attack meant to be intimidation that went fatally wrong. Two other men remain in custody.

Bruges-born Lieutenant-General Marc Comperpol has been **named Chief of Operations of the army**, making him the second-highest ranking officer in the military after chief of defence Gerrard Van Caelenberghe. Lt-Gen Comperpol was the commander of the Para Commando battalion for 19 years before joining the general staff. Since 2009 he has been in charge of land troops.

Contaminated drinking water has been ruled out as the cause of a **mysterious illness** that last week affected 90 of the 130 pupils at a primary school in Aarschot, Flemish Brabant, as well as members of staff. The Flemish agency for health care is investigating stool samples from those affected to determine the cause. Most of the victims are now recovering.

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege has approved an additional **€1 million in subsidies to tackle soil erosion** in 15 Flemish municipalities, which can lead to mudslides, flooding and blocked sewers. "Every euro spent on tackling erosion is earned back twofold from reduced damage and

lower clean-up costs," the minister said.

A strike by cabin crew at Lufthansa led to the cancellation of 26 flights to and from Brussels Airport last Friday 7 September, mainly to and from Frankfurt and Munich. Staff were striking for the third time in two weeks over pay and conditions.

Antwerp Zoo last week announced the **birth of a single cub** to lioness Maouli, which took place at the end of August. The lioness was treated for an infected uterus following the birth, in which another cub was stillborn.

A Flemish psychologist has developed a **computer game designed to help adults** who were sexually abused as children to work through the trauma under the supervision of a therapist. The so-called Virtual Reality Therapy allows victims to reconstruct the circumstances of their abuse, as therapists believe the more concrete a memory is, the easier it is to treat. It was developed by Elke Geraerts, a Limburger who works for Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

The city of Genk last week honoured the socially active priest and one-time Member of the European Parliament **Jef Ulburghs**, who died two years ago. The city inaugurated a street named after Ulburghs, born in nearby Zolder in 1922, and a memorial service was held in the Italian church where he often celebrated mass.

Police in Limburg are investigating a **spate of fires on farms** after two incidents in Meeuwen-

Gruitrode and Maaseik on the same day. The cause is thought to be spontaneous combustion in the large quantities of hay being brought in by farmers. If not completely dry, the hay can begin to ferment, with temperatures inside the stacks rising to 70 degrees.

An experiment to **broadcast classical music to deter young people** from hanging around in the Begijnhof park in Kortrijk has been declared a success by the town's mayor, Stefaan Declerck. The experiment will continue, together with improvements to the surroundings, including more playground equipment, benches and terraces.

Jordan, the five-year-old daughter of a roofer from Malle, Antwerp province, must be **returned to her father's custody**, a judge in South Africa has ruled. Jordan was abducted in 2009 by her mother, Lisa Michael, and taken out of the country, an act for which she was convicted in absentia by a Turnhout court and sentenced to five years. Father Ive Gödecke learned last week that the child will first move to Cape Town before later being repatriated to Belgium.

The media is **"glorifying" the gangster Patrick Haemers** at the expense of his victims in their coverage of the new TV docu-series *De bende Haemers* due to start shortly, Flemish ombudsman Bart Weekers said. Haemers was responsible for violent armed robberies in the 1980s and was linked to the crimes of the Brabant Killers. He committed suicide in prison in 1993. The trailer for the new series describes him as the country's "most charismatic gangster".

FLANDERS TODAY

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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw
DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper
NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope
AGENDA EDITOR Robyn Boyle
ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren
PREPRESS Corelio AdPro
CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Sabine Clappaert, Sarah Crew, Katy Desmond, Andy Furniere, Nicholas Hirst, Tamara Gausi, Toon Lambrechts, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Marcel Schoeters, Senne Starckx, Georgio Valentino, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton
GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore
PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS
Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden
tel 02 373 99 09 - fax 02 375 98 22
editorial@flanderstoday.eu

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS
subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu
or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING
Evelyne Fregonese
02 373 83 57
advertising@flanderstoday.eu

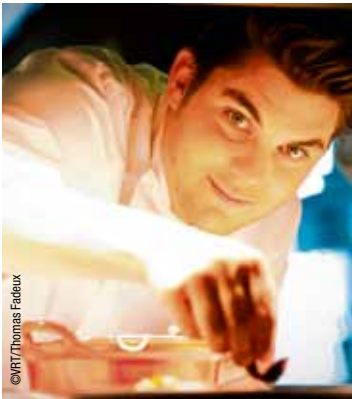
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Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

"It was the *best* butter, you know"

If you keep up with local best-seller lists, you'll know that nothing is doing better than celebrity cookbooks. One such is by Jeroen Meus (*pictured*), once merely a young chef in Leuven, now one of TV's biggest stars, with *Dagelijkse kost* (Everyday Food). Oona Mennes, meanwhile, is a student of media studies at the University of Antwerp. For her Master's thesis, she fed the details of 183 of Meus' recipes into a computer programme, which calculated the amount of carbohydrates, vitamins and other nutritional information. The result was largely positive: The recipes offer a varied diet, with lots of fresh veggies, fewer calories than the maximum advised, fewer carbs, less sugar and more vitamins. On two fronts, though, Meus was guilty



of being heavy-handed: butter and salt. To be exact, 13.5g of saturated fat per portion compared to a maximum of 7.5g. And 926mg of salt compared to a recommended limit of 600mg. Meus shrugged off the research, pointing out that Mennes had landed on the two ingredients of his recipes that are never

quantified. The problem may arise from a montage created by *De laatste show*, which edits together all of the occasions when he chucks a knob of butter in the pan, it was suggested. Mennes' research confirms, however, previous studies that showed that top chefs in fancy restaurants routinely use more salt and butter than you normally would at home – part of the reason why restaurant food seems to have more flavour and a more luxurious texture than meals you make yourself. The blame for that belongs to the father of French cuisine, Auguste Escoffier, who on being asked his secret, answered "Butter, butter and butter". Meus, if he does use too much, is following in the highest of traditions.

The Devil and Terry Gilliam

Faust production adds political context to enhance the narrative

► continued from page 1

On top of these technical demands, *Faust* also required something unusual from the performers. "You need people on stage who are really able to perform theatre, and in the opera world of the 19th century, that was not the case. Productions were completely different."

Opera as theatre

Things have changed a lot since then, but *The Damnation of Faust* still represents a challenge. "One hundred years later opera has seen many developments," says Jurowski. "But I think that it is still not enough to work with common theatrical techniques."

This is what makes Terry Gilliam such an interesting choice as director. Although new to the world of opera (and live theatre for that matter), the 71-year-old has decades of experience bringing the fantastic to life, first through the animated sequences he created for *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, then in films such as *Time Bandits*, *Brazil* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*. His most recent feature, *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, even took its inspiration from the Faust legend. "I'm not saying that the opera has to suddenly become a movie, but it would be wrong not to use the technical possibilities available today," Jurowski explains. "And if you ask someone like Terry Gilliam, who has always had a certain theatricality in his movies, who has a modern vision but at the same time respects the music, and who has a team helping him with the technicalities of putting it on an opera stage, then I think it's a combination that represents the future of opera."

Adding modern context

Gilliam's production takes full advantage of all the modern techniques of physical and digital stagecraft, with moving images playing an important part in the design. But his most significant innovation is to introduce a parallel narrative that unfolds

during the opera's extended musical interludes, when the Faust story is essentially at a standstill. This explores German culture and history from 19th-century romanticism to the Third Reich, providing a startling context for dramatic events such as Faust's descent into hell. His imagery is drawn from sources as diverse as the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich and Otto Dix, and the films of Leni Riefenstahl.

Jurowski has found collaborating with Gilliam a fascinating experience. "In a sense, it's a new world for him, but in the rehearsal process, it is not so different working with a singer than it is working with an actor. What he does is to work very deeply on every character, and what I really like is that he doesn't try to get big theatrical movements from the artists. He really wants it to be as intimate as possible, and I think this makes it very strong."

Their collaboration has also extended to the musical aspects of the performance. "I've really enjoyed talking to him about musical theatre and how it is possible that sometimes the music gives a certain impulse to an actor – and when it's better that an actor, through his movements, gives an impulse to the music."

Changes from London

Although Gilliam's production has been staged before (in London and Palermo), there will be differences



Composer Dmitri Jurowski

playing Méphistophélès.

Meanwhile, Gilliam has continued to work on the staging. "Now in the rehearsal process, I can see that things are developing from what I saw in London," Jurowski says.

Then there is his own musical contribution, engaging with Berlioz's complex music. "I wouldn't say it is a typical French opera," says Jurowski. "It's one of those pieces where you can, as a conductor, make very interesting work combining different styles." These range from the early Baroque to ideas that would not be out of place in contemporary music. "From one point of view, it is a complete piece, but from the other it has so many elements that you can mix in different combinations,"



Gilliam in Flanders working with the Vlaamse Opera cast



Vlaamse Opera rehearses Terry Gilliam's *The Damnation of Faust*

structure with dramatic climaxes in all the right places. "It's a real challenge because you have to create a big line and at the same time you have to show all the miniatures within it. Sometimes

you have five bars where you have five different miniatures," Jurowski says. "I'm glad we are doing it for the opening of the season, while everyone is fresh!"

"I'm not saying that the opera has to become cinema, but it would be wrong not to use the technical possibilities available"

when it comes to Flanders. The opera will be sung in the French of Berlioz's original rather than English or Italian, and the cast has changed: American tenor Michael Spyres takes the title role, while the Italian Michele Pertusi and the Briton Simon Bailey take turns

he says. "You could even start the piece in the middle and end at the beginning. It's like a *perpetua mobilia*."

At the same time as making these innovations, Berlioz was working within a particular style of opera that demanded a narrative

16 SEPTEMBER TO 14 OCTOBER

Opera House Ghent (16-23 September)
Opera House Antwerp (3-14 October)

► www.vlaamseopera.be

A season of faith

A quick look at the Vlaamse Opera's programme for the coming year

Terry Gilliam is not the only person from the world of cinema appearing at the Vlaamse Opera this season. Rising local film director Gust Van den Berghe (known for *Little Baby Jesus of Flandr* and *Blue Bird*) will also make his operatic debut with *The Queen of the Night*, a production for children based on themes from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. These have been put together by composer Jan van Outryve and the children's author Kristien Dieltiens, for an

audience aged seven and up.

The Queen of the Night accompanies a new production of *The Magic Flute* by German director David Hermann, which promises a contemporary interpretation stripped of the sugar coating that is often applied to this opera.

The 2012-13 season also marks two composer bicentenaries, with new productions of Verdi's *Nabucco* and Wagner's *Parsifal*. The Vlaamse Opera will also be holding an international symposium on

Wagner in collaboration with Ghent University.

Meanwhile, Flemish artist and choreographer Jan Fabre will present a new piece exploring the turbulent relationship between Wagner and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, once close friends Wagner who ended in bitter conflict. *Tragedy of a Friendship* will combine music by Wagner with new work by the German composer Moritz Eggert. The opera programme is completed with Handel's *Agrippina*, in a

new production that promises sly references to soap operas of the 1980s, and a revival of Leonard Bernstein's comic opera *Candide*.

Look closely, and you'll see that all of these productions somehow deal with faith, from Faust's shaken faith in science to the faith in love that rules *The Magic Flute* and the faith in money and power that obsesses Agrippina. It's a theme that continues in the opera's concert programme, with the selection of works inspired by the great world

religions.

The opening concert will present Puccini's *Messa di Gloria*, spiritual music by the Swiss composer Ernst Bloch and lesser-known work by Isang Yun and Ahmed Adnan Saygun, from Korea and Turkey respectively. The season continues with Shostakovich's song cycle *From Jewish Poetry* and his 15th Symphony, Beethoven's 7th Symphony, Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* and Verdi's *Requiem*. IM

Suicide prevention plan launched

Health ministry will build on targets that have already been reached in the region

Alan Hope

Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeuren last week announced the creation of an action plan for suicide prevention, just as figures revealed the latest count showed a slight fall in the numbers of people taking their own lives – from 1,102 in 2009 to 1,066 in 2010.

Flanders has one of the highest suicide rates in Europe; an estimated three people a day here kill themselves. At the same time, there were more than 9,500 attempted suicides in 2010. “Since 2000, the death toll from suicide has come down 9%,” said Vandeuren (*pictured*). “The target for the first action plan was a reduction of 8%, so we achieved that.”

The new plan is more ambitious: a drop in suicides of 20% by 2020, based on 2000 figures. That would mean a decrease of 127 suicides over the next eight years. The budget for



the plan is €1.26 million.

Among the initiatives are a new telephone helpline and a web portal, designed jointly by the existing suicide line and the helpline Tele-

Onthaal. A game, developed in New Zealand and aimed at young people suffering from depression will be translated and made available. A “safety network” of volunteers will

be set up to target the elderly and isolated – one of the most vulnerable groups.

Companies will be encouraged to set up their own suicide prevention policies, such as fences installed by the NMBS to prevent people from throwing themselves on the tracks. Government services will develop treatment guidelines, aimed at helping carers and volunteers recognise the onset of suicidal impulses. A number of existing organisations, such as the working group Verder (Further), which counsels the surviving relatives of suicides, will continue to receive government support.

Tele-Onthaal: call 106 or visit www.tele-onthaal.be

Zelfmoordlijn: 02 649 95 55 or www.zelfmoordlijn.be

Community Help Service in Brussels for English speakers: 02 648 40 14

No higher sentences for press leaks

Federal justice minister Annemie Turtelboom has rejected a call from the Antwerp chief prosecutor for increased sentences for magistrates or other officials who breach their duty of confidence to leak details of cases to the press.

Speaking at the traditional opening of the judicial session, prosecutor-general Yves Liegeois (*pictured*) said leaks from within an investigation could threaten the presumption of innocence of an accused person, as well as threaten the progress of an investigation. He called for offenders to be dismissed and for magistrates to be given the power to put taps on the phones of anyone suspected of leaking to the press. Anyone found guilty should be liable for a sentence of up to five years instead of the current six months, Liegeois said.

Turtelboom said she was also concerned by press leaks but that her government was “not going to increase the number of prison cells just to ease the internal problems of the justice system”. Leaks by magistrates were an internal disciplinary matter for the judicial system itself, she said. Above all, judges and prosecutors needed to see the importance of better and clearer communication to make leaking unnecessary.



Details requested on firing range accident

The socialist public services union ACOD has demanded a full explanation from the ministry of defence over allegations that emergency help to men injured in a firing range accident last month caused “costly delays”. One man died in the accident in Limburg and two more were seriously injured. According to reports, a fire team was dispatched to the range from Leopoldsburg, when the team from Houthalen could have arrived at the scene much faster. In addition, the team went to nearby Hechtel instead before finding their way to the proper location. The union has also protested a decision by the ministry not to include a union representative in the commission set up to investigate the accident.

Government prepares for new responsibilities

The government of Flanders is preparing a Green Paper on the implementation of the sixth round of state reforms, agreed in December with the creation of a new federal government. Among the reforms in the government accords were a new law on the financing of the regions and the handover of a number of federal responsibilities to the regional governments. These include some aspects of judicial affairs and labour-market policy and will involve the transfer of about 4,500 civil servants from federal departments to the regions.

The team compiling the Green Paper will examine six policy areas – social and economic, health, family affairs, labour, housing and justice – to determine policy priorities once those areas are part of regional responsibility in 2014. The aim of the paper is to make the handover process more transparent for organisations, businesses and citizens.

Tougher parole restrictions for serious crimes

People imprisoned for serious crimes such as murder will in future only be released on parole after serving half of their sentence, instead of the current one-third, according to a proposed change to the law agreed last week by senior ministers of the federal government. The concept of “repeat offender” has also been adapted.

The change follows the outcry over the release last month of Michelle Martin, ex-wife and accomplice to serial killer Marc Dutroux, who was released to the custody of a convent after serving 16 years of a 30-year sentence. Martin served half her sentence but would have been affected by the repeat offender change, which is now more inclusive. Critics of Martin's release argued that she had been convicted years ago of other violent crimes and should be considered a recidivist.

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

An offer you can refuse

Nothing winds the Flemish up more than taxes. Tax evasion is seen as a national sport; many find it justifiable as the tax rate is so high. Others realise that evasion is precisely one of the reasons for the high rates.

In this climate, the Swiss proposal for Belgium to sign a Rubik agreement was bound to cause controversy. The Swiss, whose bank secrecy is under attack, have offered to levy a one-off tax on foreign capitals, the proceeds of which go to the country of origin. The trade-off is the notorious bank secrecy, meaning that the Swiss account holders remain unknown to the taxman at home.

For Belgium, say the Swiss, this agreement could mean a windfall of no less than €10 billion. This could make it much easier for the federal government to balance the budgets for the next two years. The minister of foreign affairs, Didier Reynders (MR), reacted with enthusiasm to the proposal. As a liberal, he sees this as a way to avoid raising taxes even higher.

So is this an offer we cannot refuse? Apparently, no. Secretary of state for Fraud Control John Crombez (SPA) turns it down in the most outspoken manner. He will not be part of a government that accepts this, he states. He has little faith in the proceeds the Swiss predict, and, moreover, he has ethical problems with it: People who have enough money to hide it from the taxman – fraud, in other words – should be implicated, not rewarded.

Perhaps Crombez has bad memories of the 2004 fiscal amnesty that allowed tax evaders with foreign accounts to buy off persecution with a one-off contribution. The idea alone sent shockwaves through the entire political left wing. The socialist SPA agreed to it, however, for the same budgetary reasons that makes the Swiss offer so attractive now. Johan Vande Lanotte, Crombez's political mentor and then budget minister, is even believed to be one of those who helped devise the amnesty deal.

On the moral side of this issue, Crombez got help from an unexpected corner. Bernard Arnault, France's richest man – worth €32 billion – has announced plans to move to Belgium... for fiscal reasons. Apparently the tax climate here is not as bad as some people believe it to be.

Reynders, meanwhile, is sticking to his typical dry humour. “I am sorry to see John Crombez leave. He was a good colleague.”

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1,071

candidates – 20.3% of the total – passed either the first or second examination for entry to medical and dental studies in Flemish universities

2.2 million

people took the train to the coast in July and August, compared to 1.72 million in the same period last year, despite a colder and wetter July than normal

2.6%

more visitors stayed overnight in Flanders in the first five months of the year, according to Toerisme Vlaanderen. For the five “art cities” – Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels, Ghent and Mechelen – the increase was 4.3%

15,000

users have now signed up for the car sharing scheme Cambio, which makes 500 cars available in 25 towns across the country. Cambio estimates that one shared car takes the place of 14 privately owned vehicles

8

nominations earned by the Flemish public broadcaster VRT for the Prix Europa, to be handed out next month. The nominations include three radio programmes, three TV programmes and the new international fiction series *The Spiral*

Lest we forget

Memorial to victims of Nazi deportations unveiled at Dossin barracks

Alan Hope

“Remembrance must be our duty. We must never forget the horrors that took place here, nor must we forget where extremism and intolerance can lead.” These were the words of Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters last week at the official inauguration in Mechelen of the new memorial to victims of Nazi deportations. The memorial is installed in Dossin barracks, the final staging post for the Jews and gypsies of Belgium and northern France, rounded up from their homes and taken, finally, to the death camps.

The Dossin site is of crucial importance to Belgium’s wartime memories – the locus, as one speaker said, of the greatest crime against humanity ever to have taken place in the country’s history. Between the summer of 1942 and the liberation two years later, 28 Nazi transports carried 25,482 Jews and 352 gypsies in cattle cars from Dossin to Auschwitz.

Among the deportees – of whom 1,276 would live until the end of the war – were 5,430 children, 150 of them under the age of two. The average survival time after arrival at the camp: three hours.

The Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance has stood on the site



of the Dossin barracks since 2005. In 2008, plans were announced for a new building on the other side of the square, designed by architect bOb Van Reeth, which, together with the barracks, will form the Kazerne Dossin Memorial Museum and Documentation Centre on the Holocaust and Human Rights. The museum, which will open

in November, is financed by the government of Flanders and the city of Mechelen.

But visitors can already see the memorial, the centrepiece of which is a sculpture by the Antwerp artist Philip Aguirre y Otegui that depicts a table with a few dishes, left behind as the owners were rounded up by police. Under the table, three bodies

lie beside one another, like on a tombstone.

A place of reflection

In other rooms are some of the simple, everyday objects left behind by the deportees, now imbued with the tragedy of their ultimate fate. There are also photographs of some of the deportees and the barely

audible voices of children from Belgian schools on 28 loudspeakers, intoning the names and ages of all those who went away on the 28 Dossin transports.

“We hope our murdered fathers, mothers and children will receive special attention because we are forever entrusted with the guarding of their memory,” said Eric Stroobants, citing the words of the recently late Natan Ramet, one of the prime instigators of the entire museum project. “Our aim is to make history vivid, in the hope of avoiding other genocides, of warning against hatred and racism. The memorial will become a place of reflection and remembrance, as an important additional dimension to the museum. If those hopes are fulfilled, then we, the last witnesses, can go peacefully to our rest.”

Claude Marinower, deputy chairman of the Dossin project, said: “Our memory is the only place where millions of victims remind us of our duty. Slowly the day is approaching when the last eyewitness will disappear, and on our shoulders will rest the immense task of bringing this memory to the generations who follow us.”

► www.kazernedossin.eu

Flanders launches “National Trust” for heritage

On 9 September, Open Monument Day, Flanders was introduced to Herita, the new organisation for heritage conservation launched last week by heritage minister Geert Bourgeois. Herita takes over from three existing organisations working in the field in Flanders.

The new organisation is based on the National Trust in England and Scotland. The attendance at events like Open Monument Day and Heritage Day, Bourgeois said, shows there is broad public support on the ground.

“I hope that Herita will play a part in the extension and strengthening of support for our heritage conservation and heritage policy,” he said. “Herita needs to raise awareness among more and more Flemish people about the value of our patrimony and inspire them to support its conservation. Thanks to the work of the National Trusts, heritage has become a part of the identities of the English and Scottish people. I’ve seen

how involved they are in caring for heritage and in supporting it financially. It would be good to see a Herita feeling grow in Flanders that compares with that.”

Herita will be a clearing house for information and contact between organisations that look after heritage sites and the public, providing information on visits and events, answering questions and providing a place for volunteers and donors. It will also work with volunteers and professionals in the sector, providing them with aid where necessary and forming a bridge between different sites so they can help each other.

“In short, for those people and organisations,” said the new organisation in a statement, “Herita will bring a backpack filled with knowledge, expertise and experience, to provide a support and refuge, a voice and an inspiration.” AH

► www.herita.be

Ghent’s new Stadshal divides opinion

Early this month found the official opening of Ghent’s new structure that many seem to love to hate: the Stadshal. The massive twin-peaked construction of steel and wood on Emile Braunplein in the historic city centre is the work of the celebrated Flemish architects Robbrecht & Daem (responsible for the also controversial Bruges Concertgebouw).

The Stadshal measures 40 metres long and 20 metres high, with a wooden roof pierced by no fewer than 1,600 tiny windows. Held up by steel pillars and devoid of full walls, it’s more of a roof structure than a building. The design has echoes of the stepped gables of the city’s houses, as well as the traditional long house of Neolithic settlements. Like those, the Stadshal is intended to become a popular meeting place in the city centre.

According to critics, however, it’s more like a barn, and it has already been given the nickname Schaapstal – sheep pen. “Sheep bleat, and bleating [*bleiten*] is the Ghent word for crying,” explained Hans Van Doorne, chair of the city’s Environmental Advice Council and organiser of an unofficial protest against the Stadshal on opening day. “We weep for this sheep pen, which we actually never wanted.”

Ghent alderwoman Martine De Regge, responsible for public works, pointed to the example of the Eiffel Tower, which was roundly criticised by Parisians when it was built in 1889. “Controversy is good,” she said. “*Gentenaars* are well-known for their critical attitude.”

Architect Robbrecht also had a problem: The building is actually not yet finished, and the park alongside it is not yet accessible. He said the city council ought to have waited before the official opening. According to Robbrecht, Ghent needs time to adjust to the new



“Controversy is good”: Ghent’s new Stadshal

building, an opinion shared by Lieven De Caluwe, alderman for culture: “Evidently the people of Ghent are going to take some time to get used to this Stadshal,” he said. AH

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Autos****► Sales down**

New car sales dropped 17% in August compared to the same period last year. The total for the first eight months of this year is 15% lower than previously at some 353,000 vehicles. The market leader is the Volkswagen group, followed by Renault and Peugeot.

Banking**► Belfius**

Unions at Belfius, formerly Dexia Bank Belgium, will consult with unions about the warning last week from CEO Jos Clijsters that up to 1,000 jobs may disappear in further restructuring. Clijsters made the announcement while presenting the rebranded bank's half-year profits of €225 million, compared to a loss in 2011 of €1.4 billion.

Bicycles**► Granville**

Bicycle manufacturer Granville, based in Kortenberg, Flemish Brabant, will supply 300 new bicycles to Belgian post office bpost before the end of the year. The bikes will be specially designed to carry three pouches with up to 100 kilograms of mail.

Cleaning products**► Ecover**

Ecological cleaning products company Ecover has acquired the San Francisco-based Method cleaning and personal-care products company. This makes Ecover, based in Malle, Antwerp province, the world's leading group in the field, with sales of some €170 million.

Hotels**► Motel One**

Brussels' largest hotel, German-owned Motel One, will open its 490 rooms in early 2014, bringing the total number of rooms in the city to some 16,000.

Property**► Dexia tower**

The 50,000 square-metre landmark Dexia tower in downtown Brussels is expected to be acquired by the government of Flanders for up to €350 million. About 1,900 public servants at several locations across the city will be brought together on one site.

Retail**► Veritas**

The Antwerp-based textiles retail chain Veritas is investing €15 million to build a 9,000 square-metre distribution centre in Kontich to supply the 200 stores the company expects to operate within eight years. Veritas currently has some 100 outlets in Belgium and Luxembourg and seeks expansion in neighbouring areas of Germany, France and the Netherlands.

Banks encouraged to help stimulate economy

More leniency in extending credit and investment in social programmes proposed

Alan Hope

The banking system needs to cooperate in helping to re-launch the economy in return for the help they were given at the height of the financial crisis, said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters last week during a gathering of Voka, the Flemish chamber of commerce. Peeters now plans to bring the banks into discussions on how they might go about the task. The call came as figures from the National Bank revealed that Belgians have €229 billion in savings accounts – €10 billion more than last year. This is despite continuing low interest rates – a maximum of 2.75%, while inflation stands at 2.9%.

That is an enormous sum of money, which could be used to provide a stimulus to the economy, but the banks are tending to let the money lie to increase their own reserves. According to Unizo, the organisation that represents small businesses, one in four of them has problems obtaining credit from the banks for investment. That is one of the reasons, says Unizo, why bankruptcies in August hit a record high of almost 1,200, with the loss of 13,000 jobs.

"We helped the banks when they

needed it," Peeters said. "Now it's up to the banks to cooperate resolutely and to fully support the revival of the economy." The Flemish government, he said, will provide support for the provision of credit, via the guarantee system and Gigarant, a guarantee fund for investments over €1.5 million.

Proposal to split banking sector

Also, last week, the French-speaking socialist party PS was preparing a proposal to introduce a new kind of savings account, based on a French model, which would provide a higher interest rate to savers, while using the deposits for social investments. A proposal to split the banking sector into two parts – investment banking and savings – is also on the table. Peeters prefers to see any change occur at the European level, he said. "I'm unable to understand how some, ignoring the European context and the global economy, want to go back to the local deposit banks of the old days," he told Voka. "Obviously the excesses that led to the current crisis have to be tackled. But the pendulum must not be allowed to swing too far



"We helped them when they needed it": Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters and innovation minister Ingrid Lieten (left)

to the other side."

Last week, following the speech to Voka, Peeters held his first meeting with the banking federation Febelfin, to discuss the banks' contribution to economic stimulus, such as public-private financing and export credit. Although Febelfin maintains that the level of credit given by its members has remained stable, it does accept that conditions have become more strict. The Flemish government has a certain amount of influence with the

banks: It has places as shareholder on the boards of KBC and Ethias and is one of the major customers of ING. "It is essential that money continues to flow through our economy," Peeters said. "We absolutely need to avoid a freeze on financing streams. You have to be able to go on investing. Together with the banks, I want to examine how savings surpluses can, in a suitable way, be fed into intelligent project and export financing of our companies."

Potato specialist sold to US

PinguinLutosa, the frozen food company from West Flanders, has sold its potato products division to the American group Lamb Weston, a subsidiary of ConaGra Foods, for €225 million. It will also buy the property associated with the company at a separate price. Pinguin bought the division Lutosa from the Van Den Broeke family in 2007 for €130 million. Lutosa is one of the world's major producers of frozen potato products – from flakes for the processed food industry to frozen fries for *frietkots* – selling 600,000 tonnes a year to 110 countries. Worldwide, it stands at number five, with Lamb Weston in second place behind market leader McCain from Canada. Pinguin's remaining products are mainly frozen vegetables. The sale to the US is a blow to the Dutch firm Aviko, the world's number three, which had been one of the bidders.



New degree sponsored by industry

Students who graduate from the new Master's programme in safety at the University of Antwerp should have little trouble finding a job afterwards; the course is sponsored by industry because of the need for safety experts.

The course spans six faculties and covers law, economics, technology, management and psychology. Sponsors to date include the rail authority NMBS, chemicals company BASF and the Antwerp Port Authority. Meanwhile, the Plantijn University College, also in Antwerp, will this year begin offering a Bachelor's degree in safety studies, for which 60 students have already enrolled.

Possible commuter chaos on 24 September

Unions representing rail workers have warned of the possibility of strike action from 24 September – the same day that truck drivers have announced they will use convoys of trucks to block major traffic arteries.

The rail unions are not satisfied with the plans of Paul Magnette, federal minister for government enterprises, to reform the structure of the rail authority NMBS. Unions say it does not go far enough: They are arguing for a single integrated authority instead of Magnette's plan for an NMBS made up of a transport division and an infrastructure division. The two sides are in discussion, but a joint statement from the unions spoke of "limited progress".

The exact form of the actions later this month are not yet decided, but unions have warned it could involve a 24-hour stoppage. Whether that will be timed to coincide with the road chaos promised by truckers depends on the outcome of a meeting with Magnette on 19 September.

Age worst form of employment discrimination

Belgium has the highest rate of age discrimination in employment in Europe, according to the Centre for Equal Opportunities, which last week released its first Diversity Barometer on discrimination in the workplace.

Job candidates aged 45 and over, the centre found, stand 8% more chance of being discriminated against in job selection procedures, although discrimination on grounds of age is illegal. Half of all human resources managers questioned said that an applicant's age would have a substantial impact on the interview and selection decisions.

Among workers, 6% said they had been victims of age discrimination, and 12% said they had witnessed it in the case of colleagues. According to the barometer, applicants of foreign origin are 6% less likely to be selected, and the disabled 4% less likely – all other factors such as qualifications and experience being equal.

In Flanders, however, unemployment among older workers fell by 1.7% over the year, with the age group 50 to 55 decreasing by 4.5%. Overall unemployment in Flanders has seen an increase of 6.1% so far this year. The unemployment rate in the region is now 7.6%.

Getting into hot water

With the help of Flemish scientists, an abandoned gold mine in northern Canada is yielding another valuable resource

Senne Starckx

It might be more and more scarce on the earth's surface, but below our feet, energy is abundant. The only difficulty is accessing it. Abandoned mines, however, offer excellent opportunities for relatively simple installations of geothermal plants. Flemish researchers of the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO) are helping to build one in the freezing north of Canada. The Northwest Territories is notorious for its extreme winter temperatures. In a city like Yellowknife, the mercury can easily drop to minus 40 degrees Celsius. For the 40,000 inhabitants of the city that was founded during the gold rush in the first half of the 20th century, living conditions in winter time are harsh – and energy consumption fierce. But help is on the way: In the nearby Con Mine, a gold mine that has been abandoned since 1983, Flemish scientists are helping to install a geothermal energy plant.

Fire down below

The oldest inhabitants of Yellowknife can vividly remember how miners, even in the dead of winter, came up from the depths of the city dressed in T-shirts and shorts due to the heat from the bedrock. They knew already that, apart from precious metals like gold and diamonds, the Con Mine held another, less tangible, treasure: heat. The mine goes several kilometres



Global geothermal expert Ben Laenen in Yellowknife

20 and 30°C per kilometre. The first plans to exploit the geo heat of the Con Mine date from 1988. Until recently, however, technology was simply not ready to efficiently tap geothermal energy from so far underground. But now, Yellowknife is ready to pump up the cheap energy, free of greenhouse gases, from the abandoned mine to warm the city's buildings and homes. VITO is a world pioneer in the construction of geothermal energy

First in the world

Five years ago, Ben Laenen and his colleagues at VITO were the first in the world to successfully deploy a geothermal installation in a former coal mine. They did that a little bit closer to home than Canada – namely, in Heerlen, in the Dutch province of Limburg. There they drilled 825 metres to reach 35-degree water and bring it to the surface. Now the energy from the water is used to heat buildings in the centre of Heerlen. After that, the chilled water is re-injected into the coal mines. “We gained a lot of experience in Heerlen,” says Laenen. “Actually this project made us world experts in geothermal energy. Soon afterwards, the city council of Yellowknife contacted us. Finally, last year, we were selected to co-ordinate the construction of a geothermal plant in the Con Mine.” The most challenging part of the

project, says Laenen, isn't the engineering but the management of the energy flows. “It's crucial to have the right software to deal with different types of heat and cold flows,” he explains. “One of our strengths is that we have developed our own software for this.”

From the ground to the homes

So how does hot water from the Con Mine actually warm the city of Yellowknife? Laenen: “The Con Mine has several shafts that reach two-and-a-half kilometres deep. During the dismantlement of the mine, these shafts have been filling up with water that is at a constant temperature of 50°C. That's not hot enough to make electricity from, but to warm buildings, it's just fine.” Once the hot water is pumped to the surface, “it will be spread along a fine-meshed pipeline network to every building in the city,” Laenen explains. “We have calculated that the mine delivers enough energy to warm half of the city – roughly 19,000 residents. It means that the city can cut its energy bill significantly because nearly three-quarters of the city's energy costs are for heating.” The VITO research centre in Mol is planning to move to a new site and is seriously considering powering the new laboratories and offices with geothermal energy. “To convert the earth's heat into electricity, we will need to dig more than three kilometres deep,” says Laenen. “But first we have to raise the efficiency of our technology. Currently, we could convert between 40% and 50% of the geothermal heat into electricity. To become really efficient, that should become at least 60%. We are now restudying the entire heat cycle to find and correct the spots where heat is lost.”

► www.vito.be

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Researchers at Antwerp's Institute of Tropical Medicine have made a significant contribution to the battle against the **parasite that causes sleeping sickness**. The parasite is transmitted between humans by tsetse flies. The researchers genetically modified a bacterium living in the flies so that it produces and excretes a very efficient type of antibody against the parasite. The technique is promising, but the antibodies are directed against parasite forms occurring in humans, not in flies. An antibody against the fly parasites still has to be developed.

The Flemish think tank Itinera has highlighted the **shortage of provision in care for the elderly**. According to Itinera, 109,000 to 163,000 elderly people are on a waiting list for a rest home. Only 41% of the demand for service flats can be provided, while just 55% of elderly people requesting a stay in a day centre are accepted. The Flemish minister for innovation and poverty, Ingrid Lieten, is investing €20 million to modernise care for the elderly.

According to researchers at the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB), overproduction of the **HUWE1 protein causes retardation** in some babies at birth. The discovery of this genetic defect could improve the identification and treatment of mental disabilities.

For the first time in 10 years, there are a large number of **unrented student rooms in Ghent** shortly before the start of the new academic year. There are still about 250 rooms available listed on the online platform kot@gent. The reason is that the number of students in Ghent has not increased this year, unlike in previous years. At the same time, the number of student rooms has increased considerably.

The first school year at the **new European school in the Brussels commune of Laken** has started. It can take up to 3,000 pupils, who will receive lessons in five languages. The school includes kindergarten, primary and secondary education. Work on the school has taken three years and cost €88 million.

The Catholic University College Limburg is planning a merger with the Catholic University College Leuven. Together, they would form the **biggest university college in Flanders**, with approximately 14,000 students. The study programmes of each university college would remain the same in each region, with the main advantage being the exchange of expertise. **AF**

The oldest residents of Yellowknife can still remember how miners came up from the depths in T-shirts and shorts

deep into the earth's crust, and – as you no doubt remember from geology at school – the temperature rises as you head upwards: between

plants. With their help, the city of Yellowknife hopes to put the Con Mine geothermal plant into operation by 2016.

Q&A

Professor Colin Janssen led the research team at Ghent University's department of applied ecology and environmental biology that recently discovered microplastics in mussels

How much plastic do our mussels contain?
We collected mussels from four coastal towns in Flanders and found one or two microplastics per gram of mussel flesh. Microplastics are plastic particles smaller than one millimetre. Earlier lab research had shown that some microplastics can end up in mussels, but it is surprising that the same applies to mussels living in a natural environment. We discovered that these microscopic plastic particles don't actually harm the mussels.

But should we stop eating mussels?
No, the mussels are not unhealthy. A one kilogram portion of mussels

contains 300 grams of mussel flesh and between 300 and 600 microplastics. That might sound like a lot, but the food is completely safe. Although other research concludes that the small particles can get in our blood stream and even be transmitted to children by the placenta, we have established that the concentration is always 10 to 100,000 times below the international health norms. Still, we are now looking to see whether the microplastics could be carrying harmful chemical substances, such as dioxins.

Did you examine other species?
We also found similar amounts of microplastics in sandworms, so

both our sea and sand contain the plastic particles. In future research, we want to investigate the effect on other sea creatures, like fish and shrimp.

Is the North Sea more polluted by plastic than other seas and oceans?
No, in Western Europe we recycle and sort our garbage more than in many other parts of the world. Yet, around 20,000 tons of waste – mostly plastic – ends up in the North Sea annually and affects birds and sea animals who eat it or are caught up in it. National governments and the European Union are taking action to clean the seas by, for example, ordering fishing boats



to literally fish for litter instead of fish. But more prevention and awareness campaigns are needed to reduce the scale of the problem.
Interview by Andy Furniere



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The piano man

Maarten Wilbrenninck practises the fine art of piano tuning across Flanders

Denzil Walton

Piano tuning is one of those jobs that sounds Old World and fanciful: Someone comes in with a tuning fork and a good ear and magically makes the music wafting from your living room sound perfect again. Is that how it really works? And does anyone even play the piano as a hobby anymore?

As with so many tasks these days, piano tuning has become computer-aided. Maarten Wilbrenninck from Leuven has been working as a piano tuner for the past 17 years. But in 2007, he put down his tuning fork and picked up his laptop. "Tuning a piano with a computer is faster, easier and more accurate – a bit like using a GPS instead of a map," says Wilbrenninck. "But I keep my tuning fork handy should my laptop break down."

Wilbrenninck studied music in Maastricht in his native Netherlands. In parallel with giving music lessons, he started accompanying a local tuner on his rounds. Initially it was just one day a week, but this grew to four days, until Wilbrenninck's mentor let him loose on the pianos by himself. It was a job he found he enjoyed immensely. "It is so fulfilling to see a piano in prime condition, tuned to perfection and producing the sounds it was built to produce."

Talking with Wilbrenninck – a member of piano tuner associations in the Netherlands and the UK – it's fascinating to discover that there is not simply one way to tune a piano. It depends on personal preferences and the type of music being played on the instrument.

One of Wilbrenninck's customers, for instance, mainly plays baroque music, so the piano is tuned accordingly. Part of tuning a piano is talking to its owner and deciding on what sound both the piano and the player need.

It can take up to 90 minutes to tune a piano – even with a laptop – and it demands a lot of concentration. "It's extremely tiring work, as all 88 keys have to be tuned individually," explains Wilbrenninck. "A momentary lapse in concentration on one string, and the mistake will be very obvious in many parts of the keyboard."

Losing one's tune

Wilbrenninck recommends a piano be tuned at least once a year, or twice if it's played frequently. This begs the obvious question: Why does a piano go out of tune?

The main reason is because the tension on the tuning pins varies. Piano strings are made of steel wire and are tightened to the correct tension in order to achieve the desired frequency when struck by the hammer. Over time, the pins cannot maintain this tension (around 80 kilograms per string),



A dwindling breed in Flanders: piano tuner Maarten Wilbrenninck

and the tone drops in frequency. Hence, Wilbrenninck is needed to come along and tighten the strings. The second reason is linked not to the strings but to the wooden soundboard, which amplifies the sound of the vibrating strings. All wood contains a certain amount of moisture. As the soundboard loses or gains moisture to equalise with its environment, it will either contract or swell, which affects the strings resting on it. Thus, every time the soundboard moves due to changing humidity, the tension on the wires changes, and the piano goes out of tune.

Frequency of playing is also a factor. The more a string is struck, the more likely it will cause the tuning pin to turn slightly and put the string out of tune again. Playing style is also important in this respect. The harder the keys are struck, the quicker the piano gets out of tune, particularly the middle octaves which are played most often.

Finally, moving a piano, even across a room, can disturb the wooden construction and change the string tension.

The needs of a maestro

Once a year might be the standard, but Wilbrenninck is frequently called in to tune a piano on a daily basis. This is the case with jazz festivals, for instance. He goes in

every morning and tunes all the pianos. Even more extreme are some concert pianists, who request their grand pianos be fine-tuned during performance intervals.

Wilbrenninck is not only a tuner of pianos but a repairer. At the

"A momentary lapse in concentration on one string, and the mistake will be very obvious across the keyboard"

customer's location, he can perform minor running repairs such as adjusting the piano's action and pedals, replacing strings and sorting out loose (or tight) keys.

Larger repairs involve moving the piano back to his workshop in Leuven. Here he also undertakes complete restorations of pianos, although not as often as he used to: "The price of a new piano has fallen so much in the last decade that it's frequently not worth restoring. But I am asked to do it if the piano has great historical or personal value."

Of mice and bullet holes

You may be thinking that with electronic keyboards for pros and other tech hobbies taking up everyone's time these days that the work of a piano tuner is less in

demand. But this is not the case for Wilbrenninck. "I actually have more customers now than a few years ago," he says. Though, admittedly, "part of this is due to there being fewer piano tuners around these days."

Another reason is that there is still a large demand for acoustic pianos. "Serious piano teachers and tuners will always recommend a real piano. It sounds better and gives much more ability for dynamic expression

than an electric piano." There is also the magic and inspiration of a real instrument – a recorded sound is very different to a live performance. Wilbrenninck has had his share of surprises when tuning pianos. There was the piano which was producing a very muffled sound – he discovered a family of mice had nested among the strings. Then there was the customer who rather nervously explained that a few keys had suddenly stopped working. "On closer inspection, I discovered a neat bullet hole in the housing. The bullet had entered the piano and completely destroyed part of the cast iron. I quietly got down to repairing it without asking any questions."

WILDENBORGH OPEN HOUSE

On Saturday, 15 September, from 11.00 to 18.00, you can visit Wildenborgh Piano's, Wilbrenninck's workshop and showroom in Leuven during Open Piano Day. On display will be a range of new and second-hand instruments, including Feurich, Yamaha and Kawai, of different colours and price ranges, both upright and grand. Piano benches can be had at a 15% discount.

If you're not sure about buying a piano yet, Wilbrenninck can also rent you either a new or a quality second-hand piano. Feel free to drop in, have a try-out, ask any piano-related questions you may have and maybe start up a new hobby.

► www.wildenborgh.be

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Green guerrillas

The Brussels branch of ecological organisation Velt is launching an English-language group

Andy Furniere

Something is growing in Brussels. In June, Flemish organisation Velt, which promotes ecological living and gardening, re-opened its branch in the city amid flourishing interest in urban gardening and farming in the capital.

Questions from several expats has prompted Velt Brussel to plan an English-language group where people can exchange experiences on gardening in the city and participate in workshops and guerrilla activities. The expats of the Gardeners Club of Brussels are possible partners.

There is a sincere drive by the local government and Brussels residents to make the city greener. This summer, for example, nature conservation organisation Leefmilieu Brussel turned industrial wastelands and abandoned spaces into artistic gardens and allotments for the biennial Parckdesign.

Elsewhere, Fleming Katleen Deruytter couldn't look the other way when a rare green zone near her home in the Brussels commune of Koekelberg was targeted as a building site. She began a petition and succeeded in preserving space for individual allotments and a common garden. Inspired by this success, she accepted an offer from

Velt to restart its branch in Brussels, which had closed in 2009.

Until a few years ago, Deruytter drove a car and worked for a multinational corporation. "But after an impersonal round of dismissals, I decided to sell my car and to strive for a fairer and more sustainable world," she says. In the long term, she also wants to cooperate with the social welfare agency OCMW to reach underprivileged groups who often live in densely populated areas without green spaces.

About 15 *Brusselaars* have committed themselves to developing Velt Brussel's activities. "More and more people are realising that it's better for the environment to eat locally grown food, and that you don't need much space to grow it yourself," Deruytter says. She has had a lot of interest from the Moroccan community in Brussels: "Many of them have green fingers, but they are sometimes not yet familiar with the species that are adapted to our climate, with less sun and more rain."

Velt Brussel will function as a help desk for advice on all gardening questions and will regularly hold workshops. Members can also join visits to other ecological projects



You don't need lots of space to grow your own herbs and veg – a rooftop or balcony will do

and vegetable gardens. Adapted to the city environment, Velt Brussel will pay special attention to small-scale gardening such as growing herbs in pots or vegetables in boxes on a terrace.

The second dimension of Velt Brussel's mission is to spur citizens into action through guerrilla gardening. They will occupy and clean up certain spots in the city – such as crossroads and pavements

– by planting flowers, plants, fruit and vegetables or throwing "seed bombs".

Velt member Benny Debruyne received questions from a number of expats in Brussels, so the group is now considering an English-language branch. "We are gathering information about how to best involve non-Dutch speakers," Debruyne explains.

One of the potential partners

to strengthen the collaboration between "green" Flemings and expats is the Gardeners' Club of Brussels. Since 1995, this association has been bringing English-speaking gardening aficionados in the Brussels area together at workshops, garden visits and plant sales. The club now has more than 40 members. "We often get questions on urban farming and gardening from members in the city centre who don't have much space to plant," says member Ann Auger. "Hopefully, this Flemish connection can complement our gardening work."

You can meet the crew of Velt Brussel on 16 September at the 10th edition of Rural Brussels at Paleizenplein on Car-Free Sunday, when the heart of the city will be turned into a countryside corner with several stands and ecological activities. Velt Brussel will be organising workshops on urban gardening and ecological cooking. You can learn to brew herbal iced tea and taste nettle pancakes, find out more about guerrilla gardening and join a guerrilla action at the nearby Congress Column.

► www.velt.be/brussel

Building Brussels

Open Monument Days is a golden opportunity to peek into the capital's historic buildings

Following on the heels of Flanders' Open Monument Day, the capital's sister event this year shines a light on the often-overlooked work of engineers, under the banner "The Art of Construction". Over the weekend, about 80 sites across Brussels will open their doors to visitors. Many of them are usually off-limits, and all of them are of interest for their architecture and engineering feats. Visitors can explore archaeological remains, climb defensive walls, tour churches, bridges, locks, factories and market places, check out town, concert and exhibition halls and nose around sports facilities, offices and student accommodation. Two circuits are available if you want to take in more than one site, both accessible by public transport or bike. Don't forget, this weekend it's Car-Free Sunday, too (see agenda, p15).

Curiosity seekers are also encouraged to take part in more than 50 ancillary activities, from bike rides to walking tours and boat trips around the port and canals. All events are designed to raise the question of how a building works, focusing on the



The interior of De Markten, built following an English design that protected mills from fire

work of engineers, who continually came up with solutions to the construction problems of their day. Today, with the building industry under increasing environmental pressures, this peek into the capital's architectural past has perhaps never been so pertinent. The hub of the two-day event is the

neo-Renaissance former market hall and now culture centre Sint-Gorikshallen. In addition to an information centre, the iron-and-glass structure houses two exhibitions: *How Does That Stand* and *International Photographic Experiment of Monuments*. The latter is Belgium's contribution to

a Europe-wide heritage initiative that showcases the work of young people.

Neo-Flemish Renaissance architecture is an interesting feature of such diverse buildings as the Institut Cooremans in Anneessensplein and KVS theatre in Lakensestraat. While the former was purpose-built in 1876 and fuses practicality and style, the royal Flemish theatre was converted from a former naval dockyard on the condition that the original 1780 facade was preserved. It now forms the rear of the iconic balconied building.

Another structural marvel is De Markten, the Dutch-language cultural centre in Oude Graanmarkt. Built in 1854, it features the then revolutionary iron frame and brick arch structure that was developed in England to protect mills from fire. Alternatively, head out to Oudergem to descend into the church-like ice caves in Waversesteenweg, once used for storage. Now owned by Brussels Free University (VUB), they have been successively restored to their former chilly splendour.

Sarah Crew

Monument Prize for Limburg's Sint-Rochus

Sint-Rochus in Ulbeek, a district of Wellen in Limburg province, has won this year's Flemish Monument Prize. Formerly a church dating from the 17th century, the building had fallen into ruin, but the city recently renovated the nave as a memorial site, holding 40 graves and approximately 25 urns. The unique structure won the €12,500 prize for its "inspirational example of the re-employment of a church," said heritage minister Geert Bourgeois.

The other four nominations for the prize this year, winners of €2,500 each, were the Central Station in Antwerp; the Calvary Cross of the Sint-Niklaas Church in Veurne, West Flanders; the Mostinckx House in Dilbeek, Flemish Brabant; and the Wilderen brewery in Sint-Truiden, Limburg province.

► www.tinyurl.com/monumentenprijs

15-16 SEPTEMBER

Across Brussels

► www.monument.irisnet.be

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Only human

The region-wide Visual Arts Flanders comes to a close with the assured Newtopia in Mechelen

Tamara Gausi

Newtopia: The State of Human Rights, a city-wide exhibition in Mechelen, approaches its vast subject from a wide variety of angles while remaining remarkably cohesive and riveting. It's a triumph for Brussels curator Katerina Gregos, fresh off her stint at Manifesta

They say all good things must come to an end and sadly, culture lovers, this is true of Visual Arts Flanders, the no-frills umbrella title for five rather thrilling art exhibitions showing across the region. It all began in March with the coastal parcours Beaufort 04 (ends 30 September) and continued with Ghent's city-wide arts event Track (ends 16 September), the reopening of the Middelheim Museum in Antwerp (ongoing) and the first-ever Belgian edition of Manifesta in Genk (ends 30 September).

While each event has in some way examined the discourse between art and society, the final instalment is perhaps the most emphatic. In venues across Mechelen, Newtopia: The State of Human Rights explores various artistic responses to the subject. Taking the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as its starting point, Newtopia features the work of more than 70 international artists, ranging from big names like Andy Warhol and Pablo Picasso to emerging stars such as Egyptian Arab Spring iconographer Ganzeer to forgotten heroes like the Flemish anarchist Wilchar.

Curated by the Greek-born, London-educated and Brussels-based art historian, writer and curator Katerina Gregos, Newtopia features five solo projects, including one very special exhibition in Brussels by the Chilean conceptual artist Alfredo Jaar.

The rest of the works are ordered into "chapters", each located at a different venue in Mechelen. The first, in the Mechelen Cultural Centre, explores the so-called "first generation" of human rights. These are mostly civil and political in nature, in comparison to the "second generation" (showing at the Old Mechelen Meat Market), which focus on social, economic and cultural issues.

The Museum Hof van Busleyden is home to the third chapter, which looks at the state of human rights today, while the final chapter at the Lamot Congress & Heritage Centre looks to the future. Gregos refers to it as "the utopia chapter", a concept which not only inspired the title of



See and hear British artist Satchi Hoyt's "Say it Out Loud!"



"Restraint", one of American artist Kara Walker's world-famous silhouettes

the show but also refers to the fact that universal human rights is a destination at which humanity will never arrive.

A mammoth undertaking

As well as a series of walks, talks, concerts and film screenings, Newtopia is accompanied by an excellent catalogue. Bringing together texts from key human rights theorists and activists, it features an exclusive interview with Stéphane Hessel, co-author of the UDHR. Bringing all of this together is a mammoth undertaking, and it's been deftly executed by Gregos, a dynamic and engaging figure who cut her teeth as the artistic director of the Argos Center for Art and Media in Brussels before going on to curate the Danish pavilion at the

2011 Venice Biennale and joining the curatorial team for the current edition of Manifesta.

For Newtopia, Gregos says it was very important to challenge the myth that "human rights problems are something that occur far away in places that are out of sight and out of mind." With the socio-political landscape of Europe shifting by the day, Gregos sees Newtopia as a timely reminder of what we stand to lose in the face of the privatisation of public services, the erosion of public space, the loss of civil rights and the slow death of the welfare state, as well as an overview of general human rights flashpoints since the 1970s.

For those unfamiliar with local history, Mechelen may seem like an unlikely arena for such a lofty discourse. But in the 15th century, the city was one of the most prosperous in Europe before briefly becoming the capital of the Low Countries in the early 16th century. But it was something that happened nearly 400 years later that led to Gregos' response when she was asked to curate an art project this year in Mechelen: She considered it "completely impossible" not to do something related to the question of human rights.

Both tragedies and achievements

Because of the Mechelen's extensive rail links, the Nazis chose the city to house a transit camp during the Second World War. Nearly 25,500 Jews (more than half of the country's Jewish population) and more than 350 Gypsies were interned at the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen before being transported to the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau in



Lieve Van Stappen's haunting "Esse est Percipe"

Poland. This November, the Kazerne Dossin Museum will open on the site, serving as a Holocaust memorial and an education/documentation centre on contemporary human rights (see related story, p5).

But even with the weight of history resting on Newtopia's shoulders, Gregos says she was determined to look not only at the problem of human rights abuses but also to celebrate the achievements of the movement.

As a result, Newtopia approaches the topic with a remarkably wide-angled lens. Not only does it address the political, historical, economic, social and cultural aspects but it does so through the media of painting, sculpture, video, photography, film, illustration, audio and more.

Reviving the memory of Wilchar

Given the subject, it is unavoidable that some of the work is heart-wrenchingly difficult. Nikita Kadan's "Procedure Room", for example, offers a chillingly clinical depiction of the torture methods used by the Ukrainian police, while Ghent

artist Lieve Van Stappen uses glass castings to evoke the ghosts of Catholic church child abuse victims in the powerful "Esse est Percipe".

But perhaps one of the most affecting pieces is the mini Wilchar retrospective in the Old Meat Market. A 20th-century contemporary of Magritte and Delvaux and lovingly described by Gregos as "anti-church, anti-capital, anti-art with a capital 'a' and anti-art market ... a true individualist", the Brussels-born artist was detained by the Nazis at Fort Breendonck, a detention camp close to Mechelen, and spent his life fighting injustice wherever he saw it. After his death, Wilchar's city of residence – Beersel, Flemish Brabant – opened a museum in his honour. But Gregos is incredulous that his work still hasn't found a bigger audience. "I really hope that this exhibition is going to resuscitate his reputation."

Whether or not Newtopia can breathe new life into the memory of Wilchar remains to be seen, but with regards to reinvigorating the ever-important debate on human rights, Newtopia will surely be considered a huge success.

CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

Obviously, an arts event focused on international human rights is a solemn affair. But there are many lighter moments in Newtopia. Danish artist Wooloo created a hilarious "We Are the World"-inspired charity music video called "We need you now (more than ever)". Featuring cameos from art world stars (such as Damien Hirst) rather than pop stars, it makes a plucky plea to the Catholic church

to bail out Europe.

Then there's Brussels-based South African artist Kendall Geers who was invited to curate his own exhibition-within-an-exhibition. The result is a riotous collection of musings on and visions for human rights from artists as diverse as Ai Weiwei, Marina Abramović and Banksy.

UNTIL 10 DECEMBER

Across Mechelen

► www.newtopia.be

Original sinema

Dames Draaien

Georgio Valentino

In 2010, a meeting of female audiovisual professionals from the European Union hammered out the Compostela Declaration, a Europe-wide push against gender bias in the audiovisual sector. The signatories found that women face misogynistic stereotypes on screen and unfair discrimination behind the scenes. Dames Draaien (Women Film), Brussels' international festival of films made by women, had already been running for a few years then, but the Declaration gave it an institutional context.

So a Brussels Declaration was duly drafted as a sister manifesto and festival charter. The Botanique hosts this fifth edition of Dames Draaien, which packs more than 45 screenings into four days – from drama to comedy to documentary, from shorts to features (and everything in between). The only criterion: Films must be produced in keeping with the spirit of the Declaration(s). These are films in which women figure prominently and equitably in the creative process.

French-American filmmaker Jessica Champeaux presents her short documentary *The Pedicure Trial*, starring her mother and grandmother as well as her own feet. A pedicure session leads



to a family quarrel implicating three generations of women from both sides of the Atlantic – the filmmaker is British-born, while her ancestresses are southern belles from Georgia. Ketí Machavariani's drama *Salt White*, meanwhile, takes

us half a world away to another Georgia and shows us a slice of life in the post-Soviet state (*pictured*). Dames Draaien covers an impressive cultural and geographical sweep, including Syria, China, Iran, Turkey and more. Hélène Harder's *Ladies'*

Turn follows the vicissitudes of the Senegalese women's football league. It's not easy being an athlete when most sport facilities in your country won't admit you. *Women and the Egyptian Revolution* will be screened in the presence

of its Flemish director, An Van Raemdonck. The documentary traces a programme for gender equality in post-revolutionary Egypt.

This is mostly heavy stuff, but there's a healthy dose of the surreal courtesy of Xiaolu Guo's *UFO in her Eyes*, in which a woman from the Chinese countryside has a close encounter with an unidentified flying object and a wandering American businessman. Then there's *Belgian Psycho* in which director Katia Olivier takes the basic premise of *American Psycho* – the successful boy next door is a homicidal maniac – and gives it a feminist (and Belgian) twist.

Movies are the main event at Dames Draaien, but the festival also features a day-long professional conference as well as a series of special guests and master classes. Plenty of Botanique parties are scheduled throughout, including a closing concert by UK all-girl alt choir Gaggles.

Languages and subtitles vary widely, check listings carefully

20-23 September | Botanique, Koningsstraat 236, Brussels | www.damesdraaien.be

VISUAL ARTS

Kantelingen (Tipping Point)

You've likely been to a fair share of gallery shows, but you've never been to one quite like this. *Tipping Point* is a group exhibition featuring the works of 17 artists inside a cool little experimental art house. Croxhapox is a non-commercial space where this particular group of artists have been gathering regularly since the beginning of the year for round-table discussions. The talks inevitably revolved around the meaning of art – from concept to creation to interpretation – and ultimately led to the works you'll see on display.

Expect a diverse range of works from local artists who have been on the Ghent scene for a long time, whether in or out of the public eye. Photographer Caroline Vincart shows her distinctive aerial and landscape shots, while two sculptors work in unison with the architecture of the space. Two sound and performance artists take the spotlight on 15

September, with live performances in dialogue with the works. Stick around afterwards for the party on location in bar La Resistenza for an eclectic mixture of traditional music and electronic landscapes alongside Brussels-based DJ Marcel Luckyghost.

The finissage is also not to be missed, with live performances by Maya Dalinsky and Sonia Si Ahmed – a duo that questions the power play between observer and observed, audience and performer. Later, enjoy an improv set by Rodrigo Fuentealba, Teun Verbruggen (*pictured*) and Bert Dockx. **Robyn Boyle**



Until 30 September | Croxhapox, Ghent | www.croxhapox.org

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Leigh Ledare, et al: The first solo exhibition of the American photographer, featuring more than 100 works, including examples from nearly all his series to date, as well as video, text-based pieces and several new works never shown before

Until NOV 25 at WIELS, Van Volxemlaan 354

www.wiels.org

Eeklo (East Flanders)

Walter de Buck: Works by the Ghent folk musician and artist, including new sculptures in bronze and marble and pen and charcoal drawings

Until SEP 23 at M.A.P., Molenstraat 7

www.mapvzw.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Gin Matsuri

Grey hair may stand for wisdom in many cultures, but in most Asian cultures, a head of silver marks the start of a very active life chapter. Men and women over the age of 65 can mostly be found in their local parks, exercising or simply going for a stroll. If you are also part of this age group and would like an introduction to tried and true practices that are good for the mind, body and soul, come to Gin Matsuri, or Silver Day, at Hasselt’s Japanese Garden for workshops in tai chi, yoga and more. Or take a walk through the stunning garden with its lush plants and ponds connected by charming footbridges. The initiative is part of the Japanese Garden’s 20th anniversary celebrations. Entrance costs a symbolic €1 and gets you all the tea and coffee you can drink. **RB**



16 September, 14.00-18.00 | Japanese Garden, Hasselt

► www.20jaarjapansetuin.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

ZuiderZinnen: 13th and final edition of the literary festival featuring readings by authors and poets on stages and in cafés
SEP 16 12.00-20.00 across Antwerp

► www.zuiderzinnen.org

Grimbergen

The Organ Project: Organist Bernard Focroulle joins forces with the Salva Sanchis dance company to present this unique performance, the annual concert hosted by the Flemish government in *de rand* of Brussels
SEP 14 20.30 at Abdijkerk Grimbergen, Kerkplein

► www.ccstrombeek.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Marni Jazz Festival

This new edition of this annual fest is all about the cello! You read that right: the cello. The instrument most often associated with classical music has another side you just have to hear to believe. The festival line-up is varied and includes a tribute to the exceptional cellist Denis Van Hecke, who pioneered the electric cello in Belgium 30 years ago, as well as Eastern and Latin American rhythms led by the bows of Anja Naucler (Sweden) and Ana Carla Maza (Chile). The most amazing performance is guaranteed to come from American electro-jazz cellist Dana Leong (*pictured*). **RB**



13-15 September
Théâtre Marni, Brussels

► www.theatremarni.com

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Saint-Jazz-Ten-Noode: 27th edition of the free jazz festival that mixes classical jazz with funk and soul, featuring sax virtuoso John Ruocco, young piano prodigy Igor Gehenot, groovy Belgian pianist Eric Legnini and more

SEP 14-15 at Jazz Station and Botanique

► www.saintjazz.be

Bozar Electronic Arts Festival: What began four years ago as a festival of electronic music has now become a forum for all the electronic arts, including visual art, film and new forms at the intersection of artistic expression and technological innovation

SEP 20-22 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► www.bozar.be

CAR-FREE SUNDAY

Car-free Sunday Brussels

What started out a decade ago as a means to change attitudes and open public debate on the subject of urban mobility, has turned into an almost religious event. Every year, thousands of people make a pilgrimage to Car-free Sunday Brussels, drawn to the city centre for a wide range of fun activities and cultural events. With the streets cut off from traffic and the MIVB public transport network free of charge, it’s the perfect opportunity to test and combine several alternative means of transport. So hop on a bus, ride the metro, walk, roller-skate or bike your way into town for a day free of stress, noise and pollution. **RB**



16 September, 9.00-19.00 | Across Brussels

► www.tinyurl.com/carfreesunday

MORE CAR-FREE DAYS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Antwerp Car-free: A festive day with a busy programme of activities, including storytelling and music

SEP 16 10.00-18.00 across Antwerp

► www.antwerpenautovrij.be

Bruges

Car-free Sunday: Loads of exhaust-free fun for the whole family

SEP 16 10.00-18.00 across Bruges

► www.brugge.be/autoloezondag

Ghent

Car-free Sunday: Walking and biking routes, music and other festivities

SEP 16 10.00-18.00 across Ghent

► www.tinyurl.com/carfreeghent

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Robyn Boyle

De Manedans
Mantelstraat 2a, Kruishoutem

A friend once told me about a café “in the middle of the corn fields”, which are the magic words to ensure that I will seek it out. I only regret that it took me several months to get there. The sign out front reads: The idyllic jazz & blues café. They couldn’t have chosen a more apt word, idyllic meaning “pleasing or picturesque in natural simplicity”.

The little, white, brick farmhouse with classic terracotta roof tiling is engulfed by trees. Scattered about the garden are several tables and chairs, occupied by a diverse range of clientele, from boisterous 20-something boys – whose entrance in old-timer Fords did not go unnoticed – to an older crew of friends, calmly enjoying a few rounds of drinks.

My friend and I quickly scan the menu for something out of the ordinary. Cocktails, jenever, wine, a really nice selection of Trappists and ... Artisan Reuzebier? We’ve never heard of this one before, but our friendly server explains that it’s a local brew and comes in a 75cl bottle, perfect to share with two.

No sooner had we ordered, than a live jazz outfit starts plucking away on two guitars and an upright bass, filling the place with an even more mystical vibe. The sun slowly descends behind far-off thunder clouds as our server pops the cork on our gorgeous bottle, which she has thoughtfully placed in an ice bucket to ensure the right temperature on this warm September evening.

The label is adorably simple, with a picture of a giant next to the words “big, strong and malty” and the beer’s origin: south-



east Flanders. A little research reveals that it’s from Crombé Brewery in Zottegem. As the name suggests, it’s a strong ale (8.3%). It pours hazy blonde with a nice frothy head and tastes of caramelised malt and overripe peaches. We order a couple of dry sausages, too, and they come with the spicy, artisanal Tierenteyn mustard from Ghent – a nice touch.

I head inside for a quick peek and am bowled over by the interior: low-beamed ceilings, tile floors and cosy candlelight. Once my eyes have adjusted to the dark, I see that the space is divided into a few smaller nooks, each one just as snug and inviting as the next. When I see the stack of wood next to the double-sided fireplace, I know that this is where I will be spending many long, cosy hours during the winter months.

► www.manedans.be

BITE

Robyn Boyle

Gigi il Bullo ★★☆☆

“This is not an Italian restaurant” isn’t just another clever reference to the great surrealist Magritte. In this case, scrawled across the menu, it is meant to shake off a number of clichés. For what is so often associated with “Italian” restaurants – found in every neighbourhood of every city across the world – are typical dishes like pizza and spaghetti bolognese. That’s why when Italian expat Dario Puglia opened up shop in Antwerp’s restaurant-inundated Zuid neighbourhood one year ago, he made a conscious effort to stand out from the rest. You will not find *ossobuco* on the menu, but rather veal tongue, cooked at a low temperature for 36 hours and served with cauliflower, parmesan cheese and rhubarb. Likewise, don’t expect to see seafood risotto; prepare yourself instead for fresh sardines in sour white *bottarga* (fish eggs) and red chard. Dario (*pictured*) gets most of his produce from farms across Flanders and imports the rest straight from producers in his homeland. The wine list reads like a road trip through Umbria and Tuscany, so we ask our server to kindly surprise us with two glasses of the best red to go with our meal. The reason for this is we have no idea what we’re about to eat. We’ve ordered from the “White Paper Menu”: four courses at €44, and exactly what those four courses might be is not mentioned. From my comfortable seat on the pavement terrace, I have a direct view of the interior which is modern but with cosy accents like exposed brick, dim lighting and original mosaic tile floors. My dining companion and I sip from long-stemmed glasses of sparkling prosecco while eating black olives and focaccia and admiring the black-and-white photographs on the walls, one of which is a portrait of a Sardinian *nonna*. It seems our chef also has a knack for photography. Dario’s wife is our highly attentive server for the evening. She brings a surprising aperitif of jellied gin and tonic.

Afterwards we are presented with an even more surprising starter: chicken heart with beef tomatoes, garlic and parsley. It’s a first for me, but I open my mind along with my mouth to find that the flavours are right – mostly tangy tomato, and the heart is soft and palatable. This is followed by wild pigeon fillet glazed with Sicilian acacia honey, roasted pumpkin and peppery purslane. We tuck in to discover the bird has been slow-cooked and presumably for a very long time, as the meat is rosy and juicy with an earthy flavour that pairs perfectly with the sweet pieces of pumpkin. When the wine arrives, we find that its heady spiciness goes very well with the pigeon but proves a bit too heavy for the next course. Oxtail is the main ingredient for this dish, but the meat is barely detectable through an incredibly rich sauce of figs, gnocchi, dark chocolate and copious amounts of butter. The first few bites are insanely sweet and delicious. By the end, though, our senses have hit overdrive. Next up is saddle of hare, a long strip of back meat covered in a pile of “its favourite food”, so a whole carrot and heaps of leafy chickweed. The dessert arrives just as we’re undoing the top button on our trousers (thankful that we haven’t ordered the six-course menu). The plate is covered in a beautiful combination of chalky ricotta cheese, thinly sliced peaches, cinnamon, saffron and roughly chopped almonds. The peaches have been steeped in *strega*, an Italian liqueur with a bold minty flavour. We settle the €120 bill over two very well-pulled espresso shots. Throughout the meal it’s the personal service that impresses us the most, enhanced by a visit from Dario himself, donned in white and a sheriff’s badge. There’s no question who’s in charge of that kitchen.

► www.pizzette.be



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TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

By the hoe, not the sword

I know I said I was going to talk about the body language of the Flemish, but after hours of field research, I have come to the conclusion that they don’t really have any. They don’t shake their hands like the Italians, nor do they pout like the French. If body language is any measure to go by, the Flemish are decidedly northern. But perhaps you have a different view? Perhaps you’ve noticed something I haven’t? Perhaps the Flemish flap their ears when they’re happy or wiggle their toes when they’re not? If so, I’d be very

happy to hear about it. *In de tussentijd*, meanwhile, something completely unrelated but nevertheless very interesting has happened. Dutch, it turns out, began in what is now Turkey. That, at least, is the assertion of a study from New Zealand (whose name, as you know, comes from *Nieuw Zeeland*, after the region of *Zeeland*, or Sea Land, in the Netherlands). The study was published late last month in the prestigious journal *Science*. (Ok, I read it in the newspaper.) Dutch is a member of the Indo-European language family. It’s a big

and diverse family that includes most European languages – except for such mysteries as Basque, Finnish and Hungarian – as well as Persian, Hindi and many others. You, like me, may have known that. But what I didn’t know is that for many years, there has been a big rivalry, a vendetta if you will, about the origin of the mother tongue – proto-Indo-European – between linguists and biologists. (I, too, wonder what that battle looks like.) Linguists believe that the first speakers were “chariot-driving pastoralists who burst out of their homeland on the steppes above the Black Sea about 4,000 years ago,” writes Nicholas Wade in the *International Herald Tribune*. Biologists, on the other hand, believe they were “peaceable farmers in Anatolia, now Turkey, about 9,000 years ago, who disseminated their language by the hoe, not the sword”. I would say: Choose one, they both sound equally enchanting. But now, the author of the study claims, there is “decisive support for an Anatolian origin over a steppe origin”. Whether it will settle the vendetta remains to be seen. The linguists have already replied that they don’t believe it. The only thing I can tell you is what I have been telling you over and over again: Dutch and English are cousins. I just know, without having to read *Science*.

► talkingdutch@hotmail.com



The last word...

Bad example

“They say I was responsible for young people going off the rails.” Swedish actress Inger Nilsson, who played Pippi Longstocking in the classic TV series 40 years ago, was in Aalst to speak to students learning Swedish

King of the road

“My wife Els was standing at the side of the route, along with other runners and hundreds of fans. I had no choice but to put on a performance.” Frederic Van den Heede from Waregem won Belgium’s seventh and final medal at the London Paralympics – a bronze in the marathon

Well put

“His unorthodox romantic role in *Rust and Bone*, the new film by French director Jacques Audiard, makes another persuasive case for the strapping, sad-eyed Mr Schoenaerts as the most versatile beefcake actor of our time.” *The New York Times* tips Flemish actor Matthias Schoenaerts for Hollywood success

Restorative care

“Don’t ever mess about with a painting yourself.” Restorer Helene Dubois, who will work on the *Mystic Lamb* masterpiece in Ghent, gives some useful advice to keen amateurs

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Are you tired of the expense of air travel taking so much of your summer holiday budget? Do you dream of freedom and the open road? Ahead of Brussels’ Mobicar Salon this month, we sent a mobile home novice out to experience what it’s like to holiday on wheels

News

Flanders is planting more trees, especially in the areas surrounding cities. We’ll tell you why there’s more subsidies for forestation than last year and how close the region is to planting its goal of 10,000 hectares of forest

Arts

Arno never stops. Flanders’ only rock’n’roller over the age of 60, he’s doing what so many world-famous aging rock stars have such a hard time doing: staying cool. We talk to the man about his new album, his latest tour and the younger generation