

Seeing the forest

Flanders is planting twice as much forest this year than last



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Fans of Flanders

Everything you ever wanted to know about Flanders on the VRT's new TV show in English

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"Rock'n'roll lost the war"

The 1960s, surrealism and white wine: our interview with the inimitable Arno



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A motorhome away from home



© Natalie Hill

A rec vehicle novice discovers Flanders via a fast-growing trend in European travel

Tamara Gausi

Now that we all know the carbon footprint impact of air travel, driving a giant recreation vehicle to Spain doesn't seem as bad as it used to. Just ahead of the Mobicar show in Brussels, we put a mobile home novice behind the wheel and set her off to find the best of Flanders via a home on wheels and the campsites in which they reside.

Here's a riddle for you: what's big and white and represents a surprisingly fast-growing sector of European tourism? The answer is motorhomes. A mode of travel that was once the preserve of hippies at the campervan-end of the scale and family camping holidays at the caravan-end is today a multi-million euro sector synonymous with freedom and flexibility.

There are 96,000 registered motorhomes (which you get in and drive) and caravans (which you pull with your car) in Belgium, and later this month, more than 33,000 people are expected at the 50th anniversary edition of Mobicar at Brussels Expo. The most important date in the calendar year for anyone interested in recreational vehicles, Mobicar boasts more than 700 new models of caravans, mobile homes and motorhomes,

as well as awnings and accessories. Visitors will also be able to discover the latest trends and information on the best facilities around Europe.

Caravanning has come a long way since the first Mobicar, which took place in Brussels' Duden Park in 1963. To celebrate its golden jubilee, this year's salon will exhibit classic caravans from the 1950s and 1960s, a time when local manufacturers, like East Flanders' De Reu, and the iconic Wawa caravans were among the market leaders.

Visitors will also have the opportunity to discover some of the more luxurious RVs on the market such as the Cabby 800 FTM Flexi Caienna, which costs a cool €82,000 and comes with heated floors and a media centre, or the gargantuan Volkner motorhome, which may cost over €1 million but does include a parking bay for your car.

Who buys a motorhome?

Clearly there's a lot of choice on the market but who is this type of holiday for? "There are two types of visitors at Mobicar," says Frédéric François, a spokesperson for the Belgian Caravan-Camping and Motorhome Association (BCCMA), which organises the fair. "Caravan buyers and motorhome

buyers. Caravans cost between €10,000 and €15,000, while motorhomes start at about €35,000 and go up to about €90,000 or more. So their budgets are not the same."

The two types of vehicles also offer two different kinds of holiday. "Caravans are for people who go to the same place year after year and like to stay there for a couple of weeks," explains François. "Motorhome buyers are mostly people who like to discover different countries and regions in Europe. They also tend to be slightly older."

Even so, the motorhome market has really taken off over the past couple of years. In 2011, Belgians purchased 2,800 new motorhomes, up 12% on 2010, compared to a European average increase of 9.1%. In comparison, there were only 1,500 new registered caravans in Belgium between 2010 and 2011, the same figure as the previous year.

Hitting the road

The vibrant second-hand market also records a similar gap, with 6,671 second-hand motorhomes registered in 2011 against 5,247 caravans. So what makes motorhomes so popular? "I think it is a change of mentality," says François. "People are less interested in spending two to four weeks in

FACE OF FLANDERS

Marc Michils



Alan Hope

© courtesy Saatchi & Saatchi

There's something altruistic in the air. Following the news that investment analyst Pascal Paepen (Face of Flanders, 4 July) gave up the City of London for a teaching post in Mol, we now learn that one of the country's top advertising execs has also decided to give it all up for the public good. Marc Michils, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi Brussels, will take up a new job in October, as director of the Flemish League against Cancer (VLK).

"After 30 years of profit, now it's time for 30 years of non-profit," said Michils.

The 59-year-old studied marketing at Ghent University, then earned an MBA at Vlerick Business School, before getting his first job in advertising at Brussels-based agency VVL BBDO. When he got the job, he once said, his mother-in-law reacted with shock: "Marc wasn't such a bad student as all that," she said.

That was the beginning of the 1980s, and advertising was seen as no job for a decent young man; but that was before the industry changed, turning its practitioners into Masters of the Universe, the leading examples being the Saatchi brothers.

In 1991, Michils set up his own

office with three colleagues; the agency Quattro was later acquired by Saatchi, and Michils became CEO. It became a leader in the industry, winning nine Effie Awards (the Belgian advertising Oscars) for campaigns for Carrefour, the CD&V party, Canvas and the milk industry. At the same time, however, Michils also gave his agency's attention – often working pro bono or close to it – to marketing campaigns for the telephone help-line Tele-Onthaal, the development charity Vredeslanden and the popular democracy movement G1000. In 2005, he became deputy chairman of VLK, and he is now taking the director's chair over from Leo Leys, who is retiring. Michils has lost his mother and a niece to cancer but told *De Standaard* in an interview that he's "not coming to the VLK because I haven't worked through the death of my mother," he said. "That sort of personal motivation isn't enough. My motivation is management ambition: I want to be a leader and help the organisation grow."

▶ www.tegenkanker.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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Hans De Loore

News in brief

Rail unions this week announced that they would **not carry out a one-day train strike** on 24 September. Unions will meet again this week with federal government enterprises minister Paul Magnette to discuss reform of the rail authority NMBS. Unions representing lorry drivers, meanwhile, will protest social dumping – the increase of low-wage competition from Eastern Europe – on 24 September. Convoys of up to 500 trucks from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France will converge on Brussels via the E40 from Liège and Ghent, the E19 from Antwerp and Nivelles and the E411 from Namur. When they reach 50km from the capital (about 9.30), they will reduce their speed to 50km/h and block all passing traffic.

Eight panels of the internationally acclaimed 15th-century altarpiece **"The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb"** were last week packed up in the Sint-Baaf's cathedral in Ghent and taken to the city's Fine Arts Museum for restoration. The removal of the priceless work – one panel of which has been missing since it was stolen in the 1930s – was carried out under secrecy and police supervision. Restoration work will take five years and is open to the public from 1 October.

Three men are in custody in Leuven in connection with the **discovery last week of the body** of 22-year-old Ziena Kemous in a surrounding wood. The victim was reported missing on 21 June between her work in the centre of Leuven and her home in Kessel-Lo.

Brussels needs to build a **new metro line from North Station to Bordet** near Nato if the city is to reduce reliance on car traffic,

according to a study by Beliris, the agency for development in the capital. The line would be 4.8 kilometres long, served by new automatic metro trains and cost an estimated €800 million. Brussels Capital Region's mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels responded with surprise to the proposal, about which she had not been consulted, despite being responsible for any eventual decision.

Tot altijd, known in English as *Time of My Life*, won the **Ensor for Best Film** last weekend in Ostend. The Ensors are awarded annually to Flemish films of the previous year. *Tot altijd*, directed by Nic Balthazar (*Ben X*), told the story of the first person to use Belgium's euthanasia law in 2002. Nicholas Provost's *The Invader*, meanwhile, about an African immigrant in Brussels, won the most awards with four, including Best Director. Best Actress honours went to Evelien Bosmans for *Groenten uit Balen*, and Best Actor to Geert Van Rampelberg for his role in *Tot altijd*.

Flemish minister Ingrid Lieten last week announced funding of €1 million for 22 **local projects to tackle poverty** affecting very young children. In 2010, Flanders had 140,000 children living under the poverty line: 13% of all children under three and up to 70% in families where one or both parents are from countries outside the EU.

The parents of 190 pupils enrolled in a **school for the children of expat business people** will find out this week whether the local council will allow the doors to open, following protests from local residents. The school in Artselaar, Antwerp province, was set up after an agreement was signed in India

last year during an economic visit. But protests over possible noise and traffic problems meant that the school was unable to open at the beginning of the school year.

The city of Brussels has handed out **four fines of up to €250 for sexual harassment** on the street, introduced in August after the broadcast of the documentary *Femme de la rue* by film student Sofie Peeters, which highlighted the problem. Brussels City mayor Freddy Thielemans made international headlines last week by promising that the administrative fines would also be administered to anyone using insulting or threatening language in the street.

Federations representing the food industry, the retail sector and advertisers have drawn up a document called the Belgian Pledge, which promises to **limit advertising for sweets** aimed at children under the age of 12. Advertising on radio and TV, online and in print will only target children if the products concerned meet certain nutritional criteria, the pledge says. Commercial communications in schools will only be allowed on the express request of the head teacher for educational purposes.

A 48-year-old man from Antwerp, who has been detained in a mental hospital in Turnhout for 27 years, has been given **permission to undergo euthanasia**. The man, who has not been named, was convicted of two murders and a rape. The request now has to be requested by a doctor on behalf of the man. It was also revealed that the case is not the first in Belgium, as was first supposed. Several months ago, a severely ill prisoner was also allowed euthanasia.

OFFSIDE

Candidates brought to book

The Antwerp mayoral race took an interesting turn last week, when politics gave way to literature. Stretching the definition ever so slightly, perhaps, in the case of Bart De Wever (*pictured*), currently the most popular politician in Flanders by a small margin, who released his new diet book amid much media attention.

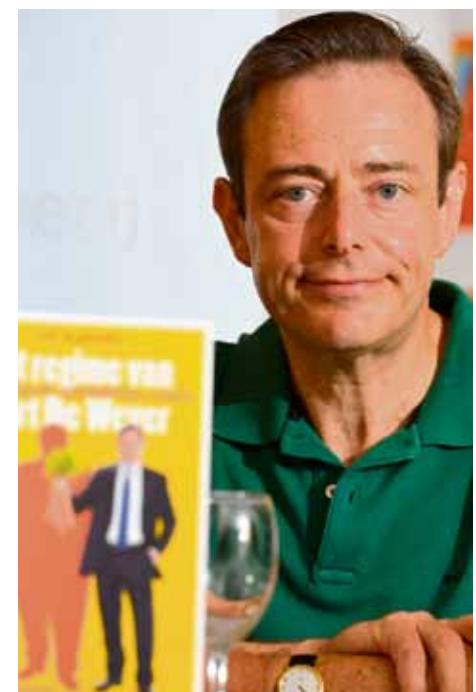
Het regime van Bart De Wever reveals the secret of the slimming plan that saw the leader of the N-VA lose more than 50 kilos. "I don't want to make a political thing of this," he told the audience at the launch, far from the political arena in De Haan. He also said that he's "not a crusader against obesity. Medical supervision is all that I have to recommend for such a diet."

The royalties from the book, published by Davidsfonds, will go to the Zeepreventorium in De Haan, which tackles obesity among children.

De Wever's political opponents, perhaps recalling his appearances on popular TV quiz show *De slimste mens ter wereld*, to which many attribute his success in the 2010 general elections, kept their distance from the media storm.

Sitting mayor Patrick Janssens, meanwhile, was appointed chairman of the jury for the 2013 AKO Literature Prize, the prestigious annual prize for Dutch-language literature and non-fiction. His predecessor on the jury, which will announce the 2012 nominations next week, is Jozias van Aartsen, a member of the VVD party, which was victorious in last week's election in the Netherlands, and mayor of The Hague.

Alan Hope



© Dirk Waem / BELGA

A motorhome away from home

Traversing Flanders in a motorhome comes with tiny, rural lanes but also charming, friendly campsites

► continued from page 1

the same place, which is what you do with a caravan. The motorhome represents freedom. You can go pretty much where you want, whenever you want. It is a great way to travel."

Is that so? To test these claims, I was offered the chance to drive a motorhome for a couple of days, courtesy of the BCCMA and rental company Cap Horizons. Having seen a fair amount of Flanders by car, train, foot and bike – but never motorhome – I jumped at the chance. Photographer Natalie Hill agreed to be my road dog and together we etched out an itinerary that would allow us to see as much of the region as we could in three days.

Or so we thought. Our rough plan was to traverse East Flanders to West, packing in visits to Tongeren, the Hoge Kempen National Park, a few spots on the coast, a couple of war memorials and whatever else caught our fancy in between. This would be interspersed with overnight stays at the Jocomo Parc in Lanaken, Limburg province, and the Kerlinga campsite in Bredene, West Flanders. Ambitious, but totally doable in a car, so why not in a motorhome?

Size matters

Well, there is the small issue of size. What makes motorhoming such a comfortable and convenient way to travel when you are inside the vehicle can also make it rather challenging when interacting with the rest of the world. Flemish roads aren't well-known for their expanse, which can make driving a motorhome challenging, especially if there is a tractor heading your way, as we found out more than once. You will also need to keep an eye out for the ubiquitous Flemish cyclist, who will not be in the least bit intimidated by the size, width or speed of your vehicle.

Once we got used to the size of our vehicle – a two to seven berth Elliot 40, which measured up at nearly seven metres long and 3.3 metres high – we headed east, making a quick stop in Tongeren, a beautiful Roman town with roads the size of drainpipes, where parking was a barrel of laughs. Even with the super handy rear-view video camera for when you are reverse parking (there is no rear-view mirror), the traffic behind us and the cars parked beside us left very little room for error.

With regards to safety, by the way, we found nothing to worry about. As long as you keep the vehicle



© photos: Natalie Hill

Clockwise from top left: Your correspondent plans her trip across Flanders; cooking facilities at your fingertips; landscapes vary at campsites across Flanders, where people with cabins live for several weeks or months of the year; the toilets sparkle at Jocomo Parc

secure and don't leave valuables in view, a parked motorhome is as safe as a parked car.

The motorhome parks

Even though Belgium isn't a major motorhome destination, there are many campsites across the country

15 hectares of idyllic woodland, Jocomo is the perfect location for a cycling or walking holiday. And being less than 15 kilometres from the Maasmechelen shopping centre and the city of Genk, it is also well-placed to discover the charms of Limburg. Well-maintained by

"You will need to keep an eye out for the ubiquitous Flemish cyclist, who will not be the least bit intimidated by the size, width or speed of your vehicle"

(see sidebar). We opted to spend our first night at Jocomo Parc, a four-star campsite on the edge of the Hoge Kempen National Park in Limburg. Despite being almost empty (it's off-season, and the park closes in October), it was an excellent choice. Family-run since 1960 and set in

manager Marc Wyenbergh with incredibly clean bathrooms and toilets, it exceeded our expectations of what an off-season campsite would be like.

Our next dwelling, the three-star Kerlinga in Bredene, wasn't quite as idyllic but whatever it lacked in rural charm it more than made up for by being located just a few hundred metres from the beach. Surprisingly, it was packed with caravanners and some motorhome visitors. Like at Jocomo, most of the clientele were Dutch, Flemish and German (in that order), with some Walloon, French and even British visitors, and, like at Jocomo, the staff were multilingual.

That evening, however, we learned the final, and probably most important, rule of motorhoming – always be prepared. The temperature dropped to the mid-teens after having been sunny all day. This wouldn't have been a problem if someone (no names mentioned... Natalie) hadn't left our bedding in her car, but she did, forcing us to sleep with all our clothes on and still waking up with cold noses in the morning.

On the way back to Brussels, we passed by Diskmuide, where, despite Elliot taking up nearly four parking

spaces, we discovered a thought-provoking and moving exhibition on the impact of the two World Wars in Flanders at the IZertower Museum. Unfortunately, we didn't make it to the fisheries museum in Oostduinkerke (we couldn't find anywhere to park) or indeed half of the places on our itinerary, but we did enjoy a whistle stop tour of Flanders.

I would definitely do it again, and I can finally see what all the fuss is about when it comes to motorhomes. I'll just make sure to remember the bedding next time.

MOTORHOMING: MORE INFO

ASSOCIATION The Belgian Caravan-Camping and Motorhome Association (BCCMA) not only organises Mobicar but it also provides information on where to buy or rent RVs

► www.bccma.be

CAMPsite GUIDE A great resource with summaries of many campsites across Belgium in English, Dutch, French and German

► www.camping.be

CAMPsite MAP Flanders Tourism produces a camping map offering a comprehensive overview of facilities available across the region

► www.visitflanders.com

RENTALS Guy Sohie at Brussels' Cap Horizons rents various motorhomes. Prices start at €570 for a weekend.

► www.caphorizon.be

29 SEPTEMBER TO 4 OCTOBER

Mobicar

Brussels Expo, Belgieplein 1
€10 entry

► www.mobicar.be

Cycle highways for Brussels

Minister Smet reaches out to “a large group of potential cyclists”

Alan Hope

Socialists SPA last week unveiled a proposed plan for “cycle superhighways” in the capital. The plan would involve new cycle routes along flat terrain and lifts to help in climbing hillier parts of town.

Aside from road safety, bicycle theft and the lack of infrastructure, the hilly topography of Brussels presents a sizeable disincentive to many people who would otherwise choose to cycle, said spokesperson Pascal Smet, who is also Flemish minister for Brussels. “By promoting cycling in low-lying areas and installing cycle highways along railway lines, we want to reach commuters and others in Brussels who don’t cycle yet,” he said. “There are more and more cyclists in Brussels, but there’s an even larger group of potential



The long, flat route from the Basilique to the centre of Brussels is one of the sites pin-pointed as a possible future cycle highway

cyclists who remain to be won over.” The Flattrack plan includes a map of existing locations of cycle

highways, to be joined by new cycle paths following the course of railway lines, which would also

avoid climbing hills. “The slopes that remain could be equipped with a lift, such as the one at Poelaert.” That lift connects the Poelaertplein at Brussels’ Justice Palace with the Marollen in the lower part of the city. Smet also referenced a cycle lift in Trondheim, Norway, which works like a tow lift on a ski slope. “The number of cyclists has doubled since the installation of their lift.” The map is intended to be a work in progress and open to input from cyclists. The intention is for cyclists to share their Flattrack experiences and fill in the gaps,” Smet said. “Eventually every cyclist will have a picture of the most important flat cycle routes.” The initiative is accompanied by a Facebook page: www.facebook.com/FlattrackBrussels.

Antwerp protest leads to more than 200 arrests

A riot that led to more than 200 arrests in the Antwerp district of Borgerhout at the weekend were “absolutely not the behaviour expected of a Muslim,” according to the city’s leading imam. “We appeal to everyone for calm and ask the Muslim community to act peacefully,” said imam Nordine Taouil (pictured).

Taouil was speaking after protests at a You Tube video from a film insulting the prophet Muhammad. The Antwerp protests followed incidents in Libya and Cairo in which US embassies were attacked and four

US diplomatic staff killed. However, it later emerged that the Libya attack had been planned to coincide with the anniversary of 9/11 and merely used the anti-video protest as a cover.

Imam Taouil called on Antwerp Muslims to “ignore this provocation, the intent of which was to cause conflict between the religions.” Mohammed Chakkari, of the Federation of Moroccan Associations, also condemned the violence, which he said had been forbidden by preachers in the

mosques. And the Muslim Executive issued a statement: “The freedom of expression is a fundamental right in a democracy but has to be applied with intelligence. Provocation and incitement to hatred have to be avoided.”

Elsewhere, about 30 people were arrested in central Brussels and in Sint-Joost-ten-Node during protests, including six in the area of the US embassy, where all demonstrations are forbidden at all times. In Ghent, about young people held a march against the film, without incident.



Ombudsman’s top 10 list of recommendations

Flemish ombudsman Bart Weekers has released a list of 10 recommendations to all political parties taking part in the October municipal elections, based on complaints he receives from residents. The recommendations could be seen as pledges, he says, which each of the 308 municipalities in Flanders ought to take:

- Create and maintain a local complaints desk
- Involve local people earlier and more deeply in matters relating to the installation of GSM masts or container parks
- Take rapid and consistent action to deal with applicants for permits, permit holders and objectors
- Deal consistently with everyone equally
- Implement a strong sewer policy regarding connections to the main sewer and contingencies for dealing with waste water
- Do everything necessary to avoid having to shut off drinking water and restore service as soon as possible
- Maintain the quality of housing, ensure an ample supply of social housing and apply flexible conditions regarding access for local people
- Implement a mobility policy that gives precedence to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users before considering the needs of cars
- Help create a rapid and safe public transport service

► www.vlaamseombudsdiest.be

Students make the case against courts

The time taken before cases come to court in Flanders could be greatly improved, as could communication and opening hours, according to a survey carried out by two university colleges in Limburg. The students of judicial practice looked at the “client friendly” aspects of courts in Antwerp, Mechelen, Tongeren and Turnhout. “We noticed that lawyers as well as members of the public found the waiting times for a case to be dealt with were too long,” commented one of the students. “The courts’ communications are also not up to scratch. Summons and other correspondence often contains too much legal jargon. Not every court has a website, and the websites that exist provide too little information.”

Michel Rozie, chairman of the court of appeal in Antwerp, reacted positively. “We are never too old to learn,” he said.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

550,936

families and businesses in Flanders switched to a new supplier for electricity and/or gas in the first eight months of the year, more than in the whole of 2011

12,000

school children commute every day from the Netherlands to schools in Flanders, twice as many as eight years ago. Barely 1,000 travel in the opposite direction

82nd

place in world university rankings for the University of Leuven, down from number 68 last year in the QS rankings, but still the only Belgian university in the top 100

14%

increase in rental prices in Brussels over the last seven years, despite a 70% increase in the cost of buying property, according to the regional housing authority BGHM

€625,635

handed over by the US Drug Enforcement Administration to Belgium as a reward for cooperation in bringing the Antwerp-based gangster Riccardo Fanchini to justice, along with 40 members of his gang, in 2007

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Seeking a Flemish Rutte

The Dutch elections, won by liberal prime minister Mark Rutte, are a rare ray of hope to many a member of Open VLD, for it is hard being a Flemish liberal these days.

Five years ago, Open VLD still had the prime minister within its ranks. Now, as *De Standaard* put it after another disastrous poll, the party has become “peripheral”. This explains why vice-prime minister Vincent Van Quickenborne was so vocal last week in denouncing the tax on capital, which no-one believes will be introduced any time soon, certainly not under this federal government.

Open VLD has been losing popularity since 2004, when the party engaged in some of the in-fighting it is known for on the issue of the immigrant vote. It bounced back slightly after Alexander De Croo was elected party president in 2009. This inspired De Croo to withdraw his party’s support for the federal government Leterme II, a move that did not work out the way De Croo had hoped, as his party lost the ensuing elections.

Many people hold De Croo responsible for the rise of the N-VA, the nationalist party that was able to profile itself on the language issues he had put on the agenda. De Croo may now pay the price for this, as he may be on his way out.

When De Croo was elected party president, he promised Open VLD members “courageous change”, but he couldn’t seem to fulfil that promise. He resembles his father in this respect. Herman De Croo was elected party president in 1995, as party members had grown weary of Guy Verhofstadt’s antics. The same is true for his son Alexander, who had never held a political mandate before 2009 but seemed to be the right man at the right moment.

Just as Open VLD never managed to cash in on the fall of Leterme II, it now fails to reap any rewards for being part of the current federal government. In the institutional imbroglio that preceded the formation of this government, Open VLD long held an opposition stance, denouncing Di Rupo I as a tax government.

After the liberals entered the so-called “coalition of the willing” themselves, they could never shake off this image. Once again, it is N-VA that benefits, as the party of Bart De Wever profiles itself as more liberal than the liberals. Time for Open VLD to look for its own Mark Rutte.

No beating around the bush

Flanders' environment minister explains the region's conservation plans

Andy Furniere

This year, the government of Flanders is providing €1.67 million in subsidies to municipal governments to create 68 additional hectares of forest. That's more than double the area of forestation achieved with last year's subsidies.

Because of the success of the first call for forestation projects last year, Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege more than tripled the budget for subsidies. The Flemish agency for nature and forests (ABN) approved 11 projects: six forests on the outskirts of a city, three "recreational forests" and three local forest expansions. In total, the forests cover a surface of 68 hectares, up from 30.5 hectares last year.

Although forest conservation organisation BOS+ is pleased with this evolution, it is still critical of the government's forestation policy and is demanding that it plant 1,000 hectares of forest each year. In

August of 2008, BOS+ collaborated with ABN in a campaign to plant a million trees in four years. The goal was reached well in time; in fact, BOS+ says that locals planted about 1.5 million new trees.

But BOS+ says that the region cannot rest on its laurels and has launched a campaign to plant 10 million trees by 2020. This means around 4,000 hectares, as a forest is measured as approximately 2,500 trees per hectare. It is also calling on the Flemish government to create 1,000 hectares of forest every year.



© Macduff Everton / CORBIS

"These are ambitious goals, but they are necessary because Flanders is one of the regions with the least amount of forest in Europe, and forests are still being cleared at a higher rate than trees are being planted," says BOS+ director Bert De Somviele.

Flanders Today talked to minister Schauvliege about her forest policy and response to BOS+.

FT: What are the Flemish government's forestation ambitions?

Joke Schauvliege: We have agreed to the Pact 2020, part of the Flanders in Action plan, to make sure that at least half of city or town areas have a forest or are creating one by 2020. In 1997, the Flemish government specifically decided to provide 10,000 hectares of ecologically responsible

forest expansion. We are committed to pursuing this goal further and in 2011 reached 37% of the required woodlands.

The resources for the 11 projects this year come from "forest compensation funds". What does that mean?

In Flanders, every deforestation has to be compensated, either with a compensation forest or a financial contribution to our funds. From 2001 to 2011, almost half of the compensation was done by reforestation. The funds have received €39 million since 2002, and the budget for this year was €3.35 million. ABN uses these resources to buy land for forestation projects.

BOS+ feels that nature associations and residents should also benefit from these funds.

I agree. As we speak, we are working on a system to extend the subsidies to these target groups in the most effective and fair way. I will introduce the new method as soon as possible, to support everyone with quality forestation projects.

BOS+ also says that it is still too complicated for residents to get a permit for forestation projects.

At the beginning of the year, I made the procedure much easier so that local governments can act more quickly and autonomously in arranging forestation in agricultural areas.

BOS+ asks that you create 1,000 hectares of new forest each year.

It sets the bar very high, as it is difficult and expensive to find so much land for forestation in our very urbanised and densely populated

region. Further, there are other natural areas than forest threatened in Flanders, which also deserve our attention. The Flemish government aims to increase natural areas, including forests, by 3,000 hectares each year.

Does the urbanised profile of Flanders mean it is one of the regions with the least forests in Europe?

I don't want to beat around the bush: With a forest index of 13% [*the ratio between the forested surface and the total surface of Flanders*], the Flemish region is only ahead of Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. We are working to improve the situation and objectively evaluate the evolution every two years with the Boswijzer, a digital database of all forested surfaces in the region, which I introduced last year.

Six of the new forestation projects will be created on the outskirts of cities.

They are essential for the quality of life in Flanders' many city environments, as the trees absorb dust, clean the air and form "climate buffers". Apart from the ecological advantages, the recreation and sporting possibilities contribute to the well-being of Flemings.

► www.natuurenbos.be
► www.bosplus.be

Port House construction kicks off

The Antwerp Port Authority's new headquarters will incorporate old and new design

Marc Maes

"This new Port House will be embraced by the entire port community and emphasises the port's standing as a major economic entity worldwide," said Eddy Bruyninckx, CEO of the Antwerp Port Authority, last week at the official kick-off of the construction of the new Port House. Due to be completed in 2015, the Port House will become Port Authority headquarters, home to all the port's technical and administrative departments – some 500 employees. The Port House will consist of the existing building that until recently was home to the port's technical services and a new integrated construction. The location, near the Kattendijk dock, was strategically chosen; it marks the boundary between the city and the port. The new headquarters is the next in a line of new builds in the port area

and the Eilandje neighbourhood, joining the MAS museum, the pilotage building and the future Red Star Line Museum.

The existing building, built by the city as a fire station 90 years ago, is a replica of the 16th-century Hanzehuis, which was located where the MAS is now. The fire station became a listed monument in 2000. The design of the new Port House was awarded to London's renowned Zaha Hadid Architects, responsible for such high-profile projects as Rome's MAXXI National Museum, the Guangzhou Opera House in China and the London Aquatics Centre. Zaha Hadid, who was present at the launch of the building project, said that the challenge was "to combine old and new with an eye for the future".

The new construction is designed as a two-part structure, attached to



The new headquarters for the Antwerp Port Authority integrates a new glass-and-steel structure with the existing 1920s building, originally a fire station

and set above the former fire station, which itself will undergo a complete renovation. The upper structure, with a ship-shaped, glass triangles facade, refers to both the port and diamond industry. Aside from glass, it will require 1,500 tons of steel

construction. Staff and visitors will enter into the existing building, which will house offices and meeting rooms. More offices, meeting rooms, an auditorium and a restaurant with panoramic views in the new

extension will be accessible via lifts just off the central courtyard. The new Port House will also include two underground parking lots. Construction will make use of sustainable materials where possible, and construction is planned to maximise energy efficiency. The cost of the new Port House is €50 million and is part of the investment plan worth €1.6 billion approved by the Port Authority in 2010. Construction will begin on 1 October. "This new Port House is to become a true beacon, enhancing the dialogue between the city and the port," said Hilde Crevits, Flemish minister of public works. "The building will strengthen Antwerp's position as the world's leading port."

► www.tinyurl.com/havenhuis



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ING

Uncertainty at Ford Genk

Parent company in the US not denying or confirming rumours of closure

Alan Hope

Unions at the Ford car manufacturing plant in Genk were hoping this week for more information on the future of their workforce, after increased tension last week arising from an article in the *The Wall Street Journal*, which speculated that the plant might close. The Ford parent company in Detroit is refusing to rule out closure of the Genk plant as part of a European restructuring plan. Attempts by union representatives to obtain clarification from the company's European headquarters in Cologne

were unsuccessful, with the company declining to deny or confirm the *WSJ* report. The company did point out that Ford guaranteed work security at Genk until 2020. In the meantime, workers could be on temporary unemployment for 36 days in the last quarter of this year, according to provisional plans, partly as a result of reduced sales of the current Mondeo, as the market waits for its successor. "Ford has announced that measures will be required, which of course creates uncertainty," said company

spokesman Jo Declercq. "But you have to understand that long-term decisions in the car industry are not taken overnight. We are waiting the same as everyone else."

Union representative Rohnny Champagne said: "Management has always maintained that contractual undertakings will be honoured, and that rumours about a possible closure are pulled from thin air. Let's hope it's all pure speculation."

In June, the Flemish government gave strategic support of €28.1 million for the construction of the



© courtesy Ford

new Ford Mondeo, conditional on a specific set of investments by the company, and the amount depending on maintaining the agreed level of employment.

Cut tie between oil price and power bills, regulator advises

Consumers could save hundreds of euro a year on energy costs under a proposal from the federal energy regulator Creg to decouple the price of electricity and gas from the world oil price. According to Creg, the average household would pay €600 less if their bill reflected the true price of electricity and gas, instead of being linked to the oil price, as it is now. The regulator argues that the oil price has nothing to do with gas and electricity prices.

The proposal has the support of federal economy and consumer affairs minister Johan Vande Lanotte (pictured). "If you went to the baker, and he told you bread was going to be more expensive because of the rising price of apples, you'd also find that a bit strange," Vande Lanotte said. The proposal could form the basis of policy when a price freeze imposed by the government last spring runs out at the end of the year.



Flemish finalists for cleantech awards

Three Flemish companies are among 30 worldwide to go through to the finals of the Later Stage Award 2012 organised by the Cleantech Cluster Association. The finalists were chosen from a field of 4,000 applicants. The awards are given in 10 cleantech categories: bio-energy, energy storage, lighting/energy efficiency, solar energy, smart grid/sustainable IT, tidal/hydropower, transportation, waste management, water treatment and wind energy. Winners will be announced in November at an international cleantech conference in the United States. The three Flemish companies are: **Waterleau** – based in Herent near Leuven and dealing in water, air and waste treatment and energy recovery. The company won this year's Export Lion award from Flanders Investment & Trade.

Ducatt – based in Lommel, Limburg province, making ultra-thin toughened glass for solar power applications.

Emrol – based in Malle, East Flanders, specialising in batteries, chargers and accessories.

► www.globalcleantech.org

Peeters gets backing for bank plan

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has rejected criticism from the Flemish minority parties of his new plan for the banks, describing them as "premature and incorrect". Peeters' plan would involve setting up investment funds with government guarantees in order to provide credit for small and medium-sized businesses, as a means of tackling the difficulty small companies have in obtaining credit from the banks. It would also take steps to encourage those with hefty savings accounts to use some of those funds to invest in business.

The plan was supported by Ingrid Lieten, minister for government investment, who said it was "a measure to break the negative spiral of bad economic news and lack of consumer confidence". During times of shrinking growth, she said "the government must accept its responsibility to revive confidence and give companies the opportunity to invest," she said.

Criticism of the plan came from the liberal Open VLD and the ecology party Groen. Open VLD argued that the plan would allow banks to pass risk off onto the government, and ultimately the

taxpayer. "They need to study the proposal more carefully," Peeters responded. "The claim that the plan is careless because we want to increase guarantees is not correct. The intention is not to increase guarantees, but to make the best use of existing guarantees."

Meanwhile, ratings agency Fitch has given Flanders its first-ever independent rating of AA. Fitch cited "a strong socio-economic profile, moderate indebtedness and efforts to achieve a balanced budget".

Q&A

Elizabeth Vennekens-Kelly is an American businesswoman living in Flanders and has just published the book *Subtle Differences, Big Faux Pas* about the affect of cultural differences on business



What sort of cultural problems might arise for people doing business in Flanders?

It depends where they're coming from, but Flanders is a little bit

more formal than some places, such as the United States. People here are famous for wanting to find a compromise. They like to look for solutions, so they're terrific to have on your team. Another benefit is that most people doing business in Flanders are multi-lingual, though sometimes that's a challenge in that people expect them to speak their language and don't make as much of an effort to speak theirs.

People have different approaches to discussions of money, personal details and the like. What do foreigners need to look out for?

Some cultures are more quick to ask what you do, what's your position or about finances. People in Flanders are fairly conservative about money, so they're not as anxious to talk about that. It's always important to ask someone if you can call them by their first name; it's so important not to assume. In business, at least the first couple of meetings, there is a tendency to want to keep it more formal until you start to establish a relationship.

One of the things that often throws foreigners is the ritual in offices of shaking hands

or kissing everyone present. What's the best way to avoid discomfort?

Shaking hands is more comfortable in some places than in others. You do have to make it clear if something is making you uncomfortable; respect is the most important thing. Just because we do it differently, doesn't mean that it can't be respectful. If you don't want someone to kiss you, then you might put out a hand to indicate that you'd rather shake hands.

Interview by Alan Hope

► www.subtle-differences.com

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Autos

► Volvo

The Volvo Trucks assembling plant in Oostakker, East Flanders, has been selected to build the new Volvo Front High model from early 2013. The company is seeking additional staff to cope with the increased production volumes.

Banks

► Crelan

The new financial institution created in the merger between Landbouwkrediet and Centea Bank will be called Crelan from April of next year. The move entails reducing the number of branches from 937 to some 700 by 2015.

Business Schools

► Vlerick

Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School has changed its name to Vlerick Business School. The institution has also reworked its MBA curriculum, redesigned its Executive Education programmes and announced the opening of a Brussels campus, set for the spring of 2013.

Chemicals

► Solvay

The Brussels-based plastics and chemical products group plans to invest €10 million in its French Salindres plant to double production of fluorinated derivatives to meet demand from the electronic, pharmaceutical and energy storage markets.

Insurance

► Ageas

Brussels-based insurance group Ageas is in negotiations to acquire the non-life activities of Groupama UK, the affiliate of the French insurance group. The move would significantly strengthen Ageas' UK-based operations.

Mail

► bpost

Belgian national post office bpost is likely to be one of the bidders for the soon-to-be-privatised Hellenic Post, the Greek national postal service.

Petrol

► ExxonMobil

The US-based ExxonMobil oil group has sold 44 of its filling stations to the West Flemish G&V petroleum products distributor.

Trucks

► Scania

The Swedish heavy trucks manufacturer is investing €23 million to increase capacity of its distribution and parts logistics centre in Opglabbeek, Limburg province, by some 37,500 square metres.

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Hooked!

Dive into the history of fishing in Flanders at a wide-ranging museum on the coast

Ian Mundell

Navigo, the National Fisheries Museum in Oostduinkerke, covers all aspects of the history of fishing at the Belgian coast, houses an aquarium and even tells you how to smoke and can your own fish

The last thing you expect to find in a fishery museum is real live fish. Yet here they are – bass, turbot, sole and plaice – circling around two massive aquaria in a room beneath the restored trawler that is the pride and joy of Navigo, the National Fisheries Museum in Oostduinkerke.

It's actually a bit disconcerting standing there under the trawler's hull, the fish staring back at you, when you've spent the past few hours considering all the ingenious ways devised for getting them out of their element and onto our plates.

Including the fish is typical of the museum's comprehensive approach to its subject. It comes at the local fishing industry from every angle, so why not from below? The result is a wide-ranging experience that should have something to please everyone, even if the scale sometimes means that fascinating aspects of the story have little space to develop.

The iconic image of fishing on this part of the Flemish coast is men on horseback dragging nets through the water at low tide to catch shrimp. This began as a sideline for farmers, who would take their plough horses through the dunes and down to the beach when agricultural work was slack. Later on, fishing with horses or mules became a mainstay for fishermen (along with a less romantic variant that involved their wives and daughters pushing nets through the icy water on foot).

This is the starting point for the museum's permanent exhibition. First there is a restored fisherman's cottage outside on the grounds, where grandparents watch over the hearth and the young children. Then inside the museum is a large diorama showing both methods of shrimp fishing. Up close, the dummies are not entirely convincing, but with added ambient sound effects and first-person narratives on the audio guide (available in English and other languages), a vivid picture of this way of life emerges.

It's a trick that the museum pulls off throughout its seven large rooms: Initially unpromising dioramas are brought to life by a detail or a well-placed sound. For example, close to the shrimp fishers is a display recreating a broken boat among the dunes. This is optimistically

decorated with gulls on wires and a scattering of stuffed rabbits, yet the dune soundscape gradually transports you out of the room. Then being told that beachcombers used to pick up starfish and take them home to fertilise their gardens takes you to another time and place entirely.

A fisherman's tale

After this exploration of shore fishing as practised in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the museum devotes a room to the longer historical view of fishing on the Flemish coast.

For many centuries, fishermen used flat-bottomed boats, which they could moor simply by running them up on to the beach. Initially they lived close at hand, among the dunes, but between the 12th and 16th centuries, most moved to land behind the dunes to avoid catastrophic storms that troubled the coast. Each community had its own tight-knit group of fishermen who worked with traditional methods and often distinctive designs of boats. These are explored further in a later room, with enough models to keep the armchair sailor busy for hours.

It was only after 1800 that fishermen started to congregate around harbours such as Ostend, Blankenberge, Nieuwpoort and latterly Zeebrugge. Partly this was down to changing fishing methods, partly because coastal development for tourism was forcing them out of their traditional homes.

As well as working the waters of the Channel and the North Sea, fisherman also made the arduous voyage to the waters around Iceland. This began as early as the 17th century but gained momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as economic forces made fishing locally even harder. The museum has a separate section devoted to the Iceland run, full of hair-raising detail about the conditions endured by fishermen.

These historical sections are rather heavy on text, although the museum succeeds in bringing out the human angle in panels following events in the Legein family from 1701 to 1981.

Contemporary and industrial

Part of the challenge that Navigo faces is that many of the artefacts left behind in the history of fishing are small and simple, such as the tools used to mend nets or the votive offerings placed in chapels by superstitious fishermen. These demand more attention from the visitor than exhibits in museums devoted to more



The National Fisheries Museum runs the gamut, from wax dummies to state-of-the-art control panels

extravagant subjects.

Yet items such as the pins, hooks and fragments of pottery found at the lost fishing village of Nieuwe Yde speak volumes just because they are so slight, a reminder that these were modest lives. The papers left behind are also modest, from fishing permits and muster rolls to the obituaries and memorial postcards for men lost at sea.

Things become grander in the final room dealing with fishing boats and industrial

fishing of the 20th century. As well as the Martha, a restored wooden trawler dating from 1942, there are control panels and radio equipment from industrial fishing boats and more contemporary clothes and equipment. And from time to time, the lights dim and a simulated storm crackles overhead.

From here you can go up a floor to think about smoking, canning and other ways of preserving the catch. Or you can go down to the basement to commune with cod.

ZEESCHATTEN



After last year's eye-catching temporary exhibition on the erotic aspects of the sea, the museum's latest offering is a bit of a disappointment. It is billed as *Zeeschatten*, or sunken treasure, and a lot of effort has gone into making pirates a principal theme. But for all the panels about the Jolly Roger, Jack Rackham and Anne Bonny, there is very little in the display cases to back up these stories.

Many of the artefacts on show come from the Rooswijk, a merchant vessel sunk in a storm in the English Channel in 1740. Shiny relics such as coins and wine flasks appear in a section devoted to treasure from shipwrecks, alongside ceramics and, bizarrely, tea from more distant wrecks.

Meanwhile, more martial debris from the Rooswijk, including cannonballs and fragments of sword and musket, are pressed into service in the pirate displays. With a little imagination, you can make it work, but by the time you get to the case featuring a Lego version of the ship from *The Pirates of the Caribbean*, it feels pretty desperate.

A more coherent display on the Rooswijk would have been preferable, exploring the cargo it was carrying, the route it sailed and how the wreck was rediscovered in 2004. That's no less romantic just because pirates

weren't involved, and at least it has a vaguely local connection. The same goes for the woolly mammoth remains tucked away in one cabinet. Apparently, they are abundant in the North Sea, but that's all we get of this potentially tantalising story.

Information panels for Zeeschatten are in Dutch with partial translations in French and German

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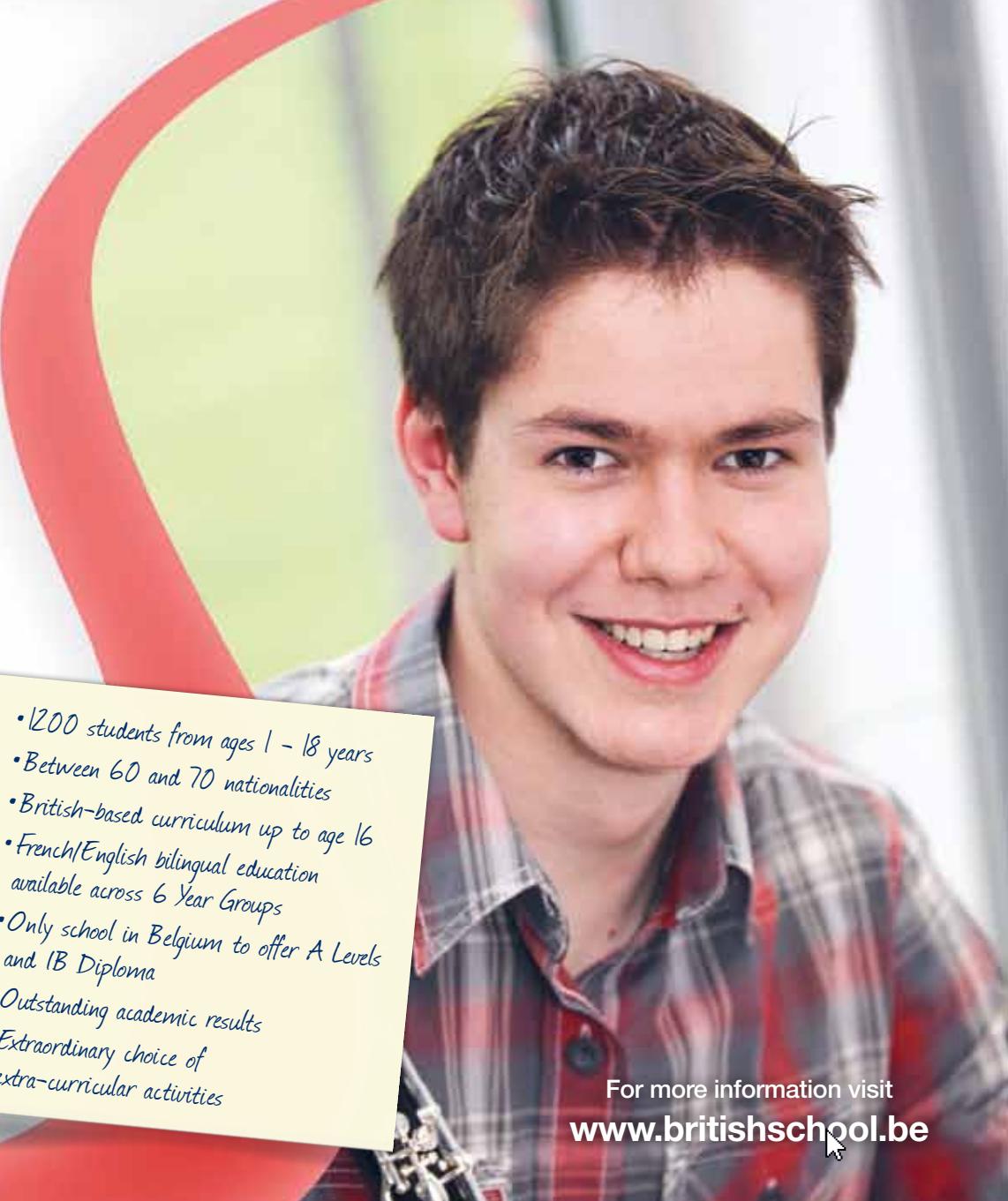
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Are you a Fan of Flanders?

The VRT launches its first-ever English-language programme to introduce internationals to the Flemish way of life

Alan Hope

Last week saw the launch of *Fans of Flanders*, a new TV programme and accompanying website, with news and information about Flanders in English, aimed at the international community.

FoF is a project of the Flemish public broadcaster VRT and produced by Borgerhoff & Lamberigts, publishers in Leuven that recently announced the creation of a new TV production department. That department is headed by Kris Hoflack, who was previously head of VRT's news service.

"We started almost a year ago with a lot of investigation," explains project coordinator Els Van de Sijpe. "We brought together all the expertise and research we had, but it wasn't enough. So we talked to the international community itself, brainstormed with them, and out of that came particular ideas we could use."

This was done with some of VRT's existing international contacts but also included contacts they came across online, such as bloggers. "A lot of people are very active on the internet," says Van de Sijpe. "They have blogs with beautiful photos and texts on visiting Flanders or explaining Flanders."

They also had some contacts with de Rand, the organisation charged with introducing people who live in the municipalities surrounding Brussels to Flemish culture. "When we started, we didn't know much

about the international community," admits Van de Sijpe. "We had to learn a lot in a short time, and we did it by talking to them and listening to their needs and their expectations."

From expat views to Flemish potatoes

Fans of Flanders airs on Wednesday evenings on the digital channel OP12 and is repeated on Canvas on Fridays. The programme consists of short segments on Flemish culture, including habits, food and language. Several expats were featured on the debut episode, from Irish people talking about what they miss from back home to an Afghan woman on the CD&V elections list in Hasselt. The website, meanwhile, is largely video-based, with short films on a variety of topics. These include Elections for Dummies, a look at the sometimes mystifying political process; Once Upon a Time, a look at various periods of Flemish history; food feature Eat This!; and Wabliet!, a feature on the Dutch language and its Flemish variants.

"Right now, there are about 10 videos to give some context," Van de Sijpe says. "There are also daily news videos. We'll have a publication rhythm of about two new videos a day. Within a year, there should be about 400 videos on the platform." The news is provided by VRT's English-language service, which has been online at flandersnews.be for eight years. "It's a pooling of

expertise," says Van de Sijpe. "There is one central desk where online and television expertise comes together and where the VRT news is integrated within the platform. So there's daily contact and constant dialogue."

The platform will also feature an international guest blogger each day on a different subject. For the time being, Van de Sijpe says, the aim is to think local. "Our first goal is to reach foreigners here in Belgium, especially the expats in and around Brussels, but also international students and newcomers – people for whom language in the beginning is a problem. That's a very large group of foreigners, and, of course, when they go back to their home country they can be the best ambassadors for us."

Contact with users is of top importance, and *FoF* has employed a relative newcomer – Stephanie Summers has been here since last December – to handle social media. "She's British and lives in Brussels, and she knows the way into the international community," says Van de Sijpe. "We call her our conversation manager. That was very important from the beginning of the project: Our first medium, our base, is the internet. The television programme is an extension of what we do on the internet because we believe that the best way to reach people is online."

► www.fansofflanders.be



What's on *Fans of Flanders*: cultural observations courtesy of actor Gert Winckelmans (top); expats share what's good about here and what they miss from home TV personality Chris Dusauchoit explains the finer points of language

STREEKPRODUCT SERIES

Sandwiches with a regional accent

Whether you're brown-bagging it at the office or preparing a lunch box for the kids, it's always a problem coming up with varied and interesting sandwich fillings. By mid-September, everyone is fed up with Dutch Gouda, but buying something every day certainly adds up.

What about something different that's from these parts, top quality and doesn't break the bank?

VLAM to the rescue. The Flemish agro-marketing agency is responsible for handing out the seal of approval to *streekproducten*, those traditional regional products we highlight in this monthly series, and they've compiled a list of recipes for using the products, including a series of sandwiches. Some of them might be a bit grand for a lunch box, but for a weekend lunch or your next At Home, they'd be perfect: original, authentic and, above all, yummy.



Mechelse koekoek (Mechelen cuckoo) is a breed of chicken, the breast of which you marinade in red-brown beer from West Flanders before cooking it in butter then dressing it with a vinaigrette using Torhout

mustard (also from West Flanders). Finish with some shallot, chives and watercress and fill your rolls. (There's a great recipe for buckwheat rolls made with Mechelen dark beer on the website).

There are numerous varieties of Flemish paté, including a rabbit-pork mix from Leuven, which is served in a sandwich and drizzled with a reduction of Limburg apple wine and Antwerp candy sugar and topped with onion rings caramelised in Westhoek farmhouse butter.

Candy sugar crops up again in a sandwich featuring the richest of the *streekproducten*: black blood sausage from Hageland in Flemish Brabant – although there are variants from all over Flanders, including the famous *bloempanch* from Brussels (which happens to be the only Brussels product on the list). The sugar is used to caramelise apple slices, which go on top of the sausage,

together with some Flemish dried ham, aged for between nine and 40 weeks.

As a change from meat, try West Flanders' smoked sprat fillets (which we've yet to be able to track down) and raw goat's milk cheese from Le Larry in Destelbergen, East Flanders, which is soft and creamy and not at all "goaty". Some radish and black pepper, and you're done.

For the vegetarians, we suggest cheese from the Norbertine abbey near Mol in Antwerp province, topped with an omelette and some Leuven mustard and parsley (pictured).

Finally, dress up your sandwich selection with some homemade potato chips made with Moese patat and garnished with a variety of preparations. You can find recipes for these and all the above dishes on the *streekproduct* website. AH

► www.streekproduct.be

Suburban angst

The Nature Theater of Oklahoma continues *Life and Times* in Brussels this month

Georgio Valentino

Contemporary theatre companies probably don't sprout like weeds in Oklahoma, but the Sooner State must nevertheless cultivate its fair share. The Nature Theater of Oklahoma isn't one of them. The Obie Award-winning collective is from New York City and cribbed the name from Kafka's unfinished novel *Amerika*, in which the immigrant protagonist Karl Rossmann arrives at Ellis Island and goes west, taken in by hyperbolic Okie boosterism.

The narrative ends with Rossmann's entry into the blinding expanse of the Great Plains. We never learn if the Nature Theater of Oklahoma lives up to its own hype.

One of the founding members of the modern-day Nature Theater of Oklahoma, which presents its *Life and Times: Episodes 3 & 4* in Brussels this month, has a similar

but regularly. "We have made performance and visual work separately and together ever since," says Copper. "We took the name Nature Theater of Oklahoma in 2005 as a formal collectivisation – a way to escape questions of who does what."

A clever tactic, but the dogged journalist is undeterred. I immediately ask who does what. "Pavol and I are the directors," Copper responds patiently. "We create the projects, and we have strong connections now with some of the performers who've worked with us for years."

So the NTO is a family of sorts, with members taking on different roles according to the needs of the moment. "We tend to fall in love a bit with the people we work with," Copper continues, "and the people who join us as performers

"There is no substantial support for the arts in America. We only make money when we tour"

story. Like a Rossmann in reverse, Pavol Liška landed first in Oklahoma from his native Czechoslovakia. He found his way to New York City after a detour through New Hampshire's Dartmouth College, where he met the other half of NTO's creative core, Kelly Copper.

At the beginning (1992), Copper and Liška collaborated informally

have usually first worked with us in some other way. One who is in *Life and Times* started with us as a technician. Another was originally an intern, getting lunch and buying supplies."

At home in Europe

Although based in New York, the company tours Europe regularly



The life and times of an American teen, NTO style

and maintains long-standing relationships with local venues like Ghent's Vooruit and Brussels' Kaaitheater. Indeed, the NTO is obliged by financial necessity to practically live on the road. "I think everyone knows that there is no substantial support for the arts in America," Copper says. "We are not paid in the US. We only make money when we tour. If we do not tour or get commissioned, we have to do other jobs, like selling bicycles or making sandwiches. This leads to situations such as one recently in Hamburg where Pavol ended up in the hospital. His body just gave up." Liška recovered, but the crisis underscored the need for rest, relaxation and contemplation, even on the road. Enter OK Radio, a regular podcast featuring interviews with fellow artists

encountered here, there and everywhere. (Guests include famed Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker). "We started doing this as a way to create a forum for the reflection that's missing for us in our practice," explains Copper. OK Radio podcasts are available for free through the NTO blog (oktheater.tumblr.com).

Life and Times

But make no mistake: Copper, Liška and the Nature Theater are still working hard. Their latest

production *Life and Times: Episodes 3 & 4* continues the serial dramatisation of NTO performer Kristin Worrall's life story. There's nothing especially dramatic about the script, and that's exactly the point. Copper and Liška recorded more than 16 hours of phone conversations during which Worrall presents a familiar American suburban tragicomedy. Through the 10 episodes of the *Life and Times* series – the current episodes follow Worrall to age 18 – Copper and Liška aim to coax the theatrical out of everyday life. Earlier episodes were presented in the style of a Broadway musical, but this time around another format was required to suit the angsty melodrama of adolescence. Worrall's script was duly adapted as a locked-room thriller, less *Cats* and more *Mousetrap*. The schlock is tongue-in-cheek, of course, delivered by a talented and seasoned company that has greatly appealed to a Belgian audience keen for oddities.

One last note: don't worry if you missed the previous episodes. *Life and Times* is designed to be picked up at any point.

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Adventurous ideas

Ghent's two-week music feast is Festival of Flanders at its best

Marie Dumont

If someone asked me, where is there something really important going on for the future of classical music," British maestro Simon Rattle said recently, "I would simply have to say... in Venezuela."

He might have added Ghent, which is about to echo the Latin American country's vibrant musical atmosphere by hosting the Youth Orchestra of Caracas in buoyant numbers by Tchaikovsky and Saint-Saens, under conductor Dietrich Paredes.

Although by any standard a fine outfit that breathes fire and excitement into everything it lays its hands on, the Youth Orchestra of Caracas is not unique. It is one of 125 or so young people's orchestras set up and maintained by El Sistema, a government programme that

aims, quite boldly, to "change lives through music" and is the reason for Rattle's enthusiasm.

Set up in 1975, El Sistema has provided first-class musical training to hundreds of thousands of children and teens, most of them from poor backgrounds, and been emulated as far as Scotland. Gustavo Dudamel, the flamboyant conductor now at the head of the LA Philharmonic, is its most famous product. But its proudest achievement is to have lived up to its ambitious motto and done much to stem the rising tide of poverty and crime across Venezuela.

The concert will be one of the highlights of the Festival of Flanders Ghent, an exhilarating two-week music spree that takes over the city's concert halls, streets and waterways. The oldest of the events that make up the region-wide Festival of Flanders,

it is also, in many ways, the most genial and likeable, hitting just the right balance between big and small, indoors and out, beautiful sounds and adventurous ideas. Paredes and his young protégés should feel right at home.

So, no doubt, will baritone Thomas Bauer, who will deliver a razor-sharp reading of Schubert's *Winterreise*, which he tried and tested in Siberia last year, and Vincent Morelle and Maryline Lefor, two Belgian dancers whose graceful moves in *Terra Tango* prove that they have tango in their souls, if not in their blood.

There's also a compelling concert of 13th-century music accompanied by footage of Gothic cathedrals and contemporary dance, and another that attempts to soften our somewhat forbidding image of the



Don't miss the buoyant Youth Orchestra of Caracas on 25 September

composer John Cage, whose 100th birthday is being celebrated this year. Or you might prefer to grab a

bike and pedal along to Avant!, a 25-kilometre cycling tour across the surrounding countryside that stops in barns and cute churches where small concerts are staged.

Act fast to catch American soprano Jessye Norman, a living legend with capacious lungs and seemingly limitless repertoire. It is more than six decades since the diva sang her first notes in a church in her native Georgia, and this concert will go back to her first love: songs and standards by her fellow Americans Gershwin, Bernstein and Duke Ellington. It will also be her final performance in Flanders: at 67, she has decided to call it a day. Not the Festival of Flanders Ghent, though, which is only 55 and has a lot more up its sleeve.

► www.festivalgent.be

The son of surrealism

With his new album *Future Vintage*, Arno has surpassed himself

Christophe Verbiest

Arno, like Elvis, can do without a surname, but if you've ever wondered: It's Hintjens. The 63-year old singer was born and bred in Ostend, but has been living in the centre of Brussels for decades, where you can see him sipping a coffee on a summer morning in a café or drinking something stronger late at night in the famous art deco jazz club L'Archiduc.

Arno is not only the most highly praised Flemish rock singer, he's also easily surpassing the language barrier. In his very unique style, combining English with French (and on very rare occasions his Ostend patois), he's as popular in Flanders as in the French Community. No one sings like Arno, no one thinks like Arno and, certainly, no one speaks like Arno.

It's impossible to render the experience of talking with Arno in print, even in Dutch for that matter. You miss his sighs and his laughs, his strange faces and his grasping for words. But, luckily, what he has to say is just as interesting.

The bare necessities

Arno's excellent 13th studio album *Future Vintage* is one of the best of his career. And, clocking in at 35 minutes, his shortest. All trifles removed, all superfluities cut away, Arno goes straight to the heart in 11 superb songs.

The title *Future Vintage* is a typical Arno paradox. "Vintage refers to the past. And without the past there wouldn't be a future," he says. "Growing older, I've realised I'm a son of surrealism. I live in Brussels, and I am a Belgian, and surrealism was born here. The album cover is an accolade to Rene Magritte. Don't forget that without Magritte, there wouldn't be an Andy Warhol. That's too often forgotten in this country."

In the previous century, the singer recorded albums in France and Nashville, but in the past decade, he has been faithful to studios in Brussels and Ostend, which means he can sleep at home at the end of the day. This time around, though, he went to Bristol, where he worked with producer John Parish. This British multi-instrumentalist is mostly known as a faithful cohort of

PJ Harvey, but he is an artist in his own right: producing, writing songs and composing soundtracks.

"Last year in November I finished, in Canada, the long tour following my previous album, *Brusseld*," says Arno. "Soon after, I felt in low spirits – playing live helps me staying sane – and in order to heal myself, I started writing songs like a madman. By January, I had already finished 20 songs. I immediately wanted to record them, and it was my brother who suggested that I do that in England."

The singer liked the idea and phoned up Parish. "He asked me when I wanted to start. 'Yesterday,' I answered him!" He bursts into one of his characteristic big laughs.

One could have thought that, through the Parish connection, he would have collaborated with PJ Harvey. "All respect to her, but I don't know her personally. And I didn't want female voices on the album."

But wait, Arno. Some members of the choir used on a few of the new songs are women. "That's different," he refutes with typical Arno logic,



© Danny Willems

country."

He continues, without a drop of the irony that often invades his answers: "What used to be left wing nowadays is right wing, and what used to be right wing nowadays is far right: That's happening all over Europe. A

He stops talking and sighs heavily. "It makes me sick. Am I the only one who cares?" But he sees a glimmers of light at the horizon. "I feel a change amongst kids of 15, 16. But the older ones..." He stops. "But I better stop complaining. I don't want to sound like an old bastard who thinks that everything was better before."

No regrets

In "Chanson d'amour" Arno sings about the dangers of cigarettes and alcohol. I knew he quit smoking a few years ago, but with two glasses of wine during our interview, he still seems to be drinking. He shakes his head. "I'm not drinking every day. That would be too dangerous for me." And he adds, with a wink, "for the other people, too."

Is he taking care of his health, now

that he's a sexagenarian? "It's too late," he admits in a voice that doesn't

show much regret. "Why should I?

You have to keep on going forward. I

want to live now and about the things

of yesteryear..." He wipes his hands,

"But I better stop complaining. I don't want to sound like an old bastard who thinks that everything was better before"

because they are women from Brussels."

He's talking about the choir Les Anges. "Four men and four women, all Africans, who sing Russian and Balkan songs. In Brussels! That's what I call surrealism!"

I'm not Christ"

Some of the lyrics on *Future Vintage* are far from surrealistic. "I Don't Believe", for instance, with the often repeated chorus "I don't believe in what they say/I don't believe in what they do", is rooted strongly in reality. Arno: "That's about politicians. *The times are a-changing*. We're back in the 1930s: Populism and nationalism govern the spirit. I never want to wake up in a Flemish nationalistic

dog with a cold can smell it. And it frightens me."

Does he consider it a task of the rock singer to signal those tendencies, I want to ask him, but he interrupts me after the word "task". "That's not the right word. I'm just an entertainer. Jesus Christ, he had a task." His smile is back now: "I'm not Christ."

He hits the nail that he's hammered on in recent years: "I'm a child of the 1960s, when rock music equalled anarchy. This has radically changed. You'll find more rock'n'roll in a hairdresser's salon than among contemporary rock artists. Rock music doesn't give me a hard-on anymore. I miss the revolutionary spirit. Rock'n'roll lost the war. The Pukkelpop festival was on television."

as if cleaning them. "I have no regrets. I had an amazing life. *Fuck, man*. The day I start to complain, I deserve to be spanked on my bare ass."

In some ways, Arno has lived quite simply. "Apart from books and records, I'm not attached to possessions," he says. "I don't care about clothes; I never had a car." With a chuckle: "I would have been dead by now if I had a driving license."

He continues on a more serious note. "I'm a happy man. People around me died, sometimes of dope, but I've been lucky."

Lucky or smart? "Lucky! I saw people much more talented and intelligent than me die."

But he's smart enough to be still alive. After a moment of reflection, he agrees: "I'm a survivor." And in one breath he continues: "I'm an optimist. And do you know what the definition of an optimist is? A pessimist with loads of life experience." His laughter is filling L'Archiduc. And he orders another white wine.

19-20 DECEMBER

Arno in concert

Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110, Brussels
More dates in 2013, check the website

► www.arno.be

Short stories show Brussels through the eyes of foreigners

Many of the protagonists in the stories that make up *The Meantime* appear to hang in limbo, not certain what they're doing in Brussels – the setting for each of the tales – but never certain either as to when they'll be moving on. In that sense, they mirror many of Brussels' real visitors, who commute in from Flanders or arrive for a three-year stint with an international organisation. They share something also with Brussels itself, a city between two cultures, where languages families meet and mix.



Yet unlike many of Brussels' guests, these nine young writers, most of whom are publishing for the first time, have gazed seriously and unflinchingly at the city and at their lives there. The result is a curious and highly-enjoyable *waterzooi* of a collection. The Brussels underworld, the EU press room, a regional train and the marital strains of an expat couple stand side by side "like adolescent boys lining up for a photograph", as one protagonist remarks on Sint-Pieters-Woluwe's irregular houses.

Indeed, just as a Brussels streets host several architectural styles side-by-side, each of *The Meantime*'s authors boasts a distinctive narrative style. In "Bear Dance", a dreamy, impulsive woman struggles to save her relationship from sixth-year apathy. In another, we spend a day with Richard, a disenchanted and randy EU spokesperson, whose press conferences surely cannot be as frank as his story-telling.

The fruit of prolonged collective work and attentively edited, these short tales are engaging,

well executed and oddly familiar with their roll call of Brussels monuments – the Justice Palace, the Hallepoort, Brussels South Station, even the Atomium, that "left-behind Christmas ornament shimmering in the heat".

The Meantime: Nine Short Stories from Brussels is available from Waterstones and Sterling Books in Brussels. A book launch takes place at 19.30 on 29 September at Passa Porta.

► www.themeantime.be

Power to the people Electrified III

Daan Bauwens

An Indian summer is upon us, which is perfectly suited for Ghent art centre Vooruit's Electrified III, three art trails that invite us to discover the city's hidden layers. "It's about public space and the several ways in which this public space can be hacked," says Eva De Groote, the festival's curator. "By using new media, our artists uncover material that lies hidden in the city. With several newly developed devices, people can start a dialogue with the city; that's why we called this third edition of the festival 'The Responsive City'."

To wit, British media artist Kaffe Matthews has designed an audio bike with huge speakers, which play animal sounds when you're riding it through the neighbourhood where Ghent's zoo used to be, or play dramatic soundscapes while you're riding along the river in the scenic Visserij quarter. You hear music written by the long-forgotten composer Louis De Meester mingled with quotes by people who used to know him when you pass the house

in which he lived. The city suddenly has its own soundtrack.

Bristol-based artist Duncan Speakman, meanwhile, who impressed Ghent in 2010 with his personal film experience *As If It Were the Last Time*, now invites you to walk through the Zuid district wearing headphones that quite literally change your perception of reality, mixing electronic music and mesmerising words with the transformed but real sound of your shoes, cars or shouts in the park. The city slowly changes into a dream, or a movie.

Paradoxically, Electrified III makes it clear that electronics can be used to make us slow down. De Groote: "The message is: Get lost in the city and turn on your ears; this is an exercise in conscious delay."

Slowness can be particularly enjoyed through Electrified III's third project, which is actually not electronic at all. In the small sweet shop next to Vooruit, international and multidisciplinary art collective FoAM has set up a beautiful plant



investigation lab. "Botanists from a parallel universe have come here to study how we, in this world, interact with plants. This is the place where they do their research," explains Brussels-based artist Maja Kuzmanovich. FoAM focuses on speculative culture: "Nobody knows what the future will look like but that doesn't mean we

cannot try it out today," Kuzmanovich says. In *Borrowed Scenery*, FoAM imagines what a possible future would look like if plants returned to being a central aspect of human society.

Unlike the other two projects, *Borrowed Scenery* still has to develop completely and needs input from the city's inhabitants. The FoAM

artists invite everyone to come into the plant lab and have a talk with them about plants and plans while drinking tea (with honey). During these two months they will be organising "urban edibles" day trips and "psycho-geo-botany" walks in the city. At the same time, they're working on an Android app that can identify naturally growing city plants.

Until 4 November | Across Ghent | ► www.vooruit.be

KIDS' ACTIVITIES

Musica baby workshops

Tired of singing "Twinkle, twinkle" and "One, two, buckle my shoe" day in, day out? Although your toddler may never tire of hearing the same jingle over and over, you might feel otherwise. Get inspired at one of Musica's "babelut" workshops for babies and toddlers. Musica, a little gem of a centre in Neerpelt, Limburg province, calls itself a "musical impulse centre". What a fitting description for a place that organises all kinds of fun workshops, including Japanese storytelling, voice development games, lullabies, dancing and even creative sound-making in the kitchen. Groups consist of no more than 15 children ages 0-3, with sessions lasting around 30 minutes. **Robyn Boyle**



Musica Impulscentrum | Domein Dommelhof, Neerpelt

► www.musica.be

MORE KIDS' ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

Flemish Brabant

Kinderhoogdag: Thirteen days dedicated to children, featuring street theatre, film, circus and more

Until NOV 25 across Flemish Brabant

► www.kinderhoogdag.be

Hasselt

Niet wiet, wel Nel: Children's theatre about relationships, language and learning to get along (ages 6 and up, in Dutch)

OCT 6 15.00 at CC Hasselt, Kunstlaan 5

► www.ccha.be

EXHIBITION

Charif Benhelima: Polaroids 1998-2012

Charif Benhelima is a photographer with international allure and an intriguing history. "Being born and raised in Belgium and having a Moroccan background has always been the base of my quest – through photography – for an understanding of human relations and living conditions in a multicultural society," Benhelima explains. And he has truly been on a quest, having produced an impressive portfolio of photographs over the years. Since the success of his 1990s photo series *Welcome to Belgium*, the result of nine years of research into what it feels like to be a stranger, Benhelima began working almost exclusively with Polaroid film: 280 of them made it into this exhibition – the ones that best weave together his personal story with the documentary image. **RB**



4 October to 18 November | Bozar, Brussels | ► www.bozar.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Sculptural Fashion: An overview of the work of Parisian couturier Madame Grès (1903–1993)

Until FEB 10 2013 at MoMu, Nationalestraat 28

► www.momu.be

Genk

Manifesta 9: The last week to catch the European biennial for contemporary art, with a focus on the history of coal mining and the effects of industry on society and migration

Until SEP 30 at Waterschei Coal Mine, André Dumontlaan

Until JUN 3 at Fine Arts Museum, Fernand Scribedreef 1

► www.manifesta9.org

Leuven

RedBall Project: Leuven forms the backdrop for RedBall installation by New York artist Kurt Perschke, in which a giant red ball shows up in the darndest places

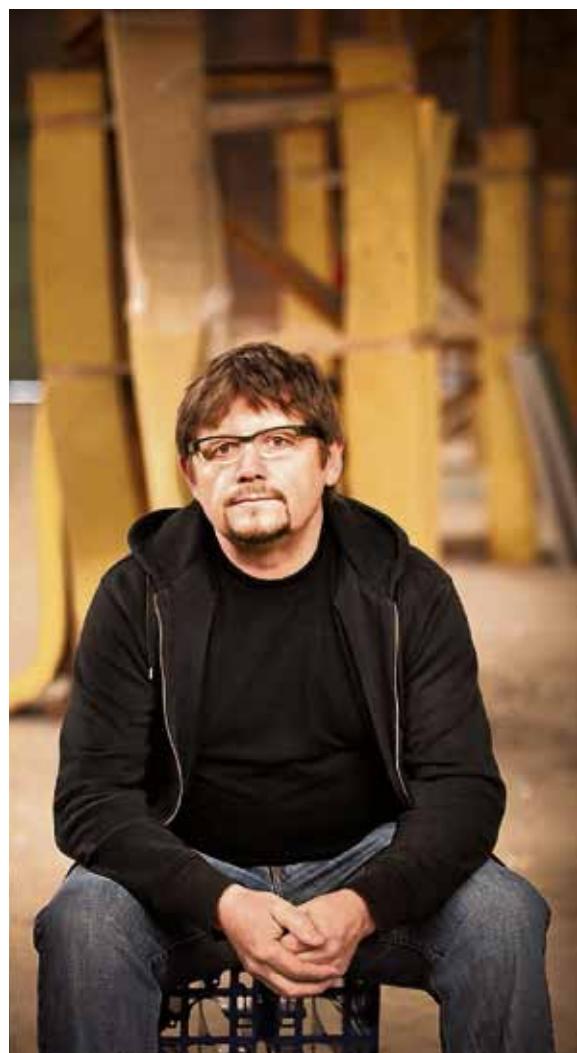
SEP 20-27 across Leuven

► www.redballproject.com

PERFORMANCE

English Comedy Night

English stand-up can be hard to find on the Continent, but when it rains it pours. Next month Brussels' Bouche à Oreille presents a special *quadruple* feature of Anglophone comedy. Nigel Williams, an internationally acclaimed, Antwerp comedian with English roots, headlines the evening with his incisive commentary on life and culture on both sides of the North Sea. Williams should know all about it. The comic was born and raised in Bristol, soaking up all the blue-collar flavour of his surroundings until the day he packed up and emigrated to Flanders, aged 20. His entry into the world of comedy was equally unexpected, but the kid was good, and he soon went pro. Fellow Englishman Dave Thompson is also on the bill. An accomplished actor and stand-up comic, Thompson is perhaps best known as Tinky Winky of TV's *The Teletubbies*. Dutch comedian Jeroen Pater and Canadian Joe Eagan round out the programme. **Georgio Valentino**



23 October 20.00 | Bouche à Oreille, Brussels

► www.tinyurl.com/englishcomedy

PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

Antwerp

De ontembare stad (The Indomitable City): The MartHa!tentatief company goes on tour with a "best of" of their Revue van het Ontembare Leven of the last two years, wherein they observed, interviewed and overheard dozens of Antwerp residents and presented their stories through theatre, video and audio

Until OCT 11 in venues across Antwerp
► www.marthatentatief.be

Ghent

M: A Reflection: Kris Verdonck examines the life of 20th-century dramatist and poet Heiner Müller by creating a conversation between two versions of Müller – actor Johan Leysen and his doppelganger, a high-tech hologram

SEP 25-26 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
► www.vooruit.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Sing for the Climate

Some 150 venues across Belgium are on board to host an ambitious piece of political activism. Sing for the Climate is staging a nationwide choir performance of "Do It Now", a lyrical call to action on the issue of climate change. The song was adapted by Flemish musician Stef Kamil Carlens from a popular Italian melody. The studio recording of "Do It Now" features more than 50 artists. Now it's your turn to take part, by registering on-line and singing along with massive crowds gathering across the region. Every sizeable city but also smaller burgs have many participants already registered and presumably practicing their scales. Footage from the various locations will be edited into a clip, which will be used to send a powerful message to politicians attending the next international climate summit. **GV**



22-23 September | Across Brussels and Flanders | ► www.singfortheclimate.com

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Accessible Art Fair: The annual event that brings thousands out to peruse locally made affordable art, including painting, photography and sculpture. Artists are on hand to discuss their work and talk prices.

SEP 21-23 at Conrad Hotel, Louizalaan 71

► www.accessibleartfair.com

WIN TICKETS TO VIP NIGHT! Flanders Today has five pairs of tickets to give away to VIP Night at the Accessible Art Fair on 22 September. Send an email to editorial@flanderstoday.eu with "accessible art fair" in the subject line by noon on Friday, 21 September. You will be informed by 17.00 the same day if you have won!

Ghent

Ghent Fashion Night: First ever catwalk show featuring local designers, followed by a wild after-party

SEP 29 21.00-5.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

► www.ghentfashionnight.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Play Festival

5-6 October, Muziekodroom, Hasselt

The Play Festival in Hasselt's Muziekodroom is slowly becoming an annual classic. Why? It's down to a mix of well-known and up-and-coming artists performing on five stages – the bigger names get you in the door, providing a no-risk method of also hearing the lesser-knowns. Expect a clubby atmosphere, with lots of dance music on day one and guitar sounds on day two.

On Friday night, about 20 artists will throw a great party: Funk and soul, for instance, with "jazz rap" by The Herbaliser, beats and video from DJ Cheeba and tunes by Limburg hip hopper Mr Critical. House and techno lovers are in safe hands with the Nightlife Ninjas, TierkratZ's deep tech, the energetic tech house of Cursed P and one of Ghent's finest DJs, Leesa. If you're into bass and garage, expect a wicked live set by Vuurwerk, eclectic beats from Brussels' Grown So Ugly (recently back from London) and Machinedrum. Those keen on dubstep and drum and bass can dance to London's Coki and Brookes Brothers, or the Limburg boys from Conform Squad, who'll be playing a home match that evening.

Saturday is all about guitars, with 25 concerts on the agenda, starting in the afternoon. Ghent's ever-great

(pictured): You, too, won't be able to stand still. Tickets for Friday are €10 in advance, €15 on the door. On Saturday, you pay €15 in advance, €20 at the door.

► www.playfestival.be



BITE

Café De Markten ★★★☆

After spending a Sunday afternoon touring the nicest corners of Brussels on foot, my friend and I happen upon an urban oasis in the Dansaert neighbourhood. Under the leafy plane trees of the car-free Oude Graanmarkt, we spot a pair of beach chairs and run to claim them as they are the only places left at this popular terrace café.

De Markten is, in the first instance, Brussels' Dutch-language community centre. It is also, we gladly discover, the perfect lunch spot.

From our reclined position we order two glasses of fresh-squeezed orange juice. The juice has obviously been pressed using part of the orange peel because it is tart and tangy, and our straws gurgle with every last drop.

We move from the comfy chairs to a proper table as soon as one frees up. A peek inside reveals a bright, airy and minimalist interior. White walls and wooden floors give the place a clean and modern feel, but not overly cosy.

Although we're a bit late for it, the menu lists some very nice breakfast options (available until 11.30) such as muesli with fruit and yoghurt and croissants or bread with ham and cheese. For lunch you can choose from a variety of salads and sandwiches and a warm dish that changes daily (today's special is Flemish stew with fries).

In the end, we order three items to share: the soup of the day (courgette and fennel), a club sandwich with Ardennes ham and grilled veggies and a Sunday omelette, with cheese, bacon and tomato.

Our composed and friendly server delivers everything almost

immediately, which is no small feat considering the full terrace. Although it required both salt and pepper, the soup's flavours start to come through, namely fresh courgette and spicy anise.

The club sandwich contains three hefty slices of organic whole wheat bread, one of them in between the grilled courgettes, aubergines, thinly sliced, salty cured ham and homemade green pesto. It's an incredibly fresh and healthy sandwich, and very filling.

But the best part about our lunch is the Sunday omelette. The fluffy golden omelette is stuffed with diced tomato, crunchy spring onion, melted cheese and smoked bacon. It comes with a sizeable salad, too, topped with a tasty vinaigrette. The bill comes to less than €27, which is almost as remarkable as the location.

► www.demarkten.be



Oude Graanmarkt 5, Brussels; 02.513.98.55



Mon-Sat 8.30-midnight; Sun 11.00-18.00



Mains: €5-€10



Café of Brussels' Dutch-language cultural centre, serving good homemade soups, salads, sandwiches and omelettes



TALKING SPORTS

Reasons enough

Too often, Flanders is merely the also-rans in sport. Flemish fans are usually relieved to see their teams or players in the game at all, while reaching semi-finals or finals is a bonus. This is hardly surprising given the modest population pool to dip into, even if it is chastening. But this week, we have some good news, in a number of departments. Firstly, the Paralympics in London, where the Belgian squad brought home seven medals – including three gold – to outshine their underperforming Olympic counterparts. Two golds were won by Ostend-born horsewoman Michèle George in the dressage individual championship and the individual freestyle. The third was by wheelchair athlete Marieke Vervoort from Diest in the 100m sprint, which came just after her silver in the 200m.

The others were Frederic Van den Heede's bronze in the marathon with a personal best time of 2:31:38 (a time that would have given him the seventh place in last year's Brussels marathon), a bronze for Belgium's boccia team and another bronze for Harelbeke hand cyclist Wim Decler in the 48km road race. Considering that Belgium won just one medal – a bronze – four years ago at the Beijing Paralympics, this is a major step up.

Secondly, Belgium made a decent start to the 2014 World Cup qualifiers. The Red Devils beat Wales 2-0 at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, thanks to captain Vincent Kompany's header and Jan Vertonghen's superb free kick and then drew 1-1 with Croatia at the King Boudewijn Stadium. It was not the perfect start, but it is worth remembering that Croatia are currently ranked ninth in the



Cyclist Wim Decler (left) and runner Frederic Van den Heede arrive home triumphant from the Paralympics

Leo Cendrowicz

The last word...

Class differences

"To be addressed in a mail as 'professor'? It's been a few years since that happened. 'Hey', 'yo', 'hullo', I get that quite a lot."

Professor Eric Corbijn of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). The University of Hasselt has introduced a course in etiquette for students

Food for thought

"I knew I would be criticised, but what makes the discussion in Flanders more difficult is that there are no world-class nutrition experts."

Kris Verburgh fends off heavy criticism of his diet book *De Voedselzandloper* (The Food Hourglass) (see *Flanders Today*, 5 September)

Keep on smiling

"People shouldn't worry that I sit inside too much. Last week we went to Planckendael: Wonderful!"

Singer Eddy Wally, now 80 and living in a rest home, remains the eternal optimist

Out for the count

"Our council member did not fulfil his responsibilities. His chair was empty the whole time."

The socialist party in Puurs, Antwerp province, have decided, citing past performance, not to take part in the October elections

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

You are no doubt familiar with the night shop – the small grocery store that is open when the others have closed. More than one city is trying to close down some of their night shops and prevent new ones from opening, citing that the late-night sale of alcohol has become a public nuisance. Our correspondent talks to city officials and the owner of one of Ghent's most popular night shops about the issue

Health

When you are sick, who takes care of you? Most of have a partner, parent or child who can help us when we really need it. But what if you don't? That was the concern of care workers who opened the new Zorghuis in Ghent, which cares for cancer patients who live alone

Tourism

How many Flemish cities do you know well? We mean the *whole* city, not just the pretty, historical city centre. Many people never even venture beyond the ring roads of their own cities, let alone another. In the next issue of *Flanders Today*, we venture into Antwerp's districts with a group of chefs to discover where foodies in the know go when they leave downtown