

Boost me up

The Boudewijn Foundation is providing exceptional immigrant students with the support they need

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Hey, dikke nek

A new book on Dutch proverbs shows just what residents of Flemish villages think of their neighbours

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To a different tune

The Ballet of Flanders arises from the media ashes to debut its season with a new director

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Before and after: Hoboken's Kioskplaats compared to how it will look if the district's master plan recommendations are put in place

It takes a village

Hoboken residents are teaming up to tackle urban sprawl and reclaim the district's identity

Angela Chambers

Antwerp's metropolitan area, like other Flemish cities, includes several districts; but Antwerp's are feeling the pinch of homogeneity like no others. Their diversity has become diluted, and their once thriving centres for business and public spaces are disappearing. Districts that were once towns unto themselves are becoming mere extensions of the city, and some are fighting back.

On the 30-minute tram ride from Antwerp Central to Hoboken, the concern of the districts is clear: It feels as though Antwerp's centre and this southern district blend into each other, with no significant distinction. The eight

districts of Antwerp were separate towns until 1983, when they were incorporated into the city. Over the years, the qualities that made them distinctive have greatly diminished.

To restore the social, environmental and economic individuality of these districts, the city has done research and invited feedback from residents. This has led to a suggested direction for improvements in each area.

Hoboken is one district with a proposal under consideration. Sofie Verhesen, the district coordinator for the city of Antwerp, organised the research in Hoboken, which led to a master plan. "Hoboken residents are sensitive of their image among people who don't live here because of the connection with the metal industry," says Verhesen. "What is surprising about Hoboken is

that there are a lot of parks and a big nature reserve. It's very rare so near the city of Antwerp to have a nice green space."

The poor image comes from Hoboken's connection to its industrial history, which is associated with pollution and unemployment, the master plan notes. However, despite these negative connotations, statistics reveal that the socio-cultural backgrounds in Hoboken are similar to other districts in Antwerp.

Meeting up

On a recent Sunday afternoon, children are riding bicycles through Hoboken's Kioskplaats and Lelieplaats, the historic village centre. Instead of riding along cycle paths, they pass

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Ann De Roy

The winner of this year’s Lady Chef of the Year award is Ann De Roy, owner of Pand 19 in Geraardsbergen, East Flanders. One of the most remarkable features of the new Lady Chef is that she’s entirely self-taught. Ten years ago she was working as a graphic designer but felt the job wasn’t offering the kind of creative opportunities she was seeking. She has never taken a cookery lesson in her life, but her brother Kris did. He’s the chef at ’t Hofke van Bazel in Kruibeke, East Flanders, and she cites him as her greatest inspiration. “During his training, he came home every week with delicious stories about the dishes he had prepared,” she told *De Standaard*. “I always helped him whenever he was cooking at home.” De Roy and her husband eventually opened a small café in the centre of Geraardsbergen. She started serving snacks, which went down very well, and soon the food took centre stage. In 2011, they moved to the current location further out of town. The menu now includes scallops with Jerusalem artichoke, beef tartare and bone marrow and pheasant

with celeriac and *witloof*. “You could say that my training as a graphic designer is a long way from what I’m doing now,” said De Roy, 36. “But ... a lot of what I learned then makes its way back into my dishes. Still it is a surprise: Who would ever have thought a graphic designer could win this title?” She describes herself as “extremely level-headed,” and the prize is unlikely to change that. While she admires gastronomic superstars like Sergio Herman, she has no intention of scaling those heights. “I want to run a profitable business that my husband and I can enjoy building up further. I don’t need the stress that comes with striving for a Michelin star.” The prize, sponsored by Bru mineral water and given out annually since 1991, is awarded according to a vote by the readers of *Ambiance* magazine, visitors to the Lady Chef website and a panel of culinary journalists. Previous winners include Ingrid Neven of Pazzo in Antwerp and TV chef Sofie Dumont, then of Les Eleveurs in Halle.

► www.ladychef.be

News in brief

The federal government is expected this week to **confirm the appointment of Jan Briers**, director of the Festival of Flanders, as the new governor of the province of East Flanders, after Open VLD president Gwendolyn Rutten dropped her objections to his nomination. Minister-president Kris Peeters has promised to review the procedure for nominating provincial governors in the future.

The federal interior ministry has advised parents with young children to apply on time for the new **Kids-ID**, available from local municipalities. The ID card is now required for under-12s travelling within the EU. The card costs €3 until 31 March, and €6 thereafter, is valid for three years and takes three weeks to be delivered. A fast-track procedure also exists for late applicants, but costs up to €170.

Anderlecht player **Dieumerci Mbokani** has won the Golden Shoe award for the best Belgian footballer of 2012. Mbokani was not present in person to receive the award, as he was playing for his homeland Congo in an African Cup match. Mbokani is the first Congolese to win the award, and it’s the third in a row for a player from Anderlecht.

Brussels-Capital Region will repeat a training for police officers on how to handle **complaints of homophobic violence** and the victims of attacks. The one-day courses began in 2011 and will continue this year and next at the request of police forces themselves, said the region’s equal opportunities minister Bruno De Lille said. “Police and emergency services are often the first point of contact for victims of violence,” said De Lille. “Taking statements from someone who has just been attacked because of who he or she is, is no simple matter.”

Two anonymous Belgian benefactors have **saved the last Congo liner Charlesville** from the scrapyards, the Flemish maritime heritage agency announced last week. The ship, which once carried passengers between Antwerp and Congo, was destined for the breakers’ yard in Latvia after it was sold by the German city of Rostock, where it had served as a floating youth hostel. A technical expert will study how the ship can be used.

Groen in Antwerp have described as “scandalous” an incident in which police wrote up a report on a group of teenagers in Berchem who were **throwing snowballs at passing cars** last week. An off-duty police officer stepped out of one of the cars and wrote a ticket for endangering traffic. Antwerp police later said there would be no fines handed out, but the teenagers will be called in with their parents for talks with the youth intervention team.

The dowager **queen Fabiola** has **apologised** for “misunderstanding and negative reactions” caused by the news that she had placed her wealth in a private foundation for the support of her nephews and nieces after her death, in a manner designed to avoid taxes. The news of the existence of the Fons Pereos foundation led to calls for the whole civil list system of payments to royals to be reviewed. The foundation has now been dismantled, lawyers for the queen said.

Nobel Prize-winning author JM Coetzee has been appointed **curator of the Belgian pavilion** at this year’s Venice Biennale. He was chosen by Ghent artist Berlinde De Bruyckere, who is representing Belgium. The two previously worked together on a book.

A worker was injured last week

in an **explosion at Buckham Laboratories** in Ghent. The man was treated for second-degree burns to the face and hands, while fire services evacuated an area of 900m around the building. A quantity of dimethylamine escaped into the atmosphere in the explosion, but it quickly burned away.

Flemish nature conservancy organisation Natuurpunt has called on the federal government to follow the example of some other European countries by **banning pesticides** that are dangerous to bees. According to a report issued last week by the European Food Safety Agency, neonicotinoids are largely responsible for the sudden death of entire bee colonies. The products in question are among the most commonly used pesticides in the world.

The **smallest house in Brussels** is for sale. The 17th-century building on the Kaasmarkt near the Grote Markt is 2.5 metres wide and will be auctioned off on 6 February with a starting price of €146,000.

Bruges’ famous carillon fell silent last week when it was found that the hammers had frozen to the bells. The carillon will remain off until 6 February to allow for maintenance and by arrangement with the producers of *The White Queen*, a BBC series filming in the city.

The prosecutor in Antwerp has asked for sentences of one year and of 2.5 years for two women accused of **causing the death of a British businessman** during an SM session in 2010. The man had been a client of the dominatrices on other occasions. On the evening in question, they administered nitrous oxide to the man, who later died of a lack of oxygen. The verdict is expected next month.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Donor demand

Some news stories demand to be treated with more delicacy than others. This is one of those. The trend began when the East Limburg hospital in Genk announced it was opening its own sperm bank for donations from locals. The hospital treats between 400 and 500 women every year with artificial insemination by donor (AID), and until now has been using donor sperm imported from Denmark. However, according to fertility specialist Willem Ombelet, Danish donations don’t reflect the ethnic variety of the population of Limburg, and Genk in particular, which owes its diversity to the many immigrants who came to work in the coal mines. “For example a Turkish couple wants a baby who resembles them,” Dr Ombelet explained to *De Standaard*. Donations will start in February

from men aged 21 to 45, and donors accepted after screening will receive a fee of €50 to €85. In Leuven, meanwhile, they prefer donations from staff and students at the university hospital, which is facing a “permanent shortage”



of sperm donors. The university was responding to reports that samples nearly doubled between 2010 and 2011 to more than 19,000. “Would that it were true,” lamented Professor Thomas D’Hooghe, coordinator of the fertility centre,

on VRT radio. “But the reality is the opposite.” The centre promises to organise “more extensive promotion”. Leuven pays donors €50. It will surprise no-one, then, to learn that the hospital of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) is also urgently looking for sperm donors. Professor Herman Tournaye explained that the confusion over the numbers of donations comes about because they include sperm frozen for other purposes than AID: for example, cancer patients who freeze a sample of their sperm before starting a course of chemotherapy. Those samples, he said, are not available for AID treatments. The hospital pays €75 for a donation, but money is not the main reason people contribute, Tournaye said. “Most just want to help someone.”

It takes a village

Transport, green spaces and shopping are central to Hoboken's longed-for makeover

► continued from page 1



A reimagining of Broydenborg Park would make it a destination in its own right, rather than the thoroughfare it is now

through a large car park and tram crossing. What was once a major gathering area for Hoboken residents now gives little consideration to pedestrians and cyclists, making the centre less inviting – and even dangerous – for those not in a vehicle.

Transforming Kioskplaats and Lelieplaats into a nicer centre for residents and businesses is a major short-term proposal in the master plan. Sarah Van de Velde, a Hoboken resident for 20 years who is involved in the district's cultural scene through the recently opened CultuurCafé Moretus, believes the centre doesn't currently have a good meeting place. "If I want to go out, I always go to Borgerhout or to the centre of Antwerp," she says.

The first step is deciding how the cars, public transport, pedestrians and cyclists will function together – but not everyone agrees on the best way. Two scenarios were proposed in the master plan. The first includes a tram going through the central square while the parking is moved underground. The second involves a

urban design company involved in creating the master plan.

High street hopes

In Hoboken's past, Kapelstraat, which connects Kioskplaats with the Scheldt river, was the key shopping street. Now, many of the stores are empty, with the district's library being one of the few significant establishments left on the street.

"There is not one interesting store – for me, anyway – in the whole of Kapelstraat," says Cheryl Horemans, who has lived in Hoboken for three years and works for the City of Antwerp. She would like to see more local boutiques selling clothes, shoes and make-up, increased cultural activities, like theatre, and cosy pubs and restaurants.

The master plan details the difficulty of keeping shops on Kapelstraat with the competition from other shopping centres throughout Antwerp. Many of the shops aren't updated to meet today's standards. However, as the city planners note, if the appearance of the centre and this street improves, there is hope

tram line will most efficiently run through the district.

"The parks are used now to cross through rather than to enjoy for what they are," says Symons. "We talked with people in Hoboken about what they liked about the park, and people said there is water, but it is very deep, and you have no connection to it. So one idea is to make the water more accessible." Horemans would like to see more recreation in the parks and some animals for the children.

Suggestions in the master plan include making the large Sorghvliedt Park, where the town hall is located, more open for activity. In the Gravenhof Park, a new cultural centre is expected to open within the next year. The master plan notes that Broydenborg Park, between the Gravenhof and Sorghvliedt, could provide a better link between the other green areas and the centre.

Outside the auto

Another proposed improvement is to increase children's safety as they go to and from school. Several schools are clustered around Oudestraat, but there aren't safe pathways for children to reach them from nearby neighbourhoods.

"It's necessary to have a place to meet outside the school and also a way to connect the schools to the Kioskplaats-Lelieplaats," says Veva Roesems, project leader for the Hoboken master plan.

Further along in the city's development, the master plan suggests adding a "light train" for faster connections to Antwerp, Boom and Mechelen. "Everybody was very enthusiastic about this idea," says Verhesen. Another suggestion by residents is to install a public bicycle scheme like Velo in Antwerp city. Being next to the Scheldt is a major asset in the city of Antwerp, but Hoboken hasn't made the most of this in recent years. When the village was first formed around

1135, it relied heavily on the river for the fishing industry. As the city developed in the 1800s, many of the original settlements were huddled along the river.

Now, however, the industrial sites and the homes surrounding them are dilapidated. "In the long-term, we'd like to see recreational development along the Scheldt and increased links between the centre and the harbour," says Roesems.

The northern and southern neighbourhoods in Hoboken are more isolated since there are fewer railway connections, so adding extra stops could be one way to bring more people to the centre.

Know thy neighbours

Van de Velde went door-to-door to get her neighbours to sign a petition to improve the footpaths and add new lighting and trees on their

street. Thanks to her work, the city of Antwerp completed the updates to Krekelstraat last year.

"I invited my neighbours to have a drink at my house, and we formed a committee and had a barbecue and a winter party," says Van de Velde. "It's a good start for us to get to know each other."

Horemans also believes it's time to revive Hoboken's community spirit. "If the *Hobokenaars* spoke proudly of their centre and their friends came there more often, my guess is the image of Hoboken would improve drastically," she says.

The Hoboken master plan will be considered for funding in the coming months. The city will then create a team to form the final design decisions.

► www.tinyurl.com/hobokenmasterplan

LOCAL HEROES

The Nello and Patrasche statue, honouring the 19th-century novel *A Dog of Flanders*, is on Kapelstraat near its intersection with Kioskplaats. Penned by British author Marie-Louise de la Ramée, also known as Ouida, it's a sad tale about a poor Flemish boy, Nello, and his loyal dog, Patrasche, who is forced to work pulling a cart. After a series of unfortunate incidents, both freeze to death in front of the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp.

The book has never been popular in Flanders – no doubt because of its social indictment – but it became a phenomenon in Japan, known by every citizen and still required reading for schoolchildren today. Hence, many Japanese tourists visit the statue in Hoboken every year (where they often express disappointment at the small size of Patrasche). Souvenirs

and translations of the book in English, Japanese and Korean are available at Infowinkel Hoboken, Marneflaan 3.



© Angela Chambers

"If *Hobokenaars* spoke proudly of their centre, the image of Hoboken would improve drastically"

more condensed parking area with the tram going around the square. While some residents agree there is a need for parking near the centre, it's true that more room is necessary for additional terraces and event space. Van de Velde says that before she moved to Hoboken, there was an area at the Kioskplaats where musicians performed and people could easily wander around on foot. "This decision will be an important aspect in the realisation of Kioskplaats-Lelieplaats," says Lieven Symons of Brut, an architecture and

for more investors opening new businesses.

Venturing beyond the less-than-lively Kioskplaats, the mood changes when encountering Hoboken's beautiful parks and a large nature reserve, the Hobokense Polder. These natural places also have several historic castles and Fort 8, a well-preserved fort built in the mid-1800s. City planners say it's necessary to use this strength in Hoboken to make a more cohesive connection between the centre and the green areas. This will include determining how the

Parliament honours distinguished Flemings

Professor, judges and missionary receive Medal of Honour

Alan Hope

Four distinguished Flemings were honoured last week in the Flemish Parliament for their services in positively representing Flanders to the rest of the world. The five received the Golden Medal of Honour from Jan Peumans, speaker of the parliament.

Sophie De Schaepdrijver was born in Kortrijk in 1961 and studied history at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the European University in Florence. She taught at universities in the Netherlands before moving to the US, where she has been professor of modern European history at Pennsylvania State University since 2000.

Jeanne Devos was born in Kortenen in 1935, is a trained speech therapist and joined the missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the 1960s. That



From Kortrijk to the US by way of Florence: Sophie De Schaepdrijver has represented Flanders well

led to teaching at a school for deaf children in Chennai, India. Later, together with other nuns, she set up the National Domestic Workers Movement, which protects the rights of domestic servants.

Koen Lenaerts was born in Mortsel in 1954, studied law at Leuven and Harvard and later lectured in Leuven, where he was director of the Institute for European Law. In 2003, he became a judge at the European

Court of Justice in Luxembourg, and last year was promoted to vice-president of the court.

Christine Van Den Wyngaert, born in Antwerp in 1952, studied law and criminology at VUB and taught trial and criminal law at the University of Antwerp. In 2005, she became a member of the bench of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, a United Nations institution. Four years ago, she was elected to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

The Medal of Honour is awarded every two years to distinguished Flemings working in other countries. Previous winners include choreographer Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, athlete Kim Gevaert and business figures like Hilde Burie, formerly of Sabena, and the late Paul Janssen of Janssen Pharmaceutical.

Castle murder suspect identified

Police investigating the murder of Stijn Saelens in Wingene, West Flanders, in January last year are now examining the possibility of a second killer, after DNA samples identified one of the murderers – a man who died of cancer three months after the shooting took place.

Saelens was reported missing from his chateau home in January last year, and his body was discovered in a shallow grave in nearby Aalter a few days later. He had been shot once, and an autopsy showed he had bled to death.

The discovery led to the arrest of three men – his father-in-law André Gyselbrecht, brother-in-law Peter and a local man, Pierre Serry, known to have links to drugs and hormone trafficking and who owned a chalet close

to the grave. Investigators suspected father and son ordered the crime, which was then carried out by killers recruited by Serry. Saelens was known to have argued with his father-in-law over his decision to move with his wife and children to Australia. All three men deny any involvement.

Later, police detained a Dutch man, Tinus Van Wesenbeeck, who they suspect of helping recruit the killers or perhaps of being one of them. Van Wesenbeeck remains in custody, as does Serry. The Gyselbrechts have been released on bail. Now, DNA samples reveal that the killer – or one of them – was another Dutch gangster, Ron Van Bommel, who had been suffering from pancreatic cancer at the time of the shooting and died soon after.

Beating suspects identified through social media

The mayor of Eindhoven has made an appeal to the parents of five Flemish youth to encourage their sons to turn themselves in to Dutch authorities in connection with the beating of a 22-year-old man in the Dutch city.

Two local teenagers are in custody in Eindhoven, charged with attempted murder. A third was arrested but later released. The five Flemish youths, who were identified by visitors to social media sites, have refused to turn themselves in to Dutch authorities.

The incident in downtown Eindhoven on 4 January was captured on video and the clip uploaded to YouTube. The violent images led users of social media to try to identify the attackers. Eventually a photo emerged of all eight suspects – all members of the same karate club. This week police in Turnhout were carrying out extra patrols in the areas where the five teenagers live, to guard against possible reprisals. If the five do not agree to turn themselves in, Dutch authorities will pursue an extradition order.

Flemish roads are getting better, says report

The state of Flanders' roads improved in 2012 for the fifth year in a row, with more than 80% scoring between "reasonable" and "excellent", according to a report issued by the government's Roads and Traffic agency. At the same time, the number of roads rated as "poor" went down for the first time in five years, from 14.2% to 12.1%. The province scoring highest for good roads is Limburg, with 75% in the top two categories.

The advance comes despite two hard winters in 2010 and 2011, which took a toll on the state of the roads. "The general situation is improving," commented Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits.

The number of calls made to the roads information line also fell in 2012, with complaints about road surfaces down 7.7% to 974. Complaints about potholes fell by 10%. Claims from motorists for damage caused by road conditions went down from 2,350 in 2011 to 1,696 last year.



FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Brussels bickering

It is often said that the monarchy and the Red Devils, our national football team, are the only two things holding Belgium together. (The latter being in greater shape than the former.) For he who dreams of Flemish independence, there is one more obstacle, though: Brussels.

To the outside world, Brussels seems to be a French-speaking city, full stop. The reality is more complex. Our capital is officially bilingual. In practice, it has become multilingual, with French serving as a *lingua franca* – in many cases being replaced by English and with Dutch on the rise.

Originally, Brussels was largely Dutch speaking. In the 19th and 20th centuries, its patois made way for the language used by the administration, courts and upper classes. Flemings moving to Brussels adopted French as a way of moving up in the world. Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium or the EU, but also of Flanders. And there are plenty of links between the Flemish hinterland and Brussels, which people look to for work, culture and entertainment.

Still, there is a divide, with a widespread ignorance and dislike of Brussels. Part of this is historical, as Flemings still perceive a lack of respect on the part of French speakers. This also explains the resistance to the expansion of the city (surrounded by Flemish Brabant) beyond the original 19 communes, which in the past has been described as an "oil spill" – to be stopped.

This old sentiment is still at play. N-VA recently announced that it would refute the introduction of Flemish Brabant communes into what is known as the Brussels Community. This new institution, created by the latest state reform, is meant to allow consultation on matters such as mobility. To the Flemish nationalists, however, it is yet another way of expanding Brussels (and, hence, the use of French).

N-VA has been accused of not addressing its plans for Brussels should its ultimate goal, Flemish independence, ever produce. It is even rumoured that the party is willing to "give up" the capital. Last week, Bart De Wever, N-VA party president (and now mayor of Flanders' second-largest city), denied this: "N-VA will never allow Brussels to be loosened from Flanders to form one French-speaking nation," he said. Maybe that is what is holding the country together, too. The monarchy may be curtailed, the Red Devils may be beaten, but who can put an end to the everlasting bickering about Brussels?

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

436

road deaths in Flanders in 2010, half the number of a decade earlier. Three out of four victims were men

385,000

visitors to the Brussels Motor Show, a record for a "light" year when only light commercial and leisure vehicles were on show

€2 million

found so far by Balou, a springer spaniel who works as a sniffer dog for the federal police, specialised in detecting hidden banknotes

58,097

illegal uploads of Flemish films to internet torrent sites in 2012, almost three times as many as the year before, announced media minister Ingrid Lieten

273

different subjects taught in Flemish secondary schools, to be reduced to about 100 following education reforms. Currently, some classes have as few as one pupil

Support services for Ford workers

Production resumes at the Genk factory as unions look to long-term

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders and the province of Limburg last week agreed to provide counselling and other support to those affected by the closure of Ford Genk, with a new helpline for advice launched last week. At a study day in Diepenbeek, the two authorities agreed to provide therapy and advice on, for instance, financial concerns. Those requiring help can call the helpline on 011

28 88 64 to be directed to the required service.

"It is very important for these people to be supported in getting past the severe blow they have received and to try to form a new outlook," said Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeuren, himself a Limburger. "We are also calling on politicians, businesses and associations to work together for the survival of a social future for Limburg."

Production last week

resumed at the four main suppliers of parts to Ford Genk, following the resolution of a dispute over wildcat strikes. Meanwhile, Ford management announced that there will be nine days of unemployment between now and April, instead of 13 as originally planned. With that dispute apparently settled, attention is moving towards the longer-term situation at Ford and guarantees that

work will actually be available until the end of 2014, the final closure of the plant. "There's a great deal of mistrust," according to one union representative. "Since the first promise of work security until 2020 was broken, we're asking ourselves how much the promise to the end of 2014 is worth. We want to have some assurances as soon as possible. And in writing."



From left: Flemish ministers Philippe Muyters, Jo Vandeuren and Kris Peeters visit the Ford factory in Genk last autumn

ArcelorMittal workers clash with police in Brussels

Police and protestors clashed last week in Brussels as ArcelorMittal workers took to the streets in protest at the announcement by the company to close seven production lines in Liège in Wallonia, leading to the loss of 1,300 jobs and as many as 5,000 more in the area. ArcelorMittal is the world's largest steel producer, with factories in 18 countries, including production plants in Ghent, Geel and Genk.

Police used water cannons to control protestors, who attacked police barriers and forced the fencing around the Palace of the Academies. Six policemen were slightly injured. Prime minister Elio Di Rupo returned early from the World Economic Forum in Switzerland on hearing the news, vowing that



© Octavian Carare / Demotix / CORBIS

the government would "not accept" the closure decision.

ArcelorMittal ruled out a temporary nationalisation of its steel production in Liège, an idea floated by federal ministers. "We considered that option in 2011," said a spokesperson, "and nothing since then has changed. We have no plans to sell, not even to the government."

The closure of the production lines provoked more angry reactions when it was revealed that ArcelorMittal has received substantial tax benefits from the government, paying an average of 1.4% tax over the period 2008-2011. In addition, the taxpayer picked up a bill of €260 million in carbon emission rights, partially in exchange for maintaining jobs.

Fyra fiasco prompts fears of tourism fallout

This week, the Belgian parliament held special hearings on the Fyra high-speed train fiasco, and the Flemish tourism minister expressed fears that the publicity could prove harmful to the image of Flanders.

According to Dutch news reports, the NS pushed ahead last year with the scrapping of the Benelux train between Brussels, Antwerp and Amsterdam and the introduction of Fyra despite the Belgian infrastructure inspection agency DVIS having issued only a temporary licence for Fyra to operate on the Belgian network. At that point, the doubts were not about safety but about the compatibility of the trains with the Belgian networks.

The NS, however, was impatient to introduce Fyra, after years of delay and budget overrun in having the train developed by the Italian manufacturer AnsaldoBreda. The result made international headlines: Many of the scheduled Fyra trains never made it out of the station and many more broke down or were delayed. The service has been withdrawn, and the constructor given three months to sort out the problems. On Monday, during the parliamentary hearings in Brussels, NS boss Bert Meerstadt gave an assurance that "Fyra will only roll out again when the problems are fixed, and it can be done in a way that's safe for passengers. The passenger is of paramount importance."

According to NMBS CEO Mark Descheermacker, the NMBS would come up with temporary solutions for passengers on the Brussels-Amsterdam route this week. The authority has already reinstated a direct train between

Antwerp and Roosendaal, where connections are available to other Dutch stations. Meanwhile, Flemish tourism minister Geert Bourgeois (*pictured*) warned that the problems on the line could have a severe impact on tourism from the Netherlands. According to Bourgeois, 23% of day trippers and 21% of longer-stay tourists to the Flemish art cities come by train, with Antwerp the most important connection. And one in three of Antwerp's tourists comes from the Netherlands. "I fear for the economic consequences," he said. "I insist there be a rapid and affordable solution as soon as possible."



Belfius and ACW plan share buy-back deal

A deal being arranged between the nationalised bank Belfius and the Christian workers' movement ACW has met renewed criticism. According to the financial newspaper *De Tijd*, Belfius and ACW are close to an agreement by which Belfius would buy out the special shares owned by ACW, with the money being immediately loaned back to the bank indefinitely, in return for an annual payment.

The deal concerns the so-called *winstbewijzen*, a concept in Belgian banking similar to shares in that they entitle the holder to a share of the profits of the company but are unlike shares in that they can be given out in return for financial or other kinds of input and do not form part of the capital of the company.

In the case of Belfius, formerly Dexia Bank Belgium, the special shares are controversial because Arco, the financial arm of ACW now in administration, was a major shareholder in Dexia, and thus partly responsible for the downfall of the bank, which was later nationalised. ACW, meanwhile, continued to profit.

However, there is opposition: N-VA has called on the Arco administrator to seize the *winstbewijzen* and use them to compensate Arco investors. Open VLD, meanwhile, called for transparency in the dealings of Belfius. Parliament ought to be informed of the plans of the state-owned bank, Luk Van Biesen said, rather than finding out what was going on via the media.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air

► Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines is to increase the number of its flights to Senegal's capital city Dakar from four to seven a week following an agreement with the country's authorities. The move allows the airline to develop its hub activities in Dakar, which includes increasing services to Conakry and Freetown.

Energy ► Fluxys

The Brussels-based gas transport and distribution company has moved a step closer to acquiring the TIGF gas stocking and transport activities of French energy group Total by closing ranks with another bidder for the business. Fluxys will now face France's EDF energy group in the final stretch for the deal, valued at up to €3 billion. Also, Fluxys has sold a 49% stake in the LNG ship GDF Suez Boston for €70 million.

Finance ► Oyster

The Luxembourg-based Oyster Asset Management group, an affiliate of the Swiss Syz & Co financial group, has opened an office in Brussels.

Handling

► Katoen Natie

The handling and stevedore company based at the port of Antwerp has acquired three petrochemical terminals from the Dutch VSL Logistics group for €70 million.

Supermarkets

► Delhaize

The Brussels-based supermarket group has sold its Albanian Delta Maxi chain of some 20 stores as part of its re-evaluation of its activities in the Balkans. The company, which is satisfied with its growth in Greece and Romania, is writing off some of its investments in the area. Delhaize's other activities worldwide performed well last year, including in the US, where its five chains account for 65% of the group's total turnover.

Textiles ► Beaulieu

Beaulieu International, which specialises in floor coverings, has acquired DesleeClama, manufacturer of furniture textiles and interior design accessories. Both companies are located in West Flanders. The move allows volume producer Beaulieu to develop its activities in the high-end sector of home furnishings.

Theme parks

► Bellewaerde

The Bellewaerde theme park near Ypres is investing €4 million in an indoor roller coaster called "Huracan". The new attraction will be inaugurated on 30 March.

A step up

The Boost programme helps talented immigrant students realise their potential

Alan Hope

In schools in Brussels and Antwerp, the most talented and promising of immigrant students are preparing for the chance of a lifetime, as they submit their applications for the King Boudewijn Foundation's Boost programme. Boost is open to students in both cities and in Liège in Wallonia. Applications are invited from students in the third year of secondary school, for support that lasts for four years, including the first year of higher education. That support takes the form of a PC and internet access; an allowance of €50 a month, rising to €100 in the third year and a mentor from the work world, which is provided by the Business and Society Belgium network. The network is made up of companies such as Siemens, Axa

Brussels is that the student must be able to speak and write either French or Dutch; for Antwerp, only the Dutch requirement applies. Also in Antwerp, the student must not have repeated a year of secondary school, and his or her results should be higher than the class average – a condition that's not spelled out in the Brussels criteria.

Quality, not quantity

"The goal is the same in both cities," explains Benoît Fontaine, programme coordinator at the King Boudewijn Foundation. "The intention is not to get as many applications as possible because that would cause a lot of disappointment. In the first year, we didn't even know if we were going to get enough applications. But we'd



were selected from 80 applications. This year there are 25 places available. The Antwerp programme started in October with 13 students. This year 15 will be selected.

Applications are judged by an independent jury of volunteers, including teachers, according to some pretty taxing criteria. The Brussels jury is chaired by Jean-Claude Daoust, formerly head of the employers' federation and now CEO of temp agency Daoust. The chair of the Antwerp jury is Filip Peeters, human resources director of Nike. The jury will be looking for intellectual, artistic or manual talent and growth potential; ambition to succeed; proof of motivation and the discipline to get through the four-

year programme.

Once in, the programme is anything but a walk in the park. Participants are expected to take 10 group workshops or classes a year, covering themes like stress management, learning methods and personal expression. They must also take part in two or three cultural activities a year in their own time. The monetary allowance is intended for paying fees for clubs or tickets for cultural events, financing books or paying for a holiday language course.

Remarkable results

So far, Boost participants have proved equal to the task. Of the 46 who started in Brussels in 2011,

only three have dropped out. "All three were special cases," explains Fontaine. "It was mainly a question of being insufficiently active in the programme: not turning up for activities, for example." From the 20 selected last year, all are still on board. All but four from the first group achieved a pass in their diploma exam, but even those four remain in the programme.

"We only exclude people on the basis of attitude, not results," Fontaine explains. "These are young people from very vulnerable backgrounds. You can't imagine the circumstances they're living in. They may have no room to themselves where they can study, or even a table to study at. Many have parents who are unemployed or invalids. Some are new immigrants, from places like Armenia, Colombia or Cape Verde who came here not speaking a word of French or Dutch. Others are third- or fourth-generation. There's an unbelievable range of nationalities, origins and backgrounds."

But the one thing they have in common, he says, is that they "want to do better than their parents did". Application forms can be downloaded from the foundation's website and have to be submitted before 14 March (Brussels) or 28 March (Antwerp). The results of the selection will be announced in May, for the programme starting in September.

► www.kbs-frb.be

Too few science, tech students

The Flemish government is tackling the shortage of STEM workers by concentrating on universities

Alan Hope

As the general knowledge of teachers comes under the microscope (see p4), the Flemish parliament turned its attention to another persistent problem in education – the shortage of qualified teachers in what are known internationally as the STEM disciplines: science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Last week the parliament's economy and education committees came together to discuss the STEM report produced by the Flemish Council for Science and Innovation. It deals not only with the question of sufficient STEM teachers in Flemish schools but also looks at the numbers of students, and especially girls, taking classes in STEM subjects. The report begins with a clear appeal: "It is now time for action. The agreements and commitments that have been made need to be made binding and a realistic budget set aside. We call on all government partners to set their shoulders to the

wheel."

A year ago, the government of Flanders adopted its STEM action plan for 2012-2020, which set as its goal "to increase the human capital in STEM subjects so as to better meet the needs of the knowledge economy and the labour market". Another aim was to increase the number of students focusing on STEM subjects. At the same time, the number of girls opting for STEM would be increased to one in three of all STEM students, "with special attention for the extreme gender imbalance in certain study areas".

It's a girl thing

Extreme is not too severe a word: According to Wilson De Pril, director-general of the technology industry federation Agoria, "women are seriously under-represented in the technology sector, and that's also the case in technical education. In engineering, 84% of the students are male. In technology companies, the



Telenet vice-president Martine Tempels is chair of the STEM steering group

percentage can be as high as 87%." In the meantime, the number of open vacancies, about 10,000, in these sectors seems intractable: Men alone are not enough to fill the requirements of Flemish industry. It's not only a problem in Flanders, and the European Commission has

launched the website "Science: it's a girl thing", which includes a series of video testimonies from women scientists. Among them is Eline Meul, a student in bio-engineering at Ghent University and Joanna Zmurko, a Polish woman studying virology at the University of Leuven.

Meanwhile, Flemish education minister Pascal Smet told the joint committee that the STEM steering group, chaired by Martine Tempels, a vice-president of Telenet and last year's ICT Woman of the Year, met for the first time last month. "They will examine how the action plan can be realised and how an appropriate strategy can be developed. They're very enthusiastic about putting the plan into action, but right now they need time to work it out further." Ann Brusseel, a member of the Flemish parliament who sits on the education and equal opportunities committee, called on schools to "battle the gender stereotypical prejudices" that discourage girls from studying STEM subjects. "Universities and university colleges need to target female students actively for those disciplines. ... They must not be allowed to ignore this pool of talent."

► www.science-girl-thing.eu

Photocatalytic convertor

UV light may be key to improving air quality in Brussels

Alan Hope

Drivers using the Leopold II tunnel in Brussels will have noticed a string of ghostly blue lights in recent days. Those would be ultraviolet (UV) lights, which is what you get above ground in the form of sunlight, and it could be part of the answer to cleaning up the city's air.

Using a technique known as photocatalysis, the UV lamps work with the cement newly applied to the walls of the tunnel over a length of 160 metres. Particles of titanium dioxide (TiO₂) in the cement are able, in the presence of UV light, to react with pollutants in the air, principally the oxides of nitrogen known collectively as NOx, rendering them relatively harmless.

The tests are being carried out by PhotoPAQ, a Europe-wide research consortium based in Lyon, France. According to a spokesman for Brigitte Grouwels, minister for mobility in the Brussels-Capital Region, the project will cost €100,000, entirely financed by PhotoPAQ. "Drivers won't notice any inconvenience," he said.

Watching the tests closely will be Dr Anne Beeldens, a scientist at the Belgian Road Research Centre (BRRC) in Brussels and an expert on photocatalysis. It may seem odd that an experiment that requires UV light is carried out in a tunnel, but, she explains, the site has advantages. "At the moment, the air quality in the tunnel is controlled by ventilation. The number of hours that the ventilators run is determined by the quality of the air, so if you can clean the air in such a way that, for example, you require 10% less ventilation, then you save quite a lot of energy. The UV lighting is currently very strong, but one of the points of the test is to find the optimum level, at which point you would certainly see a reduction in the energy used. So even in a tunnel, the savings could



The eerie blue light currently inside Brussels' Leopold II tunnel is an attempt to make the air cleaner

be important." Grouwels has said that positive results could lead to the technique being extended to other tunnels in the region.

Better testing methods

This is the second time such an experiment has taken place in the Leopold II tunnel, the longest in the country at about 2.5 kilometres, carrying some 65,000 vehicles a day. Tests in 2011, though, produced disappointingly unclear results. "The light intensity wasn't sufficient, the product wasn't applied in a uniform manner, and the test area was rather limited," Beeldens says. "This time we've extended the test area to double the length of the previous test, and we've improved the way the cement is applied. The light intensity has also been increased."

Farther back still, in 2004, the BRRC tested photocatalytic paving stones on a stretch of Amerikalei in Antwerp. They have also done tests on industrial estates in Lier and Wijnegem, where the catalytic

compound was contained in the top layer of concrete as well as in paving stones. "In both those cases, it was extremely difficult to obtain reference measurements," admits Beeldens. "There's sure to have been an effect, but given that we had no reference measurements, it's difficult to estimate the extent of the effectiveness. The project in the tunnel allows us to take measurements before and after the catalytic product is in place, which allows us to compare the data correctly."

Decrease in CO₂, increase in NOx

Cleaning the air of NOx will also play a role in reducing the amount of fine particulate matter (PM) in the air, according to Dr Silvia Lenaerts, a senior lecturer in bio-engineering sciences at the University of Antwerp. In her opinion, a concentration on reducing emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO₂) has led to

an increase in the number of smaller PM particles, which have a more deleterious effect on human health than the larger particles, currently filtered out of exhaust gases. The concentration on CO₂, she says, "means we have made more efficient engines, and that means higher temperatures in the engine. And when you have higher temperatures in the engine, nitrogen and oxygen from the air react together and form nitrogen oxide (NOx) but also small soot particles. So it's inherent to making more efficient engines that you make more particles and more NOx."

While everyone is talking about CO₂, then, "levels of particles, NOx and even indirectly ozone are increasing, because we've only been looking at one pollutant," she says. "And in the meantime we're making two others that are worse than the original problem. But it's rather complicated technically, and that's why it's so hard to get the point across."

► www.brcc.be

Q&A

Dominique Verté is a professor in the Adult Educational Sciences department of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). He is an advisor to Flemish minister for innovation Ingrid Lieten on the Social Innovation Factory

What is the Social Innovation Factory?
This non-profit organisation supports social entrepreneurs in finding new solutions for challenges such as poverty, loneliness, diversity, the ageing population, urbanisation and climate problems. We cannot deal with such issues by technological progress alone; they require a social perspective. There are already many Flemish initiatives, but entrepreneurs often lack the necessary start-up capital, a business strategy and a collaboration network. We want to make sure they find their way to the market, so they don't have to depend on subsidies.

Which partners have you united in this innovation hub?
Companies such as Telenet and civil society organisations like the

Netwerk tegen Armoede (Network Against Poverty). With the support of knowledge institutions and the government, they should incorporate social values and work together more. The partners contributed to the Social Impact Angel Fund, which will finance both feasibility studies and the guidance offered by the Flemish Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology. The Flemish government has allocated a budget of €2.56 million, spread over four years.

You just launched an open call for projects in need of funding.
With this one-time offer of €1 million, we are exploring the seedbed for social innovation in Flanders. Associations, enterprises and knowledge institutions are invited to request an investment

of up to €50,000, for one year. Projects that prove to be feasible and sustainable can receive further support.

What would you consider a promising proposal?
There is a strong movement in the United Kingdom, led by, among



others, the Young Foundation, an influential think-tank specialising in social innovation. To combat debt problems incurred by young people, social entrepreneurs in the UK developed games for smartphones that teach them how to save money. Several banks reward the players with extra call credit if they reach new levels. We could similarly extend the programme of the small stores that currently provide inexpensive groceries to those with low incomes to big supermarket chains such as Colruyt, and even to other services, like bpost. A successful Flemish project is the BlueCall Phone: a smartphone application that increases the independence of people with mental disabilities.

Interview by Andy Furniere

► www.tinyurl.com/innovatiefabriek

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Researchers at Jessa Hospital and the University of Hasselt have discovered a new stem cell type with which they can possibly **help patients after a heart attack**. Cardiac failure damages the heart, as muscle tissue is lost. CASC cells are taken from heart tissue and programmed to become heart muscle cells. They are easier to isolate, to grow in a laboratory and are superior in quality to cells used before. Tests on pigs has shown how the heart recovers, and human trials will start next year at the earliest.

Doctoral student Isabel Beets of the University of Leuven found that **roundworms use the same molecules as humans** to learn from their experiences. The discovery suggests that the learning mechanisms of the human brain were already well developed in animals more than 700 million years ago. The "mini brains" of roundworms are ideal models to analyse the genetic basis of the human brain, as they share many biochemical processes. The research group at Leuven hopes to provide new insight into causes of learning disabilities at the molecular level.

The artworks of the **Marine Art project** will be exhibited from 2 to 6 February in the buildings of the University Forum and Technicum in Ghent. Last semester, marine researchers from Ghent University and the Flanders Marine Institute met with students of Ghent's Academy for Visual Arts, and the students created artworks that will be showcased with the scientific phenomena that inspired them.

Primary schoolchildren in Flanders will soon be able to follow **French lessons from the third year**. Currently, they can only start in the fifth year. The lessons will not be obligatory, and children need to have sufficient knowledge of Dutch first. The measure is part of the new education decree of Flemish education minister Pascal Smet.

Sint-Martinus primary school in the Brussels commune of Sint-Jans-Molenbeek has won the Çavaria Campaign Award for a **project on sexual and gender identity**. Teacher Steven De Baerdemaeker launched an exhibition in the school's corridors that featured gay couples and transgendered people. The display formed the starting point for a debate in class and an event that involved parents. At least four schools have been inspired to establish a similar project in the next academic year. **AF**



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No place like home

A new book explains how proverbs reveal a lot about a community – and its neighbours

Andy Furniere

What's so special about a bill from Blankenberge or a hat made in Lokeren? Dutch linguist Rien van den Broek knows: He has collected 1,200 proverbs featuring the names of places in Flanders and the Netherlands. It's a good lesson in Dutch and Flemish culture, and it also shows how every community emphasises its



own virtues and makes fun of its neighbours. Van den Broek (pictured) has been researching proverbs for about 30 years now, resulting in previous books on topics such as alcohol-related or erotic proverbs. After hearing how people in his home region joked people from other areas, he started to examine this phenomenon all over the Netherlands and across the border in Flanders. He consulted dictionaries, contacted history associations and visited experts to learn about the variety and meaning of any proverbs with place names.

"Proverbs can tell you a lot about the habits and morals common to places, but they are seldom neutral," says Van den Broek. "Most of the time, people praise the integrity of their own community and speak in derogatory terms about regions that are seen as rivals."

Are you stingy or just stupid?

The characteristics of people in proverbs mostly deal with stinginess, wastefulness, arrogance or stupidity. Stereotypes are often confirmed; for example, it was normal to say in Antwerp that *Antwerpenaren* were created by God from *gulden korenaren*, or golden cobs of corn. In Brussels, however, inhabitants often consider Antwerp not a city on its own but just a *voorstad*, one of its suburbs. West Flemings declare it better to have a *spraakgebrek* (speech defect) than an *Antwerpse dikke nek* (thick neck). In other words, it's better to have an incomprehensible dialect than an arrogant attitude. Inhabitants of smaller towns are also keen to poke fun at each other's weaknesses. Lokeren in East Flanders was once famous for its hat-makers, and the citizens liked to use the expression "fitting like a hat from Lokeren" to

indicate a perfect fit. But people outside the village liked to say that someone wore a *Lokerse hoed* if he was stumbling around drunk in the street. Similarly, Blankenberge may be proud of its fishing industry, but other Flemings did not have much confidence in the fishermen's trade practices. A *Blankenbergse rekening*, a bill from Blankenberge, meant an unnecessarily complicated matter because the fishermen were thought to be specialised in unintelligible financial accounts.

"Petty chauvinism"

But it's the people of Poperinge who probably have most reason to be unhappy with Van den Broek's book. The linguist discovered that residents in the West Flemish town didn't have the best reputation. "Doing the laundry like in Poperinge" meant you just quickly brushed off some dirt from your clothes or turned round a filthy apron when you met someone. If someone mentioned that you were dressed in "the latest fashion of Poperinge", it implied that your clothing was hopelessly out of date. "Many of these descriptions are expressions of petty chauvinism," explains Van den Broek, "from times when people lived in closed communities and did not

have much contact with neighbouring areas." As young people today live in a globalised world and are much more mobile than before, Van den Broek mostly relied on older locals for his research. "Proverbs with place names are becoming less popular," he says, "especially among young people." The general knowledge of proverbs among the young, he says, is disappearing. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. "They are very creative in mixing several proverbs and making up conscious parodies." He is therefore already researching his next book, based on these new phenomena.

Boeren, burgers en buitenlui: spreekwoordelijk geportretteerd by Marinus (Rien) van den Broek, is published by Boekscout for €16.95

► www.boekscout.nl



Flemish fashion designer Raf Simons made quite an impression with his first spring collection since becoming creative director at Christian Dior, and not just because of the gorgeous, flowing gowns he designed. Inspired by flowers, the collection was presented in a man-made garden created inside Paris' Jardin des Tuileries. It was Haute Couture Week in Paris, and models used the winding paths of the garden as their catwalk. In the last few weeks, Simons has been asked to design a sneaker collection for Adidas, a dress for Sigourney Weaver to wear in her next film and become a finalist for London Design Museum's Design of the Year. www.rafsimons.com

SAY WHAT?

Whether you are an arrogant *Antwerpenaar* or a filthy resident of Poperinge, Rien van den Broek's book has a proverb for you

- Op zijn Antwerps weg leven** (Living like in Antwerp): *Antwerpenaars* had a reputation of being a tad too carefree
- Het Loons zweet zit eronder** (The sweat of Borgloon is on him/her): This person is too lazy to work, allegedly like the residents of Borgloon, Limburg province
- Een Tiens uur** (Tienen time): Inhabitants of Tienen, Flemish Brabant, were thought to not take the time of an appointment too seriously
- De beste Truienaar heeft nog een paard gestolen** (The best *Truienaar* has stolen a horse): If you were from Sint-Truiden in Limburg, you were definitely a criminal – at best, a horse thief

'T Is naar Mechelse zin, een groot pak met weinig der in (It's like in Mechelen, a big package with little inside): Acting like you are very important, but without good reason



Clearly a resident of Borgloon

Dictionary will collect words from Flemish dialects

After an online petition was signed by 10,000 people, the government of Flanders and the Dutch Language Union decided to invest €800,000 to finalise and digitalise a dictionary of Flemish dialects. The linguistic department at Ghent University started the project in 1972. The *Dictionary of Flemish Dialects* collects the vocabulary of West and East Flanders plus the Flemish dialects of Zeeuws Flanders in the Netherlands and of French Flanders in the north of France. It is the final part of the trilogy of dictionaries that include *Brabantse* and *Limburgse*, which were published by the Dutch University of Nijmegen and the University of Leuven in the past

decade. By the end of 2015, this entire linguistic heritage should be accessible online. Each dictionary has three volumes, dealing with agriculture, crafts and general vocabulary. Each of these volumes is again divided in thematic chapters – for example "the human body" – which can contain thousands of words. According to coordinator Jacques Van Keymeulen, the speakers of these dialects are becoming rare. "Since around 1950, standard Dutch has been taught in schools. Better education, new media and increasing mobility have caused the dialectic vocabulary of [individual] towns to disappear, and most people now just have the dialectic pronunciation of their

home region." Van Keymeulen emphasises the importance of conserving this knowledge: "Dialects are an essential source of knowledge about our language history and culture, such as, for example, on agriculture techniques from medieval times." Aside from registering the vocabulary, the team at Ghent also wants to analyse the origin and meanings. An ultimate goal is to create a "word atlas", where terms are linked to their origin on maps. Next year, the researchers will for the third time submit a request to the government for the establishment of a Flemish research centre that studies language variation. **AF**



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Extreme makeover

Former crooner Helmut Lotti reinvents himself on an exceptional new album

Christophe Verbiest

Helmut Lotti was already a star in Flanders – with music influenced by both crooners and Elvis Presley – when, in the second half of the 1990s, he broke through internationally with his “classic” albums. He sang popular classical tunes, like “La donna è mobile” from Verdi’s *Rigoletto* or “Toreador” from Bizet’s *Carmen*, and traditionals – turning “Tiritomba” into his signature song. Sporadically, he came up with tunes himself.

The first classic album, *Helmut Lotti Goes Classic*, is still the top selling album of all time in Belgium. From 2000 on, he continued making albums in the same vein: Latin, symphonic pop classics, Russian songs and a tribute to Elvis Presley, his all-time hero. His final foray in that area was *Time to Swing*, four-and-a-half years ago.

Since then, not much was heard from Lotti. At least not musically. When he shed his toupee, though, he made all the papers. Last year, he toured with Flemish bluesman Roland, and the very surprising news surfaced that he was recording an album with Stef Kamil Carlens of the Zita Swoon Group as producer, and with musicians from the rock and jazz scene.

Still, his new album *Mijn hart & mijn lijf* (My Heart & My Body) – his 18th in 23 years – comes as a big surprise. He’s exploring uncharted musical territory, surfing from gritty rock via passionate soul and from chafing blues to intimate folk. Moreover, for the first time in two



Helmut Lotti kicks off the *Mijn hart & mijn lijf* tour on 8 March in Antwerp

much more personal, and my wife suggested that, if these stories were so important to me, maybe I should sing them in Dutch.” He smiles: “She was right, of course.”

Lotti’s wife is literary journalist Jelle Van Riet. She wrote the lyrics for one of the songs, “Kom terug” (Come Back). “She loves music,” says Lotti, “but it’s difficult for her to write to

this new album. But those darker songs don’t come without humour. Likewise, the nimble tunes always have a twist. There needs to be a balance.”

One of the most remarkable songs on *Mijn hart & mijn lijf* is “Hoera, ik ben een ster” (“Hurrah, I’m a star”), a surprisingly critical number about celebrity. Lotti calls himself “a showroom dummy in a glass cage” and says: “I’m becoming a brand myself”.

“This *had* to come out,” he exclaims. “I didn’t like the idea that, when you’re famous, people think they have the right to judge every part of you. Moreover, they even think that they know you better than you know yourself. In the very first version, I sang: ‘They labelled me depressed when I forgot to smile’. For some people, you always have to smile; if not, something is wrong.”

Isn’t he afraid to alienate his old fans with this new album? “Some will follow me, others won’t. I’ve noticed that a segment of my fans are annoyed because they think that I should sing what *they* like.”

Of course, by singing in Dutch, Lotti limits his territory to Flanders and the Netherlands. “Maybe I’ll try to bring this music to other countries, but that depends on how it is received in Flanders. If it

doesn’t work here, no one will be interested in releasing the album in another language. I’ve definitely been thinking about that.”

Are the songs already being translated? “Yes, but I can’t elaborate on that,” he confirms with a big smile.

The Carlens factor

Stef Kamil Carlens, one of the heroes of Flanders’ alternative music scene, is the surprising producer of *Mijn hart & mijn lijf*. Lotti: “We met during a television show for which they asked us to sing ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’ by Queen. We struck a chord and kept in contact afterwards, chatting about music. I asked his advice for a producer, and he suggested a few names. I met up with some of them, but in the end I thought Stef himself would be the best choice.”

Lotti had the feeling that Carlens would allow him the most freedom, he says. “Some producers like to put a personal stamp on the albums they work on,” he says. “Stef always said: ‘Helmut, it’s your album.’ He’s very broad-minded, and he only intervened when he felt I was getting off track. For instance, with the title song of the album – which, in the end, was a very difficult delivery.”

Honestly, if I hadn’t known it was Lotti’s album, I wouldn’t have recognised his voice in some songs. The singer partly credits Carlens for this different sound. “He regularly asked me to hold back. In other songs I was the one who wanted a surprising effect with my voice. It’s quite an eclectic collection of songs, and I sing very differently throughout the album. But still: It’s all me.”



► www.lotti.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Michaël R Roskam’s film *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*) has been **nominated for a César award** – France’s annual film awards – in the category Best Foreign Film. The film about the hormone mafia, based on real events in Belgium, was last year nominated for an Oscar. Also earning César nominations are Flemish actor Matthias Schoenaerts for his role in French director Jacques Audiard’s *Rust and Bone*, the Flemish short film *Oh Willy* by Emma de Swaef and Marc James Roels and the Flemish co-production *A perdre la raison* (*Our Children*) by Belgian director Joachim Lafosse.

► www.academie-cinema.org

Flemish daily newspaper *De Standaard* introduced a **new design** this week, which is “a cleaner, simpler look,” according to the publisher. Content has also been a bit reshuffled: The paper will offer more economic and work-related news and has increased the volume of its DS2 weekly culture pull-out to reflect an increased coverage of TV, media and new media.

► www.standaard.be

Viewers of the popular TV programme *Vlaanderen Vakantieland* have voted the Bronnenwandeling in the Voerstreek of Limburg province the **Prettiest Walking Route in Flanders**. A new audio guide from the Voerstreek tourist office will take you through the hilly landscape sporting timbered houses, streams and the longest railway viaduct in Flanders.

► www.tinyurl.com/bronnenwandeling

The Broken Circle Breakdown was the favourite film of the year of voters in the annual poll at vlaamsefilm.be. The favourite TV series was *Quiz Me Quick*, about cafe quiz winners with higher ambitions, and the favourite film personality of the year was, for the second time in a row, actor Matthias Schoenaerts.

Spiro Radulovic of Serbia has won this year’s Gouden hoed (Golden Hat) in Knokke-Heist’s **International Cartoon Contest** for his one-panel cartoon “Periscope” (*pictured*). “It’s a metaphor for a constant searching in modern society,” said the jury. “People make everything more difficult than it is.” The Silver Hat went to Nikola Hendrickx from Belgium, and the Bronze to Victor Crudu from Moldova. The Cartoon Festival in Knokke-Heist takes place from July to September every year.

► www.cartoonfestival.be



“When you’re famous, people think they know you better than you know yourself”

decades, he’s singing in Dutch.

The wonderful lyrics – touching, witty and not a little self-referential – were co-written by Bart Vanegeren, journalist at the Flemish weekly magazine *Humo*.

So, was it just the music that changed, or was it Lotti?

Personality found

“First and foremost, I felt the desire to change my music: I wanted it to be more personal,” explains the 43-year-old. “Not that it never was before; I’m not refuting my past. I’m present in all my music, but my personality sometimes got lost due to the concept of those albums.”

His double album *The Crooners*, with both standards and original songs, made him change his mind. “I noticed that television stations, for instance, gravitated towards the standards and were less interested in my own songs. That’s when I thought: I shouldn’t give them that choice anymore, let’s make something that is *totally* mine.”

He had traditionally written his own songs in English. “These lyrics were

music. For that song, she first wrote the lyrics. But I like to work the other way around.”

Enter Vanegeren, a good friend of Van Riet’s. “When I met Jelle, it immediately clicked between Bart and me. He has a firm sense of humour and is, at the same time, very serious and intelligent – a combination I like.”

The lyrics on *Mijn hart & mijn lijf* – all credited to both Lotti and Vanegeren – are partly based on Lotti’s initial English-language ideas. “Bart often added layers to them that I would never have thought of. But never in such a way that it didn’t still sound like me. He also wrote a few lyrics alone, as I did for one song.”

“Some will follow me, others won’t”

Lotti characterises himself as a light-hearted guy with a dark soul. “Melancholia is a part of me. You could already feel that in some songs on *From Russia with Love*, though it has never been clearer than on



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Fleet of foot

The new director of the Ballet of Flanders is well aware she has a tough act to follow

Oonagh Duckworth

The 2012-2013 season of the Ballet of Flanders is starting late this year, due to last summer's departure of artistic director Kathryn Bennetts, who cited the inability to maintain a world-class company in the midst of on-going government funding cuts. Assis Carreiro has the daunting task of taking the company forward.

The Royal Ballet of Flanders is housed in an industrial building right on the waterfront in Antwerp's now-trendy 't Eilandje area. It's quite a surprise to discover that it boasts five magnificent rehearsal studios and its own 300-seat theatre. One of the first things Assis Carreiro did after her appointment as its new director, was to paint the austere grey walls a more refreshing bright white.

Minute in stature but brimming with energy, this Portuguese-born, Canadian-educated dynamo spent last summer commuting between Antwerp and her previous home in the UK. In November, she permanently relocated with her family to Antwerp and plunged head first into her new and very challenging job.

Carreiro is on a mission to reinstate the ballet as a landmark company, both at home and abroad.

In Bennetts' wake

When Carreiro arrived, the company was still reeling from the departure of the previous director, Kathryn Bennetts, who resigned last year after disputes over the Flemish government's restructuring and funding cuts. The Australian former dancer, credited with raising the ballet to new heights of technical and artistic excellence, refused, amid much publicity, the company's offer to extend her contract for another year.

"There was no tour, no repertoire, no press – everything was at a standstill," says Carreiro. "I had just two-and-a-half weeks to get the current season together, something that normally takes two years."

But the recently turned 50-year-old clearly thrives on challenges. In Ipswich where she was artistic director and chief executive of DanceEast, East Anglia's regional dance agency, she initiated and oversaw the opening of a new, state-of-the-art dance space, the Jerwood DanceHouse.

Parallel to running DanceEast, she set up regular think-tanks for ballet directors and directors in-the-making called Rural Retreats: an experience that Carreiro says taught her a lot and primed her for her new role in Antwerp.

Her broad knowledge base, international connections and skills in networking found her fearlessly calling up some of the world's top choreographers and enticing them to make a stop in Antwerp.

Despite having to work at breakneck speed, there's already a buzz surrounding the company's comeback. The season begins on 6 February at its home theatre before touring to its other regular stop, Ghent's opera house.

Ushering in a new season

The ballet begins the 2013 season with three pieces simply titled *Mixed Bill*. "Wayne McGregor gave us *Infra*. It's only ever been seen in England and was first made for the London Royal Ballet," Carreiro continues, with more than a hint of pride.

McGregor is England's wonder-boy of dance, known for combining new technologies and speedy movements. He's also the first contemporary choreographer ever to be invited into London's Royal Ballet as resident artist.

Also sharing the bill is a new piece specially made for the company by the Italian Jacopo Godani, one of the most sought-after choreographers in the world.

"As well as restaging work, the company has to produce new pieces in order to keep those creative juices flowing," confides Carreiro. "For the last part of the three, I looked for a piece in which the entire company could dance. *Who Cares*, with music by George Gershwin, is lively, colourful, bright and fun: perfect for this bleak time of year. The piece is also challenging and spectacular movement-wise, which ensures the dancers maintain their



Wim Vanlessen and Aki Saito, the Ballet of Flanders' principal dancers

standards of excellence technically." A full-length, more theatrical, piece follows in April: the resurrection of *The Return of Ulysses*, originally commissioned for the company in 2006 by Christian Spuck, the new director of the Zurich Ballet. In May, the season wraps up with a thematic programme celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of composer Benjamin Britten. "This is a programme that will also tour to England," says Carreiro. "A real treat for the company as they'll be sharing a bill with London's Royal Ballet."

"Made in Flanders"

Carreiro labels her first season "Made in Flanders", a brand she's going to carry on developing in order to highlight the fact that all the works presented by the ballet are restaged or created on the company's home ground.

"With 'Made in Flanders', I want to issue a clear statement: I really feel the company has to be part of the community; we can't stay behind closed doors. I want all the company members to be personalities that everybody knows and are proud of." The Ballet of Flanders has 49 dancers and three apprentices who together represent 18 nationalities. Since her arrival, Carreiro has taken the time to meet each one individually. In the meantime, she struggles with administration, with a support staff of only four.

One criticism of her appointment last year was that she has never danced professionally herself. "There's this mythology that you have to have been a dancer to be a director. There are plenty of opera directors who've never sung. Of course I need to be in the studios often, keeping an eye on standards, but directing a ballet company is also about getting the right repertoire together, fundraising, people skills, etc."

She also took ballet classes, she says, "every day for 15 years, although I never made dancing my career.

I preferred to leave the dancing to those who had something really special."

But she knows ballet well. "My first job was in the National Ballet of Canada, where I worked through the archive departments, press and marketing, before becoming director of the educational programme. So coming back to ballet feels a bit like coming home."

Sophisticated audiences

"Belgium," says Carreiro, "is one of the most innovative countries in terms of dance, and there are wonderfully curious and sophisticated audiences. We will continue to present the big classical blockbusters as there's a large following for them, but I'd also like to make sure we attract a new public, too. Young people spend most of their time looking at screens these days; I want to get them in to see live art, for them to be empowered

by it. It's just about finding the mechanisms to do that."

Though she cannot yet reveal any names, she's excited about next year's programme. "We'll be working with six choreographers for the first time, introducing fresh and new ideas into the ballet and taking some risks."

Despite her optimism, Carreiro is fully aware that she has taken responsibility of a company experiencing significant funding and structural changes. "The ballet has been under-resourced for a long time. I came in with my eyes open," she says. "Now, there's an opportunity to merge with Antwerp's Opera, and I think it could be positive for both organisations as long as we keep our artistic autonomy. In times of crisis, the arts are often the first to suffer. We need to be fleet of foot to grasp the opportunities that help preserve them. We have a company of brilliant dancers; we want to give of our best, and we're not intending to compromise."



Eyes wide open: Assis Carreiro

SEASON 2013

Mixed Bill premieres 6 February

Three choreographies for the price of one: *Who Cares?*, an energetic ode to New York exuberance choreographed by George Balanchine to the music of George Gershwin; *Godani*, a new work created for the Ballet of Flanders by master choreographer Jacopo Godani; and Wayne McGregor's *Infra*, the award-winning mix of video and bodies taken to their extreme.

The Return of Ulysses premieres 18 April

Return indeed: This popular contemporary take on Penelope's exasperation with her barrage of suitors (pictured) was commissioned from Christian Spuck by the Ballet of Flanders six



years ago. If you didn't see it then, now's your chance.

Britten Dances premieres 30/5

This homage to British composer Benjamin Britten on the 100th anniversary of his birth includes *Forgotten Land* by Jiri Kylian; *McMillan*, a new ballet by London-based choreographer Cameron McMillan; and *Page*, a new work by British choreographer Ashley Page.

► www.balletvlaanderen.be

all Antwerp, all the time

Antwerpse Kleppers

Angela Chambers

Choose from theatre, music, dance and musical theatre during Toneelhuis' annual festival Antwerpse Kleppers, which features companies, bands and troupes from the port city. Two dozen productions are being staged over four weeks, and some are in English.

The festival kicked off last week with a premiere of the SKaGen theatre collective's *CCC, de vette jaren zijn voorbij* (CCC, the Fat Years Are Over), which is now on tour. CCC combines theatre and video footage that records the thoughts of Pierre Carette after he was released from prison. Carette was the founder of the Belgian Communist Combatant Cells, which used violent tactics in the mid-1980s.

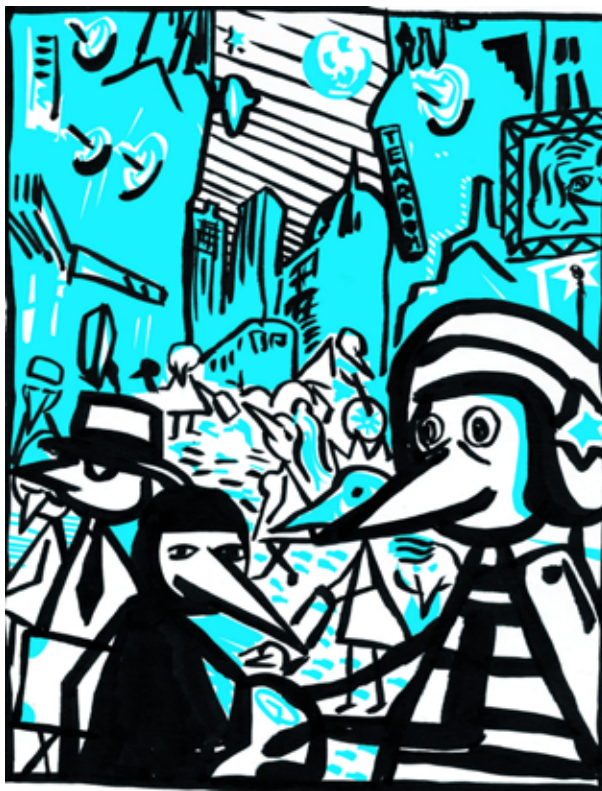
"It's fascinating to try to understand how it's possible for people to go that far for their ideals," says Clara van den Broek, a SKaGen member who co-wrote and co-stars in *CCC*. You'll find it next performed in Sint-Niklaas and Mechelen.

Several upcoming performances in Antwerpse Kleppers focus on

multiculturalism in Antwerp, including the KunstZ urban dance *Ford Escort*. KunstZ's goal is to help people with a foreign background find the connections they need to join the Antwerp arts scene. The organisation hosted intensive workshops for young people before casting them in this production, which was created by young choreographers from Let's Go Urban.

"*Ford Escort* is about the dreams of young people, and the first thing they dream about is having a car," says KunstZ coordinator Eline Van Hoya.

Parents can take their kids to MartHa'tentatief and FroeFroe's language-free puppet show *Aangespoeld* (Washed), a modern parable based on *Gulliver's Travels*. The 30-minute show is free of charge and will be performed just outside the Bourla theatre on Komedielaats for ages four and older. Also by MartHa'tentatief, *De ontembare stad* (The Indomitable City) combines images, film, recorded sounds and performance to interpret Antwerp's statistical data (pictured). "It's about how the city is changing,



Not only Antwerp; the whole world is changing, and all the cultures are coming together," says Els Kortleven from MartHa'tentatief. At the end of this show, the theatre group wants to bring the more than 170 nationalities in Antwerp together on stage and are still seeking residents to take part.

Theatre company STAN, meanwhile, is staging the English-language production *Nora*, a modern interpretation of Henrik Ibsen *A Doll's House*. In this updated version of the classic tale of a stifling marriage, STAN critiques today's marriages as well as consumerism and the pitfalls of wealthy European families. Concerts include *O mio core*, a collection of operas by Venetian baroque composer Francesco Cavalli. Produced by Scherzi Musicali and Muziektheater Transparant, the stories feature three mythical romantic couples.

Antwerpse Kleppers concludes with a free party, including DJs and dancing, in Toneelhuis' homebase, the Bourla theatre. Most of the performances take place there, too, with a few exceptions.

Until 23 February | Bourla, Komedielaats 18, Antwerp | www.toneelhuis.be

CLASSICAL

Spanish Fireworks

"That melody is so strong that the softer you play it, the stronger it gets, and the stronger you play it, the weaker it gets," said Miles Davis about the haunting *adagio* of Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, which he famously jazzed up in his *Sketches of Spain*. The piece, in its original version for guitar and orchestra, will be played this Saturday in Brussels by the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra and soloist Thomas Mailliet, among other Spanish or Spain-inspired works (such as Flemish composer Dirk Brossé's pungent *La Soledad*). Not to be confused with the Brussels Philharmonic (which is the Flemish Radio Orchestra reincarnated), the BPO has been around for about 10 years and is mostly made up of emerging young musicians anxious to further their orchestral careers. **Marie Dumont**



2 February, 20.00 | Royal Conservatory, Brussels

www.bpho.be

MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Georg Nigl & Andreas Staier: German pianist and artist-in-residence Andreas Staier joins the versatile Austrian baritone Georg Nigl for an evening of *lieder* in the romantic tradition, featuring Schumann and Schubert

FEB 1 21.00 at AMUZ, Kammenstraat 81

www.amuz.be

Ghent

The English muse: A brand-new gamba consort featuring young Austrian Romina Lischka and three colleagues, highlighting the lesser-known side of the English consort repertoire, including four-part fantasias and consort songs

FEB 2 20.00 at De Bijloke, Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2

www.debijloke.be

WORLD

Tomatito

José Fernández Torres earned the nickname "Tomatito" when he was a wee *wunderkind* performing in his native Almería. Indeed, the Spanish flamenco guitarist was only 10 years old when he made his professional debut in 1968. The kid's talent was in his genes; his father and grandfather were both accomplished guitarists and shared the stage name El Tomate. Tomatito spent the 1970s and '80s accompanying high-profile artists such as his mentor Paco de Lucía. In the past 25 years, he has produced a steady stream of award-winning solo albums, all marked by his signature fusion of Spanish, gypsy and jazz styles. Although he's getting on in years, Tomatito's popularity is only growing. Last year he sold out a Bruges concert hall, and now he and his five-piece band are performing in the capital.

Georgio Valentino



31 January, 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels

www.abconcerts.be

MORE WORLD MUSIC THIS WEEK

Brussels

Quinteto Lisboa: Former members of Madredeus and Ala Dos Namorados, two groups that blew new life into fado in the 1980s, featuring singers Helder Moutinho and Maria Berasarte

FEB 1 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

www.bozar.be

Mechelen

Celtic beats: Folk bands Moragh and Green Jacket perform upbeat Celtic jams

JAN 31 20.00 at KC Moonbeat, Oude Brusselsestraat 10

www.moonbeat.be

VISUAL ARTS

Yves Saint Laurent: A Visionary

French designer Yves Saint Laurent appeared at a crucial turning point in social history: the 1960s. Cultural and political upheaval opened up new spaces for fashion, notably around working women. Saint Laurent was among the first to create functional and stylish threads for this new breed of consumer. This exhibition, conceived by ING Belgium in collaboration with the Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent Foundation, emphasises that visionary aspect of the late fashion designer's legacy. Whether *prêt-à-porter* or *haute-couture*, these clothes are distinctly modern. Many of the 100 pieces on display have never been seen before by the public. Among them are innovative trouser suits and jumpsuits as well as adapted uniform jackets and tuxedos. Also on show are photographs (such as this one of the designer), documents and a series of prophetic paper dolls created by a teenage Saint Laurent. **GV**



Until 5 May | ING Cultural Centre, Brussels | www.ing.be/art

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Luc Dondeyne - Distances: A retrospective of the Flemish painter's 25-year career. A second exhibition, *Elsewhere*, staged in Mechelen, displays his work of the last decade
JAN 31-JUN 30 at Bedrijvencentrum Concentra, Katwilgweg 2
www.transit.be

Brussels

Conceptuele Boekkunst (Conceptual Book Art): An overview of methods and techniques for the design of book bindings, including contemporary, experimental, classic, decorative paper, engravings and more
FEB 1-APR 14 at Bibliotheeca Wittockiana, Bemelstraat 23
www.wittockiana.org

Deurle (East Flanders)

Oscar Jespers - Sculptures: Works from 1917-1930 by one of Flanders' most important modernist sculptors, shown in dialogue with works by his friends and contemporaries
Until APR 7 at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Museumlaan 14
www.museumdd.be

FOOD & DRINK

Bruges Beer Festival

Head to Bruges this weekend for a showcase of all things brewed from barley. Regional, national and international brewers – some 65 in all – set up shop in the city's iconic belfry to present more than 300 beers to a thirsty public. You'll find ales, lagers, lambics, Trappists and fruit beer in a rainbow of colours. And there's more than just tasting. Visitors are also invited to lectures and discussions with local notables as well as thrice-daily cooking demonstrations featuring dishes prepared with – can you guess? – beer. Entry is free, and once inside, you can purchase one of several tasting packages, which include an exclusive beer mug. **GV**



2-3 February | Halletoren, Bruges | www.brugsbierfestival.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Bruges

Gastro Vita: Behind-the-scenes visits to Flanders' top restaurants, including demonstrations, workshops and tastings. Next up are two iconic restaurants in Bruges (see website for full list of upcoming locations)
FEB 5 & 7 19.00 at Bistro Den Amand, Sint-Amandsstraat 4
FEB 6 19.00 at Le Manoir Quatre Saisons, Heilige-Geeststraat 1
www.gastrovita.be

Ghent

Candlemas: The traditional Christian celebration of the return of the light is honoured with a pancake party in the charming courtyard of Het Huis van Alijn, with a fire show, film and music
FEB 2 17.30-19.00 at Het Huis van Alijn, Kraanlei 65
www.huisvanalijn.be

Hoeselt (Limburg province)

Creative with chocolate: Interactive workshop shows how to temper chocolate, make three kinds of truffles, write and draw with chocolate and make a special dish (registration required)
FEB 5 19.30-22.30 at IKS0, Dorpsstraat 56
www.terkommen.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Andy Furniere

Volle Brol
Vossenplein 28, Brussels

Until late in the afternoon, groups of tourists mix with locals at café Volle Brol, located along the cobblestones of the Vossenplein in the Marollen area of Brussels. Vossenplein is the scene of the well-known daily flea market in this popular down-to-earth neighbourhood. The name of the café itself is a wink to the antique trinkets and vintage curiosities that are sold on the market, *brol* meaning "junk". The interior of this otherwise unpretentious café is brightened up by various types of colourful hats strung from the ceiling or placed on mirrors. From wide Mexican sombreros to red cowboy hats, the whole catalogue is distributed around the small place. However, the decoration that draws the most attention here is the large frame hanging on the wall, displaying figures who are not only wearing traditional boater hats but also impressive moustaches. The Volle Brol is the headquarters of the Orde van de Brusselse Moestasje, or the Order of the Brussels Moustache, a folkloric association of *Brusselaars* with a rather particular hobby: growing imaginative and especially huge moustaches. They meet every month at the pub to discuss activities; every spring, they elect the most beautiful moustache of the year. Or, as is written on the framed posters in Brussels' dialect, they elect the *Moestasje van t'joër*. Contrary to what you might expect, this is not a men's only club – although the female members don't have to fulfil the same criteria for membership. They can more easily be recognised during events by their stylish yellow boater hats, which make them look like stars of classic movie musicals.

If you want to drop in for a beer, you don't need to worry about opening days or hours. According to café owner Ramuka Besim, the bar is open every day "from early in the morning until god knows when". A special occasion to soak up the authentic atmosphere among locals is the first Saturday of every month – karaoke night.



BITE

Robyn Boyle

ViaVia Café ★★☆☆

A few tour guides from Leuven wanted to open a café in 1995. They went to Joker, a Flemish company specialising in adventure travel since the 1960s, and formed a partnership that led to the opening of the very first ViaVia Traveller's Café in Leuven. Now there are ViaVias all over the world, from Tanzania to Indonesia, including five in Flanders.

The ViaVia Café concept is simple: It is a place where travellers dust themselves off and locals gather to plan their next adventure. But most of all, the cafés are the perfect place for a laid-back lunch or dinner. Since September 2012, Leuven is home to a second location, making it the first city to have two ViaVia Cafés. That's where I'm meeting a friend for lunch on a sunny winter's day.

All ViaVias are in unique locations, and this one is no different. The Parkstraat ViaVia has a bright and airy, glass-encased dining room that looks out onto the courtyard of a former barracks, now a beautifully renovated school. While I had expected backpackers and the like, the clientele seems to be more a mix of professors, students and young families.

The international vibe comes from the music, our English-speaking server and a menu that reads like a world travel brochure: Thai meatballs, Spanish tapas, Peruvian fish stew... Knowing that it's impossible to make all the world's dishes and get them all



right, I go the safe route and order salmon and spinach lasagne. My more adventurous dining companion goes for Cambodian noodle soup. While we're waiting, we share a bowl of

lovely homemade hummus scooped up with fresh, spongy bread. A pot of tea and a glass of cola lessen the thirst while we discuss, appropriately enough, my friend's travels through Vietnam. Two years there were long

enough to make her want to eat the soup with chopsticks, but ViaVia doesn't have any. Fortunately, the soup is just as delicious with a spoon: savoury and spicy and filled with chilli peppers, mushrooms, soybeans, noodles and fresh coriander.

I'm not as lucky with my dish. While spinach and salmon wedged between layers of pasta is a fantastic combination, in this case the whole is kept together with an overly thick and gluey béchamel sauce. The top, however, is nicely crisped to a bubbly golden-brown under the oven grill.

After a freshly tapped Jupiler, a cup of Jasmine tea and a €31 bill, we're ready to brave the cold outside, and wonder which warmer climate we should travel to next.

► www.viaviacafe.com



Parkstraat 146, Leuven;
0478.36.24.82



Mon-Fri, 10.00-23.00; kitchen
10.00-14.30 & 17.00-22.00



Mains: €10-€15



Traveller's café and restaurant with a hit-and-miss international menu that changes weekly

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

Criminally successful

Good news for Pieter van Aspe, Flanders' very own Stieg Larsson, the (deceased) Swedish writer of the world-famous *Millennium* trilogy of *misdaadromans*, crime novels. After having been published all over Europe and translated into many, many languages, Aspe will be the very first Flemish *misdaadauteur* (you got it) whose books will be published in the US.

"*Ik was heel verrast*," – he was very surprised – he told VRT radio last week when the news broke in the Flemish daily paper *Het Nieuwsblad*. It had been a while since Aspe had signed the contract, he said, "*en dan vergeet je het een beetje*." And then you kind of forget.

"*Ik heb het ook gelezen in de krant vanochtend*," he told the radio presenter. I also (had to) read it in the newspaper this morning. One of Aspe's very first books, *Het vierkant van de wraak*, will be published in June with the literally translated title *The Square of Revenge*.

It is notoriously hard for a Dutch-language writer to make it in the US. But the recent hype around Larsson and other Scandinavian crime writers may have opened up a window of opportunity.

"*Ze gaan denken als ze de foto zien dat ik een of andere Zweed of Deen ben*," Aspe joked. They are going to think when they see the photo that I am some kind of Swede or Dane – understandable, with his bushy head of white hair.

Aspe is Flanders' best-selling author, averaging about two books a year, since he took up his pen about 17 years ago. He has sold more than two million copies of his books. They are mostly set in Bruges and circle around police inspector Pieter Van In and the lovely prosecutor Hannelore Martens (who of course becomes his lover).

There is, naturally, often *een moord*, a murder, and more than one character who could have done it, *de dader*, the culprit. (Giveaway alert: It is always – always – the one you least expect.)

And then there's often the traditional *mooie*

vrouw, beautiful woman, who may or may not be playing a villainous game. And there have to be different *wapens*, too, weapons. Perhaps *een revolver*, *een dolk*, *een loden pijp* en *een kandelaar*? A revolver, a dagger, a lead pipe and a candlestick?

OK, confession: I haven't read any Pieter Aspe. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't either. On the contrary, I think reading mystery crime novels are an excellent way of learning a language. The excitement and the cliffhangers make it less of a pain to look up a word. I learned English as a kid reading John Grisham.

So pick up a copy and tell me about it. And we'll see each other in two weeks. Or will we?

► talkingdutch@hotmail.com



The last word...

Gentleman thief

"Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. That's the way life goes. Congratulations, you won, so I think you deserve these back."

A couple from Alken, Limburg province, whose stolen car had been recovered, received a note from the thief, together with the keys

Advising the faithful

"Sermon: topical but hardly original. Wifi: none. Temperature: fine."

Blogger Kenneth Verhulst from Bruges has begun reviewing Mass services in Flemish churches

Monumental blunder

"Every evening we organise a commemoration for the soldiers who died... It's inappropriate to film a dance video on that spot. It's disturbing."

Benoit Mottrie of the Last Post Association on a dance clip made under the Menin Gate in Ypres by a contestant on *So You Think You Can Dance*

Exit His Excellency

"After Belgium, no country is good enough."

US Ambassador Howard Gutman is leaving Brussels this summer and will go into private business

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Archaeological research is fascinating any day of the week, but when you discover something that answers historical mysteries, that's when the champagne bottles come out. A team of Leuven researchers did that recently when they found evidence of the existence of Queen Nefertiti after she had disappeared from the historical record. We'll tell you all about the Dayr Al-Barsha project and its other many secrets revealed

Science

The need for proper sleep has been in the headlines lately as airline pilots arrived in Brussels last week to protest a new EU measure that would increase the time they are allowed to fly. We talk to experts on sleep disorders at the University of Leuven to see what long hours for pilots, soldiers and other workers means for their – and our – safety

Living

Leonidas is the ultimate Belgian chocolate brand – ironic as it was founded by a Greek who learned the chocolate-making trade in America. But Leonidas George Kestekides settled in Ghent in 1913, where he opened his very first shop and finessed his art, becoming the European leader we still know today. We'll tell you all about him during this 100th anniversary of the Leonidas brand