

Reader revolution

Thanks to the tablet, e-book sales are finally taking off in Flanders

► 5



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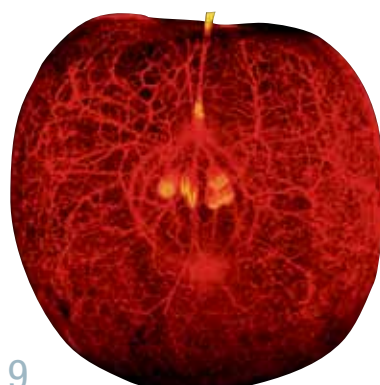
The complicated nature of job contracts and language

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See food

Researchers in Leuven provide 3D imaging of what we're putting in our mouths

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The labour imbalance

Graduates in Flanders are finding jobs fast, but the less educated are suffering for it

Sabine Clappaert

The news of late regarding youth on the job market can seem contradictory: Graduates seem to be finding jobs quickly, yet the unemployment rate among youth is rising. The problem, says the Flemish work ministry, is that employers are hesitant to take on less-educated workers when so many graduates are looking for jobs.

The *Economist* calls them "Generation Jobless". They are young people aged 15 to 24 of whom 290 million worldwide are neither working nor studying. That's

almost a quarter of the planet's youth who are considered "inactive".

Across Europe, as in Flanders, the euro crisis has hit young job seekers exceptionally hard. The continent's average youth unemployment rate sits at 23.5%. Not surprisingly, unemployment rates are highest in Greece (58.4%), Spain (55.7%), Portugal (38%) and Italy (38%).

In Belgium, 22.4% of those under 25 are unemployed – an 11.5% increase from last year.

Yet despite these staggering figures, Flemish youth with higher-education diplomas score extremely well finding a first

job, according to a recent report on job-seeking graduates presented by Flemish minister for work Philippe Muyters.

According to the report, 88.7% of Flemish graduates found a job within one year of leaving school. That puts Flanders at the top of the rankings compared to the rest of Europe.

"The average youth unemployment rate across Europe is more than 22%," says Muyters. "Of course that also includes those no longer considered graduates, but these Eurostat numbers still put us at the top."

But Muyters also thinks that there is room for improvement. "While all education will lead to employment opportunities,

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

André Denys



André Denys, the former governor of East Flanders province, died after a long illness. He was 65. Denys, who kept working until January this year while battling cancer, was this week warmly remembered by political friends and opponents alike. Wednesday's session of the Flemish parliament began with a minute's silence and continued with a series of tributes to the man who had occupied a seat there for 23 years. "As a man and as a politician, he enjoyed the esteem of others across party boundaries," said parliament speaker Jan Peumans, going on to describe him as "a very warm and agreeable man. He was also the type of provincial governor of which there are too few: someone who had a place among the people, who listened to the opinions of others and who gave comfort where needed". Herman De Croo, party colleague and former speaker of the federal parliament, echoed the sentiment, calling Denys "a self-made man, someone who could listen, a man of the people." Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters issued a statement on behalf of the government calling

Denys "the best evidence that friendship can exist in politics, despite party differences. In the last few years he fought his illness with courage, strength and dignity. He will be sorely missed." Denys' successor, Jan Briers, said: "André Denys was an example of what politics can be." Denys was born in Gistel, West Flanders, and went into the family tannery business in Zulte, East Flanders. Politics beckoned, and he stood for the municipal council in Zulte as a liberal, entering the federal parliament five years later in 1981. That seat gave him automatic membership of the Flemish Council, for which there were then no direct elections. When the first was held for what we now know as the Flemish parliament, Denys was elected and served until 2004. Also in that year, he was appointed governor of East Flanders. Denys stayed in the job until the end of January this year, although he had been diagnosed with mesothelioma, a rare form of lung cancer, back in 2010. Denys' funeral was held at the weekend in Sint-Baaf's cathedral in Ghent.

News in brief

Dimitri Bontinck came within three metres of his son Jejoen in Syria but was not allowed to see him, he said last week at a press conference on his return from the war-torn nation. Jejoen, 16, **went to Syria in February to join rebel fighters** after allegedly being recruited by Sharia4Belgium leader Fouad Belkacem. Bontinck made an emotional appeal to other young people: "Don't go to Syria," he said. "You have no idea what you'll be getting into." The federal interior ministry, meanwhile, has asked for an analysis of video messages posted on YouTube by Sharia4UK, in which two men make threatening remarks about Belgium. The messages appear to be reactions to the arrest of Belkacem in April.

The man alleged to be the brains behind the February **diamond robbery at Brussels Airport** remains in a French prison cell, after a judge in Metz declined to execute an arrest warrant on the grounds that it was "vague and incomplete". Marc Bertoldi will remain in custody until 30 May, when a magistrate will argue the case for handing him over to Belgian authorities.

Police, transport experts and customs officers last week carried out a large-scale **inspection of freight transport in Zeebrugge**, after complaints from transport industry unions that many companies are employing cheaper East European drivers, ignoring rules and regulations and competing unfairly.

The 19 communes of Brussels will in future be responsible for tackling the problem of **rubbish dumping** within their own borders, the main parties have agreed. At present, responsibility is split between the local authorities and the Brussels

Capital-Region. At the same time, all container parks in the capital will now be open to everyone, regardless of where users live.

The **fares on De Lijn public transport will increase** on 1 June, in accordance with the cost of living, a spokesperson said. A single ticket bought via text message goes up by 10 cents to €1.40 and €2.20. A journey of one or two zones with a Lijnkaart goes up to €1, while the cost of passes goes up by 2.04%.

Sophie and William Fehervari, daughter and son of the founders of the bankrupt media services company Alfacam, have set up a new enterprise called **Hove Media**, to carry out exactly the same services as the failed business of their parents, Gabriel Fehervari and Karin Stoop. Hove Media was created on 2 May, two weeks after Alfacam was declared bankrupt as a result of crushing debt problems.

Aarschot in Flemish Brabant has won a TV quiz to find the **smartest municipality in Flanders**, defeating Leuven in an all-Brabant final. The winning team included mayor André Peeters; Karel Simons, who works with the handicapped; and teacher Ann Croes. The town receives free wifi for a year within a certain area, a prize cup, a flag and a billboard announcing its clever status.

Netflix, the American video-on-demand service, will begin operating in Belgium later this year. The streaming service offers a wide range of films and TV programmes for a monthly subscription fee, including programmes specially made for Netflix, such as the last season of the popular comedy *Arrested Development*, and the recent adaptation of the political drama *House of Cards*.

A hole four metres deep that appeared in the roadway outside the Royal Palace in Brussels last week was probably caused by a water leak, Brussels city council said. Repair work to the road, as well as to sewers damaged by falling cobblestones, will take about two weeks. The road is open in both directions, but the city advised drivers to avoid Paleizenplein if possible.

A gold-plated artwork of a **man riding a giant tortoise**, made by Flemish artist Jan Fabre, has been removed from the seafront in Nieuwpoort for restoration. "Searching for Utopia" has stood at the site since 2003 and has suffered damage from the elements. Restoration will take about a year, at which point it will move to its new home outside the Ysara cultural centre in the coastal city.

Passengers flying business class with Brussels Airlines to South Africa and the US can now order **in-flight meals prepared by Geert Van Hecke**, the three-Michelin star chef of De Karmeliet in Bruges. Van Hecke is the first top chef to cook for the airline; previously, Peter Goossens of Hof Van Cleve in Kruishoutem cooked for KLM. "We wanted to position ourselves more as Belgian," a spokesperson for the airline said. "We're also now serving Belgian wine and craft beers. A star chef like Geert Van Hecke fits in with those plans perfectly."

Soft drinks giant Coca-Cola is **withdrawing Vitamin Water** from sale in Belgium, after disappointing sales figures, a spokesperson for the company has confirmed. The drink, which profiled itself as a healthy soft drink, first appeared in Belgium three years ago and never became as popular here as it was in the Netherlands or France, the company said.

FLANDERS TODAY



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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw

DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper

NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope

AGENDA Robyn Boyle, Georgio Valentino

ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren

PREPRESS Corelio AdPro

CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca

Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz,

Angela Chambers, Sabine Clappaert, Katy

Desmond, Andy Furniere, Diana Goodwin,

Toon Lambrechts, Katrien Lindemans, Marc

Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters,

Senne Starckx, Linda Thompson, Georgio

Valentino, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton

GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore

PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

tel 02 373 99 09 - fax 02 375 98 22

editorial@flanderstoday.eu

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS

subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING

Evelyne Fregonese

02 373 83 57

advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Leave it like you found it

First the good news: Student organisations in Antwerp have reached an agreement with the city council on a new charter covering student initiatives (known as "baptisms") and other party activities, which is intended to ensure a code of behaviour for the students and a reasonable degree of peace and quiet for local residents. The agreement, which was arrived at without recourse to legal action or street demonstrations, has been signed by about 250 representatives of some 70 student groups. The Brussels Capital-Region must be wishing about now that they had such civilised young people. Authorities are tearing their hair out over the weekly revels of young people – mainly but not exclusively stagiaires and other employees of the European institutions – who leave the majestic squares of the city looking like they'd been hit by a



party bomb, with tonnes of garbage scattered about the place. On Wednesdays, it's Kasteleinsplein, just off the Louizalaan, where transplanted youth gather in the chic bars and restaurants. On Thursdays the caravan moves on to Luxembourgplein in front of the European Parliament, and known to the cognoscenti as Plux. There it's the same story: the drinking, encouraged by good deals from the bars ringing the square,

goes on until well after midnight, the roadways thronged with party animals forcing buses to make a detour. And when the party's over, the mess remains. "Every week we have to deploy an extra clean-up crew, while these people often pay no taxes" to Belgium or the city, explained Rachid Madrane, the capital's junior minister for cleanliness. "They're intelligent people, yet they can't take their rubbish away with them?" Both locations are in the commune of Elsene, and its mayor, Willy Decourty, sees another cloud looming on the horizon: Flageyplein, where the growing crowds seem to be no more civic-minded. "We'll be having problems there, too, shortly," he said. You'd think those people would be smart enough to realise what a rubbish-tip they're leaving behind them."

The labour imbalance

Internships and entry-level training are key to improved employment options

► continued from page 1

our report clearly shows that certain qualifications offer more and others fewer employment perspectives. Those who have only a secondary school diploma, for example, have significantly more difficulty finding a job. But that should come as no surprise, as this is a very broad, general education in which employers find few relevant hooks for the functions they seek to fill."

Drop-outs at risk

The perspectives for those with a limited educational background are especially bleak in times of crisis. Case in point: In 2008, a quarter of those with a limited education were unable to find a job within a year of leaving school. What's more worrying is that 10,000 Flemish students a year leave secondary school without a diploma.

"While the decision to quit secondary school may at first feel like a relief, most people regret it very quickly," says Anneke Ernon, spokesperson for the Flemish jobs and training agency VDAB. "Often these young people think that things will fall into place anyway, but they soon realise that they have little understanding of the job market, no idea of what wages or salaries to

educational backgrounds.

According to a report in the Flemish daily *De Morgen*, the unemployment rate among Flemish youth with a university or college diploma has risen by nearly 13% over the past year. This suggests that, in an unfavourable economic climate, higher education is not necessarily a guarantee of employment.

"Youth employment is always strongly linked to prevailing economic conditions," adds Ernon. "They are the first to suffer in times of crisis; but they are also the first to benefit when things start getting better."

Skills mismatch

Skills mismatch on the youth labour market has become a persistent and growing trend. Overeducation and training exists alongside a lack of education and skills, and increasingly skill obsolescence, brought about by long-term unemployment.

More relevant education and skills are the first steps toward increased employability, says Ernon. "We need to guide our youth toward courses and diplomas for which there is a real need out there. While many girls still choose to study 'office



Higher-education graduates often have to accept that their first job might not be their dream job

"While the decision to quit secondary school may at first feel like a relief, most people regret it very quickly"

expect and that they are – rightly or wrongly – still competing in a very diploma-driven job market."

Flanders has four different secondary school diplomas, some of which hold more of a promise of moving on to higher education than others. Another notable trend is that the gender gap at schools is increasing. Boys not only achieve lower scores than girls, they also leave school with vocational diplomas – the diploma least likely to lead to higher education – or without a diploma, more often than girls.

And while Muyters' new report makes a strong case for further education, the continuing crisis is also affecting those with a solid

management', they suddenly realise that, due to difficult economic conditions, they're in competition with people holding BA degrees or multiple diplomas when they start applying for jobs."

On the other hand, she continues, "we have the market screaming for qualified refrigeration mechanics but hardly any youngsters enrolling in the course. The choices our young people are making are still very much driven by stereotypes surrounding certain jobs."

Young people with jobs, meanwhile, are still often the first victims of a crisis. Because many are employed part-time or under a temporary contract, it is administratively easier and cheaper to terminate their

contracts than those of older, long-term employees. It explains why, together with a lack of experience, they are often the first to lose their jobs in times of crisis.

A shrinking employment market and lack of experience remain the key reasons why young people struggle to find work. Add the fact that more than half of them are employed in the commercial services sector (hotel, catering and tourism) – sectors that offer mostly part-time and temporary jobs – and their precarious employment position becomes clear. While one in three youngsters have a temporary job, research shows that the majority would prefer a full-time, long-term contract.

Lack of experience is also cited as a key reason why so many school-leavers struggle to find a job. A recent article on *jobat.be* points out that while students in Denmark, Austria and The Netherlands often combine studying and working, Flemish students are much less likely to do so.

"One could call it a difference in culture," writes Andre Van Hauwermeiren of VDAB in the article, although he emphasises that the numbers should be viewed with caution. "A student who works two hours a week is registered as working, while one can hardly call it a full-fledged job."

Internships close the gap

On 1 February this year, the federal government introduced the *instapstage* or entry internship, a measure aimed at helping those with no secondary school diploma gain work experience. The government hopes to equip the youngsters with the necessary experience and skills to find a job more easily and also to encourage employers to train young people with little to no job skills.



"Certain qualifications offer more employment perspectives": Flemish minister for work Philippe Muyters

The entry-level internships are for those 25 and younger, last three months and provide the intern with a salary of €760 per month, most of it paid by the federal government. Interns are allowed to follow two internships at different companies for a total of six months.

The government of Flanders, meanwhile, has provided a second option, with its IBO measure, which stands for *Individuele Beroepsopleiding* (Individual Job Training). IBOs allow employers to put someone who is unemployed to work on an IBO contract. The contract offers the worker an internship of one to six months during which they still receive unemployment benefits.

With an IBO, the employer contributes a very modest portion of the salary and doesn't have to pay social security contributions for the trainee. In return, the employer must offer the worker a full-time job on completion of the training. While the VDAB prefers employer-paid internships and training programmes to those supplemented by the government, it also encourages those who have been without a job for a significant

amount of time to re-join the labour market through these low-paid training programmes.

The Flemish Chamber of Commerce, Voka, agrees: "It is better to fill an empty CV with internships than to wait for a job to fall from the sky," says Voka social dialogue advisor Sonja Teughels in *DeWereldMorgen*.

Postponing perfection

Though that may be easier said than done. Many young people don't see the point in working for essentially the same amount of money they are receiving from unemployment benefits. But in a world of work in which internships or volunteering are often the only ways in which to gain experience, it leaves many school-leavers with only one option: give up – at least temporarily – their idea of a "dream job" and accept a training programme or something that is below their level of education.

Not surprisingly, many young people are not willing to accept this reality and keep trying to find a job they really want, with all the predictable consequences. Including, according to the Belgian National Bank, an increasing mountain of debt.



The VDAB can help with information on both the *instapstage* and IBO training

Ghent University elects Anne De Paepe rector

The election marks the first woman rector of a university in Flanders

Alan Hope

For the first time in its history, Ghent University has elected a woman as rector. Anne De Paepe, 57, was selected by the university board from the two candidates – herself and Thierry Mortier – who led in the elections. De Paepe is a physician and heads the university's centre for medical genetics. Her election comes as a surprise as her opponent, now vice-rector, was the favourite throughout the race.

Under Ghent's new election system, the candidates form a male list and a female list, with each list producing one candidate for the board's consideration. Together with the rectoral election, there was also an election for vice-rector, which produced the same two candidates. De Paepe is the first woman rector of a university in Flanders, though Els Witte was at the head of the Free



Rector and vice-rector of Ghent University Anne De Paepe and Thierry Mortier

University of Brussels (VUB) in the 1990s.

Earlier, incumbent rector Paul Van Cauwenberghe took the unusual step of issuing a statement taking issue with press reports of problems with the election. Among other

things, he denied voters had abstained in protest at the existence of gender-based lists. De Paepe was elected with the necessary majority in the first round of both polls; a small number of students who did not vote forced the male list to go to

a second round.

Although Mortier – an ethicist and philosophy professor – was expected to be elected to the senior job, according to the informal agreement which alternates scientists with members of the humanities faculty, some members of the board, according to Van Cauwenberghe, decided to send a signal by giving it to De Paepe.

Meanwhile in Leuven, former senator, canon jurist and TV personality Rik Torfs was elected rector, defeating his nearest opponent, Karen Maex, in the second round of voting by 772 to 736, having led in the first round but without the required majority. Maex is currently vice-rector in charge of the science and technology faculty. Torfs said he was “proud” of his victory. “This is the realisation of a dream I have cherished for a long time.”

Handicap allowance proposed

Flemish health minister Jo Vandeurzen has proposed that every person with a recognised handicap should receive a stipend to allow them to pay for their own care, in an effort to reduce the demand for services, which has led to intractable waiting lists. In the current legislature, the number of places for assisted living housing has increased by 5,500, but the number of those waiting has still climbed to 22,000. “It's time we changed direction,” Vandeurzen

said, with the backing of representatives of the other coalition parties, sp.a and N-VA.

The proposal could be funded by imposing a €25 levy on everyone who pays for health insurance – as already exists to pay for care for the elderly – to provide the equivalent of €300 to €400 a month for every handicapped person on a waiting list.

The opposition parties, Open VLD and Groen, accused the government of “electioneering”.

Road deaths down, except for cyclists

The cyclists' federation Fietsersbond has called for additional research into accidents involving cyclists, after official figures showed there were fewer fatal accidents in total in Flanders in 2012 than in 2011, but more of them involving cyclists.

In 2012, there were 322 fatalities in road accidents in Flanders, 63 fewer than in 2011. However, while the number of fatalities among motorcyclists saw a near 40% reduction to 38, there were 52 fatal accidents involving cyclists – eight more than the previous year.

“I'm in favour of a targeted speeding policy, for example, at times when you know more accidents are likely to happen,” commented Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits. Stijn Daniels, who lectures on road safety at

the University of Hasselt, said that doubling the number of cameras on the roads of Flanders could lead to a further 50% reduction in the number of road deaths.

Flanders has about 700 cameras along regional roads, but that is not enough, he said, speaking at the Flemish Road Safety Congress in Antwerp last week. “There are cameras on 10% of the regional roads, and on one-quarter of crossroads with traffic lights. That's actually not very many, although they have had a significant effect in reducing accidents. If we want to have a really serious effect, then we need to take serious measures.”

According to his research, two out of three Flemish people are in favour of tougher measures against speeding.

Museum Prize nominees announced

The nominees for this year's Museum Prize are the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) and the Fashion Museum (MoMu) in Antwerp; the Museum of Industrial Archaeology and Textiles (MIAT) in Ghent; the Fashion Museum (Mode Museum) in Hasselt; and Talbot House in Poperinge, where soldiers would visit for rest and recuperation during the fighting in the trenches of the First World War.

In Brussels, the nominees are the Art en Marges Museum, which promotes outsider art; the Belgian Comic Strip Center; The Musical Instrument Museum; the Erasmus House in Anderlecht; and the Sewer Museum.

On 4 June, one museum from each of the three regions in Belgium will be awarded the €10,000 prize. Visitors to the website can vote for the winner of the public prize and the children's prize.

The MAS, meanwhile, has won the Siletto Award 2013 from the European Museum Forum. The prize is given annually for volunteer and community outreach. The prize jury praised the way MAS, since its opening in 2011, has connected with the local community through its presentation of the Antwerp identity.

► www.museumprijs.be



© Filip Dujardin

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€45,000

paid by Antwerp city council to six residents who filed a lawsuit against the annual Sinksenfoor fair, to compensate them for their legal costs. The fair opened last weekend as planned

€382,392,136

in traffic fines taken in by the state last year, almost double the amount of a decade ago, mainly as a result of speed cameras and co-operation with other countries

€1,746

in Flemish government subsidy per head of population in Antwerp in 2011. Affligem in Flemish Brabant is bottom of the list, receiving only €172 per resident

31

minutes more playtime per day required for schoolchildren, according to a report by the Flemish children's rights commissioner

€2.7 million

raised by the Flemish Red Cross from the sale of 540,000 stickers featuring the cartoon character Maja de Bij

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

What if?

One of Flanders' most popular TV programmes is *Wat als?* (*What If?*), a sketch comedy show that explores what might happen in a number of absurd situations: What if everyone was blind? What if we all looked the same? What if Superman got irritated quickly?

Flemish politics, too, gets wound up by “what ifs”: hypothetical scenarios that everyone talks about but may never happen. The most recent is: What if there were federal elections this year?

The federal vote is planned for 2014, in what is called “the mother of all elections”, with federal, regional and European elections all happening at once. But what if?

Federal elections this year would upset N-VA's calculations, as it hopes to play off Bart De Wever's popularity in the concurring elections in 2014. CD&V, on the other hand, would stand to benefit, as minister-president Kris Peeters would have a clear field in the 2014 Flemish elections.

The fact that this rather unlikely scenario is being discussed demonstrates that the federal government is not in good shape. Di Rupo I is a government of necessity, born out of the political crisis after the 2010 electoral victory of N-VA. It has no majority on the Flemish side, while CD&V, Open VLD and the French-speaking liberals all feel uncomfortable about some of the more socialist recipes it proposes.

Over the last couple of months, the federal government has failed to reach a compromise on the single statute for blue and white collar workers, has failed to make decisions on a number of high level appointments and has created confusion about new taxes on (the already meagre) interest from savings.

All of this runs counter to prime minister Di Rupo's mantra of the government working hard, as it should in 2013, since this is one of the rare years in which Belgian politics is not troubled by some or other election.

On to another “what if”. What if King Albert were to abdicate? The pope did, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands did. A Belgian king has never abdicated of his own free will before, but there is a first time for everything. According to rumours, the king is considering this scenario, but he does want to make sure that his successor, Prince Filip, is not faced with a political crisis from the very start.

This year seemed like the perfect moment: a year without elections. Or is it?

Turning the page

The publishing industry in Flanders is adapting as e-books grow in popularity

Linda A Thompson

Though they still account for only a fraction of overall book sales, e-books are slowly but surely gaining ground in Flanders, as tablet computers with built-in e-reading devices become increasingly widespread and publishers adapt to the changing realities of book consumption. There are no accurate numbers about e-book consumption in Flanders because Apple and Kobo, the two prime tablet and e-reader manufacturers here, do not distinguish between sales in Belgium and the Netherlands. “It’s been very difficult to gauge the exact increase in e-book sales,” says Jef Maes, head of the knowledge centre at Boek.be, the Flemish book publishers’ trade association. “But following estimates we’ve made with market research company GfK, we expect sales to double by the end of the year.”

In a recent poll among 1,600 Belgian consumers by Bookboon, itself an e-book publisher, a little over one in four people said they expected to buy their first e-book this year. If they follow through, that would mean a 330% increase in digital book sales compared to last year.

About 22,000 Flemish book titles are currently available in e-format, and they can be bought through a host of online retailers and bricks-and-mortar stores like bol.com, Standaard Boekhandel and Fnac. Almost by default, digital versions of new titles by Flemish and Dutch writers are being released alongside their physical editions. Having trailed behind other Western countries – where e-books have long been mainstream – it looks like Flanders has bridged the digital divide. Contrasting the state of play here with that in other European countries, Thomas Buus Madsen from Bookboon says: “I think Belgium is in the upper part of the class.”

Tablet 1, e-reader 0

So what changed? The tablet computer came, saw and conquered. According to the most recent figures, one in four Flemish households owns a tablet. And those full-featured tablets seem to be succeeding at something e-readers never could: convincing non-techie users to give e-books a try. The 2011 Digimeter, a yearly poll about digital consumption trends in Flanders, revealed that 75% of tablet owners used their device to read e-books. In other words, few people buy tablets specifically to read e-books, but once they have one, digital reading is just an app away.

While e-readers offer a superior reading experience to tablets, Flemish consumers have shown no interest in them over the past years. In fact, e-reader sales plummeted before they ever really took off. “For the person who reads a lot, an



e-reader is a fantastic invention,” explains Madsen. “For the rest, paying €150 for an e-reader is a lot for something you don’t know how you would use.” Just two years after e-readers were introduced on the Flemish market, Digimeter stopped asking about e-readers because it no longer seemed relevant, with ownership in Flemish households stagnating at 2%.

In an equally important development, the prices of e-books have dropped significantly. In the past 12 months, the average price of an e-book has dropped from €13 to €10. Flemish publishers initially had a hard time estimating e-book revenue, explains Maes. Rather

than suffer losses in an already depressed economy, they tended to overprice the e-books. Another factor in e-books’ increasing popularity is that the industry itself is finally catching up with consumers. In the past two years, several industry-led and government-funded initiatives have been working to help the publishing industry make the digital transition. In think tanks and pilot projects they have been trying to answer questions that publishers have struggled with since e-books first popped up. What will the return on investment be? How can they come up with a sustainable business model?

Which technology companies can they partner with? “There’s been a growing realisation in both the publishing industry and the Flemish

administration that the Flemish book industry would totally be eaten up by the big international players if we didn’t come up with larger-scale initiatives,” says Maes. For a long time, Flemish publishers stuck to proven print recipes. Annemie Speybrouck co-ordinates the Uitgeverij van de Toekomst (Publisher of the Future), an industry-led, government-subsidised project to help publishers with the transition to online reading. She says that because the Flemish market was so small, e-publishing required costly investments. The return on investment was so unclear, publishers dragged their feet. “That has been such a turnaround,” she says, pointing out that publishers were reluctant to get involved at first. “I think a lot of publishers now realise they need to think ahead. At the time same time, they’re also really concerned with: How will we stay afloat today and how can we keep our print products alive?”

Do it yourself

And more is to come. Funded by the government of Flanders, the Flemish E-book Platform – which wants to function as an online marketplace for consumers to rent, borrow and sell Dutch-language e-books – should be ready for take-off this year. And with the first Flemish self-publishing e-book platform launched last month, we might soon see even more e-books being offered and sold. From as little as €99, BoekBoek allows aspiring authors to independently publish their own novels in a production process that takes just a few days.

Despite the many advances, the electronic book industry is still in its infancy in Flanders, and digital sales account only for a fraction of overall revenue. The future will not be all digital, all the time, says Karel Vanrietvelde, a digital consultant who has been giving IT workshops at libraries, social profit organisations and small businesses across Flanders for more than 10 years. “Print will continue to exist but in a new relationship; it will no longer be the exclusive medium for communication,” he says. “Not everything will shift to digital, and where the new balance will lie is still unclear.”

TOP TITLES

The five bestselling e-books in Flanders last year according to market research company GfK

- Fifty Shades of Grey*, EL James
- Fifty Shades Darker*, EL James
- Fifty Shades Freed*, EL James
- Ongezien* (Unseen), Karin Slaughter
- Doorn in mijn vlees* (Thorn in my Flesh), Karin Slaughter



THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS

Air ▶ Jetair

The charter airline, based at Brussels Airport, is launching a weekly service to Ras al-Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates in October.

Banks

▶ Hello

French banking group BNP Paribas launched Hello, its 100% online bank, in Belgium last week. The financial institution expects to reach new customers who choose electronic banking ahead of traditional banking services.

Chocolates

▶ Neuhaus

The leading Brussels-based chocolates and pralines producer has acquired its smaller competitor Corné Port Royal. Neuhaus operates some 1,000 outlets in 50 countries worldwide, while Corné has a strong local presence, especially at Brussels Airport.

Energy

▶ Luminus

The local affiliate of France's EDF energy group has outbid Electrabel and ENI for a €45 million contract with railway authority NMBS to supply electricity for the period 2014-2016.

Holdings

▶ Sofina

Brussels-based holding company Sofina has bought a stake in Privalia, a Spanish online retailer of branded clothing.

Property ▶ Alliance
Développement

The French quoted property development group has transferred its Paris-based headquarters to Brussels.

Property

▶ Trevi

The Brussels-based real estate brokerage is merging with the Flemish property management group Foncia. The move allows Trevi to develop a full range of services in Ghent, Antwerp, Hasselt and other parts of Flanders.

Property

▶ WDP

Industrial property developer WDP, based in Meise, just outside of Brussels, is investing up to €90 million in the port of Ghent area over the next five years to build 180,000 square metres of warehouses and logistics facilities. The first building is expected to be ready in early 2014.

Nuclear plants can re-open, says FANC

Greenpeace threatens legal action, as the decision sits with the government

Alan Hope

Environmental activist organisation Greenpeace has announced it will file a legal complaint against the federal government for negligence in connection with the re-opening of the nuclear reactors Doel 3 (pictured) and Tihange 2. Last week, the federal agency for nuclear safety (FANC) said the two generating plants, which were closed last year when hairline cracks appeared in the reactor casings, could safely re-open.

Greenpeace opposes the re-opening and has already filed suit against the government for not having a nuclear emergency plan. "That still hasn't been produced," the organisation's



energy manager Eloi Glorieux said. "On the contrary, the risk is now being increased by the re-opening of the reactors. The government is not

taking its job – the protection of the population – at all seriously." According to the FANC, the "most likely" explanation for the fissures

in the reactor casings is hydrogen reactions during the casting process, meaning they have been present since the beginning and are not in danger of becoming any worse. "We can't live with 'most likely explanations'," Glorieux said. "Considering the risks, we can only be satisfied with 100% certainty." Greenpeace also criticised the tests, which were carried out in lab conditions. "It's not the same thing," said Glorieux. "That test material has not been exposed for 30 years to bombardment by neutrons and enormous heat stress."

The decision on when – or whether – to re-open the two reactors is now for the government to take.

Tom Boonen under
investigation in tax case

Flemish pro cyclist Tom Boonen is being investigated by the Kortrijk prosecutor's office in connection with a massive case of tax fraud, which last week saw investigators carry out 40 search warrants in Belgium and Luxembourg.

The case centres on a West Flanders accountant who is alleged to have helped clients evade taxes by setting up fiscal shell companies in Luxembourg and Cyprus. Boonen is thought to be being investigated in relation to the time he spent living in Monaco.

The cyclist's team manager, Paul De Geyter, has confirmed that Boonen last year came to an agreement with the tax inspection agency of the finance ministry in connection with a

separate investigation. De Geyter declined to give details of the sums of money involved, but said Boonen had paid the tax due.

Other reports said that the names of other top cyclists, as well as the Omega Pharma-Quick Step manager Patrick Lefevere, had cropped up in the investigation.

The accountant denied his involvement in anything illegal. An independent consultant, he said that he has "activities in various countries, but I want to formally deny any involvement in this case. I didn't even know an investigation was under way. The search was unexpected, but everything went smoothly. The investigators did take away several files."

Baggage handlers back to work

Baggage handlers working for Swissport at Brussels Airport have ended a four-day strike that wreaked havoc on flights and passengers flying into and out of Zaventem last week.

Unions at Swissport were protesting at split shifts, understaffing and stress of work, which regularly saw crews of only two handlers assigned to the baggage of whole flights. In September last year, Swissport took over its rival Flightcare, and unions say the company has been introducing its cost-cutting methods at Zaventem since then. The company also recently lost a major client, Jetairfly, to rival Aviapartner.

The strike led to 59 cancelled flights and passengers on other flight leaving without their luggage. Incoming passengers had to depart the airport without their luggage or search for hours amid tens of thousands of bags. Brussels Airlines threatened to cancel its contract with Swissport, while

federal transport minister Melchior Wathelet threatened to fine the unions for each day the strike continued.

Swissport CEO Per Utnegaard showed up personally on Thursday evening to speak to union representatives, who presented him with three demands in addition to the plan worked out previously with management: the end of two-man teams; a maximum of 300 pieces of baggage per flight; and a personal guarantee that all agreements would be respected. "He agreed to everything immediately," said a union representative. "He was really angry."

On Friday, baggage operations at the airport were back to normal, with Swissport also working to clear the backlog of luggage left behind – a mountain of bags that at one point numbered 20,000. The airport company said passengers should wait to be contacted rather than show up to claim their luggage.

Road delays "limited" during summer

Traffic delays caused by roadworks in Brussels will be "limited" this summer, mobility and public works minister Brigitte Grouwels has promised, announcing the region's plans for the coming months. The works consist of five main projects:

- Restructuring of the Rogierplein in the city centre, due to start in May and last until the end of 2014. Diversions for motor traffic will be in operation on the square and in Vooruitgangstraat, while public transport, cyclists and pedestrians will not be affected.
- Resurfacing of the Gentsesteenweg at the junction with Keizer Karellaan in Sint-Agatha-Berchem from 5 August to 9 September. Diversions are in operation, with lane closures on the Keiser Karellaan.

- Waterlooesteeweg in Ukkel will be closed from 1 July to 2 September to allow the construction of a dedicated tram lane between Legrandlaan and Winston Churchilllaan. From 14 to 19 August, the junction of Waterlooesteeweg with Winston Churchilllaan will be closed except for one lane in the direction of Tercamerenbos.

- Resurfacing work on the canal bridge on Paepsemalaan in Anderlecht will run from 1 July to 31 August, with diversions in operation.

- In Schaarbeek, the Lambermontlaan will see partial lane closures between 1 July and 4 October as work is carried out on underground gas lines. The road will remain open.



Dedecker stripped of immunity, could face charges

Jean-Marie Dedecker, the former national judo coach who is now the sole representative in the federal parliament of his self-named LDD party, had had his parliamentary immunity lifted by a vote of 85 to 14, with 35 abstentions. Under Belgian law, members of parliament are immune from prosecution for acts

carried out in the furtherance of their duties and on other charges so long as they are serving.

The request for a vote lifting Dedecker's immunity came from the prosecutor-general of Antwerp, Yves Liegeois. Dedecker is accused of falsifying legal documents, in particular a contract by which he

employed a private detective to investigate the financial affairs of leading liberal Karel De Gucht, now a member of the European Commission. The case involves Dedecker writing and back-dating a false contract after the investigation had been leaked to the press.

Dedecker defended himself during

the debate on the motion, claiming the leak had been engineered by Open VLD liberals with the collusion of a former LDD member. Despite losing his immunity, Dedecker can carry on as a member of parliament, unless he is convicted and is stripped of his political rights by a judge.

The small print

EU Court rules that Flanders' language decree infringes on workers' free movement

Angela Chambers

A Flemish labour law infringes the freedom of movement for cross-border workers, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has found. The language decree, implemented in 1973, says that all employment contracts in Flanders must be in Dutch and documents in other languages are considered invalid.

Philippe Muyters, Flemish minister for work, says that while workers' freedom of movement is a "fundamental right within the EU," the Flemish decree was "seen as a legitimate exception because it serves the general interest of promoting the Dutch language and encouraging workers to comprehend it".

The ECJ's decision last month notes that EU law doesn't dissuade a country from protecting its official languages or national identity. However, in this instance, the court believes it is less prejudicial to freedom of movement if the employee and employer find a common language they both understand well to use in a contract. The case before the ECJ concerned Anton Las, a Dutch national resident in the Netherlands hired by container terminal operator PSA Antwerp in 2004 with a work contract written in English. In 2009, Las was dismissed, and his severance package was based on the English-language contract. Las brought his case to the Belgian Labour Court, saying the contract's stipulations were null because it wasn't written in Dutch.

The Belgian court asked the ECJ whether this decree infringed workers' freedom of movement. This led to the ECJ's judgment, which says measures shouldn't place "EU nationals at a disadvantage when they wish to pursue an economic activity" in another member state. Brussels doesn't have a law stating that work contracts drawn up in a language other than Dutch or French are invalid, the employment



department of the Brussels-Capital Region confirms. But the Brussels law does stipulate that Belgians coming from the Walloon region have the right to have their contracts in French, while those coming from the Flemish region have the right to a contract in Dutch. This law doesn't apply to non-Belgians living in those regions who come to work in Brussels.

Expat experiences

This case started in Antwerp, a city that claims to be the most diverse in the world with roughly 175 nationalities. Naturally, it has a strong expat community, with multiple organisations and informal groups catering to its needs.

Of 12 Antwerp expats from various countries and job situations interviewed for this article, most say they received an English translation of their employment contract, but the official document they signed was in

Dutch. A few say their contract was solely in English, while three say their contract was only in Dutch.

Lowry Curley, an expat working at the University of Antwerp, says there was no confusion in his employment contract because he was given an English translation. He did, however, need help from colleagues or online translation sites to understand documents from other Flemish authorities, as his visa application, health insurance, bank account and more were all in Dutch. "The people at work were extra nice to help me translate, and it's understandable it wasn't in English considering all the possible languages," says Curley.

When Roma Jakubow was looking for freelance work, one contract was only provided in Dutch, but she says the employer made sure she understood each detail. She says this explanation made her feel comfortable with the contract.

Grace Hourihane of Antwerp, who formerly worked for an international school, says she signed her contract in Dutch with no English translation. This initially made her uncomfortable, even though it was explained in English. It became a bigger issue when she and the management team were fired last September when a new company bought the school.

The position only required Hourihane to speak English since the school teaches the English education system. She knows the difficulty of getting other jobs here because, even if the office language is English, most still require a good level of Dutch. But her views on the free movement of workers are mixed.

"It may sound strange, but the Belgians have the right to protect their economy any way they can, even though free movement of people is allowed throughout Europe," she

says. "Unlike individual states in the US, the member states of the EU are not obliged to co-operate with one another. This is the fundamental problem with the EU."

EU comparisons

No case like the one in Flanders has been an issue in other member states, as the ECJ doesn't know of any similar language decree, says spokesman Christopher Fretwell. He says freedom of movement is a "cornerstone of EU law", and within the last year, 22 cases have been brought before the court concerning this subject.

While France's Labour Code notes that employment contracts must be in French, it also says that if a translation is requested, it must be provided. There is no such law in Flanders. Both the French text and the one in another language are considered equally valid by the French justice system.

In the Netherlands, there is no law that says a work contract must be in Dutch to be considered valid. "There are many English employment agreements in the Netherlands, and it is always valid," says Babise de Laive, who works for law firm Kernkamp Advocaten in the Netherlands.

Switzerland, like Belgium, has three official languages: German, French and Italian. However, Switzerland's Federal Office of Justice confirms there is no law that says a work contract should be in any specific language for it to be valid.

The ECJ doesn't make the final decision on Flanders' language decree, as this is left to national jurisdiction. If the Belgian Labour Court agrees with the EU's judgment, Muyters says Flanders will work to adjust the decree. "Right now, we are examining various options," he says. The ECJ's opinion will, however, affect cases that may appear in other member states.

Concern over cultural subsidy for MVV

Studio 100 says subsidy for Musical van Vlaanderen is distortion of competition

Alan Hope

Opposition party Open VLD has called on Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege to suspend €850,000 in subsidies approved for Musical van Vlaanderen (MVV). The agreement to grant the subsidy request has already led to criticism of "distortion of competition" by Hans Bourlon, CEO of Studio 100, which produces commercial musicals without subsidies.

MVV is a non-profit set up by Music Hall Group, which owns a number of concert venues, including Vorst Nationaal in Brussels, the Capitole in Ghent and the Antwerp Stadsschouwburg. According to

critics, Music Hall is experiencing financial difficulties, including the non-payment of stage and technical staff.

Writing in *De Standaard* last week, senator Jean-Jacques De Gucht of Open VLD said the money should be held back until there is more clarity regarding the company's finances. "The risk exists that every euro pumped into this project by the taxpayer will go towards filling up financial holes" and not, said Gucht, for productions.

While actors, sound and lighting personnel went unpaid, he said, the money from subsidies was being paid by MVV to Music Hall Group

for the rental of its own venues.

The subsidy had already been criticised in political and cultural circles because the amount is so high: €850,000 out of a total budget of €3.18 million in this round, and because MVV had been refused a structural, multi-year subsidy last year after its plans were severely criticised on artistic and financial grounds by the advisory committees reporting to Schauvliege.

This latest round of financing concerns project subsidies, which are intended to support small-scale and more experimental projects. A previous project subsidy received by MVV had to be paid back after

the musical based on the opera *La Bohème* failed to materialise.

According to Schauvliege, the advice this time was positive on



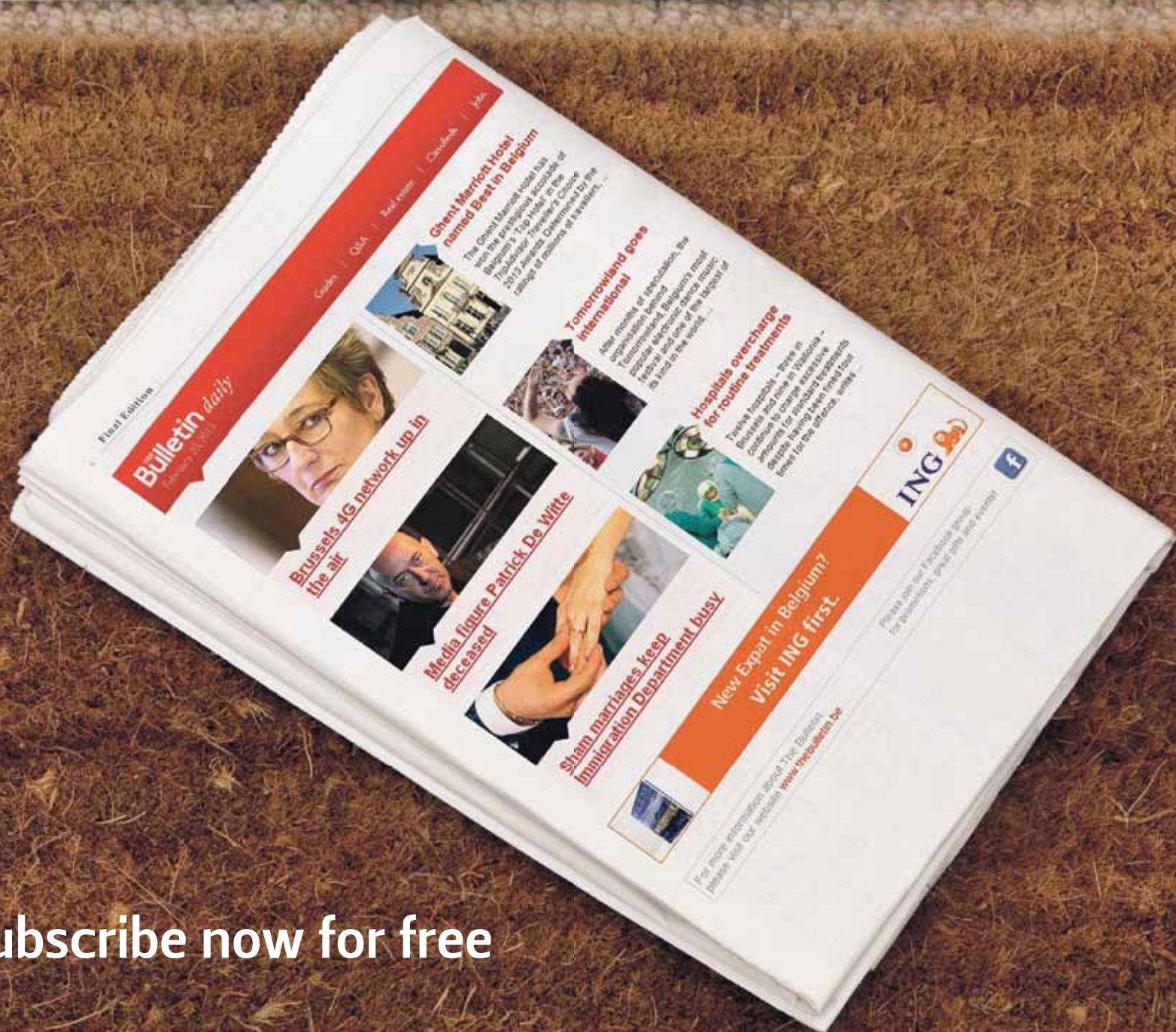
Musical van Vlaanderen's *Bex X: The Musical*, was staged earlier this year

business grounds and negative on artistic grounds. "I try as much as possible to follow the advice I receive, but I do occasionally differ if there is a risk of a particular genre disappearing," she said. The project concerned this time is a musical of Assepoester, or Cinderella – the same subject chosen by Studio 100 for a production they have now cancelled.

"We had it planned for 2014," Bourlon said. "Another player has now received money from the government. We have scrapped our plans, which amounts to bringing our activities to an end as a result of subsidies for the competition."

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The core of the matter

Scientists at KULeuven examine the inner workings of our food

Andy Furniere

CT scanners have long been helping doctors detect possible risks for our health, but scientists are now using them to screen our food as well. At the University of Leuven (KULeuven), the MeBioS research team are leading a European project that provides a unique 3D view of the interior of fruit and vegetables. The insights offer the possibility not only to check and improve the quality of our daily meals, but also to experiment with new food products made by 3D food printers. The recent InsideFood symposium of the MeBioS (Mechatronics, Biostatistics and Sensors) group was the first international conference dedicated to research on the microstructure of food. It was the conclusion of a four-year collaboration between 12 European research institutes and companies, co-ordinated by MeBioS and funded by the European Commission. Scientists X-rayed apples, bread, cheese and mousses to create 3D images of how they look on the inside. What appears on their screens is in reality about half a micrometre large, about the thickness of one hundredth of a hair. When looking at photo and video material of the interior of apples, it seems like there is a network of veins running through the fruit, making them look strangely human. “We see channels through which water and sugar are transported from the tree into the growing fruit, and air pores through which oxygen flows to different cells,” explains professor Bart Nicolai, who heads the MeBioS team. The resulting spongy structure determines the texture of food, like the crunchiness of apples.

Hibernating fruit

For the food sector, this knowledge creates possibilities to improve the preservation of food through better



The vascular system of an apple, as visualised by MeBioS at the University of Leuven

cooling techniques. The quality of apples, for example, is preserved by reducing the oxygen concentration in the cells. “It’s like they are put into hibernation until there is a demand from consumers,” says Nicolai. “A better understanding of the role of the microstructure in this process will help to refine the storage techniques.” Companies are very interested in the advance of X-ray technology, to screen their food for possible defects. When the MeBioS group was founded 15 years ago, the scientists had to conduct experiments in a particle accelerator – a huge machine for high-energy physics research, located at specialised centres abroad. For a few years, though, KULeuven has had its own CT scanners of a practical size, and

enterprises can use smaller and cheaper equipment. The next challenge is to design systems where the technology can be used more efficiently for inspection at food processing plants, without slowing down or increasing the costs of their business.

Future food

The discovery of how the microstructure forms food’s texture could mean a breakthrough in 3D food printing. The Dutch research organisation TNO (Toegepast Natuurwetenschappelijk Onderzoek or Applied Natural Scientific Research) experiments with the printing of chocolate, for example, but MeBioS could provide the expertise to perfect the crunchiness that would make it tasty enough

for the market. The TNO scientists also believe the techniques could help introduce insects into our diet. Nicolai says: “Their healthy proteins could be added to the paste used in printing all kinds of food.” The InsideFood symposium also raised a lot of curiosity among top chefs, who smelt the opportunities of creating a whole range of new food products. “In the future, it may be possible to print meat with the texture of bread,” says Nicolai. Such experimental haute cuisine will probably only appeal to a select group of gourmets, but the techniques may gradually influence the food that appears on our plates. Adding more air to the microstructure of bakery products, for example, would also reduce the number of calories without affecting the taste. To follow up on the results of the InsideFood project, MeBioS has assembled a Flemish consortium of knowledge institutes in the TomFood project, supported by the Flemish Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology for four years. The goal is to develop innovations for the Flemish industry, from new CT scanners to more affordable equipment for evaluating the quality and safety of the products in Flemish food processing plants. The Ghent University is responsible for the food scanning, while the University of Antwerp constructs the 3D images of the microstructure. The Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research focuses on applications for the dairy sector, University College Thomas More Kempen investigates the possibilities for bakery products and MeBioS is concentrating on fruit and vegetables. Research on meat is not included as it doesn’t have the necessary spongy microstructure.

► www.insidefood.eu

Q&A

Professor Jaco Vangronsveld, director of Hasselt University’s Centre for Environmental Sciences, is an expert on phytoremediation

Phytoremediation is the use of plants to clean up contaminated soil and groundwater, isn’t it?
The plants are in fact the hosts of a “cleaning team” of bacteria. The bacteria on or inside the plants interact with the bacteria at the contaminated sites and the plants convert the pollutants into carbon dioxide (CO₂) and water. If the pollution is concentrated in the groundwater deep under the surface, we plant trees such as poplars, which grow quickly and can suck up large quantities of water. In a few years, plants can clean up an entire field in an organic way.

What are the main advantages of this method?
It’s relatively cheap and the

ecological footprint is very low. You only need to plant and care for the flora, which use the power of the sun to fulfil their task. Classic remediation methods consist of digging off a layer of soil or pumping out the groundwater, after which the soil or water is purified at specialised centres. This way of working requires a lot of energy and transport activity, resulting in a big impact on the environment.

Why is it not the standard technique yet?
First of all, you cannot always apply this green method; it’s impossible if buildings are in the way for example. We also need to keep refining the technique, but the main reason is that the enterprises of the sector



are not acquainted enough with phytoremediation. Fortunately, the situation is changing. Since we

started this research in the middle of the 1990s, we have opened many eyes here and abroad.

You’re now providing expertise for a demonstration project by consultancy firm Arcadis
The goal of Arcadis and the Flemish waste management agency OVAM, which is partly financing this project, is to raise awareness of this natural method among actors in the land remediation sector. The Arcadis project is taking place at Genk, where our team is also involved in cleaning up a site of car manufacturer Ford. We are also collaborating with partners from 10 countries in the European project Greenland.

► www.uhasselt.be/CMK

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and Ghent University have installed new, rare **technology for high resolution microscopy**. The CLEM technology (Correlative Light Electron Microscopy) allows researchers to make recordings of living cells, which can afterwards be enlarged on a nanometre scale. Flemish innovation minister Ingrid Lieten committed €3 million to the project. Currently only five laboratories worldwide have the necessary equipment for such high tech microscopy.

The government of Flanders and Ghent University are hosting the 12th **congress of the International Society of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity**, which will take place in Ghent from 22-25 May. About 800 participants from all over the world will take part in symposiums, presentations, debates and workshops. Key themes are healthy food and physical activity, in an effort to counter the growing problem of obesity.

The Artificial Intelligence Lab at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) celebrated its 30th anniversary with the **premiere of the comic opera Casparo** last week at Théâtre Molière. The opera, with a robot as the main character, was written by VUB professor of artificial intelligence Luc Steels, who used technology from his lab to create the piece, together with other scientists of the faculty.

Students with humanities-based secondary school diplomas **lack adequate knowledge of finance, economic and social issues**. That is the conclusion of research carried out by students in teacher training at the Artevelde University College Ghent. Just under 1,200 students from the third year only reached an average score of 43% on a test of 20 multiple choice questions. In the meantime, Belgian bank KBC and Limburg Catholic College (KHLim) developed the Skillville game to teach youngsters the basics of insurance and financing.

The Flemish League of Catholic Education has introduced **contact centre training** for students in the third year of vocational schools. Starting this autumn, 22 schools will offer the training, which was prepared in cooperation with the Association of Belgian Contact Centres. The organisation expects about 200 students in the first year.



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The Flemish Islands of Canary

During your holiday, give a little nod to the Flemish who settled on the islands 400 years ago

Toon Lambrechts

The Canary Islands. A somewhat old-fashioned, but still very popular holiday destination for many Flemings. Sun, sea and beach, what more do you want? What many travellers do not know is that a large Flemish community lived on the islands during the 16th century. It is hard to spot traces of the Flemings who settled on the Spanish archipelago at the time. Only a handful of names refer to their presence. For example, the Caldera de Bandama, a breathtaking volcano crater on the island of Gran Canaria, is named after the Flemish Vandamme family. Similarly, there are street names such as Vandale Plaza and Westerling Street. And those who visit the Tazacorte valley on the island of La Palma should consider that once some Flemish families had vast sugarcane plantations here. The Canary Islands are located off the coast of Morocco, but are still a part of Spain. Despite their remoteness, evidence has been found suggesting that the Romans set foot there. The Portuguese made a few reluctant attempts to occupy the islands in the 14th century, but without succes. The Spaniards finally succeeded a century later, but not without a fight. The islands were already inhabited, home to the Guanchos, a people related to the Berbers on the African continent. The Guanchos offered fierce resistance against Spanish colonisation, but eventually lost the battle. Most died of new diseases, and the rest were enslaved. (A harbinger of what would happen later during the colonisation of America.)



The picturesque Vandale Plaza on the island of La Palma is named after the famous Flemish family



Tourist attraction extraordinaire, the volcano crater Caldera de Bandama is named after a Flemish family

Soon, the islands were an important final stop for Spanish ships making the crossing to America. Large plantations were established on the islands to grow sugar cane, grapes and orchilla, a lichen used to make dye. Trade between the outlying islands and mainland Europe flourished. And trade attracts people. It was Italian merchants from Genoa who established the trade

route between Flanders and the Canaries. Via Cadiz, the first ships carrying sugar and Canary orchilla reached the port of Antwerp in 1508. Antwerp had grown spectacularly after the decline of Bruges and at that time was part of the Spanish empire. It became Europe's main port of entry for sugar in the decades to come. So it did not take long before traders from Antwerp sailed off themselves in the direction of the Canary Islands, not only to sell goods but to set up sugar plantations. By the middle of the 16th century, a large Flemish community lived in the Canary Islands, not only from Antwerp, but also from Bruges and the rest of Flanders, which was then called the Southern Netherlands. Most were sugar growers or traders, but there were also craftsmen who made the crossing, especially barrel makers. Sugar production in the Canary Islands was dominated by two Flemish families: The Van Dales and the Groenberghs. Both families would give their names a Spanish touch, changing them to Van Dalle and Monteverdes. **Suspect Flemings** Meanwhile, unrest spread over Europe. Protestants and Catholics massacred each other, including in the lowlands. There was a revolt against Spanish rule, and during the *Beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury), many churches and abbeys were destroyed. Spanish King Philip II sent the Duke of Alva to restore order, and he brought with him the Inquisition. That worked out only partially. The Northern Netherlands were lost forever.

The events in Europe seeped through to the Canary Islands. The Inquisition was already, from the beginning of colonisation, active on the islands, but strengthened its grip. And every "Flamenco" was already a suspect in any case. Many Flemings were tried, often based on questionable evidence, though there were devout Protestants among them. Some of them were burned at the stake. The zeal by which the Inquisition persecuted possible heretics had to do not only with faith; the Spaniards had prohibited all trade between the islands and the rebellious Northern Netherlands. But trade is trade, and soon a lively smuggling network developed. The Inquisition checked all vessels that docked on the Islands for nationality and religious purity. But through the use of brokers and false documents, trade flourished as before. The fact that the Inquisition could confiscate the assets of convicted heretics must have been an extra motivation. Eventually the Spanish empire collapsed and lost its overseas colonies. The Canary Islands remained Spanish, and the Flemings, already well assimilated, dissolved into the Spanish population. The islands became a sleepy, distant corner of Spain, until mass tourism took off in the mid-20th century. Again, hordes of Flemings were drawn to the little islands, this time not for work or colonisation, but in search of sun and sea. The few traces of their predecessors 400 years earlier will likely have eluded them.

STREEKPRODUCT SERIES

Alan Hope

Strawberries of Hoogstraten

Our *streekproduct* series has traditionally concentrated on the regional food and drink products with the official *streekproduct*, or regional products, label awarded by the Flemish government's agricultural marketing agency Vlam. However, there are others out there hoping to encourage people to eat fresh local produce grown or manufactured by their neighbours in the area. Vlaanderen Lekker Land is an organisation spanning the five provinces, with the participation of the food service industry association Horeca Vlaanderen and the support of tourism minister Geert Bourgeois and Toerisme Vlaanderen. One of the things they do is appoint ambassadors, one town from each province, and give them a year to sell themselves to the rest of the region and the world. One of those ambassadors, Hoogstraten in Antwerp province, is just coming into the ripeness of its mission. Hoogstraten is famous for its *aardbeien*, or strawberries, and the local season is just beginning. Strawberries, perhaps more than any other fruit, depend greatly on the season. If you've been eating them all year



round, it may not occur to you there's a season at all. I advise you, in that case, to walk into a shop that's selling fresh local strawberries and see if you're not entranced by the way those luscious fruit seem to infuse the very air you're breathing,

their colour giving new meaning to the word "red". The world will suddenly seem like a sunnier place. Hoogstraten has been working flat-out to fulfil its mission as ambassador for the strawberry (strictly speaking not a berry at all, since its seeds are all on the outside). Among the attractions are an artisanal strawberry beer called Erbizzem – the local word for *aardbeien* – something you may think has been a long time coming. Steven Goetschalckx of Het Chocolatehuis has invented three pralines based on the strawberry, and 25 restaurants and cafes have got together to create a culinary itinerary of dishes based around the fruit. Away from strawberries, there's a beer-tasting route running until September, where the best beers of the Kempen area can be savoured. If you're up to it, there's a 60km cycle route taking in some of the Kempen's traditional cafes, where for €11 you can try a local beer in three places, each accompanied by a typical local snack. Tapas, eat your heart out. But don't forget to cycle safely.

► www.vlaanderenlekkerland.be

“

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Kaat de Corte (BSB alumna, Harvard College Class of 2014)

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Sweet bees are made of these

First album from Quasiland is filled with sparkling pop songs in Dutch

Christophe Verbiest

On their eponymously titled debut album, Quasiland alternate groovy, brisk pop songs with more subdued tunes. Most of the seven members play different instruments: guitar, bass, drums, keyboards and trumpet are prominent in the mix. The album just came out this spring, but Quasiland started in the summer of 2009 in the town of Tienen, Flemish Brabant.

"I had been asked to play a solo concert, but I wasn't keen to perform alone," explains lyricist and lead singer Wannes Deboes. "So I asked some extra musicians to join me. It wasn't yet the line-up we have now, but I consider it the beginning of Quasiland."

The group, who play a concert this week in Brussels, have been compared to the Dutch artist Spinvis, Flemish band Senne Guns, the Britons of Belle & Sebastian and New York adventurers Talking Heads. Deboes: "Honestly, apart from Talking Heads, I didn't know any of these artists when I was writing the songs for our album, so they cannot have been an influence." Although *Quasiland* contains a



The never-lonely Wannes Deboes is third from right

in the rock band Willow Tree Court. While studying in Leuven, he started writing his own stuff. "With a €5 microphone, I recorded myself singing and playing guitar, recorder, melodica and a cheap keyboard. Those were the seeds for the first songs."

"Some sound more logical than others."

One of the songs written with the latter strategy is "Zoete bij" (Sweet Bee). True, the words sound a bit mysterious: "Zoete bij / Hoffelijk / Niemandslan / Heilig" (Sweet bee / Courtly / No man's land / Holy). But when listening to it, I found myself giving them a meaning. "That's what I like about it," Deboes admits. "It makes the lyrics equivocal."

"Terrible accent"

Deboes tried writing in English, like so many of his pop contemporaries, but quickly turned to Dutch. "Honestly? I'm just not capable of writing in English. I lack the vocabulary. Moreover, I have a terrible accent. After English, I tried Spanish; I lived for a year in Peru. After that, French, and in the end I settled for Dutch. Though I sometimes still use some French." Singing in Dutch, of course, limits Quasiland's market to Flanders and

the Netherlands. Deboes: "I know, but I never started making music with the idea of finding a market. I did it because I liked it. I don't define my ambition as going on long tours abroad or playing at a specific festival. My ambition is to make music as well as I possibly can. I'm quite happy with our first album – but I'm sure we can do better."

Deboes is trained as a social worker; in his day job, he helps the unemployed gain new skills that can help get them back to work. It would be nice, he says, to be a full-time musician, "but I'm a realist: It's not going to happen soon. And even if music did generate an income, I think I will always keep on working part time, just to have some security." Background singer Abigail Singo-Magou, also Deboes' girlfriend, takes over the lead vocals in a few songs, though they were not written with that idea. "At one point we discovered some of them sounded better when she's singing them," explains Deboes.

And it keeps evolving. "We recorded 'Zoete bij' with me as the lead singer, but Abi sings it live. Probably she'll become more and more the voice of Quasiland. That way, I'd be able to concentrate more on guitar. It was actually never my ambition to become a singer. And if she sings more, I'll surely take that into account when writing the lyrics."



"I like browsing books and choosing words at random or putting myself in front of a computer and typing all the words that spring to mind"

song called "Helden" (Heroes), Deboes himself doesn't have any musical heroes. "I must admit that I don't listen to music a lot; I haven't added songs to my iPod for three years. But I really like Talking Heads, and when I was younger, I was very impressed by Neil Young's guitar playing. I'm happy, by the way, that I discovered Spinvis, because I've really come to like his music. And I have a weak spot for Nina Simone. I don't love everything she did, but her 'Beautiful Land' is an extraordinary song."

Before Quasiland, Deboes, who turns 26 in a month, played guitar

He starts out with the lyrics, he says, then moves on to matching them with music. "I never feel the urge to write about something that happened to me. Chances are very small I'll ever do that. I don't have the necessary literary talent for that, so I leave it to others."

Still, he has great fun *constructing* his lyrics. "They are a hodgepodge of words and short sentences. I like browsing books and choosing words at random. What I've also done is put myself in front of a computer and type all the words that spring to mind. These word eruptions might be integrated into lyrics." He smiles:

23 MAY, 20.00

Café Kafka

Visverkopersstraat 21, Brussels

► www.quasiland.be

MUSIC REVIEWS

Brussels Jazz Orchestra

BJO's Finest - Live! • Saphrane

Twenty years after they're inception, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra has developed into one of the most lauded big bands in Europe, and they're celebrating the jubilee with a couple of new CDs. Later this year, they will release the new studio album *Wild Beauty*. But first comes *BJO's Finest - Live!*, recorded at Flagey in Brussels during two concerts last winter. It contains only



compositions by members of the orchestra and is 75 minutes of pure beauty – classic but adventurous big band jazz. As jazz

chronicler Marc Van den Hoof puts it in his superb liner-notes: "The BJO doesn't age, it continues to outfox routine."

► www.brusselsjazzorchestra.com

Daan

Le franc belge • PIAS

After reworking old songs for *Simple* and the toned-down live album *Concert*, Daan pulls out all the stops on *Le franc belge* (The Belgian Franc, referring to the ancient currency). It's the Flemish singer's first studio outing in four years: Most of the

songs have a dominant orchestral arrangement, with Daan's voice twisting and twirling, fully loaded with emotions. Switching between French and English, he especially drops the mask in French. "*La vraie décadence c'est de ne pas dire ce qu'on pense*" ("Real decadence is not saying what you think"), he sings in "La vraie décadence". Drawing as much from Gilbert Bécaud as from Burt Bacharach, *Le franc belge* is Daan's most far-out album yet. Superb!

► www.daan.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Flemish artist **Koen Vanmechelen** has won a **Golden Nica** at this year's Prix Ars Electronica in the category of Hybrid Art. The Hasselt-based artist won the award, the most prestigious in the world for digital and interactive art projects, for his long-running Cosmopolitan Chicken Project. Vanmechelen breeds hybrid chickens as both a scientific experiment and social commentary on multi-ethnic identities and the ethics of genetic engineering. The prize comes with a €10,000 award and an exhibition of the project during the Ars Electronica Festival in September in Linz, Austria. Vanmechelen's project is currently on view in Washington, DC, and can also be seen later this year in Amsterdam and Venice.

► www.aec.at

Three Flemish TV series and one co-production have been **nominated for the World Media Awards**, better known as the Rockies, handed out at the Banff World Media Festival in Banff, Alberta, Canada. *Quiz Me Quick* is nominated for Best Sitcom, while sketch comedies *Loslopend wild* (known in English as *Foxies on the Run*) and *Wat als?* (*What if?*) are both nominated for Best Comedy. *Wat als?* won the category last year. The co-production *Picknick met taart* (*Picnic with Cake*) is nominated in the Cross-Platform Fiction Programmes section. Awards are handed out during the four-day festival, which begins on 9 June.

► www.banffmediafestival.com

American pop singer **Beyoncé** had to cancel her 14 May show in Antwerp's Sportpaleis due to illness. She was able to perform the following night's show, however, and the cancelled performance has been rescheduled to 31 May. Tickets for the cancelled show are valid for the later date or can be returned for a refund until 24 May. Any resulting available tickets to that show will be sold starting on 25 May.

► www.sportpaleis.be

If you feel guilty every time you can't be bothered to return your plastic cup to the counter at Ancienne Belgique and retrieve your 20 cent deposit, be concerned no more. The Brussels concert venue is **donating all unclaimed deposits** to the 12-12 campaign for Syria. The AB bars also have donation boxes so you can put in much more than €0.20. You can also donate during the venue's summer outdoor festivals Boterhammen in het Park and Feerieën.

► www.abconcerts.be

Double vision

After the Rehearsal & Pers

Ian Mundell

At first glance Ivo van Hove seems to be a great enthusiast for the cinema. Over more than a decade in charge of the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, the Flemish theatre director has staged adaptations of films by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Luchino Visconti and John Cassavetes. Yet he happily admits that he has never seen some of the films in question, while others remain distant memories. Instead of working with the film itself, he starts with the screenplay, treating it like any other theatrical text. The visual side of each film is of no interest. “It is important to me that our stage production is an autonomous production which doesn’t refer to the film, even though we play every sentence as it is in the scenario,” he says in an interview accompanying his latest production, a double bill based on Ingmar Bergman’s *After the Rehearsal* and *Persona*. His reason for turning to the cinema for inspiration is that these films deal with themes he does not find in plays,

or at least not in the same way. In this case it is a reflection on the theatre itself. *After the Rehearsal* is about an ageing director, Henrik, who embarks on a production of Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* in order to be close to a young actress, Anna. His fascination with her becomes clear as they talk, but memories gradually intrude of his relationship with another actress, Anna’s mother, Rakel. *Persona* (pictured) also involves an actress, Elisabet, who forgets her lines on stage and then loses the ability to speak entirely. Initially taken into hospital, Elisabet is sent by the doctor to recuperate on an island, with only the garrulous nurse Alma for company. The films hold distinctly different places in Bergman’s filmography. The director considered *Persona* (1966) one of his major works, a view shared by critics. Meanwhile, *After the Rehearsal* (1984) is a minor work, made for TV after Bergman had formally declared his cinema career



31 May to 2 June | Kaaitheater, Sainctelettesquare 20, Brussels | www.kaaitheater.be 8-9 June | deSingel Desguinlei 25, Antwerp |

SPECIAL EVENT

Feria Andaluza

Spain comes to Flanders for the 12th edition of Feria Andaluza. Some 30,000 visitors are expected to visit this free festival, which features music, dance, equestrian shows and, of course, authentic food and drink. Tapas and sangria? Yes, please. (The warm Spanish sun, on the other hand, had to stay down south). The Feria is put on by Antwerp’s flamenco centre Peña Al Andalus, so it’s not surprising to find the programme brimming with flamenco orchestras and instructional workshops for the rhythm-challenged (there’s even a special dance programme for kids). The fiesta continues late into the night with cocktails and Spanish DJs spinning steamy Latin club records. **Georgio Valentino**



24-26 May | De Schorre, Boom (Antwerp province)
www.feriaandaluza.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels
Yo!fest: Music festival hosted by the European Youth Forum, featuring free concerts, debates, workshops, a picnic and more
MAY 30-31 at the Esplanade of the European Parliament
www.yofest.eu

Ghent
Les Gôuts de Gand: Annual world music festival in Ghent’s historic Portus Ganda neighbourhood featuring free concerts all day long, a world market, after-parties and more

MAY 25 in and around St-Baaf’s Abbey Park, Voorhoutkaai 43
www.decentrale.be

Mol
Regional Products Market: Market inside abbey walls, featuring some 30 stands selling local cheeses, mustards, liqueurs and other products from Antwerp province
MAY 26 10.00-17.00 at the Norbertine Abbey of Postel, Abdijlaan 10
www.gemeentemol.be

CONCERT

Arctic Monkeys

Since the days of The Beatles, one of the UK’s chief pop-culture exports has been fresh-faced, high-energy guitar bands. Arctic Monkeys may not be in the same league as the Fab Four, but the Alex Turner-led quartet made their ascent to the top of the charts look blissfully easy, almost accidental. Naivety, it seems, is part of the charm. The Sheffield band remain a hot commodity after 10 years, four best-selling albums and numerous number one hits, including “I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor” and “Brianstorm”. They’re so hot, in fact, that if you’re keen to catch them on their autumn tour, you should reserve now. **GV**



9 November, 20.00 | Vorst Nationaal, Brussels |

CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels
Gianna Nannini: “Là Gianna”, one of Italy’s foremost pop singers
MAY 24 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110
www.abconcerts.be

Belgian Beatbox Championship: Fifth edition of the competition featuring artists battling for the honour to represent their country at the world championships
JUN 1 19.00 at KVS, Arduinkaai 7
www.beatbox.be

Ghent
Selda Bağcan: Turkish folk singer, who has gone from activist protest rock’n’roll today
MAY 26 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
www.vooruit.be

ona

over. In his memoirs he wrote that it was meant to be “a pleasant little episode on my road toward death”, put together for the pleasure of working with the actors. Bergman did not intend the two works to be paired, but van Hove sees them as complementary: One is about people who are willing to give everything for the theatre, the other about someone who suddenly finds it meaningless. “Both plays relate to each other like yin and yang; they are each other’s opposite. So when you bring them together, they give an even more complete picture.” The connections are emphasised by Marieke Heebink and Karina Smulders appearing in both plays, as Rakel/Elisabet and Anna/Alma respectively. The evening begins with *After the Rehearsal*, which at 75 minutes is roughly the same length as Bergman’s original. *Persona* follows after an interval, reduced to an hour as might be expected if Bergman’s rich visual storytelling is set aside.

► www.desingel.be

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FESTIVAL

Brussels Jazz Marathon

Once upon a time, the Brussels Jazz Marathon was a modest neighbourhood shindig, but today it is one of the capital’s biggest musical events. Hundreds of jazz cats from Belgium and abroad perform on four open-air stages (located strategically at the Grote Markt, Zavel, Sint-Katelijneplein and Fernand Cocqplein) as well as dozens of participating bars. And the whole thing is free. The city of Brussels is also throwing in free shuttle busses. The Marathon isn’t just for aficionados; everyone is invited to discover the depth and breadth of jazz. There’s classic jazz, world fusion and contemporary acts like the Neil Cowley Trio (*pictured*). The three Britons have made a name for themselves by blending jazz, avant-garde and pop/rock. Performing on opening night at the Grote Markt, Cowley and his crew were named UK Jazz Artist of the Year in January. **GV**



24-26 May | Across Brussels

► www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Kuurne (West Flanders)

Jazz Kuurne 2013: Jazz festival featuring the UK’s Neil Cowley Trio, Lionel Beuvens 4tet and Pure Elastic Quintet
MAY 25 18.30-00.30 at Kubox, Kattestraat 188
► www.jazzkuurne.be

Mechelen

Pataboem: New music festival within the walls of Mechelen’s *begijnhof*, featuring free concerts by a diverse array of bands, including Quinteto Aster, Fanfare Produit Blanc and De Letter Geletterden
MAY 25 16.00-23.00 at Groot Begijnhof Mechelen, Nonnenstraat
► www.groot-begijnhof-mechelen.be

Puurs

Duvel Blues Festival: Annual international blues festival, featuring American blues greats Otis Taylor, Eric Bibb and Trampled Under Foot, among others
MAY 25 at Hof van Coolhem, Coolhemstraat 64
► www.duvelblues.be

PERFORMANCE

Mush-Room

Choreographer Grace Ellen Barkey and her Brussels-based Needcompany are known for their whimsical contemporary performances. San Francisco’s gonzo music collective the Residents are, for their part, generally considered the weirdest pop group since Captain Beefheart. Geography aside, theirs is a most logical collaboration. And it has come to pass with the production *Mush-Room*, a bizarre but memorable romp through the fungal world, with Barkey’s dancers boogying to a score composed by the Residents. The bad news: the soundtrack is recorded, and so said Residents will not be performing live. **GV**



27-28 May, 20.30 | STUK, Leuven

► www.stuk.be

MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Marktplaats 76: Needcompany presents the latest production by director Jan Lauwers, which examines how people collectively cope with suffering and tragedy (in English)
MAY 30-JUN 1 20.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25
► www.desingel.be

Brussels

The Importance of Being Earnest: The Irish Theatre Company presents Oscar Wilde’s famous play, directed by Andrew McLroy (in English)
Until MAY 25 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
► www.bozar.be

Ghent

Sheepnoise & Shopping Bags: Flemish artists Annelien Vermeir and Claire Stragier’s don black masks for this interactive installation that creatively recreates the stages of processing textiles
MAY 29 & JUN 1 20.30 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
► www.vooruit.be

BITE

Robyn Boyle

Barnini ★★☆☆

In the neighbourhood off the Meir, Antwerp’s main shopping drag, you’ll find a lot of trendy places to have a drink or a bite to eat, most of which are modern and minimalist and not overly inviting. But then there’s Barnini, a welcome exception to the rule, wedged in along a row of characterless establishments.

Its green exterior and retro terrace call to mind the cosy coffee houses of world cities like Paris or Berlin. And that’s no coincidence, as the owner opened Barnini three years ago, inspired by similar places she found while studying in Berlin.

Inside is warmly and dimly lit and furnished with a mishmash of second-hand tables and chairs, no one matching any other. The sound of Bon Iver wafts through the speakers, as if asking us to stay for a while. So that’s exactly what my friend, her young son and I do on this Wednesday afternoon.

The four-year-old has a choice between six drinks on the “kiddy drinks” menu, including the cutely named Babycino, steamed milk with cacao powder, and Specumini, a mini hot chocolate with speculoos. But it’s the hot chocolate with whipped cream and colourful smarties on top that wins his vote. My friend enjoys her dreamy mango-banana smoothie, while I happily sip an iced latte from a straw.

Bagels being such a rarity on Flemish menus, we don’t hesitate to order three of them: one Popeye for our little Olympic hopeful, one Chick and one Smoske. The Popeye is the hands-down favourite, stuffed with strips of chicken, creamed spinach, parmesan cheese shavings and iceberg



lettuce. The Chick, meanwhile, is a scrumptious combination of chicken, avocado, guacamole mayonnaise and lettuce. My Smoske is made up the classic ham-and-cheese duo with heaps of mayo, hard-boiled egg, lettuce and tomato. But while the toasted bagel has a hole in the middle, it misses that essential bagel chewiness, making it more bread-like than anything else.

On to dessert: we split a hunk of bread pudding and a slice of chocolate brownie. The extra thick bread pudding is moist and dotted with bits of apple and dark chocolate.

The brownie, for its part, is so decadently rich and delicious that it makes me regret my next choice of drink: steamed milk with chocolate Maltesers melting away on top and an excessive drizzling of honey. This level of sugary goodness should probably go under the kiddy drinks menu, for it’s far too sweet for any adult taste buds.

My friend was smarter and ordered a double-shot cappuccino, which she enjoyed on the front terrace while her son watched the action in the skate park across the street. The bill comes to a reasonable €36, and we can’t even think about eating again for the rest of the day.

► www.tinyurl.com/Barnini-on-Facebook

- 📍 Oude Vaartplaats 10, Antwerp; 03 485 82 69
- 🕒 Mon-Sat 8.00-19.00; Sun 8.00-17.00
- € Lunch: €2-€5
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TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

Hey baby

“Antwerpse zoo verwelkomt nieuw aardvarken.” The Antwerp zoo welcomes a new what now? A new aardvark, a “burrowing, nocturnal mammal native to Africa”, according to Wikipedia, whose family name made its way from Dutch, via Afrikaans, into English. “Aarde” means earth or dirt, and “varken” means pig. “Het kleine, kale diertje heeft een roze, gerimpeld velletje,” it reads on the website of the zoo, which in Dutch is also known as “een dierentuin”, an animal garden. The small, bald animal has pink, wrinkled skin. (“Vel” means skin – “velletje” is the irregular diminutive.) “Het vreemde uiterlijk geeft het de looks van een buitenaards wezentje.” The strange appearance gives it the looks of an extra-terrestrial creature. (“Buiten” means outside.) Poor little bugger. Not a day old

and already being made fun of. And if its looks weren’t bad enough, it doesn’t even have a name yet, because, for testicular reasons I shall not elaborate on, we don’t know yet if it’s a boy or a girl. “De naam wordt bepaald als we het geslacht kennen,” the zoo says. The name will be determined when we know the sex. Contrary to what its name suggests, the aardvark is not related to *het varken*. Instead, hard to believe as it may be, the hairless animal is closer to *de olifant*, the elephant, or *de zeekoe*, the sea cow. (Note the irregular plural of *koe*, cow: *koeien*.) It was the second baby – which in Dutch is *baby* – in a week. The zoo had earlier welcomed the birth of a *monniksgier*, a monk vulture, *de grootste roofvogel van Europa*, the biggest bird of prey in Europe (“*roven*” is to rob or to prey upon; “*vogel*” is bird). “Deze geboorte is

uitstekend nieuws voor [...] deze bedreigde diersoort,” the zoo said. This birth is excellent news for this endangered species. Animal names have long been a favourite for kids and adults alike to learn more about a language – though I doubt if *aardvarken* or *monniksgier* are often part of the curriculum. Many a textbook includes phrases such as “*De hond zegt waf!*” The dog goes woof. Or: “*De kat zegt miauw!*” The cat goes meow. (In Dutch, animals don’t “go” but actually “say” things.) So, off to the zoo you go, to get a glimpse of Orion the baby monk vulture and ET the aardvark. And to catch up on Dutch animal names such as *de tijger*, *de leeuw*, *de aap*, *de giraffe*, *het nijlpaard* and, of course, a personal favourite, *de struisvogel*.

► talkingdutch@hotmail.com



The last word...

Boy in blue

“I want to catch bad guys. The police do that with dogs that sniff around the place.” Five-year-old Jorry had his dream come true last week, thanks to Brussels police and the Make a Wish Foundation, shortly before a serious heart operation

Prideful

“On the day of #BelgianPride, I am proud of our country, where tolerance and respect are not empty words but the legal reality.” A tweet by prime minister Elio Di Rupo. Belgian Pride attracted 80,000 to the streets of Brussels at the weekend

Plotted plants

“We have here in Belgium a rich tradition of garden designers, but only for flower gardens. Why shouldn’t it be possible to have the same sort of thing for a garden of fruit and vegetables?” Idea submitted by mobility expert Kris Peeters (not the minister-president) won an ideas competition organised by Flanders DC

Couch surfing

“Watching drama series in one go, and sometimes even losing sleep to do so, is a growing phenomenon.” With the rumoured arrival of Netflix (see p2), communications scientist Jo Pierson of iMinds in Ghent predicts a local outbreak of “binge-viewing”

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Perhaps you’ve seen on the news already a report on Antwerp artist Wim Tellier and his We Drift project. Known for his monumental art installations in unique locations, Tellier is busy preparing the next one, in which giant photographs will sail down the river Scheldt. We talk to the artist and his latest attention-grabbing project

Business

We’ve reported regularly on the current period in which businesses can bring any money they might have hidden in offshore accounts back to Belgium with no risk of persecution if they just pay their taxes and a reasonable fine. It’s good for the businesses, and the government gets more tax revenue. But its critics are harsh. We look at the pros and cons of fiscal amnesty

Tourism

Willy Vandersteen is one of Flanders’ most beloved strip artists. The creator of *Suske en Wiske* and *De rode ridder*, Vandersteen died in 1990 and is finally getting a show dedicated to him at the Belgian Comic Strip Center in Brussels