

Pay to play

A pilot project is set to measure drivers' reactions to paying a toll to enter Brussels

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Masters of Maaseik

The birthplace of the Van Eyck brothers is the first in our series of often over-looked Flemish towns

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Where wrinkles rule

Rimpelrock gets the over-50s involved in Flanders' massive music festival culture

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Taste of the future

Entrepreneurs of healthy fast food are discovering the challenges of sustainable business

Linda A Thompson

There is a subtle shift happening in the world of food: More and more young people are starting businesses that not only provide you with healthier food options but are determined to work sustainably while doing it. They are walking the talk, but with that comes challenges in the balance between making money and staying true to your ethic.

Every weekday morning, Mieke Dumortier mounts a sturdy cargo bike and begins her workday. Between 8.30 and 12.30, she makes a 50-kilometre trek around the Singel area of Antwerp to deliver half-litre refrigerated portions of soup – come rain or shine. After her round, Dumortier, known better by her business name Soepmie, locks herself away in her kitchen and begins making soup for the next day – always vegetarian and always with seasonal and organic produce.

“I want to do this as ecologically as possible,” says Dumortier (*pictured*). “For every aspect of Soepmie, I ask myself: ‘Is there a green way or a greener way to do this?’”

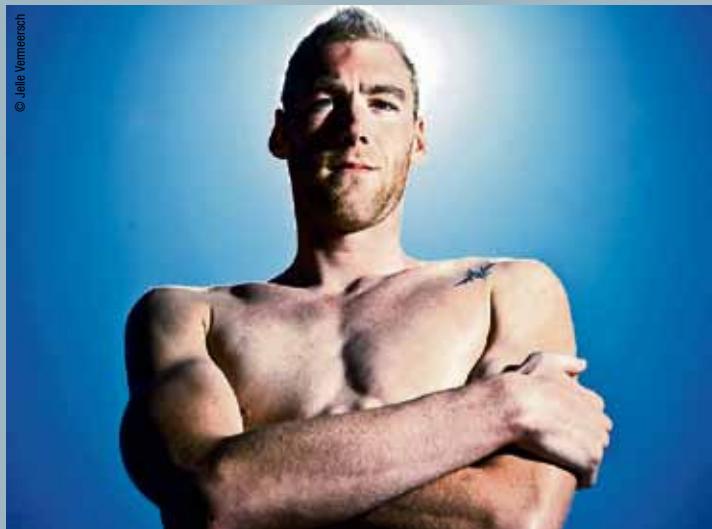
This ethos makes her one of a handful of young Flemish entrepreneurs determined to offer more healthy food options to consumers on a tight schedule or budget – or both. Combining an idealist streak with a nifty business approach, sustainable entrepreneurs like Dumortier share a desire to help Flemings eat more healthily and brand their products as a green and local alternative to industrially produced foods. From vending machines that dispense organic snacks (Coolbox) to weekly subscriptions to vegetables direct from the farm (Nieuw Vriesehof), these food-related start-ups and small businesses target consumers looking for shortcuts to a healthy and nutritious diet.

Many of the entrepreneurs behind these ventures are in their 20s and 30s. They represent a generation that is rebelling against business as usual, says Céline Louche, an

► continued on page 3

FACE OF FLANDERS

Brian Ryckeman



After a drought of 15 years, a Belgian athlete won a medal at the World Aquatics Championships, which finished up in Barcelona last week. Brian Ryckeman from Ostend walked away with silver in the 25-kilometre open water event. Two years ago, the serviceman in the Belgian army already won the European championship in the event.

Ryckeman, 29, follows in the championship footsteps of Flemings Frédéric Deburghgraeve and Brigitte Bécue. "Fredje" Deburghgraeve won gold in 1998 and bronze in 1994, while Brigitte Bécue was a bronze medallist at the Rome championships of 1994. After almost five hours of swimming laps in Barcelona's harbour, four swimmers entered the last line to the finish. Ryckeman lost in a nail-biting sprint only four-tenths of a second behind Germany's Thomas Lurz. It's an impressive time considering that Lurz is a multiple world champion in open-air swimming and won three other medals in Barcelona. "I don't know if I should be disappointed or happy," was Ryckeman's first reaction, speaking after the event to a reporter of Sporza, the sports channel of Flemish public broadcaster VRT.

The latter feeling seemed to prevail, as he recounted how he recently overcame a troubled time in his career. The 2012 Summer Olympics in London proved a major disappointment for the athlete: He started the 10k race with high hopes but only finished 16th. "After London, I didn't just start from zero again, but from below zero," said Ryckeman. "Until last December, I was hesitating about whether to continue competing, and I've only been training seriously since February." In the 10k race at Barcelona, Ryckeman reached 11th place.

His top-notch open water performance, though, gives rise to expectations for the European Championships next year and the World Championships in 2015. In 2016, Ryckeman could compete at the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, but he's then again have to concentrate on the 10k, as his favourite 25k race is not an Olympic discipline.

At the end of the interview with Sporza, the reporter noticed a jellyfish sting under Ryckeman's arm. Coolly, he told her how the jellyfish attacked him in the last 200 metres of the race, but that his whole body by then hurt too much to notice any pain that specific.

Andy Furniere

FLANDERS TODAY

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

News in brief

Antwerp's city council is considering introducing a **fast-track procedure for registering** with the municipality, alderwoman Liesbeth Homans said last week. The new measure is still being discussed but would probably cost the same the fast-track issue of a passport: €227.50. Opposition parties pointed out that registering with the municipality is a legal obligation and the introduction of a fast-track would slow down the registration process for those unwilling or unable to pay. Earlier this year, the city council approved a measure to make foreigners pay €250 for registration, but that decision was overturned by provincial governor Cathy Berx.

Lt-Gen Michel "Mike" Donnet, one of **Belgium's foremost heroes of the Second World War**, has died at the age of 96. Donnet escaped in 1941 from under the noses of the German occupier when, together with Léon Divoy, he hand repaired a Stampe SV-4 and flew it to England. A replica of the plane is on display in Brussels' Royal Museum of the Armed Forces. Donnet then joined the RAF and flew fighter missions, commanding 350 squadron of Belgian expat pilots. He later won the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). On his return to Belgium, he occupied several senior posts in the air force, retiring in 1975 as Lieutenant-General. At his funeral in Brussels this week, four F-16s flew over the city in Missing Man formation.

Federal mobility minister Melchior Wathelet last week fell 10 metres from a crane while seated inside a Smart car – but only as part of a campaign by the Belgian Institute for Road Safety. The bungee car-drop was designed to demonstrate the effects of a collision at 50 km/h and stress the importance of the use of seatbelts. The campaign runs for the rest of the month, aimed at the **one in six of all drivers who fail to buckle up**. Fines for non-use of

seatbelts, meanwhile, go up from €50 to €110 for adults, and to €165 for parents of children who are not fastened in.

Belgian animal rights organisation Gaia has started a campaign to inform consumers about the **extreme abuse of horses** in Romania and Argentina that are slaughtered for meat and sold in Belgian supermarkets. Gaia is trying to convince both Colruyt and Carrefour not to buy horsemeat from these sources. Lidl has stopped buying from those countries and now stocks only horsemeat from places with a proven humanitarian track record in the industry.

Nine cycling associations in Flanders signed a **new code of conduct for cyclists** last week, proposed by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters and mobility minister Hilde Crevits – both avid cyclists. The code contains 15 main points, including respect for the rules of the road and attention to other travellers, particularly walkers. The code also requests that racing cyclists avoid training during peak times for other recreational cyclists and avoid riding in large groups taking up the entire path.

► www.ikfietshoffelijk.be

The federal government has introduced a new law making it **illegal for scrap metal merchants to make cash payments** to sellers of copper, in an attempt to cut down on thefts of copper cable from the railways. Payments must now be made electronically via a bank account, making it possible to identify all sellers. Last year, there were 1,362 cases of theft of copper, 81% more than in 2011, and responsible for 1,100 hours of train delays.

Ten metro stations in Brussels are being tested with a new cleaning

product intended to **neutralise the smell of urine**, the public transport authority MIVB confirmed. The tests are being carried out in the stations most subject to complaints, including Beurs, Rogier, South Station and Simonis. The product is odourless, but the MIVB has not excluded the possibility of a "metro perfume", following the example of Paris.

Bruges city council has **removed the listed status of the controversial pavilion** by Japanese architect Toyo Ito, which stands on the Burg square. The glass pavilion was built in 2002 to mark Bruges' period as European Capital of Culture and was intended to stay for two years. However, it has stood in the square since, in a condition of growing disrepair. Last week's decision, mayor Renaat Landuyt said, will allow the council to go ahead with plans to renovate the entire square. Where the Ito pavilion will wind up has not yet been decided, but Landuyt said it would not be destroyed.

A mass was held in the cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula in Brussels last week to mark the **20th anniversary of the death of King Boudewijn**, who died of heart failure while on holiday in Spain in 1993. The mass was attended by the adult members of the royal family and officiated by Cardinal Danneels.

Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten has extended official recognition to **eight new radio stations**, which will be granted radio frequencies: Bilzerse Omroep Organisatie in Bilzen (Limburg province); Kalmthout FM/KFM, Story FM Arendonk, Radio Boemerang in Essen and Radio Lille (all in Antwerp province); FM Overijse and Radio Glabbeek (Flemish Brabant); and Rodenbachstad FM in Roeselare (West Flanders).

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

What a week

Just a few weeks ago, Planckendael animal park in Mechelen reported that its population of storks had reached a record of 72, smashing the previous record of 60 set in 2008. Last week it became clear what the consequences of an increase in the stork population are: babies popping out all over.

That's the conclusion you might jump to, anyway, based on news last week from Planckendael, which is part of the Royal Zoological Society of Antwerp. Last Sunday, the wide savannah habitat in the park echoed to the sound of a new set of little hooves. They belong to Okoth, a Grévy's zebra born to 21-year-old Fanny, and the first male zebra born at Planckendael in eight years. Okoth, whose name means "born in the storm" because he arrived during a thunderstorm, is a member of an endangered species numbering about 2,500 in Southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. Planckendael, which now has eight Grévy's zebras, is part of the worldwide breeding programme.

Then, barely a day later, keepers saw two legs emerge from the pregnant Diamant, one of the giraffes living on the savannah alongside the zebras. Three hours later a visibly impatient young male – a normal delivery takes four or five hours – made his appearance. While newborn baby elephants have to watch out



Welcome, Okoth

they're not trampled by aunts and cousins crowding around, newborn giraffes have another problem: a fall of some two metres brought about by the giraffe's anatomy. A rather distressing video of such a delivery can be viewed on the Planckendael website. The baby had not yet been given a name as *Flanders Today* went to press; that task will be the responsibility of the viewers of Ketnet, whose cameras were on the spot to record the birth. The youngster is Diamant's third child, and all born at Planckendael. He can expect to grow to about 5.3 metres.

► www.planckendael.be

Taste of the future

Flemish start-ups target consumers who want a straightforward way to a healthy diet

► continued from page 1

associate professor of strategy at the Audencia Nantes School of Management in France, who taught at the Vlerick Business School in Ghent until recently. "They don't want to continue the way we do business because they see that it doesn't make sense," she says. "There is a generation here that is really more aware of social and environmental impact, and they want to change something."

Sustainable entrepreneurs try to reduce the negative social, environmental and economic impact of their ventures. According to Louche, it's no surprise that so many sustainable food businesses have popped up over the last few years. Crises, financial or otherwise, prompt reflection, she says. "It's a time when people, especially young people, start to ask questions. Is it really working? Can we do it differently?"

Even the most Belgian of all fast-



everything in a sustainable way." Soepmie, meanwhile, has grown from a quaint one-woman start-up to an established small business in two short years. First, Dumortier branched out by adding salads and other light dishes to the menu; later she began catering events and parties and hired her first employee. Finally, she opened a lunch spot in the Antwerp North area. She doesn't feel like this trajectory has in any way betrayed her modest beginnings: "You try to stay small, but you sort of grow automatically." Pointing out that most of the



Smartmat not only delivers groceries to your door, it gives you the recipe to make from them (left)



© Hilde Christiaens / UGent
Ghent's travelling Natuurfrituur offers all-organic fries and toppings

"There is a generation here that is really more aware of social and environmental impact, and they want to change something"

food has received a sustainable upgrade. The Natuurfrituur in Ghent offers only organic fries in addition to vegetarian grub like spinach nuggets, "vol-au-veggie" and "not dogs", all made with local and organic ingredients. It was nominated for the Grote Prijs voor de Toekomstige Generaties (Grand Prize for Future Generations), which puts sustainable initiatives in the limelight. In December, Lucie Evers, who runs Natuurfrituur, told a local paper: "If you can make a Flemish staple like fries in a sustainable way, you can make

changes came in response to customer demand, she says: "It's a constant struggle for balance – what do you and what don't you take on?" When asked if she would expand to Brussels or Ghent, she sighs emphatically. "There are hundreds of opportunities. But I like doing my rounds. When you expand, you're doing something else. Then you're managing." Like Dumortier, many of the entrepreneurs behind these small-scale food businesses struggle to strike the right balance between the sustainable and business

dimensions of their projects. "That's the Achilles heel of this project," says Hans Cardyn, one of six volunteers running the non-profit Ministry of Ideas. This grassroots online platform aims to give more visibility to eco-pioneers and currently has 36 "ministers" whose portfolios have oddball titles like happy bees, food woods and solar cooking. "It's something we haven't really figured out yet," Cardyn says of the tension between business and sustainability.

Some time ago, Cardyn linked up one of their ministers, Bruno Van Haudenhuyse, with a consultant. Van Haudenhuyse had found a way to grow fungi on recycled waste materials like coffee dregs and cardboard and had used them to make croquettes. The consultant's business plan required Van Haudenhuyse to sell those croquettes at a very high price to turn his project into a profitable business – a deal breaker for Van Haudenhuyse. With the fungi, he had found something he enjoyed doing, something he hoped would inspire others. But he recoiled at the idea of becoming a manager and building a money-making enterprise.

That has been an issue for several of their ministers, says Cardyn. "If the idea is just to do things in a greener way, but otherwise adhere to the traditional business route of growth, growth, growth, then maybe we're not doing this the right

Antwerp but delivers across Flanders, had grown so much in the previous 10 months that they had to outsource the wrapping of their groceries, he explained. Plus, they were required by law to individually wrap the ingredients, even that one little red onion.

More power

That was then. Today, Smartmat, has more subscribers – and more clout. As they have grown – with currently 450 subscribers across Flanders, up from 300 in March – Åsarby has increasingly been able to nudge the companies they work with to take a greener route. "When you tell your suppliers they have to start offering organic carrots, and you only have seven customers, that's not very impressive," he says – adding that the groceries are now wrapped with much less plastic. Åsarby has been pushing his customers, too. Emphasising that Smartmat tries to educate its subscribers, he says: "We help people discover new products, like bulgur and quinoa, and learn new ways of cooking." He has had "zero pressure" from customers to provide organic produce, but in recent months he has gone the extra mile to obtain labelling from Certisys, the chief certification body for organic products in Belgium. "We chose to do it this way," he says, "because to help people to eat a little bit better is important to me. Sure, it's a job – but we're also trying to make the world a little bit better." Together with these small ventures, a host of businesses have cropped up that offer a more natural and health-conscious take on fast food snacks. Consider Hopdog, for instance, a gourmet food truck in Brussels that sells modern variations on the traditional hotdog with menus called Eco and Healthy, or Keep on Toasting – also in Brussels – with its grilled sandwiches made

"Sure, it's a job – but we're also trying to make the world a little bit better"

GET HEALTHY

Soepmie delivers a half-litre of fresh, organic, vegetarian soup to the door of your home or workplace. For €3. You read that right. They also do quiches, salads and pastas and even offer catering. If you prefer to pick it up or enjoy lunch at their cute eatery, head to Oranjestraat 94 in Antwerp.

► www.soepmie.be

Smartmat delivers groceries to your home together with recipes to use up everything in the packet. Once a week delivery gives one person enough meals to last the entire week. At least 25% of the food is organic, all is from local sources, and they deliver to most addresses across Brussels and Flanders

► www.smartmat.be

Natuurfrituur serves organic and vegetarian fries at its permanent home in Ghent at 5 Tinkstraat and also as a mobile *frituur* at events. You might think that fries are vegetarian, but the oil used to fry them is usually beef fat.

► www.tiny.cc/natuurfrituur

from Sweden (where it is known as Middagsfrid) says that with Smartmat he wanted to go against microwave culture, which he describes as "just barely food". Insofar as possible, the recipes steer clear of additives, artificial sweeteners and preservatives, and the dishes should be ready in 30 to 45 minutes. One evening in late January, Åsarby gave one of his customers a call. Earlier that day, she had posted a piece on her food blog in which she raved about the Smartmat concept but took Åsarby to task for the groceries' excessive plastic wrappings. "I, too, hate plastic," he told her. "But for now, we can't do it any other way."

Smartmat, which is based in

from organic bread. In Ghent and Antwerp, Moochie offers a low-calorie alternative to ice cream with "moochie" made from organic frozen yoghurt.

Louche is doubtful if businesses like these, with thin claims to sustainability, are here to stay. "If it's just a marketing gimmick, then in a couple of months or years they will be doing something else," she says. But she does believe that Flanders needs both the honest believers and the skin-deep sustainable entrepreneurs. "If you want to reach a critical mass to make a change in society, you need everybody to embark on these endeavours so that, rather than a niche, sustainability will become a more mainstream behaviour."

Murder suspect attempts suicide

Suspect in hospital, as funeral for Aurore Ruyffelaere takes place

Alan Hope

The funeral of Aurore Ruyffelaere, the 29-year-old woman who was murdered when returning to her car after the Gentse Feesten, was due to take place on Wednesday, 7 August, as *Flanders Today* went to press. The service is being held in the Westlede crematorium in Lochristi, just outside of Ghent. Ruyffelaere (pictured) is the daughter of Claire Tillekaerts, director of Flanders Investment and Trade, and the stepdaughter of renowned composer Dirk Brossé. A search was launched for Ruyffelaere, a resident of De Pinte, near Ghent, when she failed to

return home from an evening at the Gentse Feesten on 26 July. Her car, which was parked in a lot behind a business in the area of Sint-Denijs-Westrem, was also missing. Her body was found on Monday, 29 July in the boot of a car in the underground garage of a nearby apartment block. She had been strangled, but there was no sign of sexual assault, police said. The following day, police arrested Andrei Grigoriev, a Russian national living in Ghent legally. He had been using Ruyffelaere's bank card, was driving her car and matched the description given by another woman who had been

assaulted in the same parking lot the night before.

Grigoriev, 29, has denied killing Ruyffelaere. Later in the week while in custody, he slashed his wrists with a razor blade and is currently in stable condition in hospital.

At the weekend, current and former pupils of the Erasmus secondary school in Deinze, where Ruyffelaere worked as a teacher, were joined by her parents for a ceremony, which included the planting of a tree and the release of hundreds of white balloons, each carrying a message from a student.



Banner month at the Flemish coast

July was a banner month for businesses at the coast – the best in years, according to Franky De Block, chair of the West Flanders tourist agency Westtour, making up for a dismal spring and a disappointing June. Hotels were filled to 95% capacity and campsites were full, while food service businesses were run off their feet. The rail authority NMBS laid on extra trains to the coast. Last Friday, meanwhile, was the warmest 2 August since records began, as well as the warmest day of the year so far, with temperatures exceeding 36 degrees in Limburg. The previous night was also the warmest



of the year.

The month of July was 30% more sunny than the average for the time of year, according to the Royal Meteorological Institute, while the average temperature at the Ukkel observatory was almost two degrees higher than normal. An official heat wave took place between 21 and 27 July.

It rained on eight days, for a total rainfall of 66mm, less than the usual 73.5mm. Diepenbeek in Limburg had the driest month with only two millimetres of rain. The extreme temperatures made the news on a daily basis:

- More than 200 people were trapped for 90 minutes inside a train that broke down between Bruges and Blankenberge. Railway personnel handed out drinking water until the passengers, on their way from Tongeren to the coast, could be transferred to another train.

- The heat caused part of the road surface of the E34 Knokke-Antwerp motorway to become detached at the E17 interchange close to the Kennedy Tunnel.

- Sales of drinks and barbecue foods were up by an average of 25% at the three main supermarket chains, Colruyt, Delhaize and Carrefour.

Grants approved for allotment garden projects

The government of Flanders has announced that a subsidy of €300,000 will be awarded to extend the creation of allotment gardens in Flanders. The land will be in public ownership and provided on loan to members of the local community for gardening. The money goes to 25 projects that will manage some 10 hectares of land, enough to provide 400 allotments.

The 25 successful projects were selected by an independent panel from applications sent in. They include 13 new locations, four extensions of existing locations, five modernisations and three combinations of extension and modernisation. Each project is subsidised at 75% of the cost, with a ceiling of €15,000.

The initiative, Peeters said, was intended



"to give people the chance to get a feel for healthy eating, for the production of their own food ... for alternative forms of exercise and for an active lifestyle". Allotment gardens, he said, also create social cohesion in local areas.

Diamond robbery was staged, says prosecutor

A so-called "tiger kidnapping", in which the wife of an employee of a diamond trader in Antwerp was held hostage in her home while her husband emptied the office safe, appears to have been an inside job organised by the employee himself, the Antwerp prosecutor's office said.

The robbery took place last October, when three armed men reportedly burst into the couple's home and forced the husband to rob his employer, the Indian trader Kiran, of diamonds worth an estimated €10 million, dropping them off at two designated spots.

The prosecutor now believes that the man organised the whole incident himself, together with a colleague. The pair, together with the three supposed robbers – an Armenian and two Russian-Chechens – have been arrested. Following house searches in the city, part of the stolen goods, worth about €8.5 million, has been recovered.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

220

incidents a day in which escalators in Brussels metro stations are brought to a halt by misuse of the emergency brake

28,500

people last year made use of the state-owned pawn shop in Brussels, the only one in the country, for a total of €9.5 million in loans

30,000

visitors to the latest edition of Museum Night in Antwerp, up from 22,000 last year. Museums in the city stayed open until 1.00

28 years

average age of a woman in Flanders giving birth for the first time, two months later than in 2010. The average age in Brussels is 29 years

230

swimmers stung by jellyfish at the Flemish coast on Thursday last week, as large numbers of the creatures came closer to the shore because of warmer water temperatures

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The European job

It is hard not to notice Karel De Gucht. The EU trade commissioner has a knack for speaking out, no matter what the consequences may be.

In 2004, he drove his party Open VLD to despair when he continued reacting against the migrant vote, after the party had decided to just give in and keep quiet about it. After a long night facing the entire party establishment, he was forced to give up the party presidency to Guy Verhofstadt, then prime minister, in an unprecedented move. (After which, as De Gucht recently recalled in a TV documentary, he went home and had a glass of whisky.)

De Gucht is known as a polemicist, forever lashing out at, for instance, the Flemish nationalists, and as one of the toughest negotiators in Belgian politics. The move to his dream job at the European Commission was seen as an elegant way out for the man many in Belgian politics had grown weary of.

Now the rest of the world is encountering De Gucht, as he has recently pulled off trade agreements with China – on solar panels – and with the US. But what does the future hold for the man from Berlare, East Flanders? Does it have a second term as European commissioner in store for him? Who becomes the European commissioner for Belgium is decided on during the formation of the federal government. The posts are considered to be even with minister posts. This means that the party that gets to appoint the European commissioner has to give up one ministerial post – a heavy price to pay.

Maybe another party will claim the commissariat? The Christian-democrats have not had a European commissioner for ages. And will Open VLD's president Gwendolyn Rutten be willing to give up a minister for De Gucht? The two are rather close, as Rutten started off her career on De Gucht's staff. She may, however, prefer to opt for some younger talent as minister or to fill in the mandate another commissioner leaves.

And what about old Guy Verhofstadt, whose talents have not gone unnoticed in Europe either, and who has his eye set not just on a commissariat, but on Manuel Barroso's job, as president of the Commission? Many questions go unanswered for De Gucht, who has vowed to stay on the trade commission for the full length of his mandate. After that, he might be in need of another glass of whisky.

Road tolls pilot project set

Test drivers charged a fee for kilometres travelled in Brussels

Alan Hope

The Flanders, Brussels and Walloon regions have selected a partner for a pilot project due to begin in January to examine the effects of applying a road toll in and around the capital. The project involving 1,000 drivers will be carried out by a consortium led by management consultancy PwC.

The project will cover the area of the future regional express network – a planned light rail system – roughly corresponding to the borders of the old province of Brabant. Participating drivers will be charged a notional sum for every kilometre they travel inside the project area, with lower rates for off-peak travel.

The pilot project will examine whether drivers modify their



behaviour as a result of being charged a toll, by choosing not to travel at peak times or even deciding not to

drive within the boundary at all. Co-ordinating the project with PwC are motoring organisation Touring,

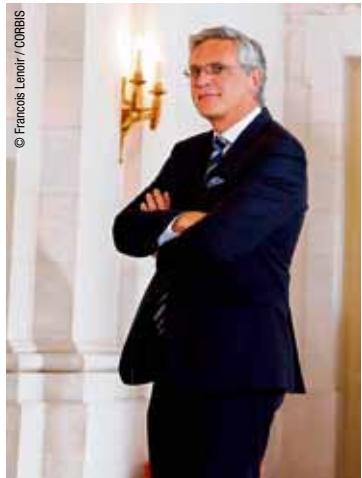
the Flemish research institute Vito and market researchers GfK, as well as an international panel of experts on road tolls. The results of the research will be known later in 2014, following the regional elections in May. The decision on whether to introduce a permanent system of road tolls will be one for the new regional governments.

Meanwhile, mobility expert Johan De Mol of Ghent University said that road tolls could have a beneficial effect on mobility in and around Brussels but only if sufficient attention was paid to other forms of transport, particularly public transport. The money raised by tolls, he said, should be invested in increasing the frequency of public transport systems.

EU calls for new Oosterweel contract

The government of Flanders will have to restart its procedure to award the contract for the construction of major parts of the Oosterweel connection in Antwerp, said the EU's internal market commissioner Michel Barnier. In response to a written question from a member of the European Parliament, Barnier said the contract for works on the Scheldt Tunnel and ring-road works on the left bank would have to be re-awarded and emphasised that Flanders did not have to put the project on hold until the formal decision of the Commission is handed down next month.

In 2009 the Flemish government awarded the contract for the Oosterweel link to the consortium Noriant. Since then, the project has changed substantially, after a referendum in Antwerp rejected the planned viaduct known as the Lange Wapper in favour of a tunnel. The EU is of the opinion that such substantial changes to the contract make a new award procedure necessary. The Flemish government, however, would have to pay damages to Noriant as a result.



"We are doing everything in our power to ensure that Noriant can retain at least part of the works," said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters (pictured), adding that he expects to have one final meeting with Barnier after the holidays. "We're doing everything to see that things are perfectly clear as far as Europe is concerned, and I hope we will get clarity from the commissioner in September. At that point, the Flemish government will accept its responsibility."

Bankruptcies bring highest job losses since 2000

Last month, 670 companies in Brussels and Flanders declared bankruptcy, leading to the loss of 1,183 jobs, the highest figure since the turn of the century. Brussels was the most affected region, with 429 businesses going bust, a year-to-date increase of 37.47%, compared to the same period last year. The year-on-year increase for Flanders is 7.37%.

The sector most affected was restaurants and catering, with the biggest increase in bankruptcies seen in the construction industry. On 1 August, an amendment to federal law came into force that is

intended to detect businesses in trouble at an early stage and so avoid bankruptcies wherever possible. The so-called law of enterprise continuity has been in force since 2009, but was recently amended to give judges more power to provide troubled businesses with protection against creditors.



Brussels Airport closes runway for repairs

Residents of areas under the flight paths of planes taking off from and landing at Brussels Airport can expect changes to the level of noise nuisance in the month of August, as the airport's management has closed runway 25R/07L for resurfacing. Residents living along the line from Haacht to Steenokkerzeel and Evere will have a peaceful month while works continue. By contrast, the airport's other two runways will see increased use, affecting residents of Wezembeek-Oppem, Kraainem and Sterrebeek. Residents' committees in the areas affected have praised the information provided by the airport, which has allowed people to make the necessary arrangements, including taking holidays during the two-week period and the nine days of limited use.

According to Brussels Airport, now is the perfect time for the works, despite the increase in air travel during the summer months. "But this



is the perfect moment because there are more hours of daylight and less chance of rain," said spokesperson Jan Van der Cruyse. The works will see the runway stripped back to its foundation for repairs to the surface and a change from halogen to LED lighting.

The airport is also building a second solar power installation, with 5,800 solar panels along the Tervurensesteenweg in Steenokkerzeel. The new panels will augment the existing solar installation of 7,200 panels installed on the roof of freight handler Brucargo. On completion of the new works, the airport will obtain 3% of its energy needs from solar power.

Apple harvest down, pear crop up

The price of fruit is going up faster in Belgium than in neighbouring countries, and that trend is likely to continue, according to figures released by the Prices Observatory department of the federal economy ministry.

According to the department, the prices of a variety of foods, including bread, meat, vegetables and fruit, all rose markedly in the second quarter. Fruit prices went up by 17% compared to the year before, the highest rise of all.

At the same time, an estimate of the apple and pear harvest expected later in the season shows a decline in the apple crop of 9% to 201 million kilograms, 34% lower than the peak year of 2011. The main reasons for the falling harvest are low temperatures and rain in the spring

during the critical blooming season. The year looks slightly better than in 2012 for pears, with 8% more crop, but, again, compared to 2011, the expected harvest of 256 million kilograms is still 13% lower. Here, the crop suffered from frost in March and rain and lack of sun throughout the spring. The pear harvest, which consists of 90% Conference (pictured), will be later as a result, and the pears themselves smaller.



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Advertising ▶ VRT

The two main channels of the Flemish public broadcaster VRT – Eén and Canvas – broadcast an average of 54 commercials a day in the first five months of this year, up from 49 in the same period in 2012, and from 35 in 2010, said Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten. The increase is due to the allowance of more commercial income in the VRT's new management charter from €10 million to €16.5 million.

Batteries ▶ Hoppecke

Battery manufacturer Hoppecke in Zemst, Flemish Brabant, was responsible for the leak of more than 100 litres of sulphuric acid last week after a safety valve failed to work. The acid was cleared by the fire service of Vilvoorde and Overijse as well as the company's own workers. There is no damage to the environment, the company said.

Media ▶ CIM

The small gains in sales by three Flemish dailies – *De Tijd*, *De Standaard* and *De Morgen* – were a result of increased digital sales and the use of an online paywall, according to the latest figures from the Centre for Information on the Media. Other newspapers saw sales figures continue to fall in the year to June.

Retail ▶ Sales

The summer sales period has been declared a success by industry organisation Unizo, with sales 5% higher than in July last year. The month began slowly, but fine weather from the second week saw business pick up, particularly in the clothing sector, Unizo said. The improved sales will help make up for a 9.5% drop in sales in the earlier part of the year.

Telecoms ▶ Scarlet

Bruno Delhaise has been named the new CEO of Scarlet, the low-cost subsidiary of telecommunications giant Belgacom, from 1 September. Scarlet has been without a boss since the departure of Pierre-Eric Evrard in May this year.

Telecoms ▶ Telenet

Trading in shares in Telenet was suspended on Tuesday last week after the Mechelen-based company's half-year results were leaked to Twitter by a journalist attending the press conference, in breach of an embargo. Telenet announced a 12% increase in sales to €813.6 million, with profits up 27%. Trading was later resumed.

Calling out Da Vinci

Dirk Huylebrouck's book insists that due respect be paid to Belgium's major maths talent

Senne Starckx

Mathematics teacher **Dirk Huylebrouck** is a man with a mission: He's dedicated to sharing his love for numbers, equations and complex formulas with the general public in the most amusing – and sometimes embarrassing – manner possible

On 21 July (not coincidentally), a new book was published titled *België + Wiskunde* (Belgium + Maths). It's written by Dirk Huylebrouck, a mathematics teacher in the architecture department at LUCA School of Arts in Brussels. In the book, Huylebrouck makes – in a rather frivolous and very readable style – a remarkable proposition: that Belgium and Flanders have played a significant role in modern mathematics.

Huylebrouck is not unknown to those who read the science section in Flemish newspapers or flip through the popular

And often Huylebrouck's interventions make a monkey of policymakers. A few years ago, he discovered that, due to restoration works, Brussels' beloved Atomium had lost its mathematical perfection – one of the nine spheres came out slightly off course.

Last year, the teacher discovered a mistake in the Madrid I Codex of Leonardo da Vinci and just a few months ago, he discovered embarrassing mistakes in the (modern) replica of a bridge invented by Da Vinci, which is currently on view at the *Da Vinci: The Genius* exhibition at the Beurs in Brussels.

Does it frustrate you that mathematicians have a rather dull, "nerdy" image?

Dirk Huylebrouck: No, not really. I guess everybody has to be a little nerdy to be successful in his field. The Borlées for instance, who do nothing but run

"Politicians have to justify spending money on someone who is making weird scribbles all day"

science magazine *Eos*. A couple of times a year, the author makes the press with his comments and findings on events in daily life that connect with mathematics. For instance, three years ago on World Pi Day – you didn't know there was one? It's 14 March (written 3/14 in the US) – he convinced a branch of (Pi)zza Hut in Ghent to sell slices for €3.14.



One of the world's top mathematicians, Ingrid Daubechies was born in Houthalen, Limburg Province

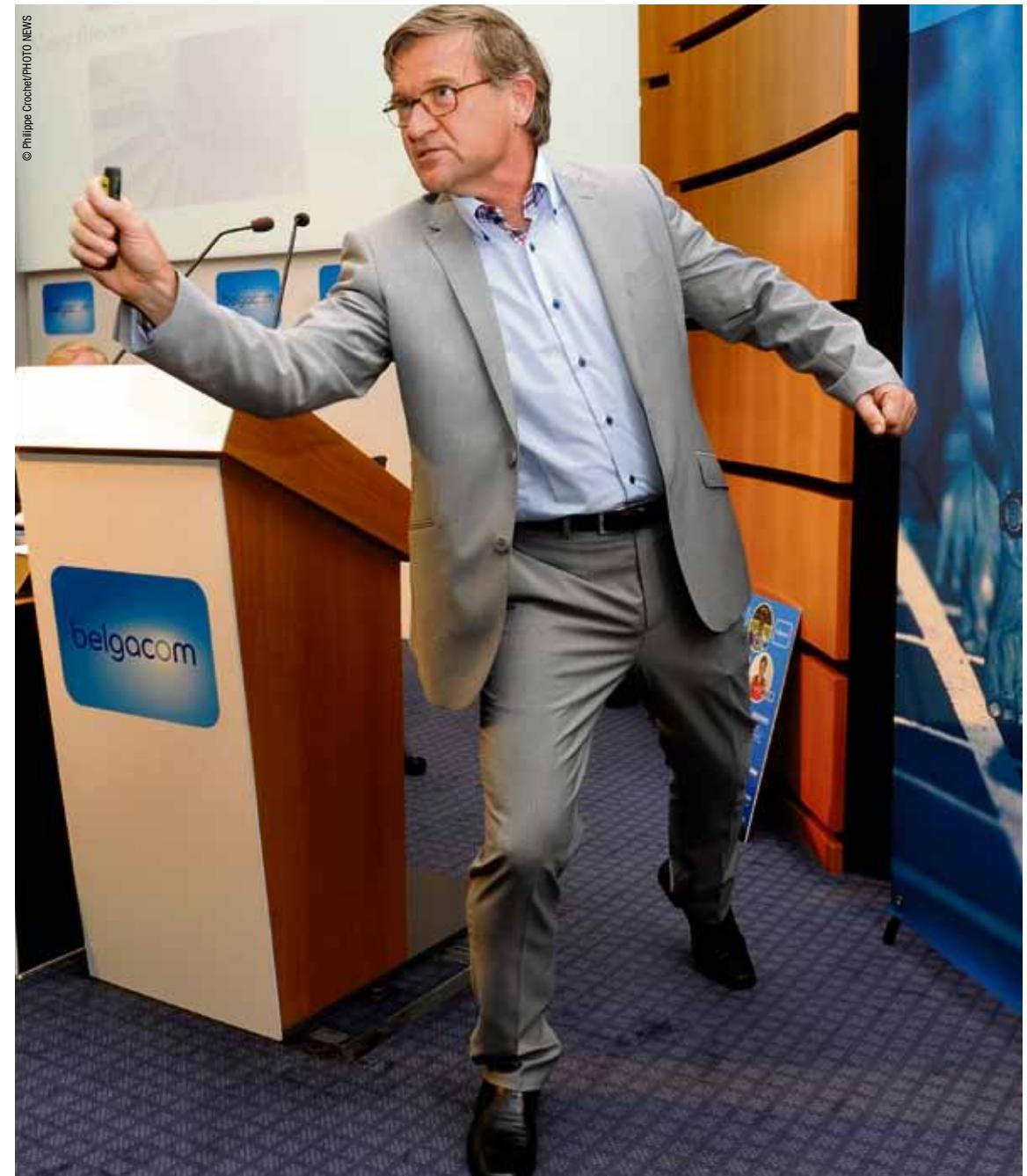
the 400-metre, are perhaps even more "nerdy". The public – rightly – admires the Borlées, but it doesn't really appreciate the work of mathematicians. And yet, in contrast to many other nerdy activities, mathematics sometimes has a "collateral advantage", as unexpected applications are always popping up.

Why do you find popularising math so important?

It's an important social matter. Taxpayers need to understand why mathematicians are allowed to spend their time using their money to do math 24 hours a day. This does not mean all math should have useful practical applications – an often asked question – but the people also want to understand why fundamental research in math is necessary.

Politicians expect that scientific research, including maths, generates something that serves a practical purpose. Does that annoy

© Philippe Crochet/PHOTO NEWS



Flemish maths instructor Dirk Huylebrouck during a 2011 presentation of his theories about the direction in which athletes run track. He convinced the organisers of the Memorial Van Damme to schedule an additional 400m competition – run clockwise

you?

No, they are right. Politicians have to justify spending money on someone who is making weird scribbles all day. Though it's frustrating indeed that people always ask what math is good for, while they never ask the same question to a painter, to a musician or

... to a politician!"

Why is there no Nobel Prize for mathematics?

Don't believe the popular myth that it's because Alfred Nobel had an issue with a mathematician about some woman. The reality was that Nobel, who invented dynamite, wanted his prize to be awarded to research with practical applications.

You're often taking up the cause for the little-knowns in mathematics – those who don't get the attention they deserve. Like Belgian mathematicians.

And the homosexual mathematicians, like Alan Turing! Yet I am not particularly interested in 'underdogs': As long as there is something remarkable to say, that works for me. As you said, mathematics has a dull image, and I want to contradict this, that's all.

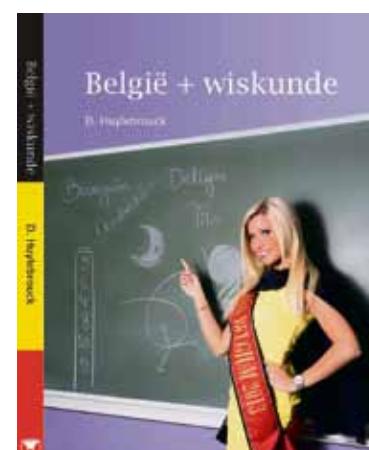
How do you think education and research in maths will evolve? Will the computer become the mathematician of the 21st century?

Mathematics has already undergone

several transformations through time, so that would not be the first. The Greeks, for instance, did their math by drawings in the sand and did not even have a good numbering system. Computer software is of course a marvellous tool. There now is a completely new field of "experimental mathematics". So yes: perhaps the computer will become a powerful mathematician in the 21st century, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing. Look at what happened for the chess game; since computers have become good chess players, there are more chess players than ever!

Who's your personal math hero?

[British mathematical physicist] Roger Penrose, for several reasons. The main one is that he is a – still living! – mathematician who is active in many different fields. The discovery of quasi-crystals for instance, which allowed Dan Shechtman to get a Nobel Prize in 2011, used his Penrose tiles. Penrose also did research into the most pure forms of mathematics and physics, yet he does not object to popularising mathematics. I've never met him, which is a real pity.



We Belgians ought not only to be proud of our chocolates, our beer and our waffles, but also of our accomplishments in mathematics. That's the idea behind **Dirk Huylebrouck's *België + Wiskunde*** (Academia Press). After all, several Belgians are among the most important mathematicians of all time. Take Limburg-born Ingrid Daubechies (*Flanders Today*, 27 June), who developed the mathematics behind the image standard JPEG and who was the first female full professor of Mathematics

at Princeton University. She now teaches at Duke University in North Carolina and is the president of the International Mathematics Union.

* The current Miss Belgium, Noémie Happart, has always had a weakness for maths. In secondary school, she participated in the Flanders Mathematics Olympiad, in which she finished just one spot from the podium, in fourth place.

Enter the next level

HoWest's new 3D competence centre is a high-tech home for those working with game technology

Andy Furniere

From September, students of the Bachelor's degree in digital arts and entertainment (DAE) at the University College West Flanders (HoWest) will follow their courses in a setting appropriately filled to the brim with winks to the gaming world. Students and researchers are free to play with the high-tech facilities at the new 3D competence centre – called The Level – and so are companies interested in game technology.

Stepping inside The Level, there is no mistaking that you are entering a world with virtual possibilities. You are immediately greeted by a towering robot, created by DAE students. As you climb the unusual staircases – reminiscent of those in fantasy castles – you meet other intriguing characters, also designed by the young artists. To give you an idea, one character's head is shaped like a jellyfish.

While these imaginative creatures are still made of materials such as cardboard, the green key studios and motion-capture technology will enable students to bring their ideas to life in a virtual environment. But before the students can apply special effects, they need to learn the theory in the classroom and develop their characters and environment in the workshops.

The Level also includes seminar rooms, a lounge area and an incubator for starting and existing companies that want to explore the advantages of game technology.

The white house

A brand new construction in white sits atop the existing premises, a former industrial building. This working space of the DAE lecturers and researchers was the brainchild of Kortrijk-based architects Vande Kerckhove. A large LED display with game visuals will soon be



The new extension for HoWest's DAE lecturers sits atop the existing programme's building; visitors to The Level are greeted by a giant robot

placed on the front, and the display will be directed to one of the main motorways leading into Kortrijk. The total budget of The Level is about €3.5 million.

Its new home is a logical next step for the expanding DAE Bachelor's degree. Launched in 2006, the programme now attracts about 500 students, many of them international. The DAE degree is unique in Europe because it focuses on the development of Triple-A games – the category of most

technically complicated games. "We raise the bar as high as possible," explains Geoffrey Hamon, co-ordinator of The Level's research department. "If students can create a Triple-A game, they have the necessary knowledge and skills for all kinds of game technology applications."

The DAE degree already offers courses in English, and Hamon says they want to increase the number of courses in English as part of their international strategy.

The students also visit companies abroad and can often do their internships abroad, meaning many graduates get jobs at large, international game-developing enterprises. A "wall of fame" in The Level showcases the success of some alumni – with their names printed under posters of the games they helped create. For example, one worked on the well-known *Battlefield* game series.

Graduates aren't just ready for a job in the game sector, they are "technical artists" or "artistic technologists" who can also work at companies in the media, advertising and product-development sectors.

Wild ideas

To support entrepreneurship related to game technology, The Level also provides services for start-up and existing companies in their incubator, which is deliberately not separated from the student area. That way, the companies can benefit not only from the facilities and the researchers' knowledge, but also from the wild ideas of the students, who will be involved in experimental projects for a company. Students can also do their internship in the incubator. Similarly, students will be involved in research initiatives. The research team applies game technology to projects in diverse sectors like building and education. With funding from IWT (the Flemish Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology), the team at The Level will develop a platform for the health-care sector, with tools to create serious games that can improve the lifestyle of people with autism, among other conditions.

► www.howest.be/thelevel

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The oldest "watch" in Europe, found last April in the Dutch community of Zutphen, was made in Flanders. That is the conclusion of experts who investigated the metal composition of the so-called *quadran* – the medieval predecessor of our current watches. The instrument dates from around 1300. Worldwide, there are only a few examples left of this instrument, which was invented by Arab scientists and also served navigational purposes. Archaeologists suspect that the *quadran* of Zutphen was bought by a merchant in a Flemish city.

Seven top Flemish researchers will receive up to €2 million each for a five-year project from the European Research Council. Among them is professor Bram Vanderborght of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) for his robotics research. Vanderborght will develop a new generation of propulsion systems for robots.

Six students have registered to follow the country's first-ever course for butlers, which is being held at Brussels' Plaza Hotel. The course of four weeks costs €6,980. Students will be trained in organisation, service, technology and psychology. They will learn the skills of flower arranging, cooking, cocktail preparing and general housekeeping. According to founder Vincent Vermeulen, similar courses are only organised in the UK, US and the Netherlands.

► www.schoolforbutlers.com

Teachers are in general unsure about how to deal with cyberbullying, according to a survey by Marilyn Tyteca, a Master's student in Health Education and Promotion at Ghent University. Tyteca questioned 266 teachers from secondary schools in Flanders. Half said they are insufficiently trained to recognise and handle cyberbullying, and a quarter admitted they had difficulty understanding cyberbullying because they lack adequate knowledge of social media.

A record number of 2,474 students were permanently suspended from school in the last academic year. Three years ago, 1,935 students were dismissed from school. The situation has deteriorated the most in Brussels' Dutch-speaking schools, where the number of suspended students almost doubled from 84 to 150. The president of the Flemish secondary school students organisation VSK says that schools take this measure too quickly and points out that the problems of the punished youngsters will only worsen.

Q&A

Professor Adrian Liston of life sciences research institute VIB headed the Belgian-Australian research team that discovered the genetics determining the strength of the immune system

Which missing link in the immune system did you find?

We focused on the regulatory T cells, which determine how our immune system reacts to possible



health threats. In short, these T cells are in charge of the activity of white blood cells – the cells that defend us against viruses. When there are not enough regulatory T cells, our immune system can be overactive and cause allergies or autoimmune diseases such as diabetes and arthritis. In the opposite case, an underactive immune system allows infections and tumours to grow. We have now identified the genetic programme that sets the number of regulatory T cells, which should help us to keep the immune system ideally balanced.

Until now, you have worked with genetically modified mice
Yes; the next step is to design and

test drugs for humans. We are contacting academic research groups and pharmaceutical companies. Basic medicine can be developed in a time span of five years, but the clinical trials to perfect the working of the drugs can take another 10 years. In the near future, our findings will hopefully help, for example, to kill off the remaining cancer cells after chemotherapy. Later, we hope to develop the means to give an 80-year-old back an immune system that is as strong as that of a healthy teenager.

What's the Australian connection?

No, I have Australian roots and finished my PhD at the

Australian National University in Canberra. During my research there, I collaborated with experts, including the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne. Four Australian scientists from this institute took part in this recent research project. The team in Flanders consisted of seven researchers at the Autoimmune Genetics Laboratory of VIB and the University of Leuven. Our project lasted four years and was funded by the Flemish Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology and the European Research Council. The results were published in the scientific journal *Nature Immunology*.

Interview by AF

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Mighty oaks

Step back in time in the medieval Maaseik, birthplace of the Van Eyck brothers

Diana Goodwin

It's best known as the birthplace of the famous Van Eyck brothers and for the sugary *knapkoek*. In the first of our August series on often-overlooked Flemish towns, we visit Maaseik in Limburg province.

In the middle of Maaseik's main square stands a large statue of two men in elegant medieval clothing. These are the city's most honoured sons, the 15th-century painters Jan and Hubert Van Eyck. They stand side-by-side, Hubert noticeably older than his more famous brother and Jan recognisable from the chaperon hat he wears in his famous self-portrait (housed in London's National Gallery).

But 150 years ago, this spot was occupied by a large oak tree, the symbol of a city whose name combines the Dutch word for oak with the name of the great river that flows past. When it was time to erect the statue, there was a bitter dispute among Maaseik's citizens over whether to keep the tree or remove it so the statue could occupy the square's central position. In a typically Belgian compromise, the tree was cut down and its wood used to make chairs for the city hall.

The people of Maaseik chose the Van Eyck brothers, rather than a tree, as their preferred mascot – and today the city is enjoying a resurgence thanks in part to efforts to preserve and capitalise on that cultural heritage. You can take a guided walking tour called "In the footsteps of the Van Eyck brothers", drink a beer inspired by their greatest work and see traces of the medieval town they would have known.

Perfect symmetry

Any visit to Maaseik starts here on the Markt, where the Van Eyck brothers look out over one of the prettiest squares in Flanders. The Markt really is a square, perfectly symmetrical and ringed by well-preserved and beautifully restored 17th- and 18th-century buildings.

As with Brussels' Grote Markt, which was rebuilt after being destroyed by the French in 1695, this architectural unity came about through disaster: A fire in 1684 destroyed one-third of the city's buildings, which were then quickly rebuilt in the prevailing "Maasland renaissance" style. Unlike the Grote Markt, however, Maaseik still allows cars to be parked around the perimeter, which rather impedes on tourist shots of the otherwise lovely square.

The area's tourist office is on the square in the former city hall; on the same side of the square in a pair of historic buildings is the small Regional Archaeological Museum. It houses artefacts from prehistoric times up until the 19th century and the modern, informative installations provide a good overview of the region's history. It also incorporates what the city proudly calls Belgium's oldest



Find Maaseik's tourist train in front of the statue of the Van Eyck brothers in the Grote Markt. It runs three times daily until 31 August (top); the new Tripel named after the famous painter, born in Maaseik (right); a giant *knapkoek*, a speciality of the region, is baked in an open-air wooden oven every first Sunday of September for Maaseik's Knapkoek Festival (above)

private pharmacy, an apothecary from the early 1700s that was in use until 1959. Recent conservation efforts have stripped away any architectural elements deemed not original, with unfortunate results: Instead of walking into a 250-year-old pharmacy, the visitor is confronted with isolated 18th-century apothecary furnishings in a plain white room. Looking at a photograph of the premises as they appeared before the restoration, I found myself wishing they had left well enough alone.

In the summer, a tourist train departs from the Markt daily, with commentary in Dutch. The route wends through the historic city

centre and also goes to Aldeneik, a neighbouring village that pre-dates Maaseik.

Despite its long and rich history, Maaseik is a living city offering plenty of modern diversions. The Markt is ringed by restaurants and cafes with copious outdoor seating. At De Beurs, you can try the Jan Van Eyck Tripel, a beer developed last year at the request of the city. Served in a glass bearing the likeness of the painter, the brew is flavoured with herbs depicted in the Van Eyck brothers' greatest work, "The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb". The altarpiece is currently undergoing restoration in Ghent's Fine Arts Museum.

Just off the Markt, the restaurant De Soeten Naam Jesus (Sweet Name of Jesus) takes its name from the building it occupies, an 18th-century canon house. Diners sit in the former cellar under vaulted brick ceilings, and the speciality here is barbecued ribs, served on a wooden plank. If the weather is good, head to brasserie De Kloostertuin and sit in the peaceful garden, tucked away in the courtyard.

The interior of Café De Vagant, on a side street near Sint-Catharina church, is all dark wood, exposed brick and vintage tile, and the ceiling is decorated with scores of little holy water fonts. Given the somewhat kitschy interior, the back patio comes as a surprise, filled as it is with tropical and flowering plants. The streets around the Markt are perfect for strolling and shopping. At antique and home decor store Barbotine, proprietor Petra Jeurissen not only sells beautiful handicrafts, home furnishings and gifts but runs a furniture-refinishing studio in the back of the shop. She refinished most of the exquisite vintage pieces for sale here. She also runs workshops on painting techniques.

If you plan to spend the night, try Het Agnetenklooster. Hostess Patricia Indekeu has transformed her family home, part of a former convent, into a



luxurious and stylish retreat. Two suites on the ground floor have the feel of a private country house, while the three attic rooms combine contemporary furnishings with wooden floors and exposed beams. The house and its gardens are hidden behind a wall, giving it an air of exclusivity in the middle of the city. The new Maas Valley River Park encompasses several municipalities along the river and contains many hiking and cycling routes. Maaseik-Aldeneik is one of six starting points for hiking in the park; maps featuring nature and cultural walks are available at the tourist office. For more information on the big grand opening of the park on 25 August, see p14.

► www.maaseik.be

SISTER ACT

In the early eighth century, a powerful local nobleman named Adelhard founded an abbey in Aldeneik for his daughters, Harlindis and Relindis. The sisters served as the first two abbesses and helped the Anglo-Saxon missionaries-cum-saints Willibrord and Boniface spread Christianity in the region. The name Aldeneik means "old oak" and was the name given to the original settlement. A new town was founded in the 13th century, closer to the Maas and therefore called Maaseik.

Thanks to Harlindis and Relindis, Maaseik boasts some rare and historically important artefacts from the early middle ages, including an illuminated Gospel



book from the eighth century, the oldest such manuscript in the Benelux (pictured). It most likely came from Echternach, the abbey that Willibrord founded in present-day Luxembourg. The church treasury of Sint-Catharina Church also contains the oldest surviving Anglo-Saxon textile fragments in the world, preserved for centuries as pieces of a reliquary cloth.

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From pimple to wrinkle

New initiatives this year for Flanders' only music festival aimed at the over-50s

Tom Peeters

This Sunday for the 12th consecutive year, thousands of enthusiastic middle- and senior-aged Flemings will gather for a festival of star crooners, mellifluous pop hits and Flemish *schlagers*. They will sing along to Engelbert Humperdinck and De Romeo's in the same field their grandchildren descend upon a few days later for the (much louder) rock festival Pukkelpop.

You could call Rimpelrock the hale and hearty grandfather of Pukkelpop. The seniors may not need a mosh pit, but you don't have to teach them how to do the polonaise or drink a few brewskies. "It was Steve Stevaert's idea," explains Rimpelrock director Chokri Mahassine, also the founder of Pukkelpop and a member of the Flemish parliament. Fellow socialist Stevaert was the mayor of Hasselt from 1995 to 2005. He and his friend Herman Reyners (who followed up Stevaert as the mayor of the city) noticed how people tended to hang around the entrance gate of the Pukkelpop rock festival every year. "They were mostly older people from the neighbourhood," recalls Mahassine. "They tried to look through the fences, curious about what was happening inside, but they would never have come in, because it simply wasn't their type of music." And the idea of a festival specifically for the over-50s was born.

Tough audience

"Our only ambition was to create a new festival for these older adults, but it is one of the most difficult target groups," Mahassine admits. Most of them "don't go out much except to maybe a village feast or other very local event. We had to give them the skills to visit a concert or a festival. The only way it could work out was through easy accessibility."

With the major support of the government of Flanders and the City of Hasselt, which supplied big enough budgets to keep the one-day festival free for the first few years, Rimpelrock gained a foothold. These days a ticket costs €34, offering visitors 10 concerts from national and international artists on one stage, starting at 11.00 in the morning and finishing before midnight.

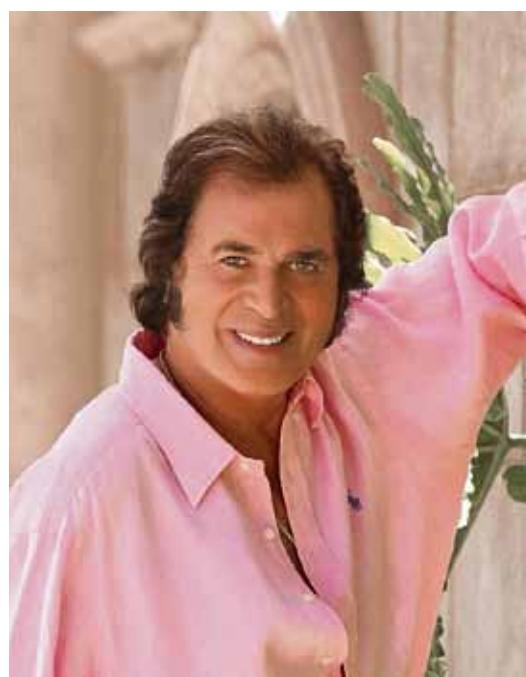
As an older version of Pukkelpop (Pimple Pop), the name Rimpelrock (Wrinkle Rock) was pretty obvious. But it sounded a bit less than respectful, so organisers came up with the official name R-rock Hasselt. But festival-goers and the media latched onto the title Rimpelrock, and its use in popular language was so complete, that it's been the official title ever since. In 2002, there was no such big festival in Flanders focussing on this target group. So, although Mahassine had years of experience



If you're tired of teens, get your groove on at Rimpelrock



Rimpelrock has no shortage of big names, both local (Natalia) and international (Engelbert Humperdinck)



on the festival scene, for this event he had to start from scratch. "This new audience meant a totally new way of organising," he explains. "Take the catering. Because easy

intention." So *pintjes* and coffees are the same price as at Pukkelpop. "We couldn't afford to be flexible on this," Mahassine grins. It's hard to

just see the opposite!" After 10 editions of the festival, Mahassine has built up a specific expertise for receiving and accommodating the elderly. Much to the praise of his customers. Zulma Lemmens is from Zichem in Flemish Brabant. She once went to see Flemish heroes Eddy Wally and Will Tura at the festival. "First a bus took us from Zichem to Hasselt, and at night a train would bring us back home," the 83-year-old recalls. "But what an experience. Everyone was having a ball. We danced on our chairs! You always have to take

"Rimpelrock is a social project; it was never our intention to make money from it"

access has always been our main policy, we allowed visitors to bring their own food and drinks. We soon regretted that decision," Mahassine laughs.

"We have to think commercially, and if no one spends money at the festival site, the consequences are inevitable. Rimpelrock had become one big picnic; that was not our

control the mind-set of the older festivalgoer, he admits. "Their behaviour is totally different from the Pukkelpop crowd. They are just more demanding. We have to be extremely clear in our communication. Young people hate being lectured. They come to Pukkelpop to escape people telling them what to do. At Rimpelrock we

a chair because you can't stand up all day. And better take a knapsack with a sandwich, too, otherwise you have to buy food at the back of the festival, and then you lose your place!"

Lemmens would like to go to Rimpelrock again, but she feels it's a bit too tiring at this point in her life. Indeed, someone who went to the first edition in their 60s can be in their 80s today. Wanting to respond to the issue, organisers found a modern-day solution: some retirement homes in Limburg are now streaming the festival live. "So a few hundred more people can follow the festival," says Mahassine proudly. "I don't have to tell you how much fun that is. It shows how much of a social project this is. It was never our intention to make money from it."

Changes

After a fast growth in the early years when the festival was still free (up to 50,000 per edition) the number has dropped to between 25,000 and 30,000 a year. "Eleven years ago, we were the first to organise an event like this. To keep up with our audience, we expanded our programme, made it more international. The popular Flemish scene was soon too small." He mentions Paul Anka, The Supremes, Billy Ocean, Vicky Leandros, José Feliciano and Tom Jones as the biggest international crowd-pleasers. But, Mahassine surprises me by saying, "maybe it's time for a totally new concept. We have a strong feeling that we have to rethink what we're doing. Without throwing away our initial ideas or becoming less ambitious, it's time for new paths."

The Ambiance Tent is a first step. This year, in between the French *chansons* of Gérard Lenorman, the Dutch *levensliederen* of Jan Smit, tribute band The Barry White Experience, the prime Flemish *Idol* star Natalia and headliner Engelbert Humperdinck, festival-goers can visit this new hot spot for all things polonaise.

During breaks between concerts, Flemish singer Maarten Cox will introduce the new "Rimpelrock song" here, and visitors can gather for sing-alongs plus a bit of dancing, courtesy of Hasselt Danst. "We want to focus more on atmosphere," explains Mahassine. "Think of it as the Rimpelrock version of Pukkelpop's Boiler Room. Not every member of the audience will visit the tent, but if we get 3,000 to 4,000 during every break, the atmosphere is guaranteed."

11 AUGUST

Kempische Steenweg, Hasselt-Kiewit

► www.rimpelrock.be



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The stories behind the stars

It's rock photography like you've never seen it before in Antwerp

Tom Peeters

"Rock music has become more of a business," says Alex Vanhee. He's been photographing rock stars and other musicians on and off the stage for Flemish daily *De Morgen* for 20 years. His work and that of other rock photographers is on view now at the Photo Museum in Antwerp.

When Vanhee started going to shows in the late 1970s, rock music was still considered counter-culture and for teenagers only. "I remember watching an AC/DC show in a really small provincial hall. The next day the same space was used for a *saucissenkaarting*," he laughs [a folk event where card games are played to win sausages]. "But eventually the outlaws became celebrities, partially thanks to the extended media coverage. In those early days, I often was the only photographer in the room. Now organisers sometimes receive 50 photo applications."

No wonder opportunities to spend time with the stars became rare and limited. In the meantime, the increasing number of managers and PR agents increased the distance between artists and the media.

The result is that we see almost everywhere the same concert pictures from the same angle. If there's one thing the curator of *You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet*, the big summer exhibition in Antwerp's Photo Museum, wanted to avoid, it's displaying the work of rock photographers from that very angle.

Selective

"Since alternative rock went commercial in the 1990s and since the digital revolution a bit later, photographers had to search for different ways to cover artists," says curator Rein Deslé. "Often the musicians themselves were interested in those new ways to create images, leading to fruitful collaborations between them and the photographers, who were hired for album sleeves and art work."

In the same vein, *You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet* is a reaction against the emphasis on nostalgia related to rock photography and specifically to the iconic, often black-and-white photos of the rock icons. "At first this fixation with nostalgia prevented me to see clearly," Deslé explains. "Catalogues, exhibitions and photo books gave me the impression that nothing interesting happened in the genre after the 1980s."

But that turned out to be a challenge to dig deeper and consciously choose photography after 1990, even if that meant that Deslé had to leave the real rock icons out."

On the edges

Ten photographers — five Flemish and five international — received an invitation, some of them working in the music scene but most on the edge of it. "The images had to illustrate the individual approach of the photographer," explains Deslé, "searching for the borders of what



Alex Vanhee's 1993 graduation project *Big Dreams / Dream Big* shows rabid Flemish fans lip-syncing their favourite musicians

rock photography could stand for, avoiding the clichés." She mentions the American photographer Michael Schmeling. His photos have a rather playful aesthetic that one hardly associates with rock music.

On the other side of the spectrum, there's the British music and fashion photographer Dean Chalkley, whose over-the-top-photography is frequently iconic but always shows a personal perspective. Also Alex Salinas, known for his work with the Flemish bands Soulwax and A Brand, puts his fashion stamp on his colourful music photography. Chalkley, responsible for the striking White Stripes image used on the exhibition's poster, says that a present-day rock photographer has to be able to create a relaxed environment. "There's more money and stress involved in the business. If you can soothe the artists and convince them you're creative, they will step more easily into your story. Psychological skills are almost as important as technical skills."

Quality time

But of course, nothing beats quality time spent with the artist. London-based Flemish photographer Eva Vermandel can tell you everything about it, as she followed the Icelandic post-rock collective Sigur Rós for several months, creating the poetic imagery that matches the band's pensive music.

Chalkley can only agree: "The first time I met Arctic Monkeys in their rehearsal room, they were asking if I could put out the lights. But later, spending time with them on the road, they became just four young blokes instead of stars. Then it gets really interesting for me."

The de-mything of stars is another central theme of the exhibition. The process takes us both on the road and backstage, showing moments when it's clear that artists would rather be left alone.

Dutch photographer Daniel Cohen, for instance, was allowed to take photos between gigs and encores in Amsterdam concert halls Paradiso and De Melkweg. His Flemish colleague Charlie De Keersmaecker, went into dressing and hotel rooms with one of Belgian's biggest rock outfits, dEUS. Vanhee is present with his graduation project, dating back to 1993, in which he photographed people imitating their idols in old-fashioned Flemish living rooms, while the whole family was watching. It's a bit voyeuristic, but it explains one thing: "The decorum and the times may have changed, but

the dream is timeless."

"One of the most exciting things about composing this exhibition was noticing that all the photographers were really music fans," says Deslé. "There's a lot of passion and personal motivation behind their photos."

With extra rooms focussing on album sleeves (and their stories), video art and concert photography, there's no stone left unturned. Festival-goers are encouraged to share their amateur concert pictures with the museum via social media, those with Rock Werchter tickets get free entry, and the accompanying exhibition catalogue contains a free Spotify soundscape.

UNTIL 6 OCTOBER

You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet: Music and Photography

Photo Museum, Waalsekaai 47, Antwerp

► www.fotomuseum.be

THE PRIDE OF THE FAVELAS

Also on show at Antwerp's Photo Museum until 6 October is the work of Frederik Buyckx, part of the Young Belgian Photography series. Buyckx, Max Pinckers and David Widart all made the short list for this year's Paule Pia Prize for young photographers. Buyckx won it with his ambitious project *Jesus, Make-up and Football*. The Antwerp photographer published photos from the series in *National Geographic* and *The New York Times*, among other publications.

Buyckx lived for several months in the favelas, the slums of Rio de Janeiro. He socialised with the locals and came back with a



remarkable eyewitness report, not only illustrating the rough life of the drug gangs but also showing a typical Brazilian pride and even a touch of optimism. Behind the pumped up muscles, tattooed skin and giant necklaces, hide the dreams of a brighter future.

► www.frederikbuyckx.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

The Royal Ballet of Flanders won the Critics' Circle's Award for Outstanding Company of 2012 at the National Dance Awards in London last week. The Critics' Circle was impressed by the company's performance of William Forsythe's *Artifact*, staged in Sadler's Wells in April of last year. The ballet was nominated alongside such illustrious companies as Merce Cunningham Dance Company and Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch. "This was truly a surprise to us all, and a great way for us to start my first season as artistic director," said Assis Carreiro. In other ballet news, the company announced the appointment of Lena De Meerleer as the new general director of both the ballet and the Flemish Opera. De Meerleer will leave her current position as the general manager of production for VRT.

Flemish film director Felix van Groeningen's *The Broken Circle Breakdown* is one of the final three nominations for the LUX Prize, awarded by the European Parliament each year in December. The film will be screened at LUX Film Days, which take place in all EU member countries in November. The other two nominations are the Italian film *Miele (Honey)* and the *The Selfish Giant* from the UK.

► www.luxprize.eu

Marie De Backer of Roosdaal, Flemish Brabant, and Dries Feremans of Leuven won the Belgian Mobile Phone Throw championships last month, held on the beach in Bredene. JIM Mobile sponsors the event, in which competitors hurl a GSM as far as possible. De Backer won the women's category, with a throw of 38.28 metres, and Feremans won for the men, with a distance of 68.56 metres. The pair will be joined by junior winners Louise Van De Ginste and Karim Setta for the world championships in Finland later this month.

Dance hit diva Gloria Estefan has signed on to Antwerp's Night of the Proms this November. She joins Scottish singer Amy Macdonald and Japanese pianist Hiromi for the popular annual event that pairs pop artists with classical orchestras. Tickets to the six shows are on sale now.

► www.notp.com

Members of the public are invited to vote online for the World Soundtrack Public Choice Award, handed out at the Flanders International Film Festival in Ghent in October. Votes must be placed by 15 September, and all participants will be entered into a contest to win a year's subscription to the online music streaming service Deezer.

► www.worldsoundtrackacademy.com

don't you know it's a pity, that the days can't be like the nights

Brussels Summer Festival

Georgio Valentino

Belgium is famous for beer and chocolate but, truth be told, the nation's true speciality is the summer festival. Every year Belgians host more than 130 of these shindigs. Some are tiny block parties; some are massive, Woodstock-like affairs. The Brussels Summer Festival is somewhere in between.

Although the event is planted squarely in the city, its scope (and programme) is on a par with the major grassy-field festivals. Four stages are spread out over a swathe of the capital from Warandepark to Kunstberg, with the main stage on the Paleizenplein, just in front of the palace. Vendors and street performers are camped out along the circuit, creating a non-stop party village for the 10 days of festivities. It has proven a successful formula. In just 12 years, the BSF has established itself as one of the top 10 festivals in the country. The programme includes dozens upon dozens of acts, from instantly recognisable headliners to up-and-coming artists.



The international contingent this year is led by English ska outfit Madness and Scottish folk singer

Amy Macdonald. At the head of the Flemish delegation is Ostend's elder statesman of rock/pop Arno

Hintjens, who first found fame in the early '80s as the frontman of TC Matic. Antwerp alternative rockers K's Choice reprise the songs that earned them a place on the American alternative rock charts in the 1990s.

BSF also features Black Box Revelation, Brussels' hirsute contribution to the admittedly crowded field of modern "psychedelic" rock. That's not all, of course. There's an entire stage devoted to Belgian music-makers.

Classical & electro

For the past seven years, the festival has diversified its portfolio with the Classissimo programme, which celebrates classical music in all its forms. Romantic, baroque and chamber music rub shoulders in the sumptuous setting of the Koninklijk Parktheater, just a stone's throw from the main open-air stage.

Classissimo concerts feature internationally renowned musicians and singers. In addition, a young talent piano contest plays out over

four matinee rounds (starting on 8 August). Aspiring musos between the ages of 12 and 16 compete for the chance to win prizes worth up to €1,000.

Nor is electronic music neglected. The special theme night Atomium Party (12 August) revolves around one of the very founders of the genre: Kraftwerk's Karl Bartos is invited to celebrate the release of his latest album, fittingly titled *Atomium*. BSF's tagline, "Ten days of music ... and much more", is in no way a vague promise. The fringe programme is actually called "Much More" and includes collaborations with nine Brussels museums and eight indoor music clubs. And a BSF ticket (a cheap €40 if you buy before midnight on 8 August – €53 if after – for the entire 10 days) will get you deep discounts on passes to select exhibitions and to the Atomium. What's more, you're invited to a number of BSF after-parties. Continue the carousing late into the night at the art-deco Café des Halles or legendary techno club Fuse.

9-18 August | Across Brussels | ► www.bsf.be

FOOD & DRINK

Stroop-tocht

As you know, Limburg nurtures Flanders' finest fruit orchards. In the Haspengouw region's cornucopia of sweet treats, you'll find the town of Borgloon, where inhabitants innovated the manufacture of fruit syrup in the 19th century. These days Borgloon hosts an annual Stroop-tocht (Syrup Tour). This guided walk begins at the tourist office and wends its way through town, stopping frequently to sample delicious local products and learn about the region's rich agricultural history. **gv**



18 August, 13.30 | Across Borgloon | ► www.borgloon.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Bollekesfeest: Annual beer and regional food festival centred around Antwerp's famous local beer, De Koninck (otherwise known as a Bolleke)

AUG 15-18 at Grote Markt

► www.bollekesfeest.be

Dilsem-Stokkem (Limburg province)

Smokkelmarkt (Smuggle Market): Market near the border where Flemish and Dutch stands sell a diverse range of products at low prices, plus horse and carriage rides, concerts and more

AUG 11 9.00-12.00 at Steenkuijstraat

► www.tinyurl.com/smokkelmarkt

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Jazz Middelheim

Antwerp's annual open-air festival boasts an international programme of 16 acts, some of them world-famous and others soon to be. Unlike other local jazz festivals, Middelheim also spotlights an artist-in-residence. This year's nominee is Armenian pianist Tigran Hamasyan (pictured); he will perform on three of the festival's four days, each time with a different line-up and repertoire. The local scene is well represented, too. Belgium's most famous (and, at age 90, longest-playing) jazz cat Toots Thielemans headlines opening night with his quartet. At the younger end of the spectrum is Melanie Di Biasio, the Belgo-Italian flautist and singer who has been lauded in recent years for her contemporary approach to a genre which is approaching its centennial. **gv**



15-18 August | Park Den Brandt, Antwerp | ► www.jazzmiddelheim.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Bruges

MA Festival: 50th anniversary edition of one of the world's most famous early music festivals, featuring concerts, a competition for young musicians and an exhibition on historical instruments

Until AUG 11 at 't Zand 34

► www.mafestival.be

Klinkers: Annual festival in the historic centre of Bruges with kids' activities, fireworks, dance by Compania Flamenca and concerts by Mûm and Accademia del Piacere, among others

Until AUG 10 at Burg 12

► www.klinkers-brugge.be

Hoogstraten (Antwerp province)

Antilliaanse Feesten: Annual Caribbean festival featuring a long line-up of dynamic concerts by international groups and musicians

AUG 9-10 at Blauwbossen, De Voort

► www.antilliaansefeesten.be

PERFORMANCE

Cats

As one of the most successful musicals of all time, this cultural touchstone probably needs no introduction. But here's one anyway. The brainchild of West-End guru Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Cats* premiered in London in 1981. The story of the "Jellicle cats" who must make a decision about who gets to come back to earth with a new life became an instant phenomenon. It has been running for 32 years and was the longest-running Broadway musical until Webber himself dethroned it with *The Phantom of the Opera*. More than 50 million people in some 20 countries have seen *Cats*.

Webber borrowed heavily from poet TS Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, in which he describes the universe of the Jellicle cats. But it was Webber who gave them the gift of life (and the jazz hand). In English with Dutch and French surtitles. **GV**



Until 18 August | Kursaal, Ostend

► www.kursaalostende.be

MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Rooftoptigrrr: The inimitable Flemish troupe Time Circus is back with a new, quirky, theatre-cum-fair act on an Antwerp rooftop. Part of Zomer van Antwerpen (in Dutch)

Until SEP 1 at Parking Nova, Van Schoonhovenstraat 25

► www.zva.be

Brussels

Anatomia publica: Contemporary dance by Cie Man Drake inspired by the films of Austrian film director Martin Arnold

AUG 16 20.30 at Les Brigitines, Korte Brugmannstraat 1

► www.brigitines.be

Carmen: Toone puppet theatre stages Bizet's famous opera, adapted by José Géral, with set and costumes by Thierry Bosquet (in old Brussels French)

Until AUG 31 at Theater Toone, Schuddeveldgang 6

► www.toone.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Colors Festival

The annual Hindu festival Holi is a celebration of spring and its promise of regeneration. The ritual's signature is the coloured powder thrown about liberally, which marks revellers with the colours of the rainbow. Hence the nickname "festival of colours". Brussels' Colors Festival borrows the format but replaces the religious element with secular, multicultural values and ... techno music. This first-ever Brussels edition is held on the grounds of the erstwhile customs complex Tour & Taxis and promises to be a unique event, combining the communal atmosphere of an open-air festival and the kinetic energy of a German discotheque. Indeed, the headlining DJs (Marc Houle, Christian Burkhardt, Der Dritte Raum, Niconé and Sascha Braemer) hail without exception from the Bundesrepublik. Flemish artists include AMyn, Ode Maen and FlatFish. Expect to leave encased in one or more of any number of bright colours. **GV**



21 September | Tour & Taxis, Brussels | ► www.colorsfestival.be

SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Antwerp Pride: Following on the World Outgames, the port city's Pride festivities feature a wide variety of events celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities. The parade is on Saturday at 14.00

AUG 8-11 across Antwerp

► www.antwerppride.com

Ghent

DOK strand: Laid-back beach on the canal featuring concerts, a flea market, entertainment for kids, open-air film screening, free-to-use barbecues and food and drink stands

Until SEP 29 on Koopvaardijlaan

► www.dokgent.be

Westerlo (Antwerp province)

International Folklore Festival: Annual festival featuring dancers and musicians from Ukraine, France, Thailand and Ghana as well as Flanders

AUG 10-11 & 13 at Jeanne de Merode Castle, Boerenkrijglaan 61

► www.diespelewei.be/festival

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Club Boat at Brussels Beach

Until 11 August

Akenkaai, Brussels

Throughout every summer, Brussels gets its very own beach, a one kilometre streak of sand, cocktail bars and exotic food stalls along Akenkaai. It's no surprise this scenery sparked party organisers as well. Head to Brussel Bad, or Brussels Beach, for after-work drinks and some serious clubbing aboard a floating boat on the canal.

Last summer, about 20,000 night crawlers partied on the Club Boat. If you haven't been yet, I suggest you plan a night out in the capital this week, as the beach closes its doors this Sunday.

On Wednesday, (7 August), Downtown Club is in charge of the music on the Club Boat. As always, the warm-up starts around 17.00 at Croisetteke, the main DJ bar at Brussel Bad. At 22.00, when all the families and early-risers have gone home, the beats continue on the Club Boat. You'll be dancing while floating – in the good company of DJs Ratman and Bobin (Ghent), Deejames (Ghent) and Exon Bacon (Brussels) – until 2.00.

The next day, catch up with colleagues or friends after work when the party is hosted by @seven, the expat community of "friendsetters". Throughout the year, their hang-out spot on Thursdays is club Mirano, but during Brussel Bad, they take over Croisetteke and the Club Boat. Brussels DJs Alex Palmer and Pericles will see to the music.

On Friday, the party is started by eclectic DJ collective Animals Club. They'll be rocking the boat until 3.00, with, amongst others, the Brussels Tang E (who plays



at Hotel Bloom's lounge bar and on FM Brussel). On Saturday, the party boat sets off with a couple of German DJs on board. The night is organised by Leftorium, a DJ collective keen to ignore the boundaries between musical genres.

On Sunday, the boat goes out twice for musical cruises. Sail away from 17.00-18.30 or from 19.00-20.30 with record label On Point's finest DJs, including Jazz Neversleeps, Alex Delforce and Billy Palmier.

Tickets for the Club Boat are €10 in advance (via yetix.be) or €12 at Croisetteke.

► www.brusselsbeach.be

© Eric Danier

BITE

't Apertje ★★★★

The Damme Canal is worth a visit all on its own. The idyllic waterway lined with swaying poplar trees is a favourite thoroughfare for pleasure boaters between Damme and Bruges. During a sunny pre-dinner walk, my partner and I are passed by multiple lycra-clad cyclists and day-trippers on horse and buggy.

When we feel we've sufficiently earned our meal, we sit down on the terrace of 't Apertje (from the word *haperen*, to stay for a while) which boasts a view of the outstretched polder landscape dotted with church towers and rows of knotted willows.

Filip, our kindly server, delivers fat radishes and marinated green olives to our table with a bottle of sparkling water. It's early, but inside we see owners Leo and Véronique Callewaert getting ready for what is sure to be another busy shift, with Leo working magic in the kitchen, while Véronique hosts. After 20 years in the business, they've mastered this routine.

Deciding what to order proves easy, thanks to the seasonal bistro menu, which changes every three weeks. It gives a choice of three starters and three main courses, finished off with either dessert or cheese and comes to just €35 per person (or €52 with aperitif, wine and coffee).

On this summery evening, our picks go to the artichoke and tomato with shrimp starters, followed by main dishes of lamb navarin and royal bream.

Across the table a giant artichoke arrives accompanied by a simple yet divine bowl of creamy vinaigrette. My partner pulls off the hardy, dark green leaves one by one, sliding them between his teeth to get at the fleshy base. As he gets closer to the middle of the artichoke, the edible part becomes bigger and tastier, culminating at the almost meat-like heart. The lemony dipping sauce is a perfect match.



© Robyn Boyle

My tomato and shrimp dish is a work of art, with red, orange and yellow cherry tomato halves scattered about the plate alongside lovely pink North Sea shrimp, hard-boiled egg, rocket salad and tangy vinaigrette. The shrimp – hand-peeled – are full-flavoured and juicy, while the just-ripe tomatoes are equally succulent.

When my lamb navarin (a French lamb stew) arrives, I am overjoyed by the sight of it. Inside the deep bowl is a tomato-red stock filled with chunks of lamb and a variety of summer veg, including green asparagus, plump peas, carrots, green beans and a few tender potatoes. The delicate meat is practically falling apart in the savoury stew, which is still surprisingly light enough for this time of year.

Meanwhile, my partner couldn't be more chuffed with his royal bream, pan-fried to a delectable crackling skin over silky white meat. The pieces of fish lay atop sweet whole shallots and a rich lemon-butter sauce.

For dessert, he indulges in a selection of local white cheeses, ranging in taste and texture from chive-infused and semi-hard to strong and runny. I polish off a gorgeous platter of strawberries from nearby Moerkerke with a scoop of yellow vanilla ice cream, tangy coulis and a sprinkling of crunchy meringue.

Two cappuccinos and €84 later, we're two very happy and satisfied customers driving along the Damme Canal towards home.

► www.apertje.be

Damse Vaart Zuid 223, Bruges; 050.35.00.12



12.00-14.00 & 18.00-22.00 Wed-Sun



Mains: €15-€25, seasonal three-course menu €35



Lovely little canal-side bistro with seasonal delicacies and polished classics

TALKING SPORTS

Perspective on the football surge

For many, August is when work switches off and the family decamps to hotter climates (yes, hard to imagine in the bizarre current conditions). But for footballers, it's back to work. The Jupiler League season began two weekends ago and is already offering a revealing taster for the months ahead.

The first surprise is that Belgium is still generating buzz as an emerging footballing power. The past decade has been so full of false starts that fans have come to expect their hopes to be crushed with a bracing defeat to an established force. But instead, the Red Devils cruised into summer with their highest ever FIFA ranking, reaching 10th place. This is just behind Brazil in ninth, but assuredly ahead of perennial mockers England (15th) and France (22nd). Annoyingly, their main rivals

for qualifying for the 2014 World Cup, Croatia, lie in eighth place.

The trade in Flemish players has never been more lucrative. Most of it takes place in the world's flashiest league, the English Premiership, where Belgian players seem to feature in most squads. From Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany and Arsenal skipper Thomas Vermaelen to Kevin De Bruyne and no fewer than six others at Chelsea, Jan Vertonghen and two more at Tottenham, and the five Belgian reserve and academy players at Manchester United, it adds up to a vote of confidence.

Gent's Jelle Vossem (pictured), Anderlecht's Guillaume Gillet and Club Brugge's Timmy Simons.

Nor does that leave the Jupiler League as a cauldron of home-grown talent. In purely monetary terms, the most valuable player in the league is Anderlecht's Argentine striker Matías Suárez. And – until he transferred to Lazio last month – the second most valuable was his compatriot and fellow Paars-wit Lucas Biglia. Biglia's replacement is the equally costly Serbian Luka Milivojević.

The first day of the new season brought a few surprises, including reigning champions and this year's favourites Anderlecht humbled 2-3 at home by lowly Lokeren. But for fans hoping to see the finest Flemish players in action, they'll have to look elsewhere.

Leo Cendrowicz

The last word...

Drug dependency

"Doctors find it easier to prescribe a pill for high cholesterol or heartburn, rather than convince the patient to adopt a healthier lifestyle." Marc Moens of the doctors' union BVAS on news that insurer Riziv is considering fining doctors who hand out too many prescriptions

As old as you feel

"I'm only 99. Why would I stop?" Amelia Verbruggen works every day in a laundry in Leuven owned by her son (aged 77)

Just the facts

"Our research shows it makes no difference if the announcer apologises or not. We think it's because that comes across through the speakers as a standard formula." Researchers found that rail passengers would rather hear the reasons for delays instead of an apology

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

It's impossible to argue against the need for environmental change – at all levels. That includes holidays. Flanders has awarded Green Keys – an internationally recognised label – to hotels, campgrounds and tourist attractions that have taken special steps to improve sustainability. We'll tell you who's got one and also reveal the name of the first passive hotel in Brussels

Tourism

How many kids can you feed with an ostrich egg? This and other compelling questions will be answered in our article next week on the Struisvogelnest, an ostrich farm that caters kids' parties and sells its farm-fresh products on-site

Arts

We here at Flanders Today make it a habit to fill you in on exhibitions of work by Flemish artists. But how would you like to see them all in one place? Art critic and fervent supporter of local culture Claude Blondeel is celebrating his retirement with the exhibition *Bazaar België*, his pick of the best of Belgian art



© Francois Lenoir / CORBIS