DEAL SEALED
Public broadcaster VRT and the government of Flanders have agreed on a new management charter and budget

NEW YEAR OR BUST
Haven’t found a place to celebrate New Year’s Eve yet? Check out our short but sweet list of spots still free in Flanders

SEVENTIES SHANGRI-LA
The Atomium’s new museum features plastic art and design – in a riot of colours – from the 1960s to today

Oh, what a year it was
Refugees, radicalism and the Red Devils: Flanders’ 2015 in review

We look back at the major events that made the headlines in Flanders and Brussels this year in politics, the arts, religion and more.

The year in Flanders and Brussels was marked in its closing stages by terror lockdown, by radicalisation and by refugee issues. But it was also the year of a world-beating football side, fresh air in the centre of Brussels and new faces in the arts. Join us as we look back on 2015.

Facebook vs Belgium
Facebook first made its appearance as a theme of the year in June, when the Privacy Commission filed suit against the social network over the controversial datr cookie, which tracks your internet behaviour after you’ve visited a Facebook page – or any page with a Facebook Like or Share button. That’s all very well if, like more than a billion people, you’ve signed up to Facebook’s privacy conditions (which you do by having a profile). The Commission was complaining on behalf of non-members – those without Facebook accounts – who get the same cookie without having agreed to anything. Facebook cited security reasons, but in the end was forced to change its ways or face a fine. As the year ends, it’s closed its pages to non-members in Belgium, but the issue is not resolved yet.

Welcome to Brussels
If one image represented the year in news, it was that of little Alan Kurdi, who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea as his family tried to escape the war in Syria and washed up on a beach in Turkey. Belgium had its own refugee problem to think of, with newcomers arriving in such numbers they could not be processed, leading to the spontaneous camp in Maximilianpark near North station, soon taken over by the Red Cross and a band of volunteers. Some saw the site as an embarrassment to the image of the Capital of Europe, but it actually functioned rather well. Eventually the refugees were moved to other locations or moved to the WTC building nearby, and the
New S-network stations open

Brussels has two more stations in its new S-network, as Schuman opening postponed

Alan Hope
Follow Alan on Twitter | @AlanHopeFT

Last week’s scheduled opening of the long-awaited tunnel linking Schuman railway station and the Halle-Vilvoorde line 26 had to be postponed because of delays caused by the heightening of the terror alert in Brussels last month. The tunnel is now expected to open in April.

Instead, federal mobility minister Jacqueline Galant, together with her Brussels counterpart Pascal Smet, were present for the opening of two other new stations: Mouterij in Elsene and Tour & Taxis in Molenbeek, adjacent to the Panenhuis metro station.

Both stations form part of the rail authority NMBS’s new urban S-network, part of the planned Regional Express Network known as GEN.

Mouterij station, at Kronlaan and Browerijstraat, was built in 2007 but never before used; the Tour & Taxis station, which is about a kilometre away from the Tour & Taxis site (and the MIVB stop of the same name) was built in 1983 and was used briefly for goods traffic before being closed in 1994.

The entire S-network will be fully operational once the Schuman tunnel is opened in April. The service will include direct links to Brussels Airport, Leuven, Mechelen and Liège.

KAA Gent face Wolfsburg, Red Devils face Italy

Football fans now know their opponents for next year’s big clashes, with the Belgian national side facing Italy, Ireland and Sweden in the summer’s European Championships, while KAA Gent take on Wolfsburg in the Champions League in February.

Gent’s stunning progression from the Champions League group stage has resulted in a second-round tie against German side Wolfsburg. They host the Bundesliga runners-up on 17 February and travel to the Volkswagen Arena for the return leg on 9 March.

Although the Red Devils are currently ranked number one in the world by Fifa, they will still be wary against four-time World Cup winners Italy in Lyon on 13 June, scrappy underdogs Ireland in Bordeaux on 18 June and a sturdy Swedish side led by Zlatan Ibrahimovic in Nice on 22 June.

In the Europa League, Anderlecht take on Greek side Olympiakos, with the first leg at the Constant Vanden Stock stadium on 18 February and the return leg in Athens on 25 February.

Proximus loses case against mobile phone mast tax

Proximus, the state-owned telecommunications company, has lost an appeal to the European Court of Justice regarding a tax on mobile phone masts imposed by the Brussels municipality of Etterbeek and the city of Namur. The ruling that the tax is not in breach of EU law confirms a previous court ruling against mobile operator Base two months ago.

The Court was responding to a judicial question from the court of first instance in Brussels, in a case filed by Proximus against the “pylon tax” in Etterbeek. In October, it dealt with a question from the court in Mons in the same manner in a case brought by Base.

The decision came as a surprise at the time, as it went against the advice of the EU’s advocate general, who argued that the tax was indeed in breach of EU law.

The tax of up to €8,000 per mast was approved by the Walloon region last year, and it has now been introduced by about half of all Walloon municipalities. Brussels followed suit this year, at a lower rate of about €1,500 a mast.

According to Proximus, the millions it pays in taxes represent a severe limit on the funding available for the improvement of communications infrastructure. The latest ruling, the company said, did not mean the end of its battle against the tax.

Antwerpen restaurant The Jane awarded second Michelin star

No change at the top, a slight shift in the middle, and 10 new arrivals on the ground floor. Michelin has announced its star ratings for its 2016 edition. The announcement in Ghent last week was postponed from November, following the terrorist attacks in Paris.

Flanders’ three-star restaurants – the only three-Michelin-star restaurants in the country – remain the same: Peter Goossens’ Hof Van Cleve in Kuurnehtemt, Geert Van Hecke’s De Karmeliet in Bruges, and Gert De Manegheer’s Hertog Jan in Zedelgem, West Flanders.

The headlining news this year was the awarding of a second star for The Jane in Antwerp. The restaurant – owned by chefs Sergio Herman and Nick Berl, both of the former three-star Oud Sluis in the Netherlands – received its first star just seven months after opening last year.

In Brussels, the restaurants Sea Grill, Comme Chez Soi, Bon-Bon and Le Chalet de la Fôret held on to their two stars and

students in six cities took part in the recent Bledsoreius blood donation action by the Red Cross in Flanders. The campaign, in its 25th year, takes place twice annually

for 100g of the new hopshoot harvest, paid at auction last week in Roesselare. The shoots, considered a delicacy, were bought by Tinois Fruit, which supplies Antwerp restaurant The Jane calls per hour to the information number 1771 set up by the home affairs ministry during the heighted terror alert. Calls have since gone down to around 10 a day

In Brussels, the restaurants Sea Grill, Comme Chez Soi, Bon-Bon and Le Chalet de la Fôret held on to their two stars and

Budget for the renovation of the Leopold II tunnel in Brussels, which will start in 2018 and last a minimum of three years. The 2.3km tunnel will only close at night and during weekends

of business owners in Brussels are women, according to the newly published enterprise barometer from Women in Business. The number has, however, increased by one-third since 2004

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8,682

€150 million

28%

3,295

€150

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The Red Devils celebrate their win against Italy in a November friendly

© yves Herman/Brussels Airport

The Red Devils celebrate their win against Italy in a November friendly

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New S-network stations open
WEEK IN BRIEF

The federal government will in future advertise job vacancies not only for M/V but also for X. To make it clear the job is open to transgendered or non-gendered applicants. The X signifies, equal rights minister Elke Sleurs said, that posts are open to any gender or orientation or none. The government of Flemish Brabant this year tackled the issue by removing any reference to gender whatsoever.

Flemish public transport authority De Lijn will operate night buses on 125 routes on New Year’s Eve, with free travel in some areas – including Bruges and Ghent – thanks to the contribution of municipalities. A special €3 ticket in other areas offers unlimited travel from 18.00 and also on New Year’s Day.

The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr. 3).
VRT and government agree to new management terms

The government of Flanders has agreed to new management and labour terms for VRT for the period 2016 to 2020. The terms, which were approved by the Flemish government and VRT's management board, are intended to strengthen the public broadcaster's role in the Flemish audiovisual sector.

Under the new terms, VRT will continue to be funded by the Flemish government, with a guaranteed multi-year financing. This stability is intended to support the public broadcaster's goals and responsibilities for the period 2016 to 2020. The terms are intended to ensure that VRT remains a public service broadcaster and that it continues to provide quality programmes for all Flanders.

The agreement is intended to improve the management of VRT, with a focus on information, culture and education. The VRT board of directors will have greater power to make decisions, with a focus on its mission and core values. The agreement also includes measures to ensure the independence of VRT's editorial staff.

The government of Flanders has agreed to this agreement, which was negotiated with VRT's management board and the VRT trade unions. The agreement is intended to ensure that VRT can continue to provide quality programmes for all Flanders, and that it remains a public service broadcaster.

Concerns over zero tolerance blood-alcohol for young drivers

Flemish mobility minister Ben Weyts has spoken out against federal mobility minister Jacqueline Galant’s proposal to lower the blood-alcohol limit for newly licensed drivers to 0.2mg, introducing an effective zero tolerance.

Galant intends to introduce the new limit in mid-2016 in response to figures showing that drivers aged 18 to 25 are eight times more likely to have a serious accident than older drivers. They are also more susceptible to alcohol in the blood. An age limit on alcohol levels could be in breach of discrimination laws, however, so the measure would apply to anyone possessing a driving licence for less than three years.

The current limit of 0.5mg allows the consumption of one or possibly two (depending on the individual) beers with lower alcohol contents. A level of 0.2 would be exceeded by even one glass.

Weyts argues that a driving licence with a penalty points system would be more effective in combatting drink-driving. Galant’s proposal, he says, targets younger drivers, while the biggest risk group is those aged 35 to 50. The points system would be consistent: the same rules and penalties for all drivers for the same offence, “Tough but fair for everyone”, he said.
Oh, what a year it was

The year in review: Facebook, asylum-seekers and Sidi Larbi

problem disappeared from view. At the end of the year, however, the people were still coming, and still camping out, this time in an empty office building.

All eyes on Molenbeek

The discovery that three of the terrorists involved in the 13 November attacks on Paris came from Molenbeek, as pointed out by prime minister Charles Michel, was picked up by the international media, which immediately condemned the district and, by extension, Brussels. At the same time, the government set up a database of the names of Syria fighters, prepared legislation to deal with them on their return and reinforced programmes in vulnerable areas to identify those at risk and turn them off the path towards radicalisation. The work may never be over, but it’s under way.

Three’s new company

K3 is no more – long live K3! The original singing trio, plucked from obscurity by media company Studio 100 and turned into a multimedia phenomenon with huge appeal to pre-pubescent girls, had been going for 17 years and decided it was time to retire. The group would divide, but the money train would continue down the track with the new K3, chosen via a televised talent competition, naturally. The three new members – Marthe, Hanne and Klaasje – are now on a joint farewell/inaugural tour with the original K3 in Flanders and the Netherlands.

All’s fair in love and war

Black, the film event of the year, is a Romeo and Juliet tale of teenagers from rival gangs in Brussels who fall in love – with dramatic consequences. The film was directed by Adil El Arbi – last year’s winner of the wildly popular TV quiz show De slimste mens ter wereld – and Bilall Fallah and was based on books by Flemish young adult author Dirk Bracke. Martha Canga Anto

และ his appointment in Febru

ary as the new artistic director of the Royal Ballet of Flanders. The latter came as doubly good news: A contemporary choreog

rapher, he was a bold and excit

ing choice, and he was replacing Assis Carreiro, an administrator with no dance background who had lost the confidence of danc

ers and board alike. His first piece for the Royal Ballet, Full, was part of a group of shorter works that made up the season premiere. Audiences and critics alike were delighted.

Walk this way

Brussels-City council ended last year with a hotly contested proposal to build an under

ground car park under the historic Vossenplein in the Marollen district, home of the famous flea market. The plan was scrapped in a wave of public protest. The council ends this year with another controversial proposal on its plate: the pedes

trian zone that took over the central avenues from De Brouck

ère to Fontainas in June for a test period of eight months. Residents have had a love/hate relationship with the zone, which has been characterised by drunks, beggars and litter, particularly after dark. Businesses in the zone complain they’re on the brink of bank

ruptcy. The review is expected in February, but no-one seriously expects that the zone will disap

pear.

Sacrificial rights

Every year during the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha – Feast of the Sacrifice – many Muslims buy a sheep to be slaughtered in ritual fashion, by slitting the throat. In Flanders, however, it’s now illegal to slaughter an animal without first stunning it except in officially licensed slaughterhouses. Ritual slaughter does not allow stun

ning. This year, animal welfare minister Ben Weyts declared that halal slaughter would only be permitted in the licensed slaugh

terhouses and not in the tempo

rary facilities set up every year during Eid to handle demand. A group of Muslim organisations took the case to court to try to get the stunning ban lifted temporar

ily. They lost, so the Muslim advi

sory body the Council of Theo

logians told Muslims that they could be excused from their duty of sacrifice this year, in the hope of finding a solution by next year.

Red Devils rampant

The national football team, the Red Devils, had the best year of their lives, ending 2015 at the top of the Fifa rankings. The side also qualified for Euro 2016 at the top of their group, but when the draw for that compe

tition was made last week, faces fell somewhat: Belgium were drawn against Ireland, Italy and Sweden. Belgium beat Italy in a friendly in November, and the Italian manager has said that Belgium are among the favour

ites to win the tournament, but Italy are world-beaters, and both Sweden and Ireland are capable of surprises.

Spiritual leadership

Jozef De Kesel was appointed by Rome as the new archbishop of Belgium to replace the retiring André Léonard. Moderate and soft-spoken, the former bishop of Bruges is unlikely to make the sort of controversial, socially conserv

ative statements for which Léonard was known, while being more moderate than the progres

sive Antwerp bishop Johan Bonny, who many thought would get the post. In other words, he is likely the perfect man for the job, under Pope Francis, who also speaks softly but carries a big doctrinal stick. De Kesel officiated at his first Mass as archbishop in the Brussels Cathedral last week. The Catholic church, he said, “must address the major challenges facing society”, referring to same

sex marriage, reproductive rights and divorce. Whether that means a shift of position on any of those subjects, God alone knows.

Cultural saviour

Dancer and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui has a long and distinguished record, not least the Olivier Award he won last year and
Flemish textile machines manufacturer and chemicals company join forces

Picanol and Tessenderlo merge

The Brussels-based chemicals group Tessenderlo and weaving machine manufacturer Picanol of Ypres have agreed to merge into a single industrial group operating in more than 100 countries. The new Picanol Tessenderlo Group will be active in four areas: Agro-industrial, bio-valorisation, industrial solutions and machines and technology.

Tessenderlo has called an extraordinary general meeting to propose an issue of more than 25 million shares at €1.50 in exchange for Picanol shares, which puts a value on Picanol of €811.6 million. The new group will have sales of about €2 billion and employ 7,000 people worldwide.

Flemish fishing industry satisfied with new quotas

The Flemish fishing industry has said it is satisfied with the outcome of a meeting of EU fisheries ministers that took place in Brussels last week. The industry in Flanders came away with an increase in the total allowable catch (TAC) of their main species. The TAC for sole in the North Sea is increased by 10%. However, the quota for the fishing grounds in the Channel west of the Dover-Calais line is cut by the same proportion. And Flanders’ small quota for the Irish Sea is cut in half. Sole accounts for the biggest catch for Flemish fishing boats, making up 40-50% of income. The TACs for cod go up 15% and for skate by 4.5%.

"The positive result for us is the maintenance of the fishing stocks, now confirmed scientifically," said Urbaan Winten of Rederscentrale, the fishing industry federation. "For the western sole stocks, there is still some difference between the official figures and what Flemish boats are experiencing at sea." Rederscentrale has prepared a proposal with colleagues from the UK and France to deal with the differences in evidence, but that was not taken into account by the ministers. Fishing quotas are dealt out on a national basis, but Belgium’s is entirely taken up by Flanders. The industry consists of 67 boats, operating out of Ostend, Zeebrugge and Nieuwpoort.

Port of Antwerp celebrates record year in tonnes of cargo

The Port of Antwerp will by the end of the year have handled more than 200 million tonnes of cargo for the first time in its history, the Port Authority has announced. The port will also have broken the record of nine million standard containers handled.

Last week in the city’s MAS museum, port director Eddy Bruyninckx and port alderman Marc Van Peel presented details of the historic trading milestone, together with a sketch of the future. Later in the week, employees in the port received a gift from the Port Authority to thank them for “their efforts in building the port into a world class platform”. Representatives of the port travelled to 40 locations in the wider port area, on both banks of the river.

The Port Authority also announced the end of an alliance with Essar Port Limited (EOL), a subsidiary of the Indian Essar Group, with a substantial return for the Authority. The alliance dates back to 2012, when Port of Antwerp International (PAI), the Port Authority’s consulting and investment agency, invested €25 million, including €5 million provided by the Flemish investment agency GIMV.

The alliance is now terminated, with a return for PAI of €6.8 million on top of its initial investment. According to Van Peel, the partnership has also helped solidify relations between Antwerp and India.
Climate in flux

Antwerp researchers measure “carbon flux” for European project

The climate change agreement concluded in Paris earlier this month was headline news around the world. Much less will be written about the construction of a small tower in the Hoge Kempen National Park in Limburg, but it is part of the same story. The tower belongs to a new research station designed to collect data on how the gases that cause climate change move between the atmosphere and the plants and soil in the ecosystem. It is one of 35 such stations across Europe in the Integrated Carbon Observation System (Icos), which was formally launched in November. Icos will provide long-term data on how greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide circulate in Europe’s environment. It will also assess exchanges with the oceans and the air over adjacent land masses, giving a picture for Europe as a whole.

This information on the “carbon flux” in Europe will inform predictions about climate change and help governments check that efforts to control it, such as those agreed in Paris, are working.

“These people need reliable data, and that is what we are going to provide,” says Reinhart Ceulemans, professor of ecology at Antwerp University (UAntwerp) and the national co-ordinator for Icos in Belgium. Icos is a European research project that brings together monitoring stations and scientists in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Luxembourg with Switzerland participating as an observer. Other countries are expected to join in due course. The system will operate for at least 20 years, long enough to pick up natural variations in the carbon flux. “An extremely hot and dry year will result in different fluxes than, for example, a wetter or more humid year”, Ceulemans explains. “If you monitor over the longer term, you can see patterns in changes over this period.”

It’s also important that everyone measure carbon flux in the same way. “We use the same instruments, the same technology, the same analysis,” Ceulemans says. The 35 monitoring stations have been selected so that all of Europe’s ecosystems are represented. The new station in Hoge Kempen, for example, is being built to provide data on heathland, which otherwise would not have been covered.

Care has been taken not to disturb the wildlife in the park. The monitoring equipment is housed in a cabin built partly underground, and the tower has been limited to two to three metres in height. The station should be operational by February.

“We measure wind speed in three directions, we sample and analyse gases, and from these we calculate the flux,” Ceulemans explains. Meanwhile, the growth of vegetation near the station will be measured and plant and soil samples taken for laboratory analysis. There will also be a connection to the University of Hasselt’s Ecotron, an experimental facility being built on the fringes of the park. Flanders has two other ecosystem monitoring stations in Icos, also run by UAntwerp. At Lochtroti, near Ghent, the station monitors a short rotation plantation of poplars, with measurements going back to 2010. And at Brasschaat, near Antwerp, monitoring takes place in a Scots pine wood. “We started measuring in 1996, so we have one of longest track records of flux measurements in Europe,” says Ceulemans.

The university also plays a role in the thematic hub that collects and analyses data from all the Icos ecosystem monitoring stations. It takes charge of vegetation data, while flux data goes to the University of Tuscia in Viterbo, Italy, and samples for laboratory analysis go to the French National Institute for Agricultural Research in Bordeaux.

Some 10 people are working on Icos at UAntwerp, with another 20 people directly involved elsewhere in Flanders. This includes staff at the Flanders Marine Institute, who are taking part in the ocean monitoring side of the project, using the research ship Simon Stevin and a research buoy moored at the Thornton Bank offshore wind farm. Belgium has a further three ecosystem monitoring sites in Wallonia, run by the University of Liège at Gembloux.

Being a founder member of Icos is important for the Antwerp group, both as a networking opportunity and for future research. “First of all, we have access to a huge database,” Ceulemans says. “This opens a lot of new avenues for research. Secondly, we can rely on these long-term sites. We can have more PhD and Master’s students on them, and we can involve people who do other research because they will be complementing the flux measurements.”

Antwerp’s Internet of Things project takes big step forward

The City of Antwerp is currently installing LoRa network technology, a huge step in its City of Things project. The project is set to become a frontrunner in the global Internet of Things system, in which objects interact with other objects through both wired and wireless connections.

City of Things is a large-scale test environment in which Antwerp will be able to communicate and interact with intelligent devices and sensors. This kind of communication requires the presence of a network adjusted to the limitations of sensors such as the lifespan of batteries. LoRa, short for Long Range Low Power, takes

“...the long term, thousands of devices and sensors will be connected through the internet,” said professor Steven Latré of iMinds in a statement. “This will form a unique laboratory to test, evaluate and optimise the use of different communication technologies in a real Internet of Things environment.”

By connecting certain city sensors with the LoRa network, researchers will be able to collect intelligent information on what happens in the city. It can, for example, be used to examine the relationship between traffic and air quality. “The information will help to improve life in Antwerp,” said the city’s mayor, Bart De Wever.

Newborns show lower levels of toxins

Newborn babies and over-50s in Flanders have lower levels of toxic substances, like cadmium, lead and PCBs, in their bodies than a decade ago, according to a study by the Flemish Policy Research Centre of Environment and Health. In 2013 and 2014, researchers analysed the umbilical cord blood of 281 newborn babies and blood and urine samples of 209 over-50s. Concentrations of cadmium and lead have shown a sharp decrease from 2002 levels, probably because of stricter legislation and awareness campaigns. Thalium levels have continued to be found in babies, though the concentrations are low compared with foreign statistics.

More funds for unmet medical needs

At the request of public health minister Maggie De Block, the federal government has raised the annual budget for the Unmet Medical Need procedure from €7 million to €10 million. For certain disorders, like types of multiple sclerosis or pancreatic cancer, there are no efficient treatments available. In such cases, there is a procedure known as Unmet Medical Need, through which patients can get access to new drugs before they are officially available on the market. Eligible treatments are selected on the basis of criteria including the rarity of the condition, therapeutic alternatives and the impact on quality of life or life expectancy. A successful request means up to €20,000 per year in drug costs can be reimbursed.

Labels influence flavour perception

Researchers at Ghent University have shown that labels on food significantly influence perception of flavour. The results of their study have been published in the science journal Nature. Researchers from the Sensolab, part of the faculty of bioscience engineering, organised an experiment in which 130 people tasted young gouda cheese. Without being aware of it, the participants tasted the same cheese at different times, each time with a different label – such as “light” or “reduced salt”. The results showed that the light label, associated with a lower fat content, received much lower scores than the standard or “normal” labels.

© Courtesy Icos Belgium

Measuring the change as it happens: members of the local Icos team

© hdr-bvba

Brasschaat, near Antwerp, monitoring takes place in a Scots pine wood.

“We started in 1996, so we have one of longest track records of flux measurements in Europe,” says Ceulemans.
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Farmers, unite
Prize-winning Kortrijk students say co-sharing is future of agriculture

DECEMBER 23, 2015

Did you know that even a fallow acre is still a net producer of carbon dioxide? Combine this with the fact that meat production is a major source of greenhouse gases, and it’s clear that agriculture has a huge responsibility when it comes to fighting global warming and saving the planet.

So how can agriculture be decarbonised? That was the question posed in Agriclimat, a competition for Flanders’ students held during the huge international agriculture fair Agribex, which took place earlier this month at Brus-

els Expo. A jury of five specialists, including science journalist Dirk Brau
dans, meteorologist David Deh
erauw and design engineer Serge de Ghel
dere, took a closer look at the 18 proposals submitted by student teams from schools all over Flanders.

The winning proposal, called CollAgro, was the brainchild of three students from the Kortrijk campus of Vri
es University College. The three are doing their Bachelor’s in a new discipline, ecotechnology – one that fits perfectly with the problem at hand.

In this discipline, students learn to see the big picture regarding aspects like energy, agriculture, environment, climate, use of materials and recycling, “said Nele Pinket, head of the ecotechnology Bachelor’s degree. “You could compare our students, once they’ve graduated, with GPs. While individual issues in energy, agriculture and materials are dealt with by more specialised people – the brain and heart surgeons, you could say.”

Pinket is convinced that it’s due to this wide range of knowledge that her students won the Agriclimat contest. “The CollAgro project delivers a solution to the various concerns of tod-

ay’s farmers, ” she says. “Waste manage-
tment, for example, is always a costly business, especially here in Flanders where regulation is very stringent.”

And the rising cost of energy is something every farmer worries about, she continues. “Not to mention the large investments in machinery that they have to make to stay competitive on the global market.”

The students came up with an idea that’s already well-established in business and, to a lesser extent, in accommodation: co-work-
ing and co-housing. In co-working, typically self-employed people share a working envi-

ronment. This way they can share the costs of necessities like coffee, printers and an internet connection.

Co-housing is a less well-known concept, in which people live in their own homes but share expensive items. “I was really struck by this concept when I first heard of it,” says Alan Cespedes Arkush, one of the students behind CollAgro. “Ten families buy one lawnmower collectively, or 10 families buy a lawnmower each. Look how much money can be saved on things we don’t use every day.”

And does the concept apply to agricultural equipment, then? “We started our project by brainstorming around some principal climate-

related issues in agriculture,” Cespedes Arkush explains, and speculating how we could solve them separately. Soon we noticed that we could link most of the solutions to one central concept: a biogas plant.

A biogas plant, of course, isn’t quite the same as a lawnmower. Cespedes Arkush, “That’s true, but in existing plants there’s often insuf-

ficient raw material to keep them running, and installing a plant is often too expensive for small farmers. So a collective acquisition and a collective supply of manure and harvest remainders for the fermentation process seemed a logical solution to us.”

Another advantage of collective acquisition, he says, “is that buyers can invest in more sustain-

able products with a longer lifetime. That also lowers their carbon footprint”.

Of course, the collective exploitation of a biogas installation is only possible in compact agri-
cultural clusters, with short distances between the individual farms – otherwise the cost and energy required for transport would be too high. For these dense clusters, the students proposed a system of rotational cultivation.

The fertility and productivity of soil increases sharply as alternating crops are used, instead of one monoculture for years. Because each of the farms in a CollAgro cluster has its own specialisation, they can swap their fields among each other.

So what did the three students win? “Oh, that’s a bit of a sad story,” says Cespedes Arkush. “Norma-

ly Agribex would have arranged a trip for us to the climate conference in Paris. But due to the attacks and the severe security measures, they cancelled it. However, we were told that they’re planning a similar trip to a foreign destination next year instead.”

Q&A
A new study puts local perspective to a staffing problem that dogs IT companies from Silicon Valley to Finland: a lack of diversity. Michèle Meeus from the Centre for Balanced Leadership in Merchtem, Flemish Brabant, one of three organisations that conducted the Gender Gap Analysis, explains what IT companies stand to gain from improving diversity.

What is the situation like in Belgium?
There is quite a gender balance in this sector, so we see an underrep-

resentation of women. This is a big problem because most IT compa-
nies are constantly understaffed and looking for new workers.

Why is this gender imbalance a problem?
Academia: studies have consistently shown that gender-balanced teams perform better. ICT and IT are now so integrated into other sectors, into all aspects of our lives, that you can’t afford to work with underperform-
ing teams. You need that talent; you need those different angles that men and women provide.

How does the study you conduct help address this problem?
In the discussion about the underrep-

resentation of women in ICT, the first thing you often hear is that there are too few girls in IT programmes, in maths and in the other STEM subjects [sciences, technology, engineering]. With this survey, we wanted to examine if there was a danger of exit in addi-
tion to the entry problem. What are women’s experiences of working in this sector?
And what did you find?
If you look at the general results, people are satisfied in this sector because it offers flexibility and opportunities. On the other hand, 25% of women compared to 16% of men say they are considering leaving the sector. Moreover, 80% of women feel they have to prove themselves more than their male colleagues, while only 22% of men agree with that statement. This is a blind spot; there is the illusion of equal opportunities, of a level playing field.

So the message of this study is: Be aware of this. Listen to what women’s experiences are of working in the company. Don’t dismiss it with “Oh, I’m sure it’s not that bad”, and “You shouldn’t exagger-
ate”. Because only by listening you can address this problem.

Interview by Linda A Thompson
**WEEK IN ACTIVITIES**

**Stella de Dunis**
A medieval-themed family festival: sword-fighting, storytelling, fire-eaters, troubadours, puppet shows, face-painting, birds of prey, 26 December 14:00-18:00, Abjag-museum Ten Duinen, Komen-klijke Prinslaan 6-8, Koksijde. €7/free for kids 12 and under and anyone in medieval costume. 

**Magical winter walk**
A guided walk through a wintry Antwerp, with Christmas stories and a nip of Elixir d’Anvers to warm the way. Includes an authentic folkloric creche in the Plantin-Moretus Museum. Until 30 December, Antwerp. Reservations required, €13.

**Café Jardin Winter Edition**
A varied programme with storytelling, barbecue, live music, knitting workshop, market stalls and more. 27 December 15:00-23:00, CC Bruxella. £37/€5. To reserve your place on the Winter Edition of Café Jardin, visit www.visitantwerpen.be.

**Christmas Walk**
An all-weather guided walk through fields and woods to four nativity scenes in the Benelux by the green version of legendary restaurant guide Gault&Millau. And yet Graanmarkt 13 is not a vegetarian restaurant. During previous stints in kitchens in Italy and France, Nobels mastered the classical restaurant tradition that favours a meat-centric menu, cheese carts, crystal glasses and white tablecloths. But that wasn’t the direction he wanted to go in with his own place. People go to upscale restaurants, he says, “to celebrate birthdays or other special occasions, and I didn’t want to be that kind of restaurant that you associate with events and exclusivity. I want to make fine dining accessible to everyone. It has to be low key and affordable.” The key to combining fine dining with accessible prices, it turns out, is vegetables. This focus is what makes Graanmarkt 13 unique. Where other chefs take meat or fish as their starting point, Nobels adds meat or fish around the vegetables.

“Lots of people still have prejudices about vegetarian food and see it as alternative or bland,” he says. “I want to show that vegetables can be as tasty as meat and the star of the dish. It all depends on how you prepare them. We frequently grill vegetables, put them on the barbecue or prepare them in a salt crust. These techniques mostly used to prepare meat.”

Nobels, 33, also hopes to minimise the restaurant’s ecological footprint by using seasonal, local and organic produce. On the roof, Nobels and his staff grow more than 100 types of herbs. They also keep two beehives here and another four on the roof of the Flemish Opera.

The restaurant gets the rest of its fresh produce from producers in and around Antwerp. “By using locally sourced ingredients and working with the seasons, we can ensure quality produce and great taste.”

Nobels recently released his first cookbook, with the intriguing title *Vegetables That Sparkle the Conversation.* “Our starter is usually vegetarian and for the main courses, the table gets a big dish in the middle of the table that they can share,” the chef explains. “It becomes a conversation topic. And I also always give one more portion than the number of people in the party, so they have to discuss who gets the last piece.”

Illustrated with mouth-watering photographs, the book centres on 17 vegetables that Nobels builds 68 glorious dishes around. As part of Studio Brussel’s charity event *De Warmste Week,* Graanmarkt 13 staff prepared and sold veggie dishes from a stall in front of the restaurant this past Saturday. For every dish sold, one meal will go to Dakar, a non-profit that works with the homeless.

“It’s a dinner from the locals for the locals,” says Nobels.

**Bruxella 1238**
Once a month, this archaeological museum under the old Stock Exchange is open to the public. Purchase a ticket for a guided tour in English at the Museum of the City of Brussel on Grote Markt, 6 January (and every first Wednesday) 10:15-13:00. Bruxella 1238, Bourse, Brussels, €4.

**Bommelsfeesten**
A traditional folk festival with roots in the Middle Ages, tied to pagan Yule celebrations. Two parades on Saturday and a children’s party on Sunday afternoon (€5/€3 for kids). Crazy Monkey costume ball with live music (tickets £17 at the door), 9-11 January, Ronse city centre.

**Make veggies, not meat**

**Graanmarkt 13 chef publishes cookbook with veggies in the starring role**

Located on a quaint square next to Antwerp’s Stadsschouwburg is Graanmarkt 13, a smart and contemporary restaurant with a casual atmosphere, and a twist. Since opening in 2010, it has been voted the best veggie restaurant in Flanders and one of the top three “vegetable restaurants” in the Benelux by the green version of legendary restaurant guide Gault&Millau. And yet Graanmarkt 13 is not a vegetarian restaurant. During previous stints in kitchens in Italy and France, Nobels mastered the classical restaurant tradition that favours a meat-centric menu, cheese carts, crystal glasses and white tablecloths. But that wasn’t the direction he wanted to go in with his own place. People go to upscale restaurants, he says, “to celebrate birthdays or other special occasions, and I didn’t want to be that kind of restaurant that you associate with events and exclusivity. I want to make fine dining accessible to everyone. It has to be low key and affordable.” The key to combining fine dining with accessible prices, it turns out, is vegetables. This focus is what makes Graanmarkt 13 unique. Where other chefs take meat or fish as their starting point, Nobels adds meat or fish around the vegetables.

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**BITE**

**Dining out on New Year’s Eve**

Finding somewhere to eat on New Year’s Eve can be a struggle as many restaurants take a break over the festive period. But we’ve tracked down a handful of places across the region where you can celebrate in style and taste. But be quick to make a reservation; they expect to be fully booked by Christmas.

**Antwerp**
Antwerp’s annual Millennium Nacht will see revellers feast and dance the old year away at the Hoog Huis. The menu focuses on seasonal produce and around Antwerp. “By using locally sourced ingredients and working with the seasons, we can ensure quality produce and great taste.”

Each year, the Hoog Huis opens its doors to the public, and the dancing continues until at least 5.00. Hoog Huis gives diners two price options – one including alcohol (€110) and one without (€90).

**Hasselt**
In Hasselt’s Hoog Huis, the six-course celebration begins at 19.00 with an appetiser and nibbles. The menu focuses on seasonal produce and features deer as the main course. At midnight, everyone who has made a reservation receives a complimentary glass of champagne. At 00.30 the Hoog Huis opens its doors to the public, and the dancing continues until at least 5.00. Hoog Huis gives diners two price options – one including alcohol (€110) and one without (€90).
Plastic is dead, long live plastic

Brussels welcomes Adam, its first museum dedicated to both art and design

Sally Tipper
More articles by Sally \ flanderstoday.eu

C ulture lovers rejoice: Brussels has another new museum. Hot on the heels of Schaerbeek’s Train World, opened back in September, comes the Art & Design Atomium Museum, known as Adam. It’s set up in a former wholesale market and furniture store in the north of the city, alongside the unmissable silver spheres of its parent cultural centre.

Fittingly for a temple to art and design, it’s got distinctive features of its own that make it stand out on the Heizel plateau. The red and yellow scaffolding-style staircase at the front entrance, designed by French city planner and architect Jean Nouvel, is reflected in the building’s windows, and some striking plastic statues stand watch in the gardens outside.

This eye-catching entrance contrasts with the low-key exterior of the resolutely functional Trade Mart building itself, and the understated design theme continues inside, where industrial fittings allow the exhibits to speak for themselves.

Lhoas & Lhoas, the Brussels-based architects charged with designing the museum in the former market space, said that their aim was to take a building that was previously practically invisible and make it just the opposite.

The permanent exhibition is dedicated to the Plasticarium, the Atomium’s incredible collection of plastic objects bought from collector Philippe Decleve, a local enthusiast who has lovingly gathered together thousands of objects since the 1980s.

The collection – a riot of orange, yellow and red – encompasses items dating from the golden age of plastic in the early 1960s via pop art to the postmodern era, with everything from chairs and radios to tableware and telephones. Before the Atomium bought it, the collection was only available to view on appointment at Decleve’s own home.

Though many of the objects scream 1970s, and the feel is decidedly retro, organisers are keen to point out that plastic as a medium isn’t dead and continues to evolve, with new developments in more ecological plastics happening all the time.

Many of these objects remain resolutely functional beneath the surface: the curved desk, the child’s table that flips over to become a chair, the hot-lips telephone, the green pineapple water jug and glasses. Freddy Thielenmans, former mayor of Brussels-City and now the honorary mayor, spoke at the opening ceremony. “We’re so proud of this museum we’ve built here,” he said, “because this place is part of our history.”

“It’s important for us that visitors make the link between this museum and the Atomium,” adds museum spokesperson Inge Van Eycken. “It’s really the Atomium’s art and design museum.”

Until now there’s been no dedicated art and design museum in Brussels, she points out. “Adam offers visitors a collection of 2,000 items in plastic, from art objects via design to everyday utility objects.

Nowhere in Belgium is there a similar collection or museum, at even anywhere in Europe.”

How does it complement the work of the Atomium, that symbol of progress and modernity at the heart of Expo 58, and still a major city landmark? “It offers us extra space, so some of our temporary exhibitions on design and contemporary art will move to the Adam,” she says. “Together, the Atomium and Adam provide a rich cultural offer: design, architecture, art and subjects like space and water.”

The plastic collection is too big to be displayed all at once, so exhibits will be rotated each year. Temporary exhibitions will also run alongside the Plasticarium, with a focus on 20th- and 21st-century art and design. They include Eames and Hollywood, coming in March.

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On the record

Punk micro-label Oddie Records is doing music the old-school way

Composer Luc Brewaeys dies at 56

Flemish composer Luc Brewaeys has died of cancer at the age of 56. Born in Mortsel in Antwerp province, Brewaeys studied composition in Brussels, Siena and Darmstadt. In the 1980s he was closely associated with the Greek composer Iannis Xenakis, and his works were regularly performed by De Munt, de Filharmonie and the National Orchestra of Belgium, as well as smaller ensembles like Champ d'Action and Ictus. Arguably Flemish's greatest composer, the work he wrote for the Queen Elisabeth Music Competition a few years ago was described by the jury as too difficult for the contestants to play.

Lead actor in Black named European Shooting Star

The Berlin International Film Festival has named Mechelen-born Martha Canga Antonio as one of its 10 European Shooting Stars for 2016, a designation that has helped launch the international careers of many young actors. "In Black, a story about gang violence in Brussels," said the jury, "Martha gives an extraordinary debut as a modern Juliet. In her very first role, she already shows great timing, courage and determination – and a natural acting ability."

The director of Black, in cinemas now, chose Canga Antonio out of 450 young women who auditioned for a part in the film. Although she did not study acting and had no prior experience, she won the lead, playing the role of Ravelin so convincingly that she has earned rave reviews around the globe. The 20-year-old was named "one of nine up-and-coming actors to watch" by movie site indiewire after the film's world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in September. (See related story, p5)

Star Wars breaks 2015 record

The new Star Wars film The Force Awakens broke the record for the most ticket sales on an opening day in Belgium this year. Some 80,000 people went to see the movie on its opening day last week for sales of €746,000. That’s an all-time record for a Disney studios film, but not for any film. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows part 2 attracted 103,000 people to the cinema in 2011, for an income of more than €1 million on its first day.

Dennis Van Hoof is punk rock. There’s no Mohican hairdo or safety pins, but he’s definitely punk rock. The ethos of Oddie, his one-man record label, is rooted in the self-reliance, artistic freedom and anti-corporatism of the American underground and British New Wave of the 1970s and 80s. "I try to approach things with a punk, DIY ethic," Van Hoof, 25, says. "I love meeting people, getting introduced as you go along, just building something with others who are passionate about music and want to create something cool together. And that you can only do with an independent label."

He’s been building his network from Zoersel, in the Kempen region east of Antwerp, since the first Oddie release, Sketchy Kids Volume One. Released in the summer of 2014, it's a compilation of 10 songs by 10 bands including Mountain Bike, The Future Dead, YAHWS, Tubelight and Alpha Whale.

Sketchy Kids was actually Van Hoof’s graduation project for his Bachelor’s in music management from PXL University College in Hasselt. "I chose to put out a vinyl rock record," he says, "I paid for the production of everything, and the bands just had to contribute a song. Since then, Oddie has put out more music by The Glacks, Double Veterans, Mind Rays, Teen Creeps, Equal Idiots, Tint Fingers, Dead High Wire and The Mary Hart Attack. The first record was all done officially but for all the others, it’s a handshake deal!

These bands are the core of Van Hoof’s network, but distribution is also key. "I had some talks with companies, but if I have 300 records and there are, like, five cool independent record shops in Belgium, I can just take the records there," he says.

Among those cool shops is Fatkat Records and Champ d’Action and Ictus.

"By focusing on the relationship and friendship with people, that’s the right way and wrong way to do things," says guitarist Kristof Souvage.

"Van Hoof has a right way and wrong way for bands to grow. Tubelight and Double Veterans are on the next level, but they are also very much aware of what they don’t want to do. To get to the final of Humo’s Rock Rally, get a nice review in Knack, spam everyone on Facebook to get the likes up, be sent by the label to do promo... You can do all that, but it just not going to be effective as it once was. ‘The punk rock way is the future’,” he adds.

To illustrate, Mary Hart Attack drummer Kris Vlaeminck recalls a show at the Vooruit in Ghent that was “nowhere near sold out, by a band who have way more airplay than we do. But if you go to a gig from the underground scene, like Mind Rays, it’s always full. People who are really interested in music are looking for gigs like that”. Van Hoof: "The routes outside Studio Brussels and the Rock Rally are becoming easier for bands to see. The old-school approach is coming back. Go to Germany playing shitty places on a real tour. That’s where the magic happens!”

Wintervuur lights up the holidays with nomadic programme

Wintervuur (Winter Fire) is a multidisciplinary festival that aims to get us out of doors during those lazy days between Christmas and New Year. Featuring premiers of local and international theatre companies as well as intricate circus acts and plenty of music, it will turn the Bist square in Wilrijk into a seasonal circus village.

Based on the principle of old-school travelling circuses and carnivals, this biennial nomadic festival sets up in a different district of Antwerp each time, giving locals and passers-by the chance to discover hidden places in the city. The nostalgic atmosphere and setting contrast with contemporary theatre, music and performances, adding a familiar yet innovative vibe to the mix. Highlights this year are the French circus company Cirque Toucan with their production Mantien ou Jamais (Now or Never, pictured), where humour and music are intertwined with breathtaking acrobatics. Local theatre company Comp. Marinas and the Dutch company 1 Barre Land premiere their new co-production Foor niks umsonet (Roughly: Without Gain), based on the work of Austrian author JP Nestroy, who loved to parody the bourgeoise in the 19th century. Annies Van Hullebusch and Compagnie Frieda have created a special production for Wintervuur called T.A.K. This dynamic performance is set in a small animation studio in Wilrijk’s oldest theatre and will feature music, memories and puppets. "By focusing on the relationship and friendship between a grandfather and grandchild, we wanted to look at a specific life as well as live in general," explains Van Hullebusch. "We zoom in on these two figures, literally and figuratively.

And then there’s Poolnacht (Night at the Pole), a production by five artists who travelled to the northernmost part of Europe where the sun doesn’t rise in winter. They wanted to explore what happens if you lose your concept of time and become one with nature. "We wanted to see how urban dwellers would cope with a situation devoid of all provocations, where even time becomes irrelevant," explains co-creator Liesbeth Grupping.

Wintervuur also features short films screened in a repurposed campervan and free music in The Barn – a huge seasonal construction on the Bist – with concerts by local bands. (See related story, p3)

On 26 December to 2 January

On and near Bist

Wilrijk (Antwerp)
Flemish writer tells of life and loss on Curaçao

Stefan Brijs' new novel is a family saga that follows three generations of men against the backdrop of Curaçao's fight for independence from the Netherlands.

With De engelenmaker (The Angel Maker) and Post voor Merneau Bromley (Mail for Ms Bromley), Stefan Brijs gave us period novels about very specific topics, namely human cloning and the First World War. But in his latest novel, his most contemporary, the writer offers a slow-burning account of the lives of three generations of men on the Dutch Caribbean island of Curaçao.

Maan en zon (Moon and Sun) begins in 1961. Macho cab driver Roy Tromp is more interested in chasing women than being a good father to his son, Max, a bright boy who wants to become a teacher. With the help of Father Daniel, Max tries to achieve a better life for himself, free from crime and poverty.

Stefan Brijs' interest in Curaçao was sparked by his wife, who was born on the island. Only that living there for 12 years, but it was

an experience that changed them, shaped them even. It is an island with extremi-
ties that leaves its mark."

The novel unfolds like a documentary, making it Brijs' most real-

istic novel to date. "Although these three men are fiction, I don't doubt that there are actu-

ally people out there living those lives. The situa-

tions, descrip-
tions, even the reac-
tion of certain charac-
ters, is very accu-

rate." In fact, the narrative was prompted by a newspaper clipping Brijs held onto for many years (and which he added at the end of the novel). "When I stumbled upon it again, I decided that it was time to tell this story," he says. "I wanted to know what happened to the man in that clipping, and to do so you have to tell a 40-year history of Curaçao. Only that can explain how he got to where he is today, as well as how the island got to where it is – how did things get so bad in certain areas?"

Brijs uses these three genera-
tions to explain the changes that Curaçao has undergone over the past decades; he focuses on labourers, unions and big oil companies. "Roy is a typi-

cal 1960s black Antillean; his son isn't sure which direction to take his life because he is scared by the absence of his father. And then there's Max's son, Sonny, who is very mate-

rialistic, like many young-

sters today. Your genes are vital in determining who you’re going to be, in addi-
tion to your surroundings."

The life stories of the three are set against the turbulent period of Curaçao's fight for independence from the Netherlands as well as a harrowing backdrop of poverty, deception and crime. Father Daniel finds most of the reminiscing in the novel, focusing on key moments when the Tromp men found themselves at a crossroads.

He often remembers flashes of conversations, which has the effect of creating a whirlwind of dialogue that adds to novel's already elec-
trifying pace. Maan en zon is a rich novel that recounts a little-known history of emancipation using flesh-and-blood protagonists filled with determination.

"I wanted to write a story that captures readers and that is hard to put down," Brijs says. "The story has to unlock certain emotions, entertain and educate, that's what makes a good story great."

Maan en zon (★★★★) is published in Dutch by Atlas Contact

MORE NEW BOOKS THIS MONTH

Wild vlees (Wild Flesh)

Celia Ledoux • Ulgterwij Vrijdag

Columnist Celia Ledoux's debut novel tells the story of three women: a rich heiress with a penchant for swinger clubs, a stay-at-home mum who can't help but think the grass must be greener elsewhere and her sister, a financial big shot who disappears into the wilderness. Wild vlees is a dark novel that calls into question a modern society's obsession with materialism, sex and deception. These daring topics make Ledoux's first venture into literature a fasci-
nating one.★★★★

Bloedboek (Blood Book)

Dimitri Verhulst • Atlas Contact

One of Flanders' most controversial and critically acclaimed authors, Dimitri Verhulst pulls another stunner with Blood-

book, a rewriting of the Bible. The novel is based on the first five parts of the Old Testa-

ment, which become a cluttered and far-

touched flight of fancy. His aim, he has said, was to show what God and his apostles were really like; in other words, that they don't practice what they preach. Bloodbook is vintage Verhulst: cynical and clever.★★★★

Verman je (Pull it Together)

Philippe Diepvents • Manteau

Philippe Diepvents' second novel centres on Wolft, a woman in the throes of a love life and death. To pass the time, she tells the reader how she ended up there. She intro-
duces us to four people who all played a crucial role in her demise: her best friend, a bystander who isn't as innocent as he claims; the man with the gun; and Erwin, who was at the right place at the right time.

Vallen in liefde is a story about love, pain and ultimately death, but in spite of its heavy subject matter, it's an entertaining novel packed with puns and plot twists.★★★★
There's no place like home

BE Film Festival
26–31 December
Bozar & Cinematek, Brussels
BOZAR & CINEMATEK, BRUSSELS

“There’s no place like home”

One of the opening lines from Jaco van Dormael’s Le tout Nouveau Testament (The Brand New Testament) got the country’s biggest collective laugh this year. The film that has made the shortlist for consideration for a foreign-language Oscar nomination can be relived over all again—or seen for the first time—at the BE Film Festival in Brussels this month. Every December, locals get the chance to see all the Belgian films they’ve missed over the last 12 months—and a few premières, which sweetens the deal. Next to Le tout, the year’s other big releases can be found here, including newcomer Robin Pront’s most excellent D’Ardennen—an action-packed cat-and-mouse between two brothers—and Paradise Trips. Raf Reytyns’ comedy drama that sees a tour bus driver (Gene Bervoets) pushed beyond his limits by a bunch of haphpy travellers en route to a music festival in Croatia (pictures). But you’ll find lesser-known gems at BE, too, such as Olivier and Yves Ringer’s Les oiseaux de passage (Birds of Passage), which won best children’s film in Montreal this year for its simple story of two girls—one in a wheelchair—who embark on a road trip to save a duckling. Then there’s Cagford, a beautifully realised animated feature by Jan Bulthuul about Ostendenaars fighting in a special unit in the First World War. The story is bleak, but the fantastical colours and heartfelt denouement breathe new life into the current war memorial climate.

Among the most exciting premières is Flemish filmmaker Manni Riche’s first fiction feature, Problemhuis Hotel, a curious mix of nationalités and languages as residents come into contact with new arrivals at a refugee centre in Brussels. The film opens in cinemas next month. —Lisa Bradshaw

OPERA

Very Alive Composers: Rethinking Opera

6–10 January
Flagey, Brussels
FLAGEY.BE

While modern composers like Philip Glass have been rich in classical music, a contemporary facefell, the image of opera remains relatively old school. But under the surface, there’s much more to 21st-century opera than fat ladies singing. This festival showcases the adventurous work of fresh, young European opera composers like Péter Eötvös, Luca Francesconi, Balázs Horváth and András Almász-Tóth—all of whom collaborate on an adaptation of Polish playwright Slawomir Mrozek’s absurd one-act play. Headliner Tom Wrigglesworth hails from Sheffield, where his quirky appearance (he’s a dead ringer for Frank Zappa) and observational humour have earned him work as a stand-up comedian and radio personality. He has toured the UK, New Zealand and Canada. Dutch-Greek comedian Soula Notos, a member of Utrecht collective Comedyhouse and co-founder of ComedyKitchen, is also performing. Irish comedian David Hayden hosts the evening. —Gy

FAMILY

Smells Like Circus

13–17 January
Vooruit, Ghent
VOORUIT.BE

This multi-venue circus festival returns for a week of family-friendly performances in and around Ghent. The event is a fruit of a collaboration between one of the city’s chief performance spaces, Vooruit, and the Flemish Centre for Circus Arts. Venues include a theatre, a cultural centre and a church. There’s even an interactive puppet show instal-lation in public space. Performances at Vooruit include Bert & Fred’s slapstick autobiography, eight years, five months, four weeks, two days; choreographer Rachid Ouramdane’s humanist dance/acetabﻼc’s production Tordre; and the closing night extravaganza Cirque Mélange, led by veteran Flemish street theatre performer Stefana De Winter. —GV

CONCERT

East Flanders
Willem Vermandere: Solo performance by the West Flemish folk legend, featuring songs in his local dialect, such as “Blanche en zijn peird” and “Ik plantte nee keer patat tens.” 26 December 20:00, Sint-Pauluskerk, Denderstraat 5, Deinze; 27 December 20:15, OLV van de Zeeuwskerk, Floraplein, Merelbeke
willem-vermandere.be

VISUAL ARTS

Brussels
Hannes Coudseyn: Ugly Belgian Houses: Exhibition around the new book by the photographer from Kortrijk, based on his popular blog and Facebook page of the same name, filled with the country’s biggest “architectural flaws,” accompanied by wry captions. 4-26 January, Recycleart, Ursulinenstraat 25
recycleart.be

Genk
Beyond Food and Design: Exhibition in the framework of 20 years of Toegepast, a mentored talent development trajectory for young designers, featuring new works with one common theme: how food shapes our landscape. Until 31 January, C-mine Designentrum, C-mine 10
beyondfood.be

FESTIVAL

Brussels
River Jazz Festival: Second edition of the festival with 14 concerts spread over three stages across the city, featuring Bap Kamara Jr, Tutu Puame and Laurent Blondiau and many more. 8-23 January, Jazz Station, Espace Senghor & Theatre Max
riverjazz.wix.com

PERFORMANCE

Brussels
Dick Whittington and His Magical Cat: The English Comedy Club presents a humorous, energetic version of the well-loved British tale based on the legend of the 15th-century Lord Mayor of London (in English). 8-10 January, Oudergem Cultural Centre, Vorstlaan 183
theatlibeboxoffice.co.uk/cnc

FILM

Brussels
Bozar Cinema Days: 25 films in five days, featuring new independent and avant-garde cinema, low- and no-budget films, art house, animations, biopics and documentaries. 6-10 January, Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 25
bozar.be
Talking Dutch
The pleasure yacht has to go

Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek @ flanderstoday.eu

Every year, Flemings get to pick the one word they would like to ban from their dictionaries. According to De Standaard, ‘‘Wie of dat woord gaat ook dit jaar weer op zoek’’ – ‘‘Throw out that Word’’ is searching again this year, naar precies dat woord uit onze Nederlandse taal – for that one word in our Dutch language, dat de meeste gebruikers koud rillingen bezorgt – that sends most people into a cold sweat.

Eind november – at the end of November, riep het Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie al Nederlanders en Vlamingen op – the Institute for Dutch Lexicology called on all Dutch and Flemish people, om hun ervaringen rond het meest griezelige woord uit ons Nederlandse taalgebed met de wereld te delen – to share with the world their experiences with the ghastliest word in our language.

The 10 most hated words were published a couple of weeks ago. It included some based on English slang, like chillen – to chill. And selfie – which needs no explanation.

Other irritating words were meaningless compounds such as dagelijks – daily. And participatiesamenleving – participation society. Then you have trendy new terms that reflect modern lifestyles, like diervriendelijk vlees – animal-friendly meat. (Bestaat niet – It doesn’t exist, said one irritated respondent. Doordat – is nooit vriendelijk – Killing is never friendly.)

You might have been tempted to vote for papagay dag waarop vader voor de kinderen zorgt – dad day, the day when the father takes care of the children. Or possibly you agree with the people who want to see the back of plezierjacht – a pleasure yacht.

Then again, if you can’t stand bad grammar, you might want to put an end to the use of me when the correct word is mijn – mine. Welke van de tien het tot absolute ‘‘winnaar’’ zal schoppen – Which of the 10 is chosen as the absolute ‘‘winner’’, dat mag u zelf mee helpen bepalen – is something you can help to decide.

Some 25,000 people responded to the challenge. And the winner was that annoying little word me – as in me moeder – my mother. Deelnemers aan de verkiezing – People who sent in their votes, kunnen het feitieve gebruik van ‘me’ niet meer aanhoren – couldn’t stand the wrong use of me any longer. ‘Me kreeg 30% van de stemmen – ‘Me’ received 30% of the votes, en is daarmee de overtuigende verliezer van dit jaar – making it this year’s undisputed loser. In second place, ‘‘Me’ kreeg 30% van de stemmen – ‘Me’ received 30% of the votes, en is daarmee de overtuigende verliezer van dit jaar – making it this year’s undisputed loser. In second place,

The other half thinks the lock-down was going too far, and prime minister Charles Michel cautiously agrees, saying recently that some of the responses – shutting down recreation and shopping centres, for instance, might have been a bit exaggerated. In the end, the arrests of serious suspects took place after the threat level was brought back down to 3, proving all those security ‘‘lockdown’’ measures unnecessary.

However you look at it, not much harm was done: a couple of football matches canceled, the metro shut down for a few days, less shopping at the weekend. It could have been worse.

And so we reach the year 2016 in perfect disagreement: 50% of you think the government’s reaction to the terrorist threat in November was not exaggerated, if only because it would have been terribly embarrassing to have done too little and have something seriously awful happen.

Poll
Do you think that Brussels went too far with its security measures during the level 4 terrorism alert last month?

a. No, better too much security than not enough. What would people be saying if a bomb had gone off? - 50%

b. Yes. Increased security patrols made sense, but closing down all the bars and sports centres was just silly

THE LAST WORD

Free to be... you and me
“I don’t want to be a girl. I’m happy being a boy. Albert a boy who likes experimenting with makeup,” University student Joppe De Campeneere of Deinze, aged 18, is using the internet to break down the taboo against men and makeup.

Spinless speeders
“A couple of minutes can make all the difference and save a life. So stop. Call emergency services, help if you can; at least find out how the victim is.”

Tunes for saloons
“Every time I go shopping or to a restaurant, I do the same exercise: What music would go best here? The answer is never music.”

Talk of the town
“I’ve never really thought about my background. I feel like a Fleming among the Flemish. But it doesn’t bother me to be considered a role model.”

Next week’s question:
The government has proposed lowering the blood-alcohol limit for new drivers, who are more likely to be involved in an accident. What do you think?
Log on to the Flanders Today website at www.flanderstoday.eu and click on VOTE!