

CURRENT AFFAIRS \ P2	POLITICS \ P4	BUSINESS \ P6	INNOVATION \ P7	EDUCATION \ P9	ART & LIVING \ P10
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SAVVY SCHOOL
A new secondary school in Antwerp province is turning classroom tradition on its head by linking subjects and emphasising initiative and creativity
\\ 9

CHIC FRIETS
Michelin-starred chef and mega-celebrity Sergio Herman has opened one of his gourmet frietkots in Antwerp, and Belgian fries may never be the same
\\ 10



GOING GREEN
Both Flanders and Brussels will have a bit o' the Irish this weekend, with historical buildings sporting a greenish glow and the annual St Patrick's Day parade
\\ 13 & 15



At the helm

Bart Somers earns plaudits for turning Mechelen into integration success story

 **Linda A Thompson**
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The mayor of Mechelen recently won the World Mayor Prize for transforming the Flemish city into a proud home for its diverse residents and a potential solution to Europe's struggle with the refugee crisis.

For someone who's just been laurelled the world's best mayor, Bart Somers strikes a rather apologetic tone. His competitors were probably just as, if not more, qualified than him, the Mechelen mayor says with a shrug in his wood-panelled office on a recent Wednesday afternoon. And no, he's not really sure why he won. He is certain of one thing though – the World Mayor Prize will boost the morale of this small city on the Dijle river, tucked between Brussels and Antwerp. "People are proud of this prize," he says, referring to local residents. "This is good for the 'us' feeling, for making us feel like we're doing all right."

Awarded every two years by the London-based City Mayors Foundation, the World Mayor Prize seeks to spotlight mayors and models for urban living that can serve as examples for politicians around the world.

This time around – on the heels of a year in which the world saw the largest-ever refugee crisis – the foundation aimed to celebrate mayors and cities that showed excellence in the integration and acceptance of refugees and newcomers into their communities. Mechelen – the city of 86,000 that Somers (*pictured*) has steered since 2001 – did just that.

At the height of the refugee crisis, Mechelen asked the federal government to send refugees its way – the only Belgian city to do so. It went on to house 200 refugees in an emergency aid shelter over a nine-month period.

“Human rights and justice are part of the DNA of this city

The men, women and children received Dutch classes as well as lessons focused on basic social skills, while approximately half of them were also involved in volunteer activities.

"Human rights and justice are part of the DNA of this city," says Somers, whose own grandfather spent time in a refugee camp in the Netherlands during the First World War. "We had to take up our responsibility."

Housing the refugees, who have since been transferred to regular shelters across Flanders, has made the city stronger and better, claims Somers. "They gave us the opportunity to realise a central Western value: that you have to give shelter to people in need, people fleeing war and violence. This is one of the basic principles of our society, and if we abandon this, we aren't protecting our Western society, but destroying it."



© Wouter Van Vooren/ID Photo

Tributes planned for 22 March

Moment of silence and special services on first anniversary of terrorist attacks



The federal government will mark the anniversary of last year's terrorist attacks with the unveiling of a monument on Schumanplein in Brussels, near Maalbeek metro station, where one of the bombings took place. The attacks took place on 22 March last year, when two suicide bombers detonated their bombs in the departures hall of Brussels Airport at about 8.00. An hour later, another suicide bomber blew up a metro rail car at Maalbeek station, near the EU quarter. Cardinal Jozef de Kesel will lead a prayer meeting on Wednesday, 22 March in the cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula in central Brussels, while the non-profit Foyer is organising an inter-religious concert in the St John the Baptist church in Molenbeek, bringing together Christians and Muslims in song.



© Nicolas Maeterlinck/BELGA

The group Silence for Peace will hold a moment of silence and meditation on a Maalbeek station platform, before unveiling a commemorative plaque. In other commemorations, the Brussels-Capital Region plans to plant 32 birch trees in the Sonien Forest, one for each victim who died in the attacks. That project will be directed by garden architect Bas Smets and should be "a place of silence and meditation," according to a spokesperson for environment minister Céline Fremault. The municipality of Brussels-City has gathered the many messages and other mementoes left by members of the public in front of the Beurs in Brussels in the days following the attacks (pictured), with the aim of turning them into a monument.

Community remembers victims of Swiss bus crash

Communities have held services to mark the fifth anniversary of a bus crash in Switzerland in which 22 children and four teachers from two schools in Flanders were killed. The coach was bringing children from schools in Heverlee, part of Leuven, and Lommel in Limburg back from a skiing holiday in Sierre in the Valais region. The two drivers were also killed when the bus hit the inside wall of a motorway tunnel. The actual cause of the crash, which took place on 13 March 2012, has never been determined. On Friday, children and parents from

Sint-Lambertus school in Heverlee marked the anniversary of the crash. Later there was a mass in the local church. "It was a very intimate and comforting service, in which the whole parish gathered to bear the intense pain and suffering of that event and support each other," said deacon Dirk De Gendt, who officiated. Friends of the victims brought commemorative texts, and a choir from the school sang. Meanwhile, the Dutch government has begun legal procedures to continue an investigation into the cause of the acci-

dent. Six of the children who died were Dutch, and some of the victims' parents are not satisfied with the verdict of the Swiss prosecutor, who concluded that the crash was an accident and that the cause could not be determined. Last October, Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte requested blood samples from the driver from the Swiss authorities. Belgian justice minister Koen Geens said that blood samples had already been destroyed by the Swiss legal authorities and pointed out that supplying samples to a third party would be in breach of both Belgian and Swiss law. \ AH



© Vincent Van Doornick/Isosport/BELGA

Antwerp move up to Division A, while Westerlo are relegated

Three years after reaching Belgian football's top division, Westerlo have been relegated after a 0-4 home defeat to Genk on the final day of the regular season. Tiny Westerlo were always going to struggle at the highest level: Their sole major honour is a Belgian Cup. The weekend fixtures saw Anderlecht top the table with 61 points, followed by Club Brugge on 59 and Zulte Waregem on 54. There was a five-way scramble for the next three places, eventually claimed by Gent, Oostende and Charleroi, with Mechelen and Genk just missing out. The top six now face a 10-game championship play-off league, while the next nine fight it out in a separate play-off for a place in the Europa League. Antwerp fans, meanwhile, had cause to celebrate as the club were promoted to Division A for the first time in more than 10 years, after beating Roeselare in the runners-up play-off (pictured). And Genk are almost certain to reach the Europa League semi-finals on Thursday, when they host Gent. \ Leo Cendrowicz

Leuven rail accident caused by excess speed, says expert

The accident that saw a train derailling outside Leuven station last month, killing one passenger and injuring 27, was caused by excess speed, according to the Leuven prosecutor's office. The accident happened on the afternoon of 18 February, as the train was leaving Leuven on its way to De Panne. The train derailed, and the front carriage tipped over. Train traffic was disrupted on the busy line – which travels through Brussels – for a week as the wreckage was removed and repairs carried out to tracks and overhead cables. A rail expert has now produced a report, which states that the train passed the second set of points on leaving the station at a speed of 100 km/h, where the maximum speed is 40 km/h. The driver of the train said he was



© Belga

convinced the limit was 90 km/h, suggesting he may not have seen the signs, according to the report. He also said he braked as soon as he saw the points where he was not expecting them, but it was too late. The driver has been on leave since the accident; a decision regarding sanctions will be taken later by the prosecutor, once the full investigation is complete. NMBS is currently outfitting its infrastructure with the European Train Control System (ETCS), which has an automatic braking system and communicates signals to the driver inside the train digitally. The train involved in the latest accident has not yet been fitted with ETCS. Currently some one-third of NMBS trains are using the system. \ AH



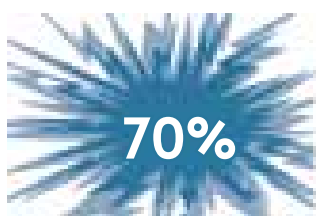
tonnes of rubbish picked up in Brussels in 2016 by Net Brussel, a fall of 2%, continuing the decline seen since 2009. The contents of the blue PMD bag, meanwhile, went up by 4% to 13,244 tonnes



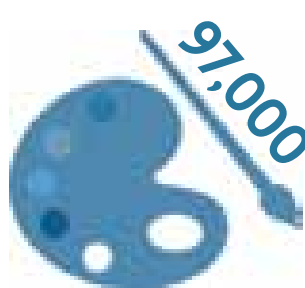
of journeys in Flanders are made by car, 6% more than a decade ago. All other modes of transport – walking, cycling and public transport – have become less popular



approved by West Flanders for this year's Watou Arts Festival, after the Flemish government cut its subsidies. The Flemish government has since earmarked subsidies for the 2018 and 2019 editions



of young people in Flanders between 18 and 30 have had an episode of tinnitus – a ringing, hissing or buzzing sound in the ears – after attending a concert or club, according to a UGent study



people visited the Pablo Picasso exhibition of sculptures in Bozar in Brussels, placing it in the top five best-attended exhibitions of the last decade. The four-month show closed on 5 March

WEEK IN BRIEF

Rail authority NMBS and Flemish public transport authority De Lijn are working on a **joint train-tram-bus pass**, which would allow users to switch from the train to a bus or tram without needing a different ticket. The federal and Flemish mobility ministers must still finalise details, including tariffs but hope to rule out the new pass by the end of the year.

Landry Mawungu is the **new director of the Minorities Forum**, which represents ethnic and cultural minorities in Flanders and Brussels. He replaces Wouter Van Bellingen, who has been appointed to lead the implementation of the Flemish government's Integration Pact. Mawungu, 26, studied sociology and international politics at KU Leuven and has been with the organisation for six months.

\ minderhedenforum.be

Brussels is adding **another cartoon wall** to the 49 already in place. Dominique Goblet was chosen by the residents of the Alhambra quarter near KVS to decorate a wall in Sint-Jan-Nepomucenusstraat. She is the first woman cartoonist to create a wall in the capital, but she won't be the last, according to Ans Persoons, the councillor in charge of neighbourhood contracts and participation.

Opposition party SPA has asked Flemish sports minister Philippe Muyters to put an immediate stop to **sport activities on artificial grass**, following a decision by Houthalen-Helchteren in Limburg to replace two football pitches with material containing rubber granulate. According to Dutch researchers, exposure to the material – often made out of old car-tyres – poses health risks. Muyters said he had ordered an investigation by Sport Vlaanderen.

Federal home affairs minister Jan Jambon has selected 15 police zones for a test project involving

the use of stun guns, commonly called Tasers, for a period of six months. The zones chosen have specially trained officers to carry out the test. Every use of the weapon, which delivers an electric shock in the case of resisting arrest, will be logged and an evaluation made. Police unions have threatened to strike over the plan because they say there is no legal basis for the use of Tasers, putting officers at risk of prosecution.

The activist groups protesting against government plans for the **Oosterweel connection in Antwerp** have gathered 75,000 signatures in order to hold a referendum if they cannot come to an agreement with the government on the current proposal. The groups – Straten-Generaal, Ademloos and Ringland – are in support of a new plan proposed by a mediator. A 2009 referendum on a previous version saw the controversial viaduct disappearing from the plan.

The prosecutor's office in Halle-Vilvoorde is bringing charges against rail authority NMBS, infrastructure company Infrabel and a train driver in connection with the **accident at Buizingen**, Flemish Brabant, in 2010. In the accident, in which 19 people died and more than 150 were injured, a train travelling from Leuven to Braine-le-Comte collided with a train travelling from Quévrain to Liège. An enquiry has revealed that the driver of the Leuven train passed through a red signal, something he has always denied. He faces up to five years in prison and a fine of €3,000; NMBS and Infrabel face fines of up to €600,000.

The **bronze sculpture "Flight in Mind"** by Brussels artist Olivier Strebelle, which used to stand in the departures hall at Brussels Airport, will be placed alongside the approach road to the airport. The giant sculpture was seriously damaged in last year's bombing and

will be unveiled in its new location on 22 March, the one-year anniversary of the attack.

Six of the seven police officers found guilty of the involuntary **manslaughter of psychiatric patient Jonathan Jacob** in 2010 are taking their appeal to the Cassation Court. The men were given six-month suspended sentences last month for their use of excessive force in helping a doctor administer a sedative in a police cell. The leader of the team, who was sentenced to nine months suspended, will not appeal. The Cassation Court does not consider the facts of the case, only the procedure that led to the verdict.

The end of this month sees the opening of **DoucheFLUX, a centre for homeless people** in Anderlecht, providing showers, a laundry and lockers, as well as a space for simple medical procedures, and even a dog kennel. The centre, in Veeartsenstraat near South Station, was partially financed by crowdfunding, which raised €15,000.

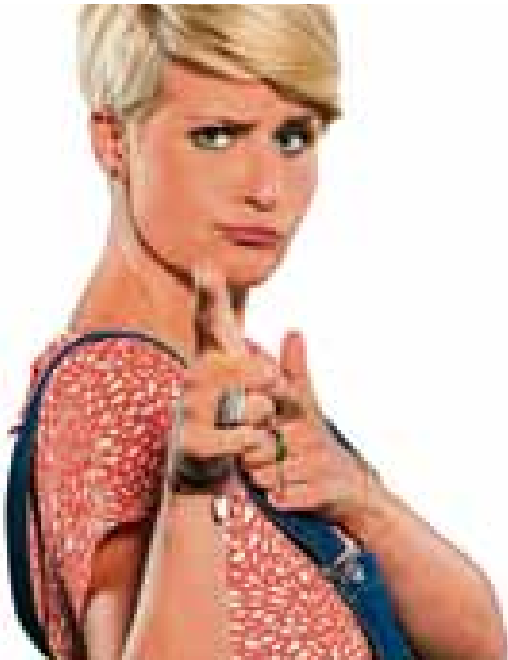
\ doucheflux.be

OdeGand, the popular opening event of the Ghent leg of the region-wide Festival of Flanders, has been voted **Strafste Gentenaar** (Coolest Gentenaar) by a jury representing *De Gentenaar* newspaper, AVS Television, Radio 2 and the Marriott hotel. Other categories were won by ballet dancer Nina Tolnoli in culture and by cyclist Jolien D'Hooze in sport.

\ odegand.be

De Brusselse Keukens, an association bringing together the food preparation units of Brussels-City, its social aid agency and the city hospitals, has **won the Catering Award 2017**. The award is given by the restaurant guide Gault & Millau for the provision of healthy meals by large-scale catering operations. The association delivers 10,500 meals a day to 200 locations.

FACE OF FLANDERS



© Dirk Leemans/VRT

Eva Daeleman

EVADAELEMAN.BE

Not so long ago the phenomenon of burnout would have been met with a quizzical look and an instruction to "buck up". Now it's headline news, as the pressures of modern life are causing more psychological and physical problems among working people – even young ones. It happened to radio and TV personality Eva Daeleman, not once, but twice. Daeleman, 27, studied radio broadcasting at the Rits media and theatre school in Brussels. Part of that training was an internship with FM Brussel, and that's where she started work as a radio host, before moving on to XL Air and MNM.

The latter brought her into the orbit of Peter Van de Veire, at one point one of the hottest names in radio, and she started hosting with him in 2010. That led to a spot as a presenter on Flemish public broadcaster VRT's main TV channel, Eén, which lasted until 2015. Simultaneously, she had her own radio show, presented a lifestyle programme on Eén, hosted

the Eurovision Song Contest and wrote a book about a trip to Asia. It all proved too much, and, in December of 2015, she disappeared from the airwaves, suffering from a burnout. She has now published a book describing her ordeal. "I'd become a master in convincing myself and others that everything was fine," she told the talk show *Van Gils & gasten* last week. "I was thinking, the show must go on. I was in a phase of denial, and two months later it all went wrong." She thinks she's come far enough now that she won't relapse. Besides rest, she credits the right medication and a new dog for getting her through. "Olav has been my teacher, my therapist, my boss, my coach, my best friend and my mirror," she said. Her new book is called *Het jaar van de hond*, or *The Year of the Dog*. "I'm now reasonably happy. I see high points in small things, whereas before I was looking for higher and higher peaks."

\ Alan Hope

FLANDERTODAY



Flanders
State of the Art

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Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE First impressions

The Dutch-language library in the Brussels municipality of Schaarbeek has kicked off a project aimed at raising children's awareness of gender stereotypes. As you'd expect, they're using books to do it. The point is that stereotypes can only be combated if you're aware of them, and what better place to start than with young readers? So the staff of the library – the second-biggest in the region after Munt-punt – will be putting stickers on books that break with gender stereotypes (Mum in the kitchen, Dad in his armchair, that sort of thing). "Gender stereotypes are ingrained in children from a young age," said Adelheid Byttebier, Schaarbeek



© Ingimage

councillor in charge of Dutch-language matters. "Youth literature is the ideal way for us to break that pattern." This week the new head librarian Ingrid Lemaire took up her new post. "Diversity is one of Lemaire's

passions," Byttebier said. The project is the latest in a line of gender-related campaigns run by the library: Two years ago it worked to raise awareness of gender diversity in literature and last year the aim was to ensure that library services were as gender-neutral as possible. The latest project coincides with Youth Book Month, with the theme "M/W/X, You are who you are". Other events include a visit from Flemish young adult novelist Brigitte Minne and a workshop for secondary school pupils given by members of the collective Le Monde selon les Femmes (The World According to Women). \ AH

5TH COLUMN

Identity politics

Identity and migration are high on the political agenda across Europe, and Flanders is no exception. N-VA in particular speaks out on these issues, with Theo Francken, secretary of state for migration and asylum, now the region's most popular politician.

This new focus makes other parties nervous, and some politicians have lost their cool. Hilde Crevits, the CD&V minister of education, spoke rather out of character last week when she stated that parents with migration backgrounds are not involved enough in their children's education.

Some secondary school graduates with perfect Dutch, she said, later put their own children into school with no Dutch at all – meaning they don't speak Dutch at home. Schools, she said, should emphasise the importance of Dutch and the efforts parents need to make in their children's education.

She was severely criticised for these remarks, not least from people with migration backgrounds, who accused her of stigmatising a community. Groen party president Meyrem Almaci, of Turkish origin, recalled that she was advised to opt for a professional education track. She chose to follow a more academic track instead, going on to get a university degree.

Not everyone disagreed with Crevits, though. Educators pointed out that some parents really aren't involved enough in their children's schooling, as demonstrated by their failure to show up at parent-teacher meetings.

At that point, Mechelen mayor Bart Somers (Open VLD) stepped in, with a remark that was just as uncharacteristic. Maybe showing up at parent-teacher meetings should be made compulsory, he suggested, with fines issued to those who didn't show.

Somers has just been awarded the title "world's best mayor" (see cover story) primarily because of his city's handling of the refugee crisis. He puts an emphasis on individual responsibility, regardless of background. Indeed, his suggestion did not focus on migration or language.

It did, however, come into conflict with his party's core belief in individual freedom. Open VLD party president Gwendolyn Rutten has repeatedly complained about governments regulating people's every move.

That sits uneasily with forcing people to attend school meetings. Somers soon retracted: Maybe fines were not such a good idea after all. \ Anja Otte

European Court finds for minister in refugee visa case

Theo Francken need not issue humanitarian visa to Syrian family



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.org

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxembourg has upheld the decision by federal asylum and migration secretary Theo Francken not to issue a humanitarian visa to a family in Syria wanting to come to Belgium to claim asylum. Francken himself said he was satisfied with the ruling, while organisations representing the rights of refugees said they were "very uneasy".

A humanitarian visa allows a person to legally travel to the country concerned in order to apply for asylum. Francken has repeatedly refused to issue such a visa to the family from Aleppo. The family took the decision to the courts, where Francken was ordered to issue the visa.

He appealed, but the ruling was upheld, and Francken (pictured) was ordered to pay a penalty



© Bart Dewaele/N-VA

of €4,000 a day for every day he did not approve the visa. The decision by the ECJ overrules both of those judgements.

The court found that a member state cannot be forced to issue a humanitarian visa, whether or not the applicants are in serious danger. "I am satisfied," Francken told VRT. "This was an important case, a European precedent."

Local organisations representing the rights of refugees – Amnesty International, Ciré, Doctors of the World and the NGO 11.11.11 – issued a joint statement. "This is a great disappointment," they said. "We had hoped the court would follow the opinion of its advocate-general. We are very concerned about the consequences of this ruling for the member states."

Ghent's new mobility plan could lead to referendum

\ TINYURL.COM/MOBILITYPLANGENT

A group of opponents of Ghent's new mobility plan, due to come into force on 3 April, said it had gathered enough signatures to demand a public referendum. Intelligemobil is a group made up of retailers and professionals, supported by opposition party N-VA.

The mobility plan splits the city centre into six traffic zones, as well as a car-free zone. The changes to each sector vary, with some streets being made one-way or no-parking zones. One of the issues of concern to business owners – pizza delivery services have been particularly vocal – is whether deliveries can be made inside the car-free zone. Currently the plan is to restrict the zone to De Lijn buses, taxis and electric bicycles.

According to mobility city councillor Filip Watteeuw, businesses can request a permit to drive within the car-free zone, which must be renewed every year. But deliveries by motorised vehicles would only be permitted between 18.00 and 11.00. Otherwise deliveries must be made using the lower-powered A scooter or an electric bicycle.

Despite having obtained the necessary 26,000 signatures to demand a referendum, the group intends to gather about 1,000 more over the next few weeks in order to avoid falling short when duplicates are removed. The last referendum in Ghent was 20 years ago, when plans for an underground car park near the Belfort were voted down.

\ AH

Government's tax amnesty could raise up to €100 million

The government of Flanders is offering a partial tax amnesty, which it hopes will bring in €100 million in unpaid taxes this year alone.

The federal government already allows anyone with unpaid taxes to come forward and pay off their arrears in order to avoid prosecution. Flanders also collects some taxes, such as inheritance tax and registration taxes on mortgages. These will also now be subject to a similar scheme.

The tariffs vary: For inheritance tax, for example, direct heirs of the deceased pay up to 27% tax while others pay up to 65%. For registration tax the tariff is 20%.

Unusually, the government will also charge a tariff of 37% on both taxes that have passed the statute of limitations, despite the

advice from tax experts that the government has no right to claim anything in such cases.

Only voluntary declarations are covered by the amnesty; in cases where the tax or legal authorities discover unpaid back-taxes, no amnesty will be allowed. In addition, offenders only have one chance to regularise. If they make a declaration, and it is later discovered there are other unpaid taxes, the immunity is used up.

"Previous fiscal reforms have demonstrated that the Flemish are prepared to pay their taxes if the tariffs are reasonable," finance minister Bart Tommelein said, noting that the recent lowering of the tax paid on gifts of property was an example. "The lower tariffs led to a doubling of the number of gifts." \ AH

Ghent mayor 'can't remove squatters'

Ghent mayor Daniël Termont says he is unable to remove the group of squatters who made headlines last weekend when the owner of the home in which they are living took to social media.

The couple are in the midst of a months-long stay in Vietnam, from where they finalised the purchase of the house in Ghent. They had already moved some furniture into the house and are legally resident there.

But the house in Holstraat, in the city centre, has been taken over by a group of Roma in their absence. Police said they could not take action without a court order.

Termont said he could not intervene as squatting "is not a municipal responsibility" and must be tackled at federal level. Wouter Beke, chair of CD&V and mayor of Leopoldsborg in Limburg, told VRT that, as mayor, Termont was perfectly able to intervene. A mayor, he said, can declare any property unfit for habitation and have it vacated.

One condition is that the occupants must be found alternative accommodation, even if they are squatters. The order could then be lifted and the owners allowed to re-occupy the property, Beke explained. \ AH

Gender imbalance could bring arts groups cuts in subsidies

Several members of the federal parliament have called for a change to the rules on arts subsidies to penalise organisations that discriminate against women. "Anyone who puts too few women on stage or doesn't show enough films by female directors should receive less subsidy," said member of parliament Els Van Hoof (pictured), who is also chair of the CD&V organisation Vrouw en Maatschappij (Woman and Society).

The problem in the arts, she said, cuts across genres, from stage to literature. "The wage gap is wide, and the glass ceiling is thick. More than three out of four artworks in museums portray naked women, yet there are only a handful of paintings by women. Do women have to be naked to be seen in a museum?" Her party, CD&V, has prepared a list of measures to combat the problem. The existing rule that a maximum of two-thirds of the board of any arts organisation may be of the same sex is a good thing, Van Hoof said, but



© Courtesy Awepa/YouTube

the rule is not backed by sanctions in cases where it is not applied.

"That has to change," she said. "Anyone who doesn't reach the target needs to get less subsidy. In the Scandinavian countries, gender balance in programming is also a factor during the subsidy rounds. That's the road we need to take." \ AH

At the helm

Under mayor Bart Somers, Mechelen becomes a safe refuge for all

continued from page 1

The number of refugees housed by Mechelen, however, pales in comparison to the efforts of several of the other cities short-listed for the World Mayor Prize, like Lesbos and Athens in Greece, and Lampedusa in Italy. These places, strapped for resources and in the throes of their own protracted economic crises, nonetheless assisted tens of thousands of refugees fleeing conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and poverty in African nations like Eritrea and Somalia.

More likely then, Somers was awarded the prize for the way in which the city has succeeded in making *Mechelaars* feel like *Mechelaars*, no matter where they, their parents or their grandparents are from.

"I think there's only one community in Mechelen, and that's *Mechelaars*," he says. "And there are 86,000 of them, and they're all different."

Indeed. Mechelen classrooms, offices and bars today look a lot like Benetton ads. The city has residents of 138 nationalities, and one in two children born there today has an immigrant background.

In Somers' view, too many people see the conversation about the rights and duties of minority groups as a zero-sum game, and he likens the emancipation of second- and third-generation migrants to the battle of the women's right movement and the fight of LGBT activists for gay marriage.

"Now children born from migration," he says, "are simply asking for their full place in society, not in opposition to, but precisely on the basis of our rights."

At a time when forces like globalisation and migration are portrayed as something of a threat to traditional values and ways of living by far-right lawmakers like Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, the London jury appears to have wanted to direct an international spotlight onto the inclusive model *Mechelaars* have perfected with Somers at the wheel.

If Mechelen were able to inspire other mayors and communities by virtue of its own approach, the city would exceed itself, Somers says. "We would be maybe a beacon of hope and source of inspiration for people who say that living together and diversity can work. That it doesn't necessarily always have to be a drama or something negative."

We are living in an age of globalisation, he continues. "The question is simply: How do you organise this? How do you adequately support people? How do you organise this diversity in a good way? That's the big challenge."

Under Somers' stewardship, not a single resident has left the town



© Patrick Hattori/ID Photo

to fight in Syria, a surprising fact considering that Belgium has the highest ratio of foreign fighters per capita, and Mechelen is surrounded by cities such as Vilvoorde, Brussels and Antwerp, which have seen dozens and dozens of young men leave.

Together with Mechelen's urban resurgence in less than two decades, Somers cites this as one of the two key reasons that Mechelen, where 20% of residents are Muslim, received the award.

When Somers was elected mayor in 2001, the first liberal politician to get the keys to the city in 100 years, he faced an unenviable job. The city had been voted the dirtiest town in Flanders by consumer organisation Test Aankoop a year earlier and crime was rampant.

Even the *Mechelaars* didn't like Mechelen. A 2004 large-scale Stadsmonitor (City Monitor) study by the Flemish government revealed that out of Flanders' 13 central cities, no-one felt less proud of their city than *Mechelaars*.

Today, 15 years later, Mechelen is the kind of city that wins Entente Florale, an international flower competition, and tops the *Financial Times* Cities of the Future

ranking. Antwerp and Brussels' bite-sized sister has become a desirable destination to move to for young people and families.

The worst thing you could say about it is that it's a bit dull, lacking the anything-goes spirit of larger cities. But carefully managing the city's growth is Somers' key priority for the future.

"We want to keep this a liveable city and heavily invest in making the neighbourhoods nice and making the city greener," he says. "We want to focus on cyclists and pedestrians as much as possible, and also attract many more companies," he says.

It may be impossible to extricate from a 15-year mix of policies a recipe for other lawmakers to follow and identify the decisive subsidy or stimulus that turned Mechelen around and allowed it to forge one community out of its many, very different residents. When pressed, Somers says his policies were distinguished by a three-pronged focus on safety, improving public space and fostering inclusion.

In the last 15 years, he has dramatically increased police spending and forces and installed more



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When Bart Somers took office in 2001, Mechelen had a poor reputation, even among its own people. Today, its 86,000 residents take pride in their diverse neighbourhoods and clean streets

cameras than any other city in Flanders – which is saying something for a municipality of this size. "Safety is a basic need; I knew I had to do something about the safety problem," he says. "I knew that if I could get the middle class to return to the city, it would create the financial and social leverage to lift the city from this negative spiral of impoverishment."

Under Somers' administration, streets were also relaid and new parks and car parks constructed. Entire neighbourhoods got a fresh makeover.

Somers says he received many a heartfelt thank you from residents with migrant roots. Many of them had no choice but to buy homes in the city's most downtrodden neighbourhoods, unable to rent on the private market due to rampant racism and discrimination. Those residents have seen their only investment double in value.

At the same time, Somers says, he also invested in the more intangible social fabric of the city and its residents' well-being, and created a narrative and story for Mechelen that everyone could feel part of. The city's family of four historic giants, trotted out during processions and recognised by Unesco as intangible cultural heritage, received two new, 21st-century additions – Amir and Noa, north African and black African giants.

"We did hundreds of things like

that to write this new narrative, this new 'us' feeling," Somers says, "so that people would identify being a *Mechelaar* with openness, and so that they would see diversity as part of their own personality."

Somers acknowledges that the decision-making process of the World Mayor Prize was not transparent. "Why we ultimately won, I really don't know," he says. Still, the prize didn't come out of the blue, he adds, noting that Mechelen has long been on the radar of anyone working in the areas of urban policies and diversity.

Asked about his own performance criteria, Somers says a good mayor should be able to affect how people feel about their city. "I think that's the most beautiful thing a mayor could aspire to. Not a town square, not a particular level of taxation, not the number of jobs."

Somers, who also served as Flanders' minister-president between 2003 and 2004, has no plans to step down (he'll quit his post the day he no longer feels like doing it, he says), but he knows what he wants to have achieved by then.

"That would be the ultimate measure of success for me – the extent to which I was able to make people feel better about and prouder of the city," he says. "If, through the city, I was able to lift them up a little, make them stronger, more empowered, more passionate."

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Insulation \ Recticel

The Brussels-based foam and insulation group is investing up to €20 million in its UK operations to increase capacity by up to 50%.

Floor coverings \ Balta

The floor coverings producer, located in Wielsbeke, West Flanders, and owned by the Lone Star fund in the US, is to be floated on the Brussels stock market this spring. Balta is one of the first so-called "Brexitee companies" to test financial markets, as a significant share of its earnings derive from UK sales. The substantial drop in the value of the pound has made its products more expensive for British customers and has cut revenues.

Retail \ Hubo

The hardware and garden centre chain, based in Wommelgem, Antwerp province, is merging with its Walloon Oh Green counterpart. The new group will run 16 stores and employ 280 people.

Car rentals \ Zipcar

The US-based car rental company has signed a contract with the Carrefour supermarket to make its cars available in 141 of the chain's outlets.

Semi-conductors \ X-Fab

The sister company of the highly successful semiconductor producer Melexis is seeking up to €250 million on the Paris stock exchange to help finance its development. X-Fab is specialised in analogue chips and processors used in the medical and automobile sectors.

Catering \ Hard Rock Cafe

The US chain of restaurants is opening an outlet on Groenplaats in Antwerp next month, 20 years after closing its first venture in the city.

Part \ LKQ

The US-based chain of spare parts for the automotive sector is acquiring 21 local outlets from four distributors to build a dominant share on the Belgian market. The deal, expected to be finalised by the end of June, has yet to be approved by competition authorities.

Eco clothing designers are female entrepreneurs of the year

Award goes to duo behind sustainable clothing for women and kids



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.org

Adinda De Raedt and Froya Deryckere of Froy & Dind in Antwerp have been named female entrepreneurs of the year by Women in Enterprise and Development (Womed). Womed is a joint venture between Unizo, which represents the self-employed, and Markant, the Flemish network for female entrepreneurs.

Froy & Dind designs and sells ecological clothing for women and children. Their line, launched in 2008, is now available in shops around the world, as well as online and in their flagship store in Antwerp's Nationalestraat. The business directly employs 13 people.

The two started off with the idea of selling clothes made from sustainable materials – nothing in cotton, for example – but stock proved difficult to source. So they decided to design and make their own collection.

The Womed jury praised their "innovative, sustainable approach, their modern staff policy



© Froy & Dind/Pinterest

based on competency, and the strong strategic sense that allowed them to put themselves on the international map from early on". Queen Mathilde and Flemish economy and innovation minister Philippe Muyters were present at the ceremony to hand over the prize.

Also receiving an award was Eef Coolen, voted most promising female entrepreneur for her company Bolster, which designs and maintains gardens. The jury said she was "interested not only in sustainability in the ecological sense, but also in customer relations and in her motivational personnel policy".

Finally, the Womed Zuid prize is given in co-operation with the Brussels non-profit organisation Trias, which assists small-business owners and start-ups in the developing world. This year's award went to Gloria Isabel, whose business Mujeres en armonía con la naturaleza (Women in Harmony with Nature) sells natural shampoo, soap and cleaning products in El Salvador.

Belgium performs poorly on women in management positions

The percentage of management positions in Belgium filled by women is one of the lowest in Europe, according to a survey by Eurostat, the European Union's statistics office. The survey was published last week to coincide with International Women's Day on 8 March.

Across the EU, 35.5% of the 7.3 million management positions are filled by women. In Belgium, the number is just over 23%. That puts Belgium ahead of only Cyprus (21.6%), Italy (22%), Germany (22.3%) and Austria (23%). Latvia leads the table and is the only country where female managers are in the majority at nearly 53%.

Belgium does better when it comes to the pay gap: Female managers earn an average 13.6% less than their male counterparts, compared to an EU average of 23.4%. Only Slovenia (12.4%) and Romania (5%) do better.

Eurostat stressed, however, that the pay gap is created by a number of different social and economic factors, and that reducing it is not simply a matter of equal pay for equal work. \ AH

Google launches Android Pay payments app in Belgium

Internet search giant Google has launched its Android Pay app in Belgium, the 10th country where it is now operational. Android Pay allows contact-free payments at shops via smartphones.

The procedure is simple: download and install the app, link it to your Google account, then to a credit card. Users simply hold the smartphone up to the terminal, and the rest is done digitally. A pin code is required for payments over €20.

For the time being, the app, which is free to download, is limited to Bank Paribas Fortis and its subsidiaries Fintro and Hello Bank. Later, some debit cards will also be admitted to the system. Android Pay has already been adopted by a number of local businesses, including Carrefour, Media Markt and H&M.

The app faces competition from



© Ingimage

Payconiq, another payments app adopted by KBC, Belfius and ING. Payconiq has a larger number of potential users and does not require retailers to install a terminal. On the other hand, Payconiq is only operational in Belgium, whereas Android Pay works in nine other countries and counting.

Neither system is open to iPhone users. Apple has its own payment system, Apple Pay, which is not yet available in Belgium. In Europe, iPhones account for 20% of all smartphones. \ AH

Apache news website awarded Ark Prize for the Free Word

The independent news website Apache has been awarded this year's Ark Prize for the Free Word, given annually to a person or organisation in Flanders that works in favour of freedom of speech and free expression. Apache editor-in-chief Karl van den Broeck said he was "speechless and very honoured".

"For seven years now, Apache has been occupied with critical investigative journalism," the Ark committee said. "All that time, the website has been financed by readers and supporters. As an independent medium, Apache battles against the commercialisation and the superficiality of mainstream news-gathering. In the current political and social context, that form of journalism is more than ever under pressure."

Apache was launched as a blog called De Werktitel (Working Title) in 2009 by a group of local

investigative journalists. With the support of hundreds of readers it expanded into a full news website, renamed Apache in 2010. Based in Antwerp, it now has some 40,000 readers a month. Originally a non-profit, the site became a co-operative in 2011, selling shares as well as subscriptions. Since 2012, part of the site has been offered behind a pay wall.

"This prize gives us enormous support at a crucial moment in our existence," said van den Broeck. "We will use whatever means we have to continue working for decent investigative journalism."

Previous winners of the Ark Prize include the late author Hugo Claus, actor Reinhilde Declercq, singer Wannes Van de Velde, writers David Van Reybrouck and Tom Lanoye and filmmaker Robbe De Hert. This year's ceremony takes place in May. \ AH

Amazon Pantry food delivery service arrives in Belgium

Amazon Pantry, a branch of the internet giant that allows customers to order groceries for home delivery, is now available in Belgium. According to Gino Van Ossel, a retail expert at Vlerick Business School, "it is certainly a threat to our supermarkets".

One problem faced by retailers is price: for example, one litre of cola sells on Amazon for €1.15, whereas Collect & Go – a division of Colruyt – sells the same bottle for €1.57. Pantry costs €49 for a year's subscription, plus €3.99 for delivery of the first 20kg box.

"Amazon has experience with e-commerce, whereas most Belgian players are not ready for major competition in that area," Malaika Brengman, a retail expert from the Free University of Brussels (VUB), told VRT. "Belgian supermarkets, be prepared for the worst."

Only 9% of Belgians bought food online last year, according to retail federation Comeos, but the proportion is growing each year. \ AH

Galileo's secrets

KU Leuven researchers ensure safe ride for Europe's navigation system



Senne Starckx

More articles by Senne \ flanderstoday.eu

In times when computers without internet access seem an artefact of the past and even the most basic kitchen appliances have wi-fi connectivity, few things in our lives seem safe from hackers' prying eyes.

From the GPS receiver in your car, to the map application in your smartphone, a skilled hacker can easily take control of them and begin sending you false information remotely. In 2020, when Europe finally gets its own navigation system – the Galileo – these issues will become more pressing than ever.

The European Space Agency (ESA) is currently working to make sure that the system is airtight by the time it rolls out. After years of planning, the first of the 30 satellites were launched in 2011.

Galileo – run by the European Commission in partnership with the ESA – is seen as Europe's answer to the American GPS and the Russian Glonass, at a time when the relations between the EU, the US and Russia have become chilly.

The team of scientists and researchers at ESA are working on authentication features that would prevent Galileo from picking up false signals or rejecting real ones. Vincent Rijmen and Tomer Ashur of the University of Leuven are the researchers helping the ESA make the signals more difficult to forge.

But it's no easy task. Because half of the system's satellites are already in orbit – and to avoid delaying the whole operation – they can implement only a handful of safety features at a time. This limit also works to not tax the signals' limited bandwidth.

Some of the features appear very conventional, borrowing from electronic signatures used in credit card transactions, online banking and internet activities that involve transferring sensitive information.

"This is why we opted for the method used in electronic signatures," says Rijmen, who works at the University of Leuven's Department of Electrical Engineering. "These signatures take up less than 100 bits, which is also the reason why they expire so quickly. But this is not a problem in the case of satellite navigation because the location is authenticated every 30 seconds or less."

Ashur, a PhD researcher under Rijmen's mentorship, wrote the assessment report on the security features for the entire authentication system, weighing in on the benefits of certain cryptographic tools and parameters. "You could call me a cryptanalyst, which means that I usually



© P. Carril/ESA

Artist's impression of one of Galileo satellites

try to 'hack' things," he laughs. "But since it's done by the good guys, I'd prefer to call it a security assessment."

Why is it so important that the Galileo system is equipped with an airtight authentication protocol? "In 2007, I was working for a data security company that protects businesses from data leaks," says Ashur. "We had a project with this huge bank in South Africa, and we were supposed to install our software on the bank's computers."

As is often the case, he continues, "some of the installations didn't go so well, and one of them was so faulty that the host computer could no longer be started. Unfortunately, this computer was located in the security operations room and was responsible for showing the location of all the bank's armoured trucks."

A more trivial example, he adds, is the recent hype surrounding the *Pokémon Go* game. "Last September, a large number of users were banned from playing because some of them were cheating inside the game by providing fake location data and catching pokemons that were not in their vicinity."

The existing satellite-based navigation systems,

he explains, were originally developed for military purposes – the US Army still operates a high-precision version of its GPS system. "This is clearly a problem that needs solving."

How does this compare to encryption used in emails or instant messengers? "Encryption has got nothing to do with this," says Ashur. "The purpose of encryption is to hide information so that it cannot be read by an unauthorised party. Since satellite navigation data is openly transmitted, this is not what we were looking for."

What the researchers did instead was add a sort of signature that "allows the receiver to verify that the data was really sent from the satellite and is not a forgery made by the hacker," Ashur explains. "Data authentication is a common problem in cryptography, and there are standard methods on how to deal with it."

Adding secret codes to Galileo's system and signals is a real challenge. The cost of exchanging information between the satellites and the units on the ground "is extremely high," says Ashur. "The environment in which we have to work is also very constrained. You could compare it to having to convey all the information in this article in only two sentences."

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Volunteering improves health

Volunteers are generally in better health than those who never volunteer, showing similar health norms as people five years younger, according to a study led by PhD researcher Jens Detollenaere of Ghent University. Detollenaere, whose findings have just been published in the journal *Plos One*, analysed data from the European Social Survey (ESS), conducted in 2012 and 2013. The ESS measured the beliefs, preferences and behaviour of about 40,000 citizens from 29 European countries. People who volunteer turned out to be in substantially better health than non-volunteers, with health benefits comparable to those of being five years younger or being a native resident rather than a migrant.

Pilot projects to test home hospital care

Federal health minister Maggie De Block has launched 12 pilot projects on home hospitalisation, to ascertain whether patients can get certain care at home, with the same quality and safety guarantees as in a hospital. The projects, which were selected following a call last year, will test a number of situations, including intravenous administration of antibiotics and cancer treatments. About 1,300 patients and 35 hospitals are involved, along with home care services and general practitioners. Minister De Block pointed to the advantages of home hospitalisation. Patients, she said, would receive care in a familiar and comfortable environment, can more easily receive friends and family and run little risk of some common hospital infections.

New DNA databases to help police

The National Institute of Forensic Science and Criminology (NICC) will soon have two more DNA databases. DNA research is crucial in identifying suspects and finding missing persons. But during investigations, many people come into contact with crime scenes, including police, prosecutors and lab technicians, who can unintentionally leave their own DNA behind. A new database with DNA profiles of key figures involved in investigations will make it possible to quickly exclude their genetic material, thus speeding up investigations and reducing costs. The database containing genetic material of missing persons, meanwhile, should make it possible to solve older cases. \ Andy Furniere

Q&A

Gabriël Van de Velde is a mechatronics engineer at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), who recently won the Agoria Prize for his master's work on making robotic mouths simpler to programme and look more human-like

Are human-like features that important in robots?

Indeed they are. Even if many of us don't realise it, artificial intelligence is present everywhere. We may not be afraid of Google or Facebook's AI algorithms, but robots still frighten us – even though they are helping us in so many different ways, from robot-assisted surgery to elderly care. They play an increasingly important role in our everyday lives.

How did you improve the movement of their mouths?

I started with photographs of the human mouth. I transformed them and was able to compare the pictures with the robotic mouth that I was building. I used the differences in features to slightly adjust the robotic mouth. I used this principle over and over, until there were no noticeable differences anymore. The crucial aspect of my improvement is that technicians who build robots will no longer have to write a



manual or implement a computer-guided calibration model. These techniques are expensive and time-consuming. Imagine that you have to calibrate a robotic head – fitted

with more than 30 motors – for every mouth position. That's a lot of work! My method was tested with only five motors, which is good for 52 reference positions. It only took an hour.

You're now working on a PhD in rotor technology – which has nothing to do with robots.

For mechatronic engineers, life isn't only about robots. I see a variety of potential study areas. Rotary dynamics has always fascinated me. I'm studying a new method to improve the speed of rapidly turning machines – beyond 60,000 revolutions per minute. That's a big challenge! \ Interview by SS

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Practise what they teach

Innovation and hands-on learning are focus of new school's vision



Andy Furniere

More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

LABONDERWIJS.BE

Students at a new secondary school will have lessons according to an innovative concept that aims to encourage their initiative, creative spirit and teamwork skills. The LAB school in Sint-Amands, Antwerp province, is supported by Antwerp University (UAntwerp) and several Flemish organisations, including technology industry federation Agoria.

A group of people from Flanders' business, HR and marketing sector took the initiative to set up the school. For the pedagogical framework, they worked with education scientist Kristien Bruggeman of UAntwerp, who will be one of two directors.

"The initiators noticed that new graduates often lacked an entrepreneurial spirit, the ability to work independently and the capacity to work in a team," says Bruggeman. To help address the problem, partners including FabLab Klein-Brabant, Flanders Synergy and CoderDojo joined the LAB network, and on 1 September, the school will start teaching up to 150 students. Lessons will be organised according to an interdisciplinary philosophy. Instead of focusing on one specific domain, different study areas will be linked. By analysing a scientific text, for example, students can learn about both the scientific content and language aspects. Teachers with different expertise will work together during lessons.



© Courtesy LAB Onderwijs

The LAB school in Sint-Amands is aiming to turn out graduates with entrepreneurial spirit, using a blend of theory, practice and mixing up subjects

Another essential part of LAB's method is the practical application of theory. "This way, new information is better anchored in students' memory," says Bruggeman. "When youngsters are only asked to reproduce theory, new information is too abstract for them to understand and remember properly."

Students will generally learn through four phases. Teachers will first encourage their interest in a topic, before explaining the theoretical background. In the third phase, students will apply the acquired knowledge in a concrete project, before teachers offer a view on the bigger picture, showing its relevance to society.

During lessons about the water cycle, for example, students might first carry out experiments with a conical flask to condense water

and then learn how the condensation process works. "In the third phase, we would ask them to make a scale model representing the water cycle," says Bruggeman. "In the last phase, we can explain how the water cycle influences climate change and can subsequently cause a refugee crisis."

As it's essential for youngsters to learn how to work by themselves, LAB focuses on the method known as Begeleid Zelfstandig Leren, or independently led learning. Students will make a plan about how to reach certain goals at the end of a week, always with the coaching of various teachers.

"Of course we will give attention to instructive lessons as well, but these will also be given in an innovative way," says Bruggeman. Students will have access to

educational videos, which they can watch before lessons in the classroom. "If they have questions they can ask teachers for clarification, while others can go on to something else."

LAB will also use a modular system, meaning students will spend several weeks focusing on specific topics, like programming or wood-working. External organisations such as the non-profit CoderDojo will lead these modules.

Teaching at LAB will be a diverse job. "We want to revalue teachers as creative and passionate professionals, whereas their capacities are now too often restrained by bureaucracy," says Bruggeman. "By sharing our leadership as directors with them, we want to offer them flexibility and autonomy."

As well as working together in a classroom, teachers will also coach each other in meetings and develop materials together. Each week, LAB will ask them to work about 36 lesson hours – lasting 50 minutes each – of which 28 will be in the classroom, instead of the official 22 lesson hours that teachers in the first grade work in the traditional system.

The school has already received about 70 applications from teachers, for just 13 vacancies. There is also a lot of interest from parents. "On the first day of registrations, it took less than 13 minutes to fill all 90 places for the first year," says Bruggeman. Registrations for the second year will be held in April.

Hasselt college brings virtual reality to the classroom

Virtual reality headsets are becoming increasingly common as people explore three-dimensional games and immersive movies. But there are also serious applications for VR, from health care and the construction industry to risk management and tourism.

But one of the most fruitful areas for VR appears to be education, which is why PXL University College in Hasselt has begun a two-year project looking at how they can take advantage of the technology. It's being carried out by education researcher Anne Appeltans and IT specialist Simon Verbeke.

"At the Centre of Educational Innovation we explore the possibilities of new technology in education," says Appeltans, giving tablets and learning analytics as examples. "Since VR is an upcoming technology, we were curious about it and wanted to explore its possibilities for educational use."

The project began with a survey of the research literature and conversations with colleagues in areas such as health care and construction to identify possible pilot projects for VR. These discussions revealed a similar set of opportunities.

"The current idea is to make enriched 360-degree videos," says Verbeke. "The videos fully envelop your view, so they are quite convincing in



© Courtesy PXL University College

PXL University College is exploring how using 360-degree immersive video can enhance education

making you feel 'there'. Because we're using VR glasses, you can easily look around and focus on different parts of the video. The videos will be enriched by having interaction points, which will show pictures, text, videos, highlight areas in the scene, quizzes... the list of possibilities goes on and on."

For example, medical students could practise their diagnostic skills on real patients documented in virtual reality videos, or student teachers could observe lessons. "The students can have a look inside the classroom without physically going to that class," says Appeltans. "Because it's a 360-degree video, the students can look around and see the teacher and the

reactions of the pupils."

The next stage of the project is to develop a system for enriching images and videos that can then be used in the pilots. "Alongside the technical development we will also fine-tune the didactic scenarios of the various cases," says Appeltans.

VR devices currently on the market can already create convincing virtual worlds. Using dedicated headsets such as Oculus Rift would be one option, but these are both expensive and unwieldy, since they need to be connected to a computer with cables. But there are cheaper, less cumbersome alternatives.

"The goal is to make our system work on smartphones, which a lot of students already have," says Verbeke. The image quality may be lower, but as long as a phone can display 4K video the result is still effective. "Schools could also provide a dedicated classroom with a couple of devices for students who don't have a suitable smartphone."

As well as thinking about students in higher education, the scope may open up later in the project. "It is possible that we will also think about using VR in primary and secondary school," says Appeltans. "We will explore this with our teacher training programmes."

\ Ian Mundell

WEEK IN EDUCATION

'Hire more unbaptised teachers'

Antwerp university college Karel de Grote has published an open letter calling on Flanders' Catholic primary education network to hire more unbaptised teachers. Both education minister Hilde Crevits and Lieven Boeve, head of the Catholic education network, welcomed the call. In theory, teachers who have never been baptised can give lessons in Catholic education. But in practice, it's uncommon, as teachers without proof of being baptised are not allowed to lead courses in Roman Catholic religion. This causes many primary schools to bypass hiring unbaptised teachers at all. Karel de Grote, which is also Catholic, is now asking primary schools in the region to be more flexible.

Tragedy prompts new road safety plan

The City of Bruges has presented a 10-point plan to improve road safety near schools, following the death of a six-year-old boy at a school crossing last month. The boy was hit by a truck while crossing the road near the school gates. The accident instigated a major debate on road safety around Flanders' schools. Bruges is now banning vehicles of more than five tons from streets around schools and from residential areas. The zone 30, in which the maximum speed is 30 km/h, will be expanded, and the visibility of crossings improved, the city announced. Pupils will also receive more information on road safety, including dangers related to blind spots.

Comments on immigrant parents spark debate

Flanders' education minister, Hilde Crevits stated at the weekend that parents of foreign origin in Flanders should become more involved in their children's schools and make more of an effort to speak Dutch. The minister emphasised that she didn't want to reprimand parents with a migration background, but the statements have instigated a fiery debate, with criticism coming from opposition party Groen and from Flanders' Minority Forum. "It's not terribly judicious to create polarisation," said outgoing Minority Forum director Wouter Van Bellingen. "Language skills among pupils are not properly supported. That's why a broader first grade is essential, so that the language skills of all pupils can develop more evenly." \ AF

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Photo Marathon

Are you a professional photographer, a dedicated amateur or just someone who loves Brussels? Participate in this fun event, shooting pictures throughout the city on various themes. At the end of the day, the jury will pick the best shots on the basis of creativity, not technical merit, and award prizes. 18 March 10.00-18.00, Muntpunt, Munt 6, Brussels; €8
[\ muntpunt.be](http://muntpunt.be)

Belgian Diving Expo

From total newbies to experienced pros, there's something for every kind of recreational scuba diver at this two-day fair. Try out the latest gear in the test tank, find a dive club or training centre, research your next trip or take part in a workshop. 18-19 March 10.00-18.00, Metropolis, Groenendaallaan 394, Antwerp; €12
[\ duiksportbeurs.be](http://duiksportbeurs.be)

Is this Molenbeek?

The Brussels district doesn't get the most positive coverage in the international media. Get to know the real neighbourhood with a guide, who will explain its industrial past and show you how migration is building its future. Registration required via the website. (In English) 19 March 14.00-17.30, meet at Metro station Graaf van Vlaanderen; €10
[\ tinyurl.com/isthismolenbeek](http://tinyurl.com/isthismolenbeek)

Health-care Day

Have you ever wanted to go behind the scenes at a hospital? Did you know that modern senior centres are very different from the rest homes of old? For one day, Flemish health-care facilities are throwing open their doors, giving you the chance to learn about the care centres in your area. 19 March, across Flanders; free
[\ dagvandezorg.be](http://dagvandezorg.be)

HOW Tuning Day

If you're crazy about cars, then you'll want to be in Anderlecht for this celebration of tuner cars – regular cars modified for speed and looks. There's a red carpet drive-by, prizes for Best in Show, live music, shopping, food and more. 19 March 9.00-17.00, Olympische Dreef 15, Brussels; €5
[\ tinyurl.com/howtuningday](http://tinyurl.com/howtuningday)



Safety net

Koksijde's fishermen reel in modern tech to protect marine life



Toon Lambrechts
 More articles by Toon [\ flanderstoday.org](http://flanderstoday.org)

\ NATUURPUNTWESTKUST.BE

It's encouraging news: In the last few years, the number of marine mammals in the North Sea has increased significantly. Today's beach-goers are much more likely to spot grey and harbour seals than they would have been only 10 years ago. Porpoises – dolphin's smaller cousins – are back as well. There are many reasons behind the evolution, according to Walter Wackenier of the conservancy organisation Natuurpunt Westkust. "The state of the marine environment has improved," he says. "We see, for example, fewer oil leaks and illegal dumping. But climate change plays a role as well. Migration and breeding patterns of fish species are changing, and predatory marine mammals follow where they go." The increased number of mammals on the coast, however, means they are more likely to come into conflict with local fishermen. Seals

and porpoises, for instance, often get caught in the nets, and die. Measures are under way to help avoid this unwanted by-catch. Gillnets – vertical panels of netting placed in a line – have been banned for several years. And now a new regulation has just been put into place in Koksijde, requiring fishermen on the shore to use a kind of filter net that prevents mammals from getting caught. Fishing from the shore is an age-old practice on the Flemish coast, even if it no longer creates much economic value. Like the shrimp fishers on horseback, the practice has been kept alive by a few hundred dedicated enthusiasts, and, according to Wackenier, the beach in Koksijde is perfect for this type of fishing. "The shore is very wide and shallow, which is ideal both for shore fishing and for marine mammals," he says. "We've set up the new regulation in dialogue with the

shore fishermen, because it is also in their interest – they want to preserve their traditional form of fishing." Shore fishermen use fixed nets, which are propped on the beach at low tide. The nets are designed to catch primarily sole and flat fish, but seals that get trapped in them have no way of escaping and drown. The new filter nets are much smaller, making it impossible for seals to enter. This is a logical step in the protection of marine mammals, says Wackenier, following the introduction of the ban on gillnets two years ago. The new regulation, he adds, sets an example for the rest of the coast. "Even though shore fishing isn't very popular on the northern side, we hope that other communities will follow," he says. "It shows that traditional fishing practices can go hand-in-hand and the protection of our marine environment."

BITE

Frites Atelier: Star chef brings chic fries to Antwerp

Korte Gasthuisstraat in Antwerp is no stranger to snaking queues – but this time people aren't lining up for the celebrated bakery Goossens, but for Sergio Herman's Frites Atelier Amsterdam, a chic new neighbour on the other side of the street. The venue, which opened last month, is the first Belgian outpost of the three-strong Dutch chain, launched last year to make "tasty fries accessible to everyone". The reality is both more glamorous and less democratic – this is no average *frituur*, with the atelier's smart navy blue facade giving onto a mosaic-tiled interior, designed by Piet Boon. Flemish cartoonist Kamagurka is behind the arty napkins, and Dutch firm Cor Unum the elegant ceramic sauce dispensers.

"I think Flanders makes fantastic fries, but we're just that tiny bit different," says Herman. "We partly join in the experience. The business oozes craft, and you arrive in a kind of workshop." Frites Atelier Amsterdam is the Dutch chef's second Antwerp venture, following the opening of the hugely popular eatery The Jane, which he

launched with Nick Brill in 2015 (it currently holds two Michelin stars). Herman shut his three-star restaurant Oud Sluis, just over the Flemish border in Zeeland, in late 2013, seeking a more balanced life – but has continued to expand his empire. Besides Frites Atelier and The Jane, it now includes hotel-restaurant Pure C in Cadzand, Zeeland, and Air Republic, due to open in Cadzand this spring.

Herman spent 18 months perfecting his fries, which use Zeeland potatoes baked in a blend of 100% natural oils before being fried and flavoured with samphire salt. Customers can pick from five homemade mayonnaise-based sauces – basil, truffle, andalouse, classic and béarnaise – or



Night of History has musical theme

\ NACHTVANDEGESCHIEDENIS.BE

De Nacht van de Geschiedenis, or The Night of History, is an annual tradition in Flanders: one evening out of the year dedicated to learning about and sharing a common past, whether it's local, regional or even global history. This year it happens on Tuesday, 21 March, and the theme is music. It's a category sufficiently broad that activities can take a variety of forms, from musical performances and lectures about music history to recitals, museum tours and more. Some activities appear again and again: organ recitals in various churches, performances by the local *fanfarle* (brass bands) or folk music groups, and carillon concerts played on age-old bells. These experiences will be familiar to anyone who lives in Flanders.

But dig a little deeper in the programme to find some unusual and surprising offerings. In Antwerp, for instance, colourful local author and guide Tanguy Ottomer will give a talk on the city's nightlife in the 20th century, with a nostalgic look back at Antwerp's nightclubs, cinemas and dance halls. And in Dilsen-Stokkem, four women (two musicians, a singer and a writer) tell the story of composer Fanny Mendelssohn through a combination of music and spoken word. Her life's work was overshadowed by that of her famous brother, Felix. Diana Goodwin



\ FRITESATELIERAMSTERDAM.COM

opt for gourmet toppings like Indo peanut sauce, Flemish stew and a fiery kimchi special. Fries start at €3.50, while "pimped up" versions stretch to a hefty €8.50. And the verdict? "Pretty good; some of the better fries I've had, but more of a one-time thing for me because of the price," says filmmaker Aaron Beyers. He's sitting at an outdoor table; the interior also hosts a handful of seats. Fellow diner Johan Matthé, rueing the disappearance of Flanders' traditional *frituren* of late, is more reflective. "Maybe the time is right for something like this – a new take on a culture that hasn't changed in decades. And the fusion-style fries are good. But personally I prefer the old-school joints." Clodagh Kinsella

32 Korte Gasthuisstraat, Antwerp

Beyond words

Film adaptation's intimate mother-son portrait is a universal story



Christophe Verbiest

More articles by Christophe \ flanderstoday.org

The performance at the centre of the film adaptation of Tom Lanoye's best-selling novel *Sprakeloos* offers heart-breaking moments. And the project left its mark on lead actor Viviane De Muynck.

In 2009, Tom Lanoye, one of Flanders' most important contemporary authors, published his magnum opus, *Sprakeloos* (Speechless). It was an homage to his mother, who lost her ability to speak following a stroke.

It's now been turned into a film by actor and director Hilde Van Mieghem (*Smoorverliefd*). At the heart of the film lies an unrivalled performance by veteran actor Viviane De Muynck.

Born in 1946, De Muynck has a great track record. She has been central to countless theatre pieces and has seen her fair share of film roles. But she's had to wait until now to get such a meaty part.

"It's an intimate portrait, and I was completely tantalised by the story," she says, the day after seeing the completed film for the first time. "There are several moments where I was overwhelmed by emotion."

Van Mieghem didn't have much convincing to do to get De Muynck to play the role of Josée, the mother. "I knew she had been trying for years to set this film up, and when she asked me, I didn't hesitate," she says. "I love the book, and I also deeply respect Hilde. I'm convinced that the film clearly benefited from having a female director. She has a specific interest in the relationship between mother and son."

The power of the story is that it's universal, says De Muynck. "A lot of people have known someone who languished at the end of their life and wasn't able to help themselves



Viviane De Muynck inhabits the character of Josée, the heart of her household, family business and local theatre group

you once adored."

She adds with some hesitation: "Of course, at one point you also think: What if it happens to me? To be completely dependent, not knowing where you are anymore. It's a fear lots of people have. Since playing this character, I've been thinking about this much more

about herself. I tried to construct the character from what I have in me."

Still, after a first reading of the screenplay with people from Sint-Niklaas who knew Josée, some told her that it was as if they were seeing her resurrected. "At the time I wasn't wearing make-up, wig or costume. It reassured me that I was doing the right thing." Acting is, of course, a form of communication. When you have to communicate that you're not able to communicate anymore, it's twice as hard. De Muynck: "It's the ultimate fear for an actor – not being able to say the words you need to. Josée is a woman who is trying desperately to communicate. It was very important for me as an actor to know what she was trying to express."

So, when the screenplay reads "Josée babbling", De Muynck didn't just utter any old meaningless words. She is actually trying to say some very concrete sentences. "Hilde was a great help in finding what that would be. I think those moments also add some lightness to a heavy story."

It's the kind of character, she says, that you

can't shake off when you leave the set. Josée stayed with her the whole time they were shooting the film.

"We're talking about a short but very intense period of work. I couldn't go home cheerfully when the next day I needed to return to that hell," she says. "The character stayed in my head and my body. Going to a party while we were shooting, for instance, was out of the question."

That shouldn't come as a surprise, she says. "Just playing an emotion isn't enough. No, I had to dig deep into myself to really *live* the emotions. In some sequences this was very difficult."

As an actor, De Muynck gets her inspiration from the most diverse sources, among them painters. "This time I was thinking of 'The Scream' by Munch, and of some paintings by Bruegel. He mercilessly depicted his characters in a brutal world. At times, Josée is that kind of wounded animal."

Sprakeloos is now playing across Flanders and Brussels

“Just playing an emotion isn't enough. I had to dig deep into myself to really *live* the emotions

anymore," she says. And she could draw on her own experiences, as her father needed care towards the end of his life.

Looking for a nursing home, she discovered some that were really terrible, places where she wouldn't leave her worst enemy. "Luckily, in the end, my quest turned out well. The most difficult thing for a child is to realise your parents are no longer the strong people

than before."

Lanoye's novel, while a work of fiction, is also an undisguised autobiography. But De Muynck didn't feel the need to talk to Lanoye about his mother. "We chatted about the book, but I wasn't particularly curious about her," she says. "I didn't want to make the mistake of trying to identify myself with someone who isn't here anymore to talk

REVIEW: SPRAKELOOS

Soon after Flemish author Tom Lanoye published his novel *Sprakeloos* (Speechless), an homage to his late mother, director Hilde Van Mieghem set out to adapt it to the screen. It was a long and rocky road to finance the project, yet she persisted; so credit where credit is due for that.

But let's not beat around the bush: The film feels underdeveloped. There are some great performances, and lead actor Viviane

De Muynck is marvellous. The magic realist touch with which Van Mieghem intertwines past and present works well. But the story is told hurriedly and mechanically, rushing from one scene to the other.

Sprakeloos is a film about a middle-aged writer who sees his mother decline after a stroke. The flamboyant Josée is the family's pivot, running both the household and their butcher's shop. She's also the

leading light of the town's amateur theatre troupe.

And then suddenly this woman with the gift of gab is left speechless, unable to communicate. In the novel, Lanoye makes this decline palpable. It's as much a novel about language as it is about this woman's personal hell.

Van Mieghem simply could not create a cinematographic counterpart for this linguistic ingenuity. You'd need someone with the

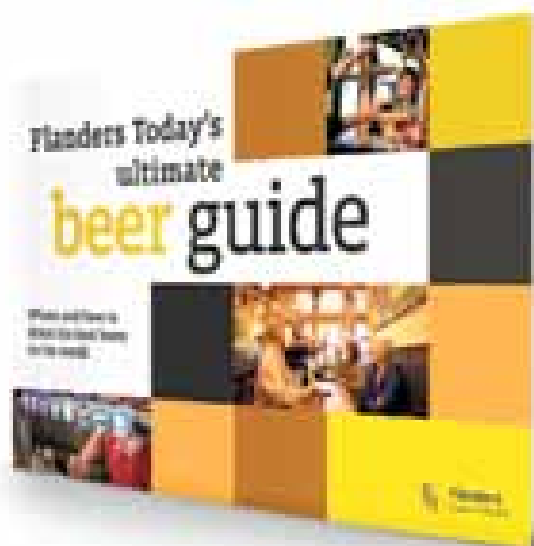
visual imagination of, say, Todd Haynes (*Carol*) or Hirokazu Koreeda (*Like Father, Like Son*) to do so, and in her previous films, she has never shown this talent.

It's a shame that viewers are not allowed to forget that there's a process of construction behind this story. *Sprakeloos* is certainly not a fiasco, but the rare heart-breaking moments show that this so-so film could have been much more inspired. ★★☆☆



Author Tom Lanoye with director Hilde Van Mieghem

Welcome to the land of beer



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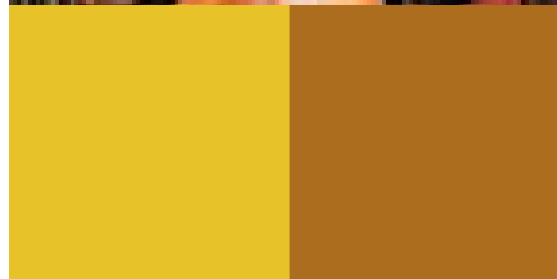
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‘Jazz is a language’

Famous former faces celebrate 30 years of jazz in Leuven



Tom Peeters

More articles by Tom \ flanderstoday.org

\ LEUVENJAZZ.BE

Though the festival is only approaching its fifth edition, Leuven Jazz has already established a tradition of putting jazz students on stage with their teachers. The resulting concerts have become a genuine treat.

The students come from the city’s Lemmens Institute, now officially the Leuven branch of the Luca School of Art, which has campuses in Ghent, Genk and Brussels. And to mark the institute’s 30th anniversary, alumni will be forming an All-Star band that reads like a who’s who of Flemish jazz, including the department’s founder.

Back in 1987, trumpeter and composer Bert Joris was asked to organise a jazz course at the Lemmens Institute, which at the time focused on classical music. “Jazz courses had also been launched in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Kortrijk,” he recalls. It was a small scene, but in the classical world, he says, there was a lack of trust of other genres. “Jazz had other, extra parameters. For instance, classical musicians didn’t have a clue about improvisation. Some said: It’s only jazz, it doesn’t have to be precise. But for me, jazz is a style that needs an even wider training than classical. You have to be able to read the notes, collaborate with other musicians, improvise and be creative. It offended me when some were calling jazz ‘lift music’.”

The launch of the course, with Joris (*pictured*) as sole tutor, was a small success, attracting about 20 students in its first year. Over the next few years other teachers were recruited: pianist Ron Van Rossum,

drummer Dré Pallemans, double bassist Philippe Aerts and saxophonist Frank Vaganée, laying a steady foundation for what would gradually become a full curriculum. At the time, Joris – who has just released *Smooth Shake*, a collaboration with the Brussels Jazz Orchestra – also taught at jazz schools in Bern, Switzerland, and Hilversum, the Netherlands. “This experience helped me to compile a programme that was based primarily on playing jazz and less on theory, especially during the first years,” he says. “Jazz is a language, and a language is learned by speaking it and being surrounded by people who have mastered it. Later on you can analyse what you were playing.” Joris also wanted his students to be introduced to instruments other than their first choice, with compulsory double bass, drum and saxophone classes, boosting the students’ collaborative qualities.

According to Peter Hertmans, who took over from Joris in 1999, things improved when the top-down-approach of the institute’s former director Paul Schollaert was replaced by a policy of mutual consultation, introduced by his successor, Marc Erkens. “We meet every Wednesday morning with the other members of the board,” Hertmans explains. “It helps us to bridge the gap between all the specialisations: instrument and voice, composition, conducting, music therapy and jazz.”

Today, the roughly 40 students still take advantage of the small scale, and Hertmans goes jamming with them in bars. “I’m struck by the solidarity at Lemmens,” he says.

“In Brussels, the scale is bigger and the vibe more international, but the combination of community spirit and seriousness in Leuven is unique.”

Of course, he continues, “the students also enjoy the presence of a few jazz legends: They really look up to Dré or Frank, who equally enjoy jam sessions with their possible successors. Being so small makes it easier for us to stick together.”

All these qualities have led to a close collaboration with Leuven Jazz. This year’s festival features internationally acclaimed bass players Avishai Cohen and Ron Carter among many others, including the jazz teachers at Luca, who have again composed a series of themed ensembles in which they are accompanied by students. Pallemans leads a Thema-Ensemble concert tackling the oeuvre of French composer Erik Satie, while a set led by Vaganée will focus on Belgian composers. “Festival-goers are really fond of the concept,” Hertmans says, adding that having students acquire stage experience accompanied by professionals fits the school’s didactic goals.

Also during the festival, a reunion concert celebrates the jazz department’s 30th anniversary. “Teachers will meet former colleagues and alumni in the morning and rehearse all day,” says Hertmans. “Everyone can propose compositions and decide which ones they want to join. I’m especially look-

ing forward to being on stage with Thomas Decock, the guitarist I tutored for five years.”

Like fellow alumni saxophonist Steven Delannoye and pianist Jef Neve, he says, “he’s one of the happy few combining diligence and talent, and reaching a level in which the hierarchy between teacher and student disappears. Now we are just colleagues, and friends.”

Van Rossum, who’s looking forward to performing with former pupils such as Neve and Ewout Pierreux, feels the same. “I’m curious about how they’re doing. Apart from following them on Facebook or listening to their CDs, it’s always nice to be on the same stage,” he says. “At Lemmens it’s impossible to remain anonymous: Special bonds are forged, and Leuven Jazz is an opportunity to share them. That’s crucial in a city where there is no permanent jazz stage.”

Hertmans is proud that his department has survived a series of financial cuts, while announcing that there will be a curriculum change in the jazz master’s degree programme in the next academic year.

To make sure students are even better prepared for the job, the department will focus more on projects and artistic entrepreneurship, and offer a wider choice of optional subjects. “All to the appeal of multiple profiles of students,” he says, “from the hardline tenor saxophonist to students appreciating a cross-disciplinary approach.”

18-26 March

Leuven Jazz
Across Leuven

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Flemish plays nominated for Catalan critics’ prize

Two productions by Flemish stage directors have been nominated for the Catalan Critics’ Awards for the Performing Arts. *De welwillenden* (*The Kindly Ones*) by Guy Cassiers of Toneelhuis is an adaptation of French-American playwright Jonathan Littell’s novel of the same name about the behaviour of ordinary citizens during the Holocaust. The production premiered in Antwerp in March 2016 and toured Europe extensively. *De stille kracht* (*The Hidden Force*), meanwhile, was directed by Ivo van Hove, the Flemish director of Toneelgroep Amsterdam. It is based on the 1900 novel of the same name by Dutch author Louis Couperus and is based on his memories of growing up on Java in the Dutch East Indies. The awards are announced in Barcelona on 27 March.

Lions return to Menin Gate

Two lion sculptures that used to make up part of the Menin Gate in Ypres will return to the monument next month, on temporary loan from Australia. The sculptures were given to Australia in 1936 in gratitude of the country’s service to Belgium in the First World War. A special Last Post ceremony – held every evening in front of the monument, one of Flanders’ best-known memorials dedicated to the casualties of the First World War – will welcome “the lions of the Menin Gate” on 24 April. The nearby In Flanders Fields museum will dedicate a small exhibition to the lions.

\ inlandersfields.be

Flanders goes green for Saint Patrick’s Day

Monuments in Flanders and Brussels will be turning green on Friday to highlight the regions’ links with Ireland. For the first time, Antwerp city hall and the Cloth Hall in Ypres are taking part in the Global Greening campaign, run by Tourism Ireland and the Irish Embassy in Belgium. The initiative sees landmark buildings and monuments around the world illuminated in green to mark Saint Patrick’s Day. These local landmarks are joined by Brussels’ Grote Markt and the Marktplaats in Bruges, as well as sites around the world such as Niagara Falls, the Colosseum and the Great Wall of China. The Manneken Pis will be dressed in traditional Irish costume for the day.

Requiem reborn

Flanders' ballet and opera team up for Eastern-inspired take on traditional mass



Clodagh Kinsella
More articles by Clodagh \ flanderstoday.org

\ OPERABALLET.BE

Choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's bold reimagining of Fauré's *Requiem* will see dancers from Royal Ballet Flanders share the stage with Opera Vlaanderen's Chorus for the first time.

From collaborating with kung-fu monks to celebrating Japanese manga gods, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's extraordinary works are all about breaking boundaries. His latest – his third original production as artistic director of Royal Ballet Flanders – is no different, as he sets his bold choreography to Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*, which was first performed in 1893.

Fauré's requiem – traditionally, a Mass for the repose of a dead soul – is unusual as the genre goes. The Frenchman was an agnostic, and – though his parents died soon after one another around the time he started it – he claimed that he wrote it “for pleasure”.

At any rate, his most famous large-scale composition is surprisingly optimistic: free of the bluster and heavy religious overtones typically associated with the funeral mass. Cherkaoui's *Requiem* will premiere in Ghent as part of the triple-bill *East*. The follow-up to *West*, which launched Royal Ballet Flanders' Borderline season via American greats like Merce Cunningham, it presents the work of three choreographers straddling the borders between East and West.

First on the bill, *Kaash* is an early piece by British-Bengali choreographer Akram Khan, rooted in the ancient Indian dance form Kathak. The ballet will dance a short version of the full-length ballet, which explores Hindu deity Shiva, with contributions from Anish Kapoor (scenery) and Nitin Sawhney (soundtrack).

Secus, meanwhile, sees Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin, director of Tel Aviv's BatSheva Dance Company, play with the boundaries between exaggeration and under-



© Ignacio Urrutia
Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui oversees rehearsals of *Requiem*, his take on Gabriel Fauré's Mass for the dead

statement through his trademark dance language, Gaga.

Arising from Naharin's faith in the healing powers of movement, Gaga relies on dancers unlocking their body's unconscious actions. The work's notably diverse soundtrack marries Bollywood and The Beach Boys.

In keeping with the theme, Cherkaoui's own contribution is far from a simple interpretation of Fauré's decidedly French music – with Flemish composer Wim Henderickx creating a new, Eastern-inspired orchestration of the score. “We had wanted to work together for a very long time, as we share each other's passion for the East and West, for these different cultures,” says Henderickx.

Artist-in-residence at Antwerp's deFilharmonie, he has previously explored Indian ragas and created a tantric cycle inspired by the Far East. While it was Cherkaoui's passion for the *Requiem* that dictated its selection, Henderickx came around to its charms.

“It's not like Brahms' *Requiem* or the other big ones, but rather very intimate,” he says. “In that sense I felt there could be a connection with my music, and I immediately wanted to make it even more intimate than the original.”

He initially set about adding in Eastern instruments like the qanun or oud, but soon realised that wasn't going far enough. After finding his way into the piece through its iconic “Pie Jesu”, which inspired a lament of his own, he began afresh with new intent.

The final version now begins and ends with Henderickx's own music, featuring various interventions along the way. “The whole piece became something new,” he says. “Of course it is based on the *Requiem*, and I didn't touch Fauré's melodies or harmonies, but, on the other hand, it's a new project. The music turns into another world, into a contemporary world that is also inspired by the Middle East.”

Cherkaoui's works often have an explicitly political bent: in *Requi-*

em's case, Fauré's artistic vision becomes a springboard to explore modern concerns. The performance will be staged against an abstract backdrop representing a slum, a devastated city – or perhaps a tortured soul.

In this sense, it functions as a kind of counterpoint to Philip Glass's Mahatma Gandhi-inspired opera, *Satyagraha*, of which Cherkaoui has just created a new version featuring dancers from his company, Eastman.

Satyagraha will play at Opera Basel during *Requiem's* run – the Flemish Opera will perform it in future – and will offer a political response to crisis in place of *Requiem's* more interior exploration of human loss. Despite its focus on the inner world, *Requiem* will draw on an unusually large cast. Avant-garde Antwerp-

based collective HERMESense will perform the work live, with rising French-Algerian soprano Amel Brahim-Djelloul juggling the classical content and Eastern arabesques. For the first time, the dancers of Royal Ballet Flanders will share the stage with Opera Vlaanderen's Chorus and Children's Chorus.

“It's a very big production,” says Henderickx. “I think the ensemble is nine musicians, and then there are a lot of dancers, a lot of choir members, and I also added a children's choir to keep it gentle.”

He wanted to bring a lot of people together, he says, “not in the kind of bombastic musical atmosphere that's often done with this piece, but to suggest the inside of the human soul”.

The collaboration was a new experience for everyone involved – and, for Henderickx, a very liberating process. “Working with other art forms, and especially with dance and theatre, you are more open. You dare to do different things,” he says.

“If it's a concert piece, you almost don't want to touch the masterwork. It's something you approach only with great respect. That was also the case with this production, but I felt completely free knowing that it was a combination of dance and music.” While such unusual cross-pollination – and the heavyweight theme – might overburden a dance work, Henderickx is confident that this won't be the case. “There's this whole big machine of singers and musicians, but it all works seamlessly,” he says.

“I think that's the quality of Larbi, too, to create an atmosphere that is open – for the dancers, but also for the singers and musicians. I don't know how he does it, but it's very natural.”

18–22 March

Opera Ghent
Schouwburgstraat 3, Ghent

12–19 April

Opera Antwerp
Frankrijklei 1, Antwerp

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

XS Festival

One hundred artists figure in this high-octane theatre, dance and circus festival. Perfect for short attention spans, each performance lasts a maximum of 25 minutes, with up to 10 shows a night. Highlights include Vladimir Steyaer's take on the last moments of codebreaker Alan Turing, and Ya Sem's dance exploring patriarchy in Egypt. 23–25 March, Théâtre Nationale, Brussels

\ theatrenationale.be

Complete Works:

Table Top Shakespeare •
Forced Entertainment

Watch a pot of marmalade blush and wonder about the fate of a jar of allspice as British company Forced Entertainment condense all 36 of the Bard's plays into surreal and touching 50-odd-minute works. The action (pictured) plays out on a tabletop and is performed by company players using a series of everyday objects for props. (In English) 21–26 March, Campo Victoria, Ghent

\ campo.nu



Miniatures • Royal de Luxe

The French street theatre company, best known for their performances with giant marionettes, have turned their attention to a more introspective story – offering a dreamlike take on society's ills. The work was commissioned for city arts festival OP.RECHT.MECHELEN, which this year focuses on the theme of law and justice. Until 26 March, Nekkerhal, Mechelen

\ oprechtmechelen.be

Stroll through the centuries

Eurantica

18-26 March
Nekkerhal, Mechelen
EURANTICA.BE

Scores of art galleries will converge on Mechelen this weekend for the latest edition of the Eurantica Fine Art Fair, the eclectic, contemporary showcase of historical paintings, modern art, jewellery, antique furniture and vintage design. The fair, a magnet for collectors, art dealers and interior designers, is now in its 36th edition. The mix is about 50% antiques, 10% ethnic art and 40% modern and contemporary art and design, with 60% from Belgian galleries and 40% from other European outlets. Luc Darte, Eurantica's exhibition manager, says that the fair has a reputation for sophistication,

daring and good taste. "It offers a wonderful journey throughout various periods and regions in the world," he says. "Next to pieces from 18th-century France or 19th-century England, you can see African art, pre-Columbian art, European silverware." This edition is only the second to take place in Mechelen, at the 18,500 square-metre Nekkerhal, after decades in Brussels. Some 95 exhibitors are expected at this year's event, slightly down from the last time the show was in Brussels, in 2015, when 115 galleries took part. Around 22,000 visitors are expected, and organisers empha-



size that strict vetting procedures by 25 art experts will ensure the

high quality of pieces on offer. Among the exhibitors are antique French jewellery expert Véronique Malaise, Antwerp furniture specialist Frank Van Laer, Ghent ethnic art dealer Sophie Van Assche and Brussels jewellers Godelieve and Patrick Sigal. There are also conferences in the margins of the fair, including a talk by Bozar's head of exhibitions, Sophie Lauwers, and art historian Gilles Marquenie about the venue's Pol Bury exhibition, and by Ghent University professor Samuel Mareel about his job as curator for Mechelen's new Hof van Busleyden museum.
\ Leo Cendrowicz

CLASSICAL

Salaam Syria

21 March, 20.30
Bozar, Brussels
BOZAR.BE

The Klara Festival is in full swing. This year's edition of the classical and new music festival celebrates composition and performance as intercultural dialogue. The programme's centrepiece is this concert, featuring the Belgian debut of the Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra. The ensemble, made up of Syrian musicians displaced by civil war, joins the National Orchestra of Belgium to perform classic works by European giants Giacomo Puccini and Pablo Casals as well as contemporary works by Syrian composers Suad Bushnaq, Dia Succari and Kareem Roustom. The concert also serves as a commemoration of last year's terrorist attacks in Brussels.
\ Georgio Valentino



PERFORMANCE

Queens Werq the World

15 June, 20.00
Stadsschouwburg, Antwerp
STADSSCHOUWBURG-ANTWERPEN.BE

America's most famous drag queen, RuPaul, hits the road with her reality TV sensation *Drag Race* for a 16-date world tour starring everyone's favourite queens. The live extravaganza is hosted by *Drag Race* laurates Bianca Del Rio, Michelle Visage and Shangela and features performances by

series alumni Alaska Thunderfuck, Alyssa Edwards, Detox, Latrice Royale and Willam as well as newcomers from the show's ninth season. Shangela touts the cast as "the most outrageous and talented collection of queens that have ever toured together". Antwerp is the tour's only Belgian stop.
\ GV



THEATRE

Odysseus, een zwerver komt thuis

24 March, 19.00
KVS, Brussels
KVS.BE

The Odyssey is known for its length. The title of Homer's magnum opus has even entered the pop lexicon as shorthand for any extended journey. KVS director Michael De Cock has embraced this fact in his marathon 24-hour stage production of the ancient epic poem. Although the text is adapted to

metered but colloquial Dutch, De Cock's *Odysseus, A Wanderer Comes Home* makes no concessions to brevity. It stars a tag-team cast of 24 actors as protagonist Odysseus, whose journey home from the Trojan War is frustrated by obstacles of every stripe. (In Dutch, no surtitles)
\ GV



EVENT

Saint Patrick's Day Parade

19 March, 13.00
Jubelpark, Brussels
IRISHINEUROPE.ORG

Saint Patrick's Day is upon us, and that can only mean one thing: a grand parade. Brussels' annual procession, organised by the Irish in Europe Association, has become a local tradition among expats and natives alike. This year's parade is led by the Brussels Caledonian Corneymusers pipe band and boasts delegations from loads of cultural and sports organisations. A Irish breakfast precedes the event at the Old Oak pub. For those who want to celebrate on the day itself, the association also hosts a lunchtime concert by vocalist Keith Paton and pianist Dénes Dosztán on 17 March at wine bar Gourmand.
\ GV



CONCERT

Brussels

Euphony: Pop, jazz and gospel music by the vocal group, featuring pianist Anne Wolf, with proceeds going to Refugees Are Not Alone to help fund integration efforts. 18 March 20.00-22.00, Hotel Communale, Paul Hyman-laan 2
\ rana-be.org

FAMILY

Ostend

Springtij: Free cultural festival for kids featuring theatre, exhibitions, workshops, readings, beach sports, an Easter egg hunt and more. 1-17 April 11.00-19.00, Achturenplein
\ visitoostende.be

THEATRE

Brussels

The Way She Dies: A co-production between Flemish theatre group Stan and Portugal's Teatro Nacional about how a book like *Anna Karenina* has the power to change lives, for better or for worse. (In English and French with surtitles in Dutch and French) 20-22 April 20.30, Kaaitheater, Sainctelette-square 20
\ kaaitheater.be

Ontroerend Goed trilogy: Ghent's renowned youth theatre company celebrates its 15th anniversary with a unique trilogy, starting with *A History of Everything*, in collaboration with the Sydney Theatre Company. (In English) 21-23 March, KVS, Arduinkaai 7
\ kvs.be

TALK

Brussels

The Art of Listening: Series of talks featuring musicologists, philosophers, artists, psychologists and neuroscientists, who take turns exploring what it means to listen and how we listen. (Two in English, one in French). Until 18 May 12.30-13.30, Muntpunt, Munt 6
\ muntpunt.be

VISUAL ARTS

Mechelen

Contour: Biennial of the Moving Image: Mechelen's biennial art parcouer is back, showcasing international installation artists in unique settings across the city. Italian curator Nicola Setari invited artists to reflect on legends and famous historical figures from Mechelen's past. Until 21 May, across Mechelen
\ contourmechelen.be

Talking Dutch

God will see you now



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

God rijdt rond in een Porsche – God drives around in a Porsche, according to a recent puzzling *De Standaard* headline. But they didn't really mean The Almighty. Obviously not. They were talking about a middle-aged man from a village in Flanders.

God is een psychiater en woont in het West-Vlaamse Beernem – God is a psychiatrist and lives in Beernem in West Flanders, the newspaper explained. And God appeared to be suffering from a midlife crisis, judging from his number plate.

Psychiater Tom Herregodts rijdt rond met een wel heel opvallende gepersonaliseerde nummerplaat – psychiatrist Tom Herregodts drives around with a number plate you can't help noticing. No number. Just three red letters – GOD.

De plaat was een cadeautje van zijn vrouw – The number plate was a present from his wife *voor zijn vijftigste verjaardag* – for his 50th birthday.

Al heb ik wel gekozen wat er op de nummerplaat moest komen – I had already decided what I wanted on the number plate, explained



© Ingimage

Herregodts. *Mijn vrouw vreesde dat ze het nooit zouden aanvaarden* – My wife feared they would never accept it. *Maar het was geen probleem* – But it wasn't a problem.

You might want to know why any sane person would want to pay €2,000 – the current fee for a personalised number plate – to pretend you are God. *De psychiater zelf ziet er geen graten in* – The psychiatrist himself didn't see the problem with it, said *De Standaard*, using the Dutch expression *geen graten* in, which literally says he didn't see any bones in it. In fact, he thought it was a really good idea.

Wie zich één dag als God gedraagt of voelt – Someone who spends a whole day behaving like God or believing they are God *gaat er psychologisch op vooruit* – is engaging in psychologically posi-

tive behaviour.

Het is zalig om je voor te stellen dat je God bent – It's heavenly to set yourself up as God, explained Herregodts. *Je laat mensen vlotter doorgaan* – You let people join the traffic more easily, *maakt je minder snel kwaad* – don't get angry so quickly *en rijdt net correcter en attent* – and drive with more care and consideration. If he had his way, we would all drive like God. Meanwhile, a few kilometres away, the owners of another high-performance Porsche were being prosecuted for letting their son get behind the wheel. *De ouders lieten hun 9-jarige zoon met een snelheid van 106 kilometer per uur door de bebouwde kom in het West-Vlaamse Jabbeke rijden* – The parents had allowed their nine-year-old son to drive at a speed of 106kph through the residential streets of Jabbeke in West Flanders.

Weerzinwekkend – Outrageous, the public prosecutor declared. *Dat er hier geen ongevallen gebeurd zijn is puur toeval* – The fact that it didn't end in an accident is pure luck.

Although some might say it was all down to God.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



In response to: *One in 10 households experience stalking by neighbours*

Clinton Ashworth: We're the entertainment for the entire street. I'm certain of it.



In response to: *The Land of Beer: Oud Beersel keeps the lambic tradition alive*

William Martyn: Good that I read it! Wonderful story!



In response to: *Holy Food Market brings the world to the table*

Maddy Wheatley: Another trip to Gent soon? 🌍



Nick in Erlangen @ErlangerNick

Booked a nice table (hopefully outside) at that one place we really like in Nieuwpoort, the night before arrive in Thanet



D Frith @DeclanFrith16

Belgium! You were incredible! Brugge, Ghent, Antwerp & Brussels. All amazing cities that everyone should visit! Bestest time



Elise Van Looy @EliseVanLooy

Leuven it is 🇧🇪



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THE LAST WORD

Outlook bright

"You know, because of that attack, I can now achieve things that would otherwise have been impossible."

Eighteen-year-old equestrian Beatrice De Lavalette lost both legs in the terrorist attack at Brussels Airport last year but hopes to take part in the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics with her horse Deedee

Away from it all

"In these times of Facebook, dashcams, phones with location services and other breaches of our privacy, we are offering complete discretion."

Hotel chain Carotel is opening a third location for secret rendezvous in Kuurne, West Flanders, adding to its current locations in the equally out-of-the-way Rumst and Lubbeek

End of the road

"To see him go by in his racing jersey in his own hometown will be an emotional moment, of course, but it should be a happy day. He's earned it after such a fine career."

Tom Boonen's 85-year-old grandfather Raymond will give the starting signal for his grandson's last race in Mol on 5 April

Time of her life

"There's some comfort for men who are having trouble understanding it: Sometimes women don't understand it, either."

Former TV presenter Martine Prenen has written the book *Menopause* about surviving menopause

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



© Nicolas Maeterlinck/Belga

HERE TO HELP Humanoids and humans mingled at the grand opening of De Krook, Ghent's new multimedia library and cultural centre. The weekend-long programme featured demos from tech organisations and talks by Flemish authors, while local radio station Urgent.fm provided the soundtrack



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