Every step you take

Flemish rehabilitation centre improves quality of life for children with cerebral palsy

Senne Starckx

Every day, hundreds of children in Flanders spend hours on fitness machines and massage tables, at home or at the rehabilitation centre of the University Hospital Pellenberg. The centre is working hard to help children with cerebral palsy lead active lives.

Six months ago, 13-year-old Georges Vermast rode her bike for the first time in her life – from her home in the coastal city of Oostduinkerke straight to the beach. Even though she wasn’t riding a real bike but a tricycle, it was a remarkable achievement and a demonstration of how endurance and devotion can eventually pay off.

A year before, Georges had been bound to her wheelchair, believing she would never be able to ride a bike or even walk independently.

The ride to the beach was the culmination of Georges’ three-month rehabilitation programme at Leuven’s University Hospital Pellenberg. There, she underwent radical surgery in which her legs were straightened and her leg muscles deviated. Thanks to that operation – and the intensive follow-up physiotherapy – Georges is now able to move her legs. To get around the rest of the time, she uses a walking frame.

Georges is just one of several thousand children and young adolescents in Flanders who suffer from cerebral palsy, a chronic brain disorder that arises at birth or at a very young age. Parts of the patient’s brain are damaged or paralysed. The disorder is non-progressive, but the damage to the brain is permanent and (for the moment) irreparable.

Signal misfire

Typical symptoms include weakened or absent motor skills, problems with speaking or learning and behaviour that fits the diagnosis of severe autism. However, symptoms vary so greatly that it’s impossible to describe an average cerebral palsy patient.

In Dutch, the disorder is described as a “paralysed brain”, but that term is not only a stigma, it’s also not accurate. On the contrary, the main problem with cerebral palsy – certainly where the motor skills are concerned – is that the brain continuously fires the body’s muscles with signals, keeping the muscles in...
Region isn’t consulted about crucial rail decisions that have impact

Alain Hope

Flanders is badly informed about decisions taken by the rail authority NMBS, even when the region’s interests are seriously affected. There is also not enough consultation over issues such as the regional express network. These statements are part of a five-page letter sent to the NMBS and co-signed by minister-president Kris Peeters and mobility minister Hilde Crevits (Vlaams Belang).

The problem has been brewing since July, when the NMBS’s investment plans for 2013-2025 were approved by the federal government, including €2.6 billion – 10% of the total investment budget – destined for regional projects. Crevits at the time wrote to government enterprises minister Jean-Pascal Labille with a list of the Flemish government’s priorities. To date, she says, those wishes have not been taken into account.

“The Flemish region regrets that the network plans of the NMBS have not been worked out together with the region,” the letter states. Primary among the concerns is the Brussels express network, known as GÉN. The Flemish government was not adequately consulted, according to the letter despite the network extending well into Flanders. Labille responded that he was “always ready to listen” to issues raised by the regions. “The aim is to achieve multi-modal mobility, where all modes of public transport correspond as much as possible with each other,” he said. “That is also one of the goals of the Flemish government, which naturally presupposes there will be co-operation. We share the concern for there to be open and constructive discussion.”

NMBS extends surveillance cameras on trains

Rail authority NMBS has installed surveillance cameras along the entire length of 130 trains. The move comes as part of a campaign against aggression towards rail staff and comes just ahead of yet another attack on a train conductor this weekend. The camera system has been installed on the authority’s Desiro trains, with the main purpose being a deterrent to violence. The cameras will also provide images of any attacker or vandals. The system forms part of the authority’s anti-aggression master-plan of 55 measures that saw a 4% drop in violence. The cameras will also provide images of any attacker or vandals. The system forms part of the authority’s anti-aggression master-plan of 55 measures that saw a 4% drop in violent incidents on trains between 2011 and 2012. Manufacturer Siemens will equip the other 175 Desiro trains in the NMBS fleet with cameras over the next two years. The attack this weekend took place on the Ghent to Brussels Airport train Tuesday afternoon when a man was caught trying to break into the train’s service carriage. He attacked the conductor, several train windows were smashed, and the police were called. The train was delayed for about an hour. The attack is the latest in a series of incidents involving aggression against staff on trains between the two cities.

“Sacred soil” for Flanders Fields Memorial Garden in London

Last week 70 sandbags were brought to Ypres, each one filled with soil from Commonwealth war cemeteries in West Flanders. The bags, each marked with the name of the cemetery, are now on their way to London to be used in the Flanders Fields Memorial Garden, currently being constructed near the Guards Museum close to Buckingham Palace.

The soil from Flanders Fields – “sacred soil,” according to Andrew Wallis, curator of the Guards Museum – was collected by children from 70 schools in Belgium and the UK. The garden was designed by Bruges-based landscape architect Piet Blancaert to be a quiet place of reflection and contemplation. “I didn’t want to make a monument with huge columns and statues,” Blancaert said. “It had to be simple, a reflection of Flanders, Flanders Fields and London.”

It is hoped that more memorial gardens will be planted later in Germany, France, New Zealand and Canada, as part of the Flemish government’s commemoration of the 1914-18 war. “I hope many people will go to see these gardens in London and elsewhere,” said minister-president Kris Peeters, present at the ceremony in Ypres. “The historical bonds between Great Britain and Belgium, in particular the battlefields and cemeteries in Flanders, are very close and unique.”

London’s Memorial Garden will be officially inaugurated in the autumn of 2014.

http://memorial2014.dux.be

More and more children arrive hungry at school

More and more children are arriving at school without having eaten breakfast and with little or nothing for lunch, according to the Flemish Education Council (Vlor). This week the alderwoman for education in Ghent, Elke Decruynaere, called on the Flemish government to take steps to assist municipalities in addressing the problem.

According to Vlor, 9.7% of children in the region are born into poverty. While overall welfare has risen in the last decades, poverty has not come down, bringing about a widening of the wealth gap. “The schools in Ghent obviously do what they can to provide these children with a meal,” she said. “But in principle that’s not their job. Schools don’t have the organisation or the financial means.”

Ghent city council is to increase its annual budget for measures to tackle the problem from €35,000 to €50,000, but, according to Decruynaere, the government needs to step in. “Schools and municipalities can’t do it alone,” she said.

According to Vlor member Gerda Bruneel, “teachers are coming to school with a loaf of bread and a pot of chocolate spread, to give out sandwiches to their pupils.”

No more pig castration without anaesthetic

Animal rights organisation Gaia has welcomed news of a ban on the castration of piglets without anaesthetic, announced by public health and animal welfare minister Laurette Onkelinx to coincide with World Animal Day last Friday. The ban includes a “transition period” and only becomes fully operational in 2018.

Piglets are castrated at an early age to avoid a particular smell considered when cooking the meat later, found unpleasant by many consumers. Gaia and others have long pointed out that there are other less painful methods for avoiding the smell. At present, only one retailer in Belgium, Intermarché – still sells meat from castrated piglets. The main supermarket and butcher chains have all either implemented bans of their own or will do so by the end of the year. “This is a beautiful gift on World Animal Day for the animals and anyone who is concerned about their welfare,” Gaia said in a statement. “For years we have been campaigning for a ban on pig castration.... Of course, we would have liked a shorter transition period, but now there is at least a clear deadline.”

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€23,304 average annual income of a farmer in Flanders this year, 46% less than the average salary of an employee in another sector

8,108 km of traffic jams in Belgium in September, the worst ever recorded and 2,000 km more than the same month last year

40% of teachers in Brussels will look for a job outside the capital within five years, according to education minister Pascal Smet

€20 for a new provisional driving licence, an increase from €9 previously. The new licence, however, is in bank card format

€515 cost for an annual pass on Brussels public transport system MIVB, up from €488 now. The monthly pass goes up to €49

The Flemish government’s commemoration of the 1914-18 war.

An exhibition of plants in London’s Memorial Garden

The garden was designed by Bruges-based landscape architect Piet Blancaert to be a quiet place of reflection and contemplation. “I didn’t want to make a monument with huge columns and statues,” Blancaert said. “It had to be simple, a reflection of Flanders, Flanders Fields and London.”

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From left, West Flanders provincial governor Carl Gosakow, British Ambassador to Belgium Jonathan Brenton and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters on their way to the ceremony that sends 70 bags of Flemish soil to London.

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Belgacom is still trying to rid its computer system of the malware planted by hackers, allegedly working in behalf of Britain, of intelligence gatherers at GCHQ. According to De Standaard, sources from both inside and outside the company report that the malware is of a kind that can mutate, which makes eradication difficult. Meanwhile, the Dutch broadcaster NOS has reported that the hacking was also directed at Middle East mobile phone traffic, as widely reported. According to the NOS, the malware also spawned on organisations in Brussels, among them the European Parliament, NATO and the interbank organisation Swift.

Brussels will require a fifth European school by 2015 if current rates of growth continue, according to a report by the government of the schools. At present there are European schools in Laken, Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, Zaventem, Etterbeek, Ukkedal, for a total of almost 11,000 students. That’s 2,500 more than in the 2006-2007 academic year, when there were only three schools. Numbers are growing by 300 a year. Talks are under way regarding a location for a new school. Kvinien said, though nothing has yet been decided.

There were 1,332 bankruptcies in Belgium in September, an all-time record monthly total, according to consultancy Graydon. The previous record of 1,220 was set in November 2008. The previous record of 1,220 was set in November 2008. Three people are reported to have committed suicide in Belgium this week, bringing the number of suicides since January to 174, a figure that is up by 31% compared with the same period last year.

The Brussels prosecutor’s office said it is investigating the disappearance of a package containing 3kg of cocaine from the Sint-Pieters-Woluwe post office. The package was found by staff hospital among the possessions of a man brought to the hospital by police. The police were unable to locate the man, and his identity is not yet clear.

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Peeters welcomes Myanmar delegation

The country follows two recent Flemish economic missions there

Derek Blyth

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters met a delegation from Myanmar, led by Vice-President and Finance Minister Aung San Suu Kyi, on 11 March. The Myanmar delegation also included transport minister Ny Lan Tun Aung and vice minister for foreign affairs Thant Khwe, along with several other officials from the transport and foreign affairs ministries.

After years of isolation and military rule, Myanmar – also referred to as Burma – is becoming more accessible economically. The government is, however, largely influenced by the military, and the country is subject to tough international sanctions imposed by the EU and US. But its government is drawing up ambitious plans to develop transport infrastructure, ports and logistics capabilities. The government of Flanders has been building relations with Myanmar following visits by Peeters in 2012 and again in March this year. The Peeters government believes that Flemish companies can play a role in the economic development of Myanmar because of their expertise in areas such as transport infrastructure. Earlier this year, Peeters met the opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi during a mission to Myanmar. That visit helped to secure contracts for several Flemish companies, including Sint-Niklaas engineers SBE, which signed a deal to work as a consultant on a project to improve navigation on the Irrawaddy river.

The Flemish government’s investment agency Flanders Investment & Trade has established an office in the former capital Yangon.

Crevits announces €300 million for improving cycle routes

Flemish transport minister Hilde Crevits has announced a new €300 million investment plan for major improvements to Flanders’ cycling networks in the period 2013-15. The plan focuses on 516 individual projects across the region. The Flemish region already has a well-developed network of cycle routes, she said, but the new plan aims to improve them by addressing missing links, constructing bike “superhighways” and sending out teams to test that cycle paths are properly designed and maintained.

Of the total budget, €21 million will go towards the construction of cycle superhighways that will link Flemish cities. Crevits sees these routes as increasingly important in future due to the popularity of electric bicycles.

“The minister noted that the current government will have created or upgraded some 1,750 kilometres of cycle paths by 2014, representing the distance from Brussels to Porto. ‘Flanders is one of the leading regions in Europe for cycling,’ she said. ‘In the coming years, we absolutely have to carry on building the infrastructure.’

Court ruling on non-appointed mayor in de rand

Flemish interior minister Geert Bourgeois will appeal a ruling last week by the Brussels court of first instance that has ordered him to pay damages of €40,000 to Véronique Caprasse because he refused to appoint her as mayor of the municipality of de rand. At the time, it was believed that other assemblies would follow suit. They did not – until last week. With both De Clerck and Pieters, the situation was particularly awkward. De Clerck said he considered it to be “some kind of insurance”. Pieters, who was one of the most vocal about his “security” concerns, was particularly irritating. The belief was, and still is, that the court cannot force the Flemish government to take action.

The Flemish government's representative in Central Europe, received the prestigious Grand Golden Decoration of Honour with Star for Services to the Republic of Austria. The award was presented by the Austrian president, Heinz Fischer. Hebbelinck, who is based in Vienna, was praised for his efforts over the past five years in developing bilateral co-operation between Flanders and Central Europe in the areas of culture, economics and politics. He played a particularly important role in securing Flemish government funding for the renovation of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The Flemish contribution went towards the restoration of the Flemish Picture Gallery, which has an outstanding collection of works by Flemish masters such as Anthony van Dyck and Rubens.

The award was also given in recognition of Hebbelinck’s work in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary and Slovakia. This work has led to Vienna becoming a hub for relations between the Central European countries and Flanders.

Flanders and Quebec sign co-operation agreement

Interior and tourism minister Geert Bourgeois has signed a co-operation agreement with the government of Quebec. The agreement was signed in the presence of Canadian Ambassador to Flanders, the Honourable David Jakuba. The agreement will result in the exchange of students and lecturers in higher education, environment, tourism and development aid.

It also involved the signing of an agreement between the Flemish fund for scientific research and its Quebec counterpart, which will support concrete co-operation projects set up over the next three years. Last year Canada was 22nd on the list of export territories for Flanders, and Quebec accounted for around one-third of those exports.
Every step you take
Young patients face radical surgery and months of hard work

> continued from page 1

of muscle and bone problems, and way, we can prevent the occurrence of involuntary movements, causing difficulties in walking or the use of arm and hand function.

What causes cerebral palsy is still a bit of a mystery. In the past, a lack of oxygen, known as hypoxia, during childbirth was thought to be the major cause, but recently this theory has been refuted. “We now consider cerebral palsy to be a result of complications during development of the foetus in the womb,” says orthopaedist and surgeon Guy Molenaers, who leads the multidisciplinary rehabilitation centre at Pellenberg. “We also know there’s an important genetic factor in the manifestation of the disease.” Naturally, all these children (and adults) need special assistance. These children all go to school and are part of youth groups or other activities.

One key feature that distinguishes children from adults is that they’re growing and constantly changing their movements. But for children with cerebral palsy, the permanent high muscle tone and spasticity stand in the way of their development. The consequences are devastating.

we can limit the need for surgical treatment.”

One way to reduce the muscle tone is to inject botuline toxine, better known as botox, in the children’s muscles. This enables the physiotherapist to stretch and intensively train the muscles.

Molenaers: “One advantage of a child’s brain and nervous system is that it’s elastic to some extent. The damaged brain is able to make new connections, using other routes than the blocked ones in the body. We stimulate this ‘rerouting’ by structural muscle reductions and bony deformities that cause deviant movement, constantly bent elbows and knees, and sometimes even a hip that spontaneously comes out of its socket. In contrast to classic orthopaedics, in which fractures and muscle strains can be repaired, we can’t intervene at the root of the disorder, which lies deep inside the brain,” says Molenaers. “Our treatment is aimed at minimising the effects of the high muscle tone and spasticity. This way, we can prevent the occurrence of muscle and bone problems, and letting our children perform physical exercises specific to each child.”

The common goal of the orthopaedists, child neurologists, rehabilitation doctors, physiotherapists and psychologists is the optimisation of the movement of the growing child. Before treatment of a new patient can start, Molenaers’ team has to document their movement completely and meticulously.

To do this, the centre has a unique clinical setting: a high-tech laboratory for movement analysis – informally known as “the gait lab.” Here, a 3D gait analysis is made of the movements of the child’s torso, legs, arms and even the hands while doing specific locomotive tasks.

It looks a bit like a catwalk – but one with a soft floor and toys on it (most children don’t understand why they have to walk back and forth for more than two hours). While they’re walking – or shuffling, assisted by a walking frame – the children’s limbs are covered with dozens of tiny sensors and electrodes. “The electrodes measure the muscle tone while moving,” explains Katrien Fagard, a physiotherapist at Pellenberg. “And the sensors emit light that the cameras around the catwalk can register.” A computer combines all these signals and churns out a detailed movement analysis in 3D. “Based on this analysis, we can see when – and at what speed – the muscular tone of our children differs from that of healthy children,” says Fagard.

Based on the analysis, a treatment is determined and a patient is ready to start with a strict physiotherapy regime, often on a daily basis. In the rehabilitation room, fitness-like machines help the children bend their elbows or knees again, ride a tricycle or start to walk. The daily visits demand a lot of the children – and of their parents and family. In most cases, parents have to bring their children to Pellenberg five days a week.

Frey (not her real name) is the mother of Bruno, an 18-year-old who’s become severely autistic due to cerebral palsy. He has been at Pellenberg every day for six months. A couple of weeks ago, Bruno had surgery, through which – in the long term – he might be able to start using his legs again, having spent his entire life in a wheelchair.

“First I had doubts about the surgery,” says Freya. “I thought: Why should I disrupt his life? He’s happy the way he is. But Dr Molenaers’ team are convinced there is indeed a chance that my son could walk again in the future.” To maximise that chance, Bruno undergoes physiotherapy every day.

Of course, there’s the expense – for the parents and for society – of treating children with cerebral palsy. “For patients who are under 18, the treatment is refunded by health care insurance,” says Molenaers. “But the parents have to pay a lot of non-refundable medical expenses. Besides that, housing and moving a disabled child asks a lot of them. They often need an elevator at home; their car needs to be adapted to transport a wheelchair... By the way, none of these children will ever get insurance for hospitalisation.”

To offer children with cerebral palsy a treatment that really makes a difference – without ruining their parents financially – Dr Guy Molenaers started a relief fund in 2008 called Move to Improve. One of its initiatives was a sponsored bicycle ride from Geneva to Nice, organised by Stefaan Vermaast, who saw firsthand the costs of providing fitness equipment during his daughter Georgies’ struggle to learn to ride a bike.

“For a good rehabilitation, you need specialised equipment, and the children should be able to practise at home,” says the ride allowed Move to Improve to buy six continuous passive motion (CPM) machines, which help to bend the children’s knees after surgery. Vermaast: “For Georges, we had to pay €550 per month to have a CPM machine at home – without any refund. Now six machines are hired out to patients for free.”

Move to Improve organised another cycling event last August, when 80 cyclists, including Flanders’ minister-president Kris Peeters, rode across the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg. One of the stops was Mol, where former world champion cyclist and Move to Improve patron Tom Boonen, rode his daughter Peeters, rode across the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg. One of the stops was Mol, where former world champion cyclist and Move to Improve patron Tom Boonen, rode his daughter

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With the proceeds, the fund wants to buy a tricycle that’s specially adapted for rehabilitation.
More than 4,000 new jobs for port of Antwerp

City's chamber of commerce says port is “alive and kicking”

Alan Hope

The port of Antwerp and the adjoining area of East Flanders known as the Waasland will require an additional 4,400 new workers over the next three years, according to a poll taken by the Antwerp chamber of commerce among 170 businesses in the area. The majority of the jobs are in technical fields, as well as IT staff and administrators.

According to soundings taken by the chamber of commerce, industries in the port will be advertising some 2,500 vacancies; most of these will be in process operations and maintenance. Port-related and logistics jobs will amount to nearly 1,900, including accountants, IT personnel and dispatchers.

“To young people who will soon be looking for work, I say ... the port is alive and kicking and a source of well-paid jobs,” said Luc Lavel of the chamber of commerce.

The new jobs offer some niche in the wake of news from Flemish labour minister Philippe Muysers that unemployment in September was 9.5% higher than the same period last year. The region now counts four unemployed, a rate of nearly 8%. For women, the unemployment rate is 8.1% and for men 7.8%. One in four of those seeking work is under the age of 25.

Meanwhile, the Antwerp port authority has launched a new international branding campaign under the slogan “Everything is possible at the port of Antwerp.” The campaign, which will run to the end of 2014, will feature a number of the port’s major clients, who will testify to “the can-do mentality” to be found in the industry.

“Everyone who has a story to tell can become an ambassador of the port, to carry our message into the world,” said Luc Arnouts, the port’s chief commercial officer.

Flemish delegation to visit UK

A group of representatives of businesses in Flanders will visit Hull in Yorkshire this week to take part in the seminar Doing Business in Belgium. The delegation includes Miel Vermogen, director of sales and logistics at the port of Zeerbrugge; Ben De Smit, economic and commercial counsellor for Flanders Investment & Trade at its London office; and Michel Vanhoonacker, chairman of the Belgian Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce.

“Throughout its history, Zeerbrugge has been the port through which the largest quantity of cargo has passed to and from the UK,” Vermogen told Flanders Today. “Over time, Zeerbrugge has also grown as a platform for continental Europe: Our rail network, thanks to the two turnpales of Douvres and Duinburg, now reaches the whole of southern Europe, all the way to the eastern edge of continental Europe. It’s certainly worthwhile to bring these developments to light, especially for a market such as the UK, which is of crucial importance for our port.”

Peter Brown, director of World Trade Centre Hull & Humberside, which is helping organise the seminar, agreed. “Zeebrugge is one of the fastest growing ports between Le Havre and Hamburg, which together handle more than a billion tonnes of cargo a year,” he said. “Flanders is a prime business region and strategically located in the centre of the most prosperous part of Europe.”

Base launches 4G mobile internet

Mobile phone operator Base launched its 4G mobile internet service in 12 cities across Flanders last week. Fourth-generation internet, known as 4G or LTE, offers greatly increased download speeds – up to 86 megabytes per second, or 10 times the speed of 3G.

Base is the region’s second operator to offer 4G, after Belgianon’s Proximus launched in Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven, Hasselt and Haasrode last year. “We are closing the gap,” said Base CEO Jos Donvli (picture). “As far as network coverage is concerned we’re already the best for 2G and coming up fast on 3G.”

Other operators that contract the use of Base’s network include Apple’s approval to allow iPhone users to wait: “It’s a matter of being open on Sunday, we should be able to take Antwerp’s shopping policy to the next level.”

Peter Aerts, the director of the Antwerp chapter of Unizo, which represents small businesses, says protest against Sunday opening hours as long as the city was prepared to invest sufficiently in marketing to ensure enough extra income to compensate shop owners for the additional expense.

Antwerp praises return of Benelux train

The city of Antwerp is “delighted” at the decision to reinstate the Benelux train from Brussels to Amsterdam in the wake of the ill-fated Fyra high-speed train, according to the city’s alderman for business, Koen Kennis.

The rail authority NMBS has announced it will resume a service between the two capitals by the end of the year, with 16 trains a day. At present the capitals are only linked by a Thalys service. The resumed Benelux train, which will be taken out of service when Fyra launched, will stop at Brussels Airport and in Antwerp. The Brussels-The Hague train, meanwhile, which began running earlier this week will operate 10 times a day.

The new service will be an opportunity, Kennis said, for Antwerp to position itself as a major destination for shopping tourism. “With a better train service out of the Netherlands and a general open-mindedness in the consideration of being open on Sunday, we should be able to take Antwerp’s shopping policy to the next level.”

Peter Aerts, the director of the Antwerp chapter of Unizo, which represents small businesses, said the organisation has planned protest against Sunday opening hours as long as the city was prepared to invest sufficiently in marketing to ensure enough extra income to compensate shop owners for the additional expense.

First World War tourism campaigns launched

With First World War centenary events starting soon, Flemish tourism organisations Toerisme Vlaanderen and Westterre have launched a publicity campaign to attract tourists to the battlefield sites of West Flanders.

With the slogan “De Grote Oorlog: Om nooit te vergeten” (The Great War: Let Us Never Forget) the centre of the campaign is a new website in three languages offering information on events, sites, museums and accommodation in the area. One section features Great War journeys into neighbouring areas in French Flanders. Tourists can also download a brochure detailing the car trip Life at the Front.

Flemish tourism and heritage minister Geert Bourgeois said that one-quarter of the infrastructure projects announced in 2010, with financing of €4.5 million, are now completed. The projects – in Ieper, Poperinge and Zonnebeke – are already open and have begun attracting tourists.

“Our goal is to receive 500,000 people a year starting next year with a top-quality, hospitable welcome, so that their experience of the commemoration is meaningful,” Bourgeois said. “In so doing, we can ensure that the message – no more war – is not lost.”

Base launches 4G mobile internet

Mobile phone operator Base launched its 4G mobile internet service in 12 cities across Flanders last week. Fourth-generation internet, known as 4G or LTE, offers greatly increased download speeds – up to 86 megabytes per second, or 10 times the speed of 3G.

Base is the region’s second operator to offer 4G, after Belgianon’s Proximus launched in Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven, Hasselt and Haasrode last year. “We are closing the gap,” said Base CEO Jos Donvli (picture). “As far as network coverage is concerned we’re already the best for 2G and coming up fast on 3G.”

Other operators that contract the use of Base’s network include Apple’s approval to allow iPhone users to wait: “It’s a matter of being open on Sunday, we should be able to take Antwerp’s shopping policy to the next level.”

Peter Aerts, the director of the Antwerp chapter of Unizo, which represents small businesses, says protest against Sunday opening hours as long as the city was prepared to invest sufficiently in marketing to ensure enough extra income to compensate shop owners for the additional expense.

Antwerp praises return of Benelux train

The city of Antwerp is “delighted” at the decision to reinstate the Benelux train from Brussels to Amsterdam in the wake of the ill-fated Fyra high-speed train, according to the city’s alderman for business, Koen Kennis.

The rail authority NMBS has announced it will resume a service between the two capitals by the end of the year, with 16 trains a day. At present the capitals are only linked by a Thalys service. The resumed Benelux train, which will be taken out of service when Fyra launched, will stop at Brussels Airport and in Antwerp. The Brussels-The Hague train, meanwhile, which began running earlier this week will operate 10 times a day.

The new service will be an opportunity, Kennis said, for Antwerp to position itself as a major destination for shopping tourism. “With a better train service out of the Netherlands and a general open-mindedness in the consideration of being open on Sunday, we should be able to take Antwerp’s shopping policy to the next level.”

Peter Aerts, the director of the Antwerp chapter of Unizo, which represents small businesses, says protest against Sunday opening hours as long as the city was prepared to invest sufficiently in marketing to ensure enough extra income to compensate shop owners for the additional expense.
Science through new eyes

The virtual world of the cyber classroom brings workshops at Technopolis up to date

Andy Furniere

The newest addition to the recently expanded Technopolis museum in Mechelen is the cyber classroom, installed in Belgium for the first time. Thanks to German technology company Visenso, youths can see such things as chemical reactions in 3D, making tricky concepts easier to grasp. The cyber classroom is installed at the Lab, where children take part in workshops full of chemical and biological experiments.

The Lab at Technopolis is a separate room in the hands-on science centre that’s not open to general visitors. In the Lab, students in the second and third grade of secondary education can use the specialised equipment to find lactose in milk, analyse the DNA of plants, create bio-ethanol and compare regular sunscreen to sunscreen with filters. On Wednesday afternoons, there is one workshop, and during the holidays and at weekends, there are three three-hour workshops a day.

Technopolis hopes that the Lab will help it reach a new target group: adolescents. The general exhibitions mostly cater to a younger audience. “On some occasions, we also provide simpler workshops for younger children, but the Lab is mainly meant for youngsters who are starting to consider their future school careers,” says Dennis Van Landeghem, one of the workshops’ organisers. These youngsters will soon also be invited to the new Atelier, where they will be able to create designs with equipment such as 3D printers, like in a fabrication laboratory, or fab lab.

For a couple of weeks now, the Lab has housed a high-tech “cyber classroom”, which looks like a new type of game console. It’s not meant for playing games, though, but for making abstract scientific concepts such as DNA easier to understand. With the aid of 3D glasses and a Wii console controller, students can examine molecules from all sides and make molecular models. On the right hand side of the screen, they receive tips and can read a concise explanation of the visualised processes in Dutch. “It definitely helps to increase their interest, because they can actually dive into these otherwise quite inaccessible worlds,” says Van Landeghem.

The cyber classrooms have their way to Belgium thanks to the partnership of Technopolis with German chemistry company Evonik. Evonik designed the 3D modules with the help of photonics company Visenso, which developed the innovative 3D teaching and learning environment. Evonik earlier introduced the cyber classroom at about 35 German schools and universities. The company hopes to further internationalise the concept by creating versions in different languages.

Via this fun and accessible teaching technology, Evonik – which also has a branch in Antwerp – hopes to attract more youngsters to the studies that prepare them for a career in the chemistry sector. Although the number of registrations for these studies is rising, the Belgian chemistry industry still needs many qualified young people to become the next generation of scientists.

Research by essenscia, the Belgian umbrella organisation for the chemistry and life sciences sectors, predicts that in Flanders annually about 2,000 of the 60,000 employees in these industries will retire. Although the sponsor of the cyber classroom programme is a chemistry company, there is also virtual lesson material in other disciplines of general humanities education like maths, physics, biology and art. There also is a version dedicated to topics for more technical studies, such as production and microsystems technology. To illustrate the many possibilities of this virtual classroom, Van Landeghem pushes a few buttons and suddenly the particle detector of Cern in Switzerland appears before my bespectacled eyes. “The cyber classroom also offers many possibilities for the Ateliers,” he says. It could, for example, help students make their own 3D copy of Michelangelo’s David.

Furthermore, we hope to create our own virtual models, specially adapted to the workshops here,” he adds. Another plan is to create a programme that enables students to control the cyber classroom with a tablet computer, which could be more practical. For people without a Wii, like me, it is a little complicated getting used to moving around in this virtual universe. “The staff at Technopolis have received training from the developer, Visenso.

At the end of the demonstration, I ask Van Landeghem how popular the cyber classroom was among the few classes that have already tried out the new technology. “The reactions were definitely positive as the interactive assignments speak to their imagination,” he says. “Still, the experiments with small explosions usually leave the biggest impression.”

Q&A

Nicola Callewaert of life sciences research institute VIB is one of two European scientists in the Top 20 Translational Researchers list of leading journal Nature Biotechnology

How does Nature Biotechnology designate its Top 20? Translational research means that scientific insights are converted into actual applications, not just into theoretical papers. A team tasked by Nature Biotechnology first screened the main research journals from last year for publications that caught the attention of biotech enterprises. A second team of experts then graded the approved patents up to last year, I made 18th place in the ranking.

Seventeen scientists in the Top 20 work in the US. Why do you think this is?

In the US, there is a stronger focus on concrete applications through collaboration with enterprises, while fundamental research is still appreciated more in Europe. But I have the feeling that this mentality is changing. Thankfully, the EU has made applying for patents easier by removing the obligation to file your request in all the European languages from next year on.

What was your most important achievement last year? My lab worked with teams from the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the Ghent firm Oxynate to start developing a more efficient and cheaper therapy for lysosomal storage diseases.

What are lysosomal storage diseases? A lysosome is like a cell’s recycling centre: It processes waste materials into substances that the cell can use again. In patients suffering from inherited lysosomal storage diseases, one or more essential enzymes are absent or don’t function properly. The result is that accumulating cellular debris poisons the cell, leading to organ damage. One example of these disorders is Pompe disease, which affects the muscles. Our team improved the biotechnology to create enzymes that patients with these disorders don’t have. After our promising trials on mice and in vitro, Oxynate will start testing the technique on patients with Pompe disease soon. Interview by AF

One million colon cancer tests

The government of Flanders has launched a research project on the prevalence of colon cancer in the region. Colon cancer is the second most common cancer in women and the third most common in men. Annually, about 5,000 Flemings are diagnosed with cancer and 1,800 die from the disease. Experts believe that the number of related deaths can be reduced by 400 per year if the cancer is detected at an early stage. From the middle of October to the end of 2015, the Centre for Cancer Detection will send an invitation for testing to about 1.4 million residents between the ages of 56 and 74.

The government prizes this as a new invitation every two years. www.brugeo.gent

VUB research group opens new “light” lab

Researchers of the Free University of Brussels’ (VUB) B-Phot, specialised in photonics, or light technology, have moved into the new Photonics Innovation Centre in Gooik, Flemish Brabant. The lab houses valuable high-tech equipment that enables the scientists to create prototypes for business, from large to SMEs. The VUB team will integrate companies like microsystems on labs-on-chips. Labs-on-chips are miniature laboratories of a few square millimetres or even much smaller. The researchers succeeded in making plastic microchips to measure pathogens, sugars and antibodies in solutions via fluorescence. B-Phot is one of a few labs in the world that can do this at a high rate, in the development of optical technology like labs-on-chips in mouldingable plastics, meant for low-cost mass production. www.b-phot.org
Paul’s Place

located in the village of Zonnebeke, is a fully furnished, top grade holiday cottage, which sleeps up to six guests.

A mere 6 miles (10 kilometres) east of Ypres and at walking distance from the infamous Polygon Wood, Paul’s Place lies right in the heart of 1914-18 Country.

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Hoping to welcome you one fine day,
Eddy Lesage – Nicole Cornelus

We visited most of the other international schools. BSB was the school we liked the best.”

Brann family from Australia (who chose BSB Primary for their children)

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“1,300 students from ages 1-18 years
Approximately 70 nationalities
British-based curriculum up to age 16
French/English bilingual education available across eight Year Groups (ages 4-18)
Only school in Belgium to offer A Levels, IB Diploma and BTEC
Outstanding academic results
Extraordinary choice of extra-curricular activities
Language matters

New kit will offer primary school teachers advice on working with non-Dutch speaking kids

Andy Furniere

T

eachers in Flemish primary schools are increasingly confronted with pupils who don’t have any knowledge of the Dutch language. For the first time in the region, experts are creating an educational kit consisting of a movie and manual with hands-on tips and examples of good practices. Part of the movie follows the first months at school of a Romanian girl who recently moved to Flanders.

One out of seven pupils in primary school don’t speak Dutch at home, according to figures from 2012 released by the Flemish government. For teachers, it’s a challenge to integrate the non-Dutch speaking children into the class group.

In Antwerp province, the organisations DoorElkaar and docAtas specialise in assisting these teachers. DoorElkaar is a department in Antwerp province, the organisation of the training centre Hivset with expertise on intercultural issues and non-native speakers, while docAtas is the provincial centre for documentation on these subjects.

‘Panic questions’

Experts Lieve Lenaerts of DoorElkaar and Yasmine Wauthier, a former staff member of docAtas, are now co-operating to make the life of teachers a little easier. “During our research, we discovered that there is a real need for easily accessible and applicable tips,” says Wauthier.

“There is so much info available on these issues, and many teachers have established creative initiatives. But teachers simply don’t have the time to go through all this material and there is not enough exchange of knowledge among colleagues.”

Their new educational kit, which provides teachers with concrete help, is called pANiekvragen, or Panic Questions. The capital letters AN refer to Anderstalige Nieuwkomers (non-native speaking newcomers).

Since last summer, the duo have been contacting schools to search for good practices and arrange interviews. To visualise the daily reality at primary schools, a director is filming several episodes of life at a fifth-year class between now and Christmas, with the focus on the Romanian girl Elena, who recently arrived in Flanders.

The film will include interviews with the 11-year old Elena, her parents, classmates, teachers, and the headmaster of school De Smiskens in Turnhout. In the film of about 40 minutes, experts of other schools and associations from Antwerp Province will also speak about their experiences.

The first shooting of the film took place on Elena’s first day of school, after arriving in Flanders only one week before. “Still, it went quite well,” says Lenaerts, “because she already had a cousin at the school and received help from another classmate of Romanian origin who speaks Dutch well.”

Many other children, however, arrive alone at school, with classmates who only speak Dutch. In some cases, it’s the first time they’ve ever been to a school.

In their manual, Lenaerts and Wauthier have gathered information and tips on 14 concrete topics, related to bridging both the culture and language gap. Teachers are often worried about how to welcome foreign students, involve parents, teach the language and deal with problematic behaviour such as aggression.

The authors also summarise the latest trends concerning teaching methods. At the end of each chapter, they offer tips by highlighting a good practice or paragraph from the scientific literature or discovered at a school in Flanders, Brussels or the Netherlands.

At the school De Vlinder in Baarle-Hertog, on the border with the Netherlands, for example, a teacher accelerated the integration of foreign students by showing considerable interest in their culture. Pupils could bring a photo that symbolises an important aspect of their background to hang on the wall of the classroom.

During a cooking workshop, pupils prepared a dish that was typical for their country. To teach foreign children basic vocabulary, many teachers assemble their own files with pictures of objects or encounters that are essential in daily life. Another method is teaching Dutch by using sign language.

The hope of the authors is that the kit will be used during workshops for the current generation of teachers but also as study material for the next generation. “It could be useful for the students in teacher education at university colleges,” says Wauthier.

“To prepare them from the start of their career on.”

For their project, Wauthier and Lenaerts received about €4,000 in subsidies from Antwerp Province and the regional fund of the Cera co-operative financial group. They can also count on the support of educational teams at Turnhout, Mol and the city of Antwerp.

The film and manual should be ready for publication by next spring. The Flemish educational publisher Garant Uitgevers will design and distribute the kit.

What changes have you implemented in recent years?

“Increasingly we bring experienced managers to our classrooms and send our students to business workplaces.”

Managers of large companies such as lingerie manufacturer Van de Velde, based in the East Flanders town of Schellebeke, challenge our students to come up with answers to strategic questions – for example, concerning expansion into international markets. It’s essential that our students acquire a helicopter view of the impact of their decisions, which influence the working of various departments in an enterprise. We also focus on individual coaching of students, with customised advice on their careers.

What is the biggest challenge left for Vlerick?

“We want to keep raising the international profile of our English-language programme in the coming years, Our collaborations with schools in Beijing, Saint Petersburg and Stellenbosch in South Africa are already gaining us much attention abroad. In the future, we may set up or enter co-operation networks with several international institutions as well. We furthermore try to attract more foreign students by offering online seminars, or ‘webinars’, to give them a taste of what they can expect. Finally, we also provide an annual international study trip in our programme. Last year, the students visited the Hungarian capital, Budapest. Interview by AF”

Andy Furniere

Q&A

Miguel Meuleman, programme director of the Master’s in General Management at Vlerick Business School, which has broken into the top 30 ranking by the Financial Times

How many schools does the Financial Times monitor?

“This year, we are 295 countries on a list of 70 courses worldwide, making us the best in Flanders. We are steadily climbing on the list. For the second year in a row, we have moved three places, and we progressed two spots in 2011. More specifically, Vlerick lost five places overall.”

What changes have you implemented in recent years?

“Increasingly we bring experienced managers to our classrooms and send our students to business workplaces.”

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Andy Furniere
WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Late Summer in the Maasland

Five cities in the Meuse Valley host special evening programmes beginning this weekend. In Kinrooi, take a river cruise and release illuminated wish-balloons over the Meuse river. In Oud-Rekem, take a guided walk through the village, which will be lit up in light. In Stokkel, experience the stillness of nature on a torch-lit boat ride. An atmospheric evening walk in Leuven begins and ends at a castle, and a special twilight tourist train goes from Museeek to the historic village of Anderlecht.

Until 2 November, across Meuse Valley

www.skystaps.be

Brussels Accessible Art Fair

The 10th edition of a juried art fair that encourages direct contact between the capital and other cities in Flanders. Each year, two cities are given the spotlight. The programme in Ostend wraps up on 13 October, while the activities in Hasselt kick off on 12 October with demonstrations by celebrity chef Giovanni Oosters and beer tasting with Julien Vrebos at the Smaksalon in the city centre.

Until 27 October across Hasselt, Ostend & Brussels

www.accessibleartfair.com

BITE

Pumpkin month

"In Kasterlee we eat pumpkins, while the rest eat beans," wrote historian and sociologist Robert Vrijens while the rest eat beans, "In Kasterlee we eat pumpkins, while the rest eat beans," wrote historian and sociologist Robert Vrijens - a nickname that has stuck to this day. Before the introduction of the potato from the New World two centuries later, many Flemish peasants relied on beans as their main source of sustenance. Pumpkins, therefore, were considered a seasonal delicacy and are still associated with festivals around harvest time. And nowhere are they more appreciated than in Kasterlee, where a new building can be constructed, and the Citroen garage, near Yser. Both have potential, according to Idrissi, who says the broad support for her plan certainly opened doors: "The successful debate at Kaaitheater showed it’s not only my dream or the dream of my inner circle, but one of many people in Brussels." The seeds of her vision were planted by indignation: "Brussels is a city full of artistic treasures, but, like its subterranean river Zeven, their beauty is unfortunately hidden out of sight," she wrote in her project proposal. "James Ensor, Paul Delvaux, Marcel Broodthaers are all well-known Brussels artists. But to see their work, one has to go to Paris, London or New York. It is almost incredible that a city like Brussels, capital of Europe and Belgium, has no museum of modern and contemporary art." Potentially, the new museum will have at least 10,000 modern and contemporary works to draw on. It’s not only the Royal Museum of Fine Arts’ collection that’s hidden in cellars. A lot of state-owned companies, as well as private collectors could contribute, too," says Idrissi. "Belgacom has an interesting collection. The National Bank has 1,600 pieces of art. And what about the banks, which were saved by taxpayers’ money? We can at least make an agreement with them to show their art."

The museum could also have a social dynamic, she believes: "The canal zone is in full development. It could become a real connection between the city centre. Molenbeek and Anderlecht." Idrissi makes the parallel with London’s Tate Modern, which transformed a neglected strip of land along the Thames. "It gave London an incredible international billboard, but it also literally created a bridge between the city and the South Bank, where previously tourists had never been seen." What happened to the South Bank can also happen to the canal zone in Brussels, she says. "Attracting extra visitors will create extra economic activity and can boost local employment." She realises that it’s a long-term project, so if all is finished by 2020, she would be happy: "I like to dream; but as a politician, I’m also realistic."

For more information:

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Bridge over troubled water

Troops test pontoon bridge across the Scheldt ahead of First World War centenary

Andy Furniere

One of the highlights of next year’s First World War commemorations in Antwerp will be a floating bridge connecting the left and right bank of the river Scheldt. On 28 September 1914, the Belgian and Dutch army troops successfully carried out a trial run of this ambitious project.

Under the eyes of many curious onlookers, barges manned by military engineering troops assembled a string of segments that finally formed a bridge between the Steenplein on the right bank and Boerentwende on the left bank. The Belgian army built a similar bridge in August 1914, at the start of the First World War, when the fortified city of Antwerp became the temporary Belgian capital – sheltering the government, army and royal family.

Info panels already installed on both sides of the river explain this history in four languages.

Via the pontoon bridge, Antwerp could be sufficiently supplied and quickly evacuated. When the German troops made progress in breaking down Antwerp’s defences, a large number of people crossed the bridge to flee to the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom. On 9 October 1914, Antwerp was conquered by the German aggressors, and the Belgian army blew up the bridge to make sure it would not be to the benefit of enemy troops.

During the recent trial run, only a few guests were allowed to cross the bridge, such as the patron and patroness of the project: Flemish architect Herbert Plack and Siham El Kanaikhi, founder and co-ordinator of the Antwerp dance school Let’s Go Urban.

But the first guest to set foot on the pontoon was John Poullet. He is the winner of a story competition that was jointly organised by the non-profit Vredescentrum set up with Oxford University and the In Flanders Fields Museum.

The company said the bridge was constructed by partners, Hannes Van Severen and Fien Muller, and they used the ten days required to complete the bridge to create a new design, the Double Seat, which also featured our Crossed furniture.

Before the festivities, the bridge will be broken up several times to let ships pass through. During the festivities, the bridge will be broken up several times to let ships pass through.

Early next year, a majority of Antwerp’s museums will take part in the commemorations through related exhibitions. The new Red Star Line museum will focus on the experiences of Belgian emigrants to America during the war years, while the MAS puts the spotlight on the masses of refugees who fled to neighbouring countries at the start of the war.

From January, Antwerp’s tourism service will also organise historical city walks, which start at the Banquet Hall on the Meir – where King Albert I resided during his stay in Antwerp – and end at the Steenplein.

www.artsproject14-18.be

Design with a twist

Seventeen innovative products receive the Henry van de Velde label

Katrien Lindemans

Every year, Design Vlaanderen – the Brussels-based organisation promoting Flemish design – honours innovative and clever products with a Henry van de Velde label, named after the Flemish architect, artist and designer. Out of the 123 entries, 17 were rewarded with the prestigious quality label. Among them, a children’s plastic spade and a seat for two.

When talking about design, we instantly think of furniture and home interior. But in this year’s list of Henry van de Velde labels, children’s toys made a surprise appearance. Scoppi is a yellow-green shovel from the Quut toy range, designed by the Ghent-based agency Pars Pro Toto. ‘A couple of years ago, we designed a collection of baby items for the brand Hoppot,’ says Johan Bonner, a partner at Pars Pro Toto. ‘We also took care of their entire branding – from their logo design to their website and their stands at baby fairs.’

The agency realised there was a lot of potential in the children’s toy market and was eager to design something from scratch. ‘The toy market is vast,’ says Bonner, ‘but we narrowed our focus down to one item that seemed to have no brand, was usually made in China and had a very low innovation threshold – the plastic spade.’

Pars Pro Toto gave the cheap beach spade a make-over, turning it into a sustainable and stylish product.

The company launched the Scoppi spade at the Nuremberg baby fair in 2013. ‘We’re now selling the Quut beach toys range in 10 countries,’ Bonner explains. ‘To receive a Henry van de Velde label is really important for us; I don’t think toys get this kind of appreciation often. Since we’re an unknown brand, the quality recognition of this label will help us grow as well.’

To expand the brand, Pars Pro Toto will need to broaden its distribution network. ‘And that’s why we joined Flanders Investment and Trade,’ Bonner adds.

While some designers have to wait years to receive a van de Velde label, others see their hard work rewarded almost instantly. ‘We only launched into furniture design in 2011,’ says Fien Muller, half of the Ghent-based design duo Muller Van Severen. Muller is a photographer and her partner, Hannes Van Severen – son of the famous designer Maarten – is a sculptor. ‘While renovating our house, we encountered some electricity problems, and we came up with a solution in the form of a table with a built-in lamp. When the Antwerp art and furniture gallery Artesia University College will create original lighting for the bridge, dancers of Let’s Go Urban will give a special performance, and literary organisation Vonk & Zonen will establish the poetry tour Hellromden, which revolves around war poets.

In the run-up to the commemorations, the Vredescentrum is hosting a variety of programmes of activities with a network of about 40 other associations. Next month, on 3 November, Flemish historian Sophie De Schaepdrijvers kicks off a monthly series of lectures on the First World War at the Palace on the Meir. Also starting at the beginning of November, the Vleeshuis, or Butcher’s Hall, invites classes from the last year in primary education for an interactive workshop around diverse aspects of war and peace.

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www.artsproject14-18.be

www.antwerpen14-18.be

www.designvlaanderen.be

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The Bulletin Newcomer is the new-look definitive guide to settling in Belgium. Mixing essential practical information with cultural highlights and inspiration for travel and design, it’s your best guide to life in Belgium.
There's a new sound in Flanders. It's both psychedelic and organic, both rough and funky. It's blues, jazz and folk shaking avant-garde's hand in Africa, creating something wonderfully fresh and new. King Dalton's first and self-titled album finally reveals what had been kept hidden in Ghent's bars for too long.

King Dalton must feel extremely lucky. One month after the release of their first album, the quintet is more in demand than ever before. The album was received enthusiastically by the press on both sides of the language border, and Radio 1 is playing songs that haven't even been released yet. And, despite their frightening appearance, the band was invited to play in front of the nation's most distinguished statesmen on the Sunday news show De zevene dag. The Netherlands has also succumbed to the band's strange charms. "I have the feeling it is really starting right now," says Pieter De Meester, King Dalton's charismatic band leader. The 25-year-old sings and plays the four-string guitar and baritone sax. "Now that the album is out, we can't wait to go play our music everywhere, as hard as we possibly can."

Pieter's older brother Jonas is a professional guitar player, but in this project he plays the Irish bouzouki. "We are facing a different situation from a decade ago," he says. "These days you need to have a strong live reputation to sell albums – and rightfly so."

In Ghent, home to both brothers, the band already has such a reputation. Over the last three years, King Dalton has become an established name at the infamous café Charlatan. "We used to play there on calm Sunday nights," says Pieter. "I think it's on that stage that we developed our sound. This band has never had any predefined concept. Everything originates organically and intuitively."

The band name is not new to the music scene. With their folk-rock band AedO, formed when Pieter was only 11, they played at every folk festival in the country, toured Europe and recorded their first album in 2004. It was about then that ideas about a new band and a new style started emerging. "It must have been some years ago," remembers Jonas, "27. We were at the festival of Saint-Chartrix in France, the so-called Woodstock of Jonas, 27. "We were recording their first album in 2004. It was about organically and intuitively."

The brothers are not new to the music scene. "We used to play there on calm Sunday nights," says Pieter. "I think it's on that stage that we developed our sound. This band has never had any predefined concept. Everything originates organically and intuitively."

Thank you to this unique combination of backgrounds, the album has an international and innovative sound. Bauweraerts is mostly heard singing high-pitched Balkan melodies. Thanks to this polyphonous music. "There's no other band like us. So we decided to add the king."

"Very unorthodox, but it sounds great" says Pieter. "There's nothing on the album we cannot play live. King Dalton is not digital. We don't send messages; we write love letters."

"That doesn't necessarily refer to the lyrics. "Well, those are best defined as absurd and fragmentary. There's no real themes. The same goes for the bands name. "My brother and I were nicknamed the Daltons many years ago by a sound technician in the Ghent venue De Centrale," says Jonas, "because we look like that dark side. On the other hand, we're as funky as Prince."

"But what's most important is for everything to sound real. "I am thinking intuitively," says Pieter. "I am not thinking intuitively."

Don't let the band's strange appearance fool you. "The music is written intuitively," says Pieter. "There's nothing on the album we cannot play live. King Dalton is not digital. We don't send messages; we write love letters."

"That doesn't necessarily refer to the lyrics. "Well, those are best defined as absurd and fragmentary. There's no real themes. The same goes for the bands name. "My brother and I were nicknamed the Daltons many years ago by a sound technician in the Ghent venue De Centrale," says Jonas, "because we look like each other, because of the funny way we walk and our tough appearance. But it's not a good name for a band. So we decided to add the king."

"Then we had another problem. Which one of us is the king? That is hard to decide."

King Dalton are (from left): Yenna De Smet, Jonas De Meester, Pieter De Meester, Jorunn Bauweraerts and Frederic Heuvinck.

NEW ALBUM REVIEWS

**Carate Urio Orchestra**

**Sparrow Mountain** • **Klein**

Clarinettist and saxophone player Joachim Badenhorst is a busy bee. In the last five years, he's played on more than 100 tunes, both as a guest musician and with his own bands. And he's added a new, at times brilliant group to his list: Carate Urio Orchestra. On the debut Sparrow Mountain, Badenhorst surrounds himself with six of his favourite musicians. It results in eight intriguing tracks, bridging the gap between folk and post-rock between improvisational music and even some noise. Half of the tracks have vocals, twice by - surprisingly - Badenhorst himself. In Dutch. All in all, a unique blend.

*Christophe Verbeke*

**Tom Vanstiphout**

**Little Beams of Light** • **DIP Records**

A quick search on the Flemish music archive site reveals that Tom Vanstiphout has so far played on more than 100 recordings. Badenhorst has released his own songs. Four years after his second album, there's now Little Beams of Light. He has his own voice, reminiscent of James Taylor, he draws delicate portraits of daily life. Pop songs with a soothing quality – though he should be careful not to sound too corny, especially with the lyrics.

*www.tomvanstiphout.be*

**Flying Horseman**

**City Same City**

With City Same City, their third excellent album in three years. Antwerp combo Flying Horseman confirm its reputation as one of the most interesting bands in Flanders. The threesome led by singer and guitarist Bert Dockx produce hypnotising songs that slowly draw you in. Some tracks burst open like a putrid abscess, others float on an imminent threat that never fully materialises. In too modern jazz, even some country, Flying Horseman has found a place for itself. There's no other band like them, and City Same City is one of the best albums of the year.

*www.flyinghorseman.be*

**Blindman [SAX]**

32 Foot: The Organ of Bach • Klara/Warner Classics

As a saxophone quartet, Blindman revolutionised the instrument at the end of the 1980s. Now, Blindman are a cluster of bands and celebrate their 25th birthday with 32 Foot: The Organ of Bach by Blindman [SAX]. A tubax, a very low-sound, modified saxophone, has been added to the line-up. It's needed to play the finest notes of Bach's compositions for organ. As beautiful to hear how the different instruments take over the different voices of this polyphonic music. 32 Foot is both a tribute to Bach and a highly contemporary album.

*www.blindman.be*
The madness of the king

Guy Cassiers takes the vowels and the blood out of Macbeth – but revels in the paraonha

Tom Peeters

The Toneelhuis’ title MCBTH is readable enough to know you’ll be delving into Shakespeare of a sort. Actor Tom Dewispelaere explains how Toneelhuis’ multi-media performance uses music and video to explore the psyche of the famous man who would be king.

Shakespeare showed in the 17th century how the thought of the acquisition of power can lead to a blood paraonha. In his tragedy Macbeth, he depicted a king going slightly mad, precipitating his own downfall. Antwerp theatre company Dewispelaere takes the paraonha partly out of the head of the main protagonist, transporting it to singing witches, a devastating orchestra and an interactive set, which gets smaller and more oppressive as the evening falls – just like the king’s mind.

Though Toneelhuis director Guy Cassiers and script editor Erwin Jans have heavily cut the Macbeth translation of Hugo Claus, which is used here; he didn’t do this to discredit the acknowledged Flemish author: he just wanted to limit the text to its core message, avoiding any kind of anecdote.

The Antwerp company has kept only five main characters of an original play with 20-plus actors. By taking the vowels out of the title, the director emphasises this skeletal content, and in doing so, he thought, he could create space for other, more contemporary accents.

More complex

For Tom Dewispelaere, being offered the role of this 21st-century version of Macbeth was an honour. ‘For me, the main challenge was trying to understand how Macbeth, step by step, reaches insanity,’ he says. ‘But the fact that a lot of the original scenes were deleted makes it a bit more complex because it doesn’t give me so much time to develop my character.’

The other main challenge lies in the interaction between the actors and some new dramatic elements. Cassiers has brought in: ‘Not only the three female singers of VocalLab, interpreting the witches whose prophesies trigger the king’s madness, but also the Spectra ensemble directed by Filip Rathe and a state-of-the-art projection system that enables the actors to start a real-time interaction with the visuals.

‘This interaction with video, singers and orchestra is not an obvious thing to do,’ says Dewispelaere. ‘There are just a lot of ingredients that hopefully will make a good meal. It requires lots of concentration on stage, but of course you have to avoid losing the freedom and the joy of the playing. Fortunately with Guy we had someone with a very clear view about the theatrical world he wanted to represent.’

First the actors rehearsed with tapes. ‘Three weeks before the opening, the orchestra and the singers joined them. ‘And then we had to start all over again,’ Dewispelaere says. ‘Those three extra women had to find their way on stage. But Guy was fantastic in managing the traffic, and also the live orchestra proved to be very flexible.’

It had to be, because at the end of the play the music, composed by Dominique Pauwels of Ghent production house LOD blauketheater, virtually takes over the role of Macbeth. ‘At the very end Macbeth doesn’t even have a voice,’ says Dewispelaere. ‘He just becomes sound. By then the singing is a metaphor for his mind going crazy, the music the soundtrack of his hallucinations.’

Scriptwriter Jans describes it even more accurately: ‘The music is a virus that’s slowly creeping into the text and taking over the dramatic statements.’ By not focusing on showing the cruelty and the blood – all the murders ordered by Macbeth (or his wife, Lady Macbeth) take place outside the stage – the audience are pushed to witness the mental decay of the main character. But how does he feel, mentally washing the blood off his fingers, immediately reflected on stage, by the clothes he wears and the gradually shrinking scenery. ‘It’s a great illustration of an oppression you cannot resist,’ says Dewispelaere. In the play’s first dialogues the actor is wearing the stiff baroque costumes of Tom Vanstenbergen. Cassiers’ favourite designer, with elegance and pride. At this point they are still virginal white.

Although Macbeth is a killer, a survivor of many battlefields, until now he has only killed “for a good cause”: out of loyalty to King Duncan. ‘It’s only after he murders him to snatch power that he starts to hear voices and becomes schizophrenic. ‘It seems he can no longer mentally disconnect from his own deeds. The cruelties he committed in support of his own glory – even killing his best friend Banquo – drive him insane.

Power of guilt

This feeling of guilt is unmistakably reflected in his appearance on stage. His costume becomes black as the night, and the walls literally close in. Ultimately he tries to get answers from the witches who started his rise and fall, but they speak in tongues. ‘By then the audience know he’s just listening to his own hallucinations. When he sees a bush coming after him, he realises the end is near.

‘The relevance of a play like this today is obvious. For Cassiers, the tragedy fits seamlessly in his recent oeuvre that has been researching what he calls the anatomy of power. Mefisto for ever. Wolfkigers and Atropa were united under the heading Frühstück of Power, and his staging of Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung also analysed the topic from very close up.

‘The relevance of Macbeth is that you see someone collapsing out of fear,’ explains Dewispelaere. ‘But at a certain point Macbeth is so far gone he says he has even forgotten how fear tastes. I always had this imagination about world leaders, reflecting on how they could reach this point where they can’t go back and start acting out of pure despair. I sometimes try to imagine how a man like Bashar al-Assad can go to sleep in his Syrian palace, realising all the cruelties he has committed, so hungry to stay in power.

How do you obtain the state of mind in which you can justify almost everything, even murdering your best friend? It’s a question Cassiers and his team try to answer by exploring Macbeth’s mind. It’s Shakespeare’s mastery of the art of introspection, giving people access to the most sinister and darkest parts of their mind, that still gives his repertoire universal appeal.

It’s the first time Cassiers has approached Shakespeare’s work. His adaptation of Hamlet will follow soon. Dewispelaere says, ‘People are still interested in these universal stories with great narratives, basically dealing with very identifiable experiences. The characters of Macbeth may be based in the aristocratic England of kings and battlefields, but I hope the people we put on stage are recognisable and that we are able to tell something that can concern Flanders too.

‘Shakespeare created the historical background, but the human feelings here could just as well have been penned by Tom Lanoye or Hugo Claus. The stories would have been different, bigger or smaller, but essentially they would also focus on the real topic of every tragedy: the relations between people, their hopes and dreams, their losses and fears, and their insanity.’

The walls close in on Macbeth and the three witches in Guy Cassiers’ adaptation of the Shakespeare play Macbeth.
The link between painting and poetry

Omdat ik geen beeld ben

Until 5 January | Mu ZEE, Ostend

www.muzee.be

The late Hugo Claus is considered one of the most influential Flemish writers ever. Until his death in 2008, not a year went by without the local papers speculating on his chances of winning the Nobel Prize in Literature. But limiting the spectrum of the artist to only literature doesn’t tell the whole story. Claus also made movies, and, throughout his entire life, he drew and painted. He kept on making little drawings until his death by euthanasia, an ultimate statement from the bold and often controversial icon whose views were historically far more cosmopolitan than those of his contemporaries. Moreover, hanging out with other Cobra artists such as Pierre Alechinsky, Karel Appel and Corneille broadened his mind even further.

In 1956, Claus staged his first solo exhibition in Brussels’ Taptoe gallery. Eventually, he felt the need to break out of the predominantly experimental Cobra movement, and his work showed other influences such as outsider art, pop art, expressionism and surrealism, making him difficult to pigeonhole.

Persuing the drawings and paintings in the Oostend exhibition Hugo Claus: Omdat ik geen beeld ben (Because I’m Not an Image), selected by curators Jef Lambrecht and Philip Van den Bossche, one could suggest they’re more poetic than much of his writing. Here, for instance, his naked women seem more innocent than those in his novels. Sometimes his compositions are colourful, sometimes minimal and/or abstract. But almost always you feel that the man behind the painter’s easel was enjoying himself. The stylistic directness of his work also suggests that he was a fast painter.

So it’s not a big surprise he was very productive, creating more than 1,000 works during his lifetime. Even the arrogance he was sometimes accused of having seems absurd here. He often destroyed paintings he didn’t like (anymore) and never dated his work. (About the women he painted, we’re not sure.) Van Parys

VISUAL ARTS

André De Meulemeester Paints Blankenberge

Until 3 November | CC De Benne, Blankenberge

http://cultuur.blankenberge.be

André De Meulemeester was a true Renaissance man. The Bruges native earned his wings as a flying ace in the First World War before taking over the family brewery De Arend. Somewhere along the way, he mastered the art of watercolour and produced some 1,000 pieces. This vast body of work was never fully appreciated in his lifetime, it has only recently been discovered by the public thanks to De Meulemeester’s trustees at Bruges Art Route, who show a selection of 40 canvases by the painter on his many seaside sojourns during the 1950s and ’60s. Each tableau is paired with a contemporary photo of the same landscape so you can see how the place has changed in the past half-century.

FESTIVAL

A.Week

13-20 October | Across Brussels

www.a-week.be

Unlike other arts, architecture meets its public every day without anyone having to go to much of an effort. The inaugural edition of this Week of Architecture, conceived by Brussels’ municipal department for planning and co-ordinated with the Flemish Day of Architecture (see p10), celebrates the contemporary spaces we take for granted and collectively imagine future spaces. Fifty Brussels buildings open their doors to the public to explore architecture’s finished product. A.Week also offers a behind-the-scaffolding look at how a blueprint becomes brick-and-mortar via visits to architects’ offices and building site tours. There are also exhibitions and conferences aplenty. Events are spread across the capital, but headquarters is the A.Week Pavilion at Bozar. GV

FILM

Het Vonnis

Now playing | Across Brussels and Flanders

www.hetvonnis-film.be

Het Vonnis (The Verdict) gives a Flemish twist to a classic film genre, the courtroom drama. Writer-director Jan Verheyen (Dossier K, Zot van A) builds his story around the problem of procedural errors that allow otherwise strong prosecutions to collapse. Koen De Bouw (pictures) plays Luc Segers, who attempts to put the judicial system itself on trial for letting his wife’s killer walk free. Naturally the film reflects Belgian court procedure, which differs from the familiar Hollywood pattern. Outsiders may find this baffling at times, but the cut and thrust of the legal adversaries (Veerle Baetens, Johan Leyen, Vivian De Caus and Jappe Claes) still hits home. Ian Moreland

CLASSICAL

Brussels

Classic & Classics: Flemish quintet made up of two generations of musicians, including father Diederik on viola, his brother Bruno on bass, his sons Jeroen and Franke on violin and cello and Bruno’s daughter Rosalie on bassoon. Verdi, Rossini, Beethoven, Puccini

OCT 11 20.00 at D’Ieteren Gallery, Malenestr. 29

patriciaros@scarlet.be

Visual arts

Brussels

Het rijk der lichten (The Empire of Light): One work from the series of famous paintings by surrealist painter René Magritte, commissioned by the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium between 1950 and 1954, of which there are currently 17 oil-on-canvas versions.

Until JAN 13 at Magritte Museum, Koningsplein 1

www.musee-magritte-museum.be

Mot (Antwerp province)

Aquarel salon: Annual watercolour exhibition celebrates “Interior” this year, featuring a collection of works by painters who retreated to churches and cathedrals, bars and factories for inspiration

Until OCT 20 at CC ’t Getouw, Molenhoekstraat 31

www.getouw.be

Events

Across Flanders

Fair Trade Week: Annual campaign to increase awareness about Fair Trade among Art consumers and to encourage the purchase of products that promote sustainability and honest trading practices in developing countries. Until OCT 12 across Flanders

www.noweekfairtrade.be

Brussels

Museum Nocturnes: Popular annual event featuring Thursday night openings in several museums with guided tours, entertainment and workshops, all with a colourful theme

Until DEC 12 Thursdays 17.00 - 22.00 across Brussels

www.xxcentaurusvandematavanmeers.be

Film

Ghent

Ghent Film Fest: 40th edition of Flanders largest film festival, this year with a focus on American independent cinema. Many screenings are in the presence of filmmakers or framed by debates and seminars. There’s a large-scale exhibition dedicated to Martin Scorsese, concerts of film music and the World Soundtrack Awards.

Until OCT 19 across Ghent

www.limfestival.be
Talking Dutch

Counting sheep

Derek Blyth

I noticed the sheep a few weeks ago. They were grazing in a small park in southern Ghent next to the old Bijloke hospital. That’s a bit odd, I thought. We don’t have sheep in Brussels as far as I know. But Ghent is, as you are possibly aware, a city that likes to do things differently. The city’s website explains the story. In 2010 ging in Gent voor het eerst een stakdoder met schapen op stap – in 2010, the city shepherd set off with his sheep for the first time. Newspaper Het Nieuwsblad goes on to explain that 80 Dutch and German moorland sheep were introduced to the city under a three-year pilot project. The idea was to allow the sheep to graze in the city’s parks and along the canal banks so that mowers were no longer required. Well done, Ghent, I thought. I wish they would do things like that in Brussels. But unfortunately the project soon ran into problems – de schapen werden vaak opgejaagd en gestresarreerd, wellicht door blaffende honden – the sheep were often frightened and stressed out, sometimes by barking dogs. Drie keer belandde er een schaap in het water – on three occasions, a sheep fell into the water. The city shepherd told Het Nieuwsblad that the project was plagued with problems, not least of all of the human kind. Several poor sheep were pushed into the canal by drunks. Someone also tried to steal one. He finally decided to head back to the countryside. He finally decided to head back with his sheep to the countryside. Schapen hebben genoeg van Gent! – The sheep have had enough of Ghent! declared the paper’s headline. The sheep have had enough of Ghent! declared the paper’s headline. But Ghent is not giving up. A new shepherd is to be appointed and additional security measures introduced, according to Tom Balthazar, the alderman responsible for green spaces. The sheep will be accompanied by a shepherd at all times to prevent any more mischief, he explained. Balthazar remains convinced that the sheep are a good idea. We krijgen veel positieve weerklink van de bewoners, daaronder zetten we dit project van ecologische begrazing verder – we have had a lot of positive feedback from residents, so we are carrying on with this ecological grazing project. So if you go to Ghent, look out for a flock of ecological sheep. And don’t do anything that might stress them out.

We asked your opinion on surveillance cameras, just one of the ways to keep track of our movements. This week we report on 110 new trains being fitted with surveillance cameras by the NMBS to try to cut crime (p2).

But do they work? Half of you, 50%, think they do. Police agree in one of the ways to keep track of our movements. As far as I know. But Ghent is, as you are possibly aware, a city that likes to do things differently. The city’s website explains the story. In 2010 ging in Gent voor het eerst een stakdoder met schapen op stap – in 2010, the city shepherd set off with his sheep for the first time. The city’s website explains the story. In 2010 ging in Gent voor het eerst een stakdoder met schapen op stap – in 2010, the city shepherd set off with his sheep for the first time. However, studies have shown that they merely shift the problem to areas not equipped with cameras. For some of you, that proves they’re useless. More than one in three of you, however, think they’re intrusive.

Next week’s question:

What should be done for pupils who come to school with no lunch? (see p2)

Log-on to www.flanderstoday.eu to vote!

FLANDERS TODAY
OCTOBER 9, 2013

THE LAST WORD

Unholy row
“It was never the intention to carry out a full funeral service. The intention was only a simple farewell prayer. Now you sometimes get the impression that the priests and deacons are employees of the crematoria.” A spokesman for archbishop André Léonard, who has told priests to no longer hold funeral mass at crematoria.

Wilse war
“That scene did not fit in with the sort of respectful commemoration we have here.” The Commonwealth War Graves Commission refused to allow the crew of the new Wilse film to shoot in one of the Great War cemeteries.

Highway robbery
“That’s the big problem with professional racing bikes. The top models easily cost €1,000, as much as a small car. But unlike a car, you can pick it up with one hand and stash it away in the back of a van.”

Big plans
“I went to get to 30. By that time I’ll be living in a nice house with a great wife, and I’ll be a DJ and maybe even a Dad.”

Michiel Vandeweert, 15, is approaching the record age for those living with the rapid-ageing disease progeria: living with the rapid-ageing disease progeria: living with the rapid-ageing disease progeria: living with the rapid-ageing disease progeria:

voices of flanders today

beer tourism
St. Bernardus Pater 8 (8% ABV) by Brewery St. Bernard in #Woluwe, West #Flanders. Fact: this #brewery used to brew the legendary #Westvleteren 12 #beer tourism

visit flanders @VisitFlanders
@Durel in same list as love brands @Apple @AstonMartin @Nike @Liberty and @Lavazza. Proud of #Flanders #CoolbrandsUK

exquisibra @exquisibra
#Flanders, possibly the sweetest destination in #Europe - #Travel - Stylist Magazine

lea winkeler @leawinkeler
UK and Ireland workshop in full swing at #eper. Tour operators eager to learn about #Flanders WW1 #FlandersFields

andrea @andreawondwiese
#Brussels – the only city where you wait for the tube listening to classical music :) culture @STIBMIVB

afar media @AFARmedia
Ann Demedemester - @DriesVanSeten, Antwerp’s style pioneers, are feat in our Oct guide to #Flanders w/@FFIantwerp

beer tourism

02/10/2013: Surveillance cameras are…

a. Reassuring 50%

b. Useless 14%

c. Intrusive 36%

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