

Christmas in Paris, p.11



Bozar director Paul Dujardin

A brand new Bozar

Arts centre turns 80 amid restoration work that will return the Horta classic to its former glory

Alan Hope

The Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, or Centre for Fine Arts, is not only a place for the enjoyment of art, but a work of art in its own right. This magnificent building of sophisticated design in the centre of Brussels – now known simply as Bozar – combines the monumental and the intimate.

Or at least it did before a series of ill-advised renovations from the 1950s to the 1980s, which severely compromised the building's form and function.

But things are on the mend. Thanks to an aggressive policy of restoration begun in 2004, work has been going on that has not only helped restore Bozar to its former state, but has also seen the excavation of two new screening rooms for the Film Museum, dug out from the inside of the building without anyone noticing.

In addition, they discovered the remnants of a 13th-century city wall about 40 metres long, at least part of which will be visible within

the new Film Museum which reopens next month.

The Bozar building was designed by Victor Horta, the leading figure in Belgian architecture and design. The site is an odd-shaped polygon on a steep hill, and the building had to fit in with existing structures on the site. It was 1928, and so it also had to conform to the rule that it must not interrupt the King's view as he looked from the windows of the Royal Palace.

Despite these constraints, Horta's creation is a marvellous, labyrinthine shrine to culture, an artistic hall of mirrors now being returned to its former glory by director-general Paul Dujardin and architect-restorer Barbara Van der Wee.

Ten years ago, "on the eve of its 70th birthday," says Van der Wee, "Bozar was greatly modernised, but the original concept of Victor Horta's design was barely recognisable." His plan involving a number of discrete and interlinked cube-shaped spaces had been chopped

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Fortis shareholders win case, and now seek €20 billion

Lawyer calls for new sale terms

Alan Hope

Shareholders in Fortis who lost their investments when the troubled bank was sold off by the government will now be seeking damages and interest worth about €20 billion, their lawyer said. Last week Mischael Modrikamen, who is acting on behalf of small shareholders, won a case before the Appeal Court suspending the second half of the sale, forcing the government to lodge a complaint against the court's lead judge.

In October, the federal government agreed to sell 49.9% of Fortis to BNP Paribas,

following a series of severe falls in the bank's share price caused by doubts, real and imagined, about its liquidity situation. The share-price fell to €5, losing 35% of its value in only two days, caught in a vicious spiral in which falling prices led to investor panic, which pushed prices down further.

At first, a capital injection by the three Benelux countries looked like it might stop the fall. By the following weekend, however, the Dutch government had walked off with its share of Fortis for €16.8

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Business

More Brussels shopkeepers are learning Dutch than ever before through an initiative of the House of Dutch to make Brussels a more bilingual city.

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Flemish painter Roger Raveel challenges James Ensor to a friendly battle of wits in the intriguing exhibition *Kindred Spirits*.

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Active

Kortrijk must be Flanders' most under-rated city, overlooked by both residents and tourists alike. Denzil Walton visits the place where the Dutch language staked its claim 700 years ago.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

St Nicholas

The Flemish minister for culture Bert Anciaux has been in the news a lot recently. Most of it has to do with his ailing political party, but some of it involves his increasingly successful attempts to buy back Flemish art.

His latest acquisitions are three panels from the wings of an altarpiece by a 15th-century Bruges artist known only as the "Master of the Legend of St Lucy". The panels, bought for some €442,000, have been presented to the Groeningemuseum in Bruges, which already owns the main panel.

The timing was perfect. The altarpiece depicts scenes from the legend of St Nicholas, and it was presented by Anciaux on – the eve of Sinterklaas. As a nice touch, adults were admitted free to the museum that day as long as they had a child in tow.

The panels reveal the fact that people in the 15th century turned to St Nicholas for a lot more than

just presents for their children. As well as being patron saint of little ones, he served as patron for students, bakers, boatmen, single women and prostitutes.

The main panel shows the versatile saint in a splendid robe against a background of Bruges buildings. Along the skyline you can pick out familiar spires, such as those of Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, the Sint-Salvatorskerk and the Jeruzalemkerk.

The final panel of the altarpiece has been lost, though there are rumours that it might be somewhere in Spain. It would of course be a major coup for Anciaux if he could track it down and bring it back to Bruges – as next year's Sinterklaas present.

Derek Blyth

online
www.brugge.be



All I want for Christmas is... an altarpiece. Bruges mayor Patrick Moenaert in front of the St Nicholas altarpiece in the Groeningemuseum

We've moved

The *Flanders Today* office moved last week from Ukkel in southern Brussels to a building in Groot-Bijgaarden owned by the Corelio group. The move takes us outside Brussels into the Flemish periphery on the northern edge of the city.

We are now in the same building as *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad* and hope to gain some useful insights from the Flemish journalists around us (or at least find out where the coffee machine is located).

Apart from the nearby motorway viaduct, Groot-Bijgaarden is a fairly typical Flemish town with a GB supermarket selling *kippenbilen 3 + 1 gratis* and a petrol station offering discount Russian fuel. At this time of year, the most welcoming place is Chez Pepe, the local frituur, run by a beaming Spanish man who switches effortlessly from French to Dutch to Spanish.

Foreigners sometimes find it hard to integrate into Flanders, but you only need to drop into somewhere like Pepe's to find people who will talk to you in just about any language you want. DB

FACE OF FLANDERS



Siska, Tomas and Sofie

This Friday, 19 December, three people will be locked up in a glass house in Ghent for all to see. No, they're not dangerous criminals like the inmates of Oz, and they're not tiresome wizards like David Blaine. They're three of Studio Brussel's most popular presenters, and, this being the season of goodwill and all, it's for a good cause.

The event is known as Music for Life, and it takes place from 19 to 24 December, just in time for the three DJs to get home for Christmas Eve. Siska Schoeters, Tomas De Soete and Sofie Lemaire will be inside the glass box for the entire six days, which means they won't always be broadcasting, but they will almost always be visible to the public.

Tomas is a long-standing Studio Brussel presenter and reporter, most famous for his drive-time show which he took over from Peter Van de Veire, now a TV star. Tomas took part in the first Music for Life in 2006 in Leuven, together with Peter and Christophe Lambrecht. The three survived six days on coffee, water and fruit juice. Listeners paid to have requests played, which went to the victims of landmines.

Siska joined Tomas and Peter in 2007, again in Leuven, and this time the money went to drought relief. Siska studied radio at the Erasmus Hogeschool and managed to get a job presenting *De Afrekening* – a programme in which listeners vote for their favourite of 31 songs – while she was still a student. Still only 26, she's now considered an old hand and served for a time as Tomas' sidekick before he gave up the evening show to make a travel series for VRT. She also happens to be his girlfriend.

The third wheel, in that case, is Sofie, who just turned 25, but is probably old enough to act as chaperone in the glass house. She started with Radio 1 rather than Studio Brussel. And despite her French-sounding name, she's Flanders through and through: born in Mechelen, moved to Bruges, studied in Antwerp. She has branched out recently as the newsreader on the satirical news programme SPAM on Canvas.

The most important thing, other than watching three well-known Flemings wear themselves out on a starvation diet, is the money raised. Two years ago, that came to €2.42 million; last year it was €3.35 million. This year, people may be feeling the loss of purchasing power or be worried about job security, but Music for Life still hopes to beat its personal best. (The move to Ghent will help, as *Gentenaars* will work flat-out to prove themselves better than the people of Leuven.)

Funds raised go to the Red Cross, which then funnels it to a charity for mothers fleeing war and violence. At the moment, there are some 36 million refugees, 80% of whom are women and children. Women in war zones are often also the victims of violent crimes such as rape and mutilation.

Anyone can take part in the action as a listener by buying a song request. Money has to be stuffed through the opening of the glass house. The National Lottery is launching a Win for Life ticket to support the action. And Studio Brussel is selling Music for Life blankets to raise cash.

Alan Hope

19-24 December, Woodrow Wilsonplein, Ghent. Listen 24 hours on Studio Brussel and on digital channel Een+ or watch TV één from 10.00 to noon and from 15.00 to 17.00

online
www.stubru.be

TALKING DUTCH
notes on language

Bob

If things go smoothly, then Bob's your uncle. Here in Flanders, Bob can be much more: he can be you or me, if we choose. You can't be Bob on your own; you need to be in a group.

This is beginning to sound like a riddle, so let me tell you who Bob is: *Bob is degene die niet drinkt als hij rijdt* – Bob is the one that doesn't drink when he drives his drinking companions home. (Bobette if the driver is female.)

It all started in 1995 when it was decided to give a more tangible form to the annual end-of-year admonitions about the dangers of drinking and driving. The BIVV (*Belgisch Instituut voor Verkeersveiligheid* – Belgian Institute for Traffic Safety) was quite clear: *Bob moet een begrip worden* – Bob must become a concept. The idea was that Bob could go up to the bar and say: *Nee, voor mij een cola, want ik ben Bob vandaag* – No, a coke for me because I'm Bob today. With the support of the European Commission the Bob concept has spread to 17 other Member States. A nice tribute to "onze" – "our" Bob.

Then there's the Bob bus. I thought at first it was to carry the sozzled home, but no, it has a more interesting function. *In dit busje kunnen feestneuzen gratis hun alcoholgehalte laten testen* – In this bus party-goers can have their alcohol levels tested for free. More interesting is the driving simulator in the back that it gives you a feel of what it's like driving *onder invloed* – under the influence.

The Bob bus can be booked for free for dances and other events: the condition is that the event be aimed at *een doelpubliek van jonge bestuurders* – a target public of young drivers.

It seems to work. A couple of years ago the campaign portrayed Bob as fulfilling a positive role rather than being the sucker who has to stay sober: *Bob wordt de held van elk feest, want hij brengt zijn vrienden steeds veilig thuis. Kortom: het is feest als Bob rijdt!* – Bob is the hero of every party because he brings his friends safely home. In short, if Bob's driving, it's a party!

If you are out and about on the roads in December do expect to be breathalysed. The police are planning to test 160,000 drivers. This year's campaign has the slogan: *Hoe bedank jij je Bob?* – How do you thank your Bob? One poster suggests *een ontbijtbuffet op bed* – a breakfast buffet in bed as Bob's reward.

In stark terms *rijden onder invloed van alcohol is een van de meest voorkomende ongevalsoorzaken* – driving under the influence of alcohol is one of the most common causes of accidents. So enjoy the holiday season and pass the breath test: become Bob. Someone will thank you.

Alistair MacLean

online
www.bivv.be

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Architect Barbara Van der Wee is in charge of the six-year renovation project that will restore Victor Horta's original vision. Left is the renovated Bertouille Rotunda. (Photos by Nora Nikowitz)



Bozar turns 80

Continued from page 1

up to suit the needs of the various associations who inhabited the building.

For example, the famous Bertouille Rotunda is a magnificent circular room directly above the main entrance rotunda that gives onto two connecting galleries intended to serve as banquet halls. But the halls were sectioned off to create offices, destroying the beauty and the unity of the space.

Similar acts of "modernisation" had happened all over the building, says Van der Wee. "Over the years, the building had become a real labyrinth in which the quality of the interiors, the ease of passage and the availability of natural light gradually became choked by parasitic structures."

Then came Paul Dujardin. He was hired as general manager in 2002, with a plan to turn Bozar into a multifunctional and multidisciplinary arts crucible, where various art forms would not only exist side by side, but also flow together.

"From the beginning, Bozar was subject to centrifugal forces," explains Dujardin in a foreword to the new book *Bozar LXXX*. The existence of separate associations for different art forms "made it possible for many years to preserve the centre from financial turbulence. In recent decades, however, this also contributed to fragmentation, in which

the artistic intention was not always clear."

The first task was to call in Van der Wee, who had already worked on the Horta museum in Sint Gilles, the Horta school in the Marollen, and whose graduation thesis was on the Hôtel van Eetvelde, a Horta house near Ambiorixplein.

"We began with an audit of the building and tried to determine what changes had been made. That was a major job," explains Van der Wee. "Then we had to decide which of the changes were reversible and which not. All of that had to be done in cooperation with the Monuments Commission, because Bozar is a listed building."

Bozar has three sides: on the Koning-

straat, at the highest elevation; on the Baron Hortastraat and on the Ravensteinstraat. On the two latter sides the construction is monumental, and Horta intended there to be shops and a restaurant, which, together with the multifunctional fine arts centre, would make the site into almost a city within a city. The side of the building on the Koningstraat, on the other hand, is modest and self-effacing because of royal sensibilities.

The building is 13 metres deep from street level on the Koningstraat to the lowest point on the original plan – a small courtyard behind the Henri Le Bœuf hall. Van der Wee explains: "There are three music halls, an immense sculpture hall known as the Horta Hall, and 30,000 square metres of exhibition space divided up into 40 rooms." With the use of sliding doors, the spaces can be arranged into six intertwining circuits. There are also spaces for technical installations, accommodation for artists and performers, catering facilities, function rooms, a royal wing, archives and the new Film Museum.

Most of the renovations aim to return the building to its original state. "It is, of course, Victor Horta's architectural achievement that first captures the attention of many visitors," Dujardin says. "So it was clear to us that we had to restore the building to its former glory by putting the emphasis on its remarkable architecture, the force of which had gradually been diluted by successive transformations."

But they are also introducing state-of-the-art facilities fit for a modern institution. These include reconstructed glass roofs for all the exhibition areas (with technical equipment ingeniously concealed between the outside roof and the original glass ceilings visible to the public). It's even possible to walk on the glass roof, since the original

glass is now covered with a strong synthetic glass.

At present, the glass roof is darkened by rolling blinds – this was specially requested by the curators of *The Smile of Buddha* exhibition. The roof can also be manipulated to allow full exposure to daylight, or to adjust the lighting according to the position of the sun.

In the galleries, false walls have been built under the cornices and above rebuilt plinths. These have two functions, explains Van der Wee. "In the first place, exhibition curators don't have to worry about damage to the fabric of the building when hanging artworks. If damage is caused to these false walls, it can easily be repaired," she points out, thumping the wall with her fist.

"Secondly, the space behind the false wall can be used to house electronic cables, pipes, air conditioning ducts and so on," she continues. "When museums around the

Bozar LXXX

The new 500-page book *Bozar LXXX* marks the arts centre's 80th anniversary. It contains articles on the economic, cultural and historical context of the centre at the time of Horta, as well as a detailed account of the renovations. You can buy it at the Bozar shop for €39.

world lend works from their collections for exhibition, they insist on exact conditions of temperature and humidity. Because everything here is computer-controlled, we can give them an hour-by-hour printout of the situation in any room at any time."

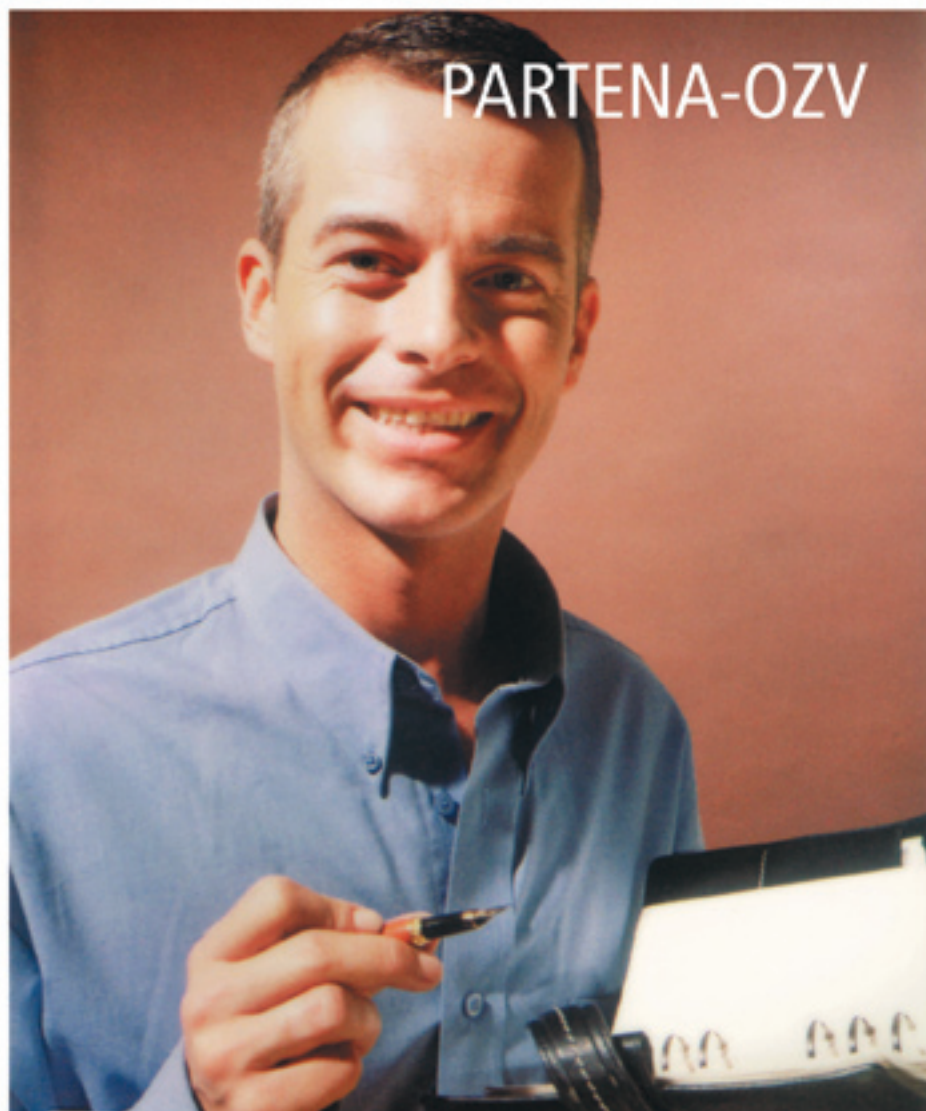
The renowned Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas has been invited to offer his ideas on what to do with the restaurant planned for the Baron Horta side, as well as the small square in front of the building. Koolhaas built the Grand Palais congress centre in Lille, the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion in London and the Casa da Musica in Oporto in Portugal. His plans will give a facelift to the Baron Horta façade and ensure that Bozar has an impact on the city for at least another eighty years.

online
www.bozar.be

What's next?

Bozar has undergone immense changes in the last four years. Expect more changes in the years to come:

- Completion of the Film Museum, with two brand-new projection rooms, which will open at the end of January
- Work on the Salle M, the former chamber music auditorium
- An international architectural competition to turn the entrance on Koningstraat into something more imposing
- Work on the southern roofs above the Henri Le Bœuf hall, as well as above the exhibition halls on the Koningstraat side



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PHOTO OF THE WEEK • TIA HELLEBAUT Retiring Olympic gold medal high-jumper Tia Hellebaut received the Sports Personality of the Year award from Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters last weekend. Hellebaut, who will stop with athletics now that she is pregnant, received the highest number of votes ever cast for a woman sports figure: only one of the journalists and photographers taking part in the vote failed to put her in first

place. The men's award was won by mountain biker Sven Nys. The Olympic silver medal-winning 4x100m relay team led by Kim Gevaert won the team award, and Gevaert, together with Justine Henin, won career awards. Newcomer of the Year was swimming hopeful Elise Matthyssen.

6 things you need to know this week

1 A special chip claiming to protect users against dangerous radiation from mobile phones is not new and is based on junk science, according to the telecommunications expert at consumer organisation Test Aankoop, Frank Vanmaele, writing in *De Standaard*. According to Vanmaele, not only does chip maker Omega Pharma exaggerate the danger of GSM radiation, it also fails to explain how its chip works. The company says that the chip filters bad radiation without disturbing the phone's function, a claim Vanmaele argues is nonsensical. Meanwhile, it was revealed that a similar device has been on sale in a Leuven bio-food store for less than half of the €40 price of the Omega Pharma device. The company later withdrew the device from sale.



3 Callers looking for the number of an ex-directory mobile phone will now be able to track their contact down by dialling 1207, the directory enquiries service. Instead of giving out the private number, however, 1207 will instead pass the caller to their contact's voice mail

2 Owners of private diesel vehicles who fit their cars with a particulates filter stand to benefit from a new €4 million plan by the Flemish government. The premium, worth €400, or about 80% of the cost of the filter, has been in operation in the Netherlands for more than two years, in which time more than 70,000 cars have been fitted. In Flanders, subsidies have been paid out since 2006 for clean motors in 5,500 company cars, and filters in 200 diesel trucks.

and allow them to leave a message. The new service only covers Proximus clients at present, excluding Pay&Go users.

4 Twenty-two sketch-books filled with works contributed by 320 Belgian artists will go on sale in Antwerp this week to benefit the development charity 11.11.11. Pieces contributed include a drawing by Luc Tuymans, a watercolour by Michael Borremans and a work (shown) by Filip Ysenbaert.



5 Contact lenses designed especially for children have gone on sale in Belgium, following their successful introduction in the Netherlands. The lenses, made by CooperVision under the brand My Vision, are currently only on sale at Contactlensstudio in Antwerp and optician Jo Deferme in Houthalen. The packet of 30 pairs of throw-away lenses costs €80. The manufacturer advises the lenses for children over the age of 10, but one expert said 14 or 15 was more appropriate.

6 The Brussels metro could have driverless trains by 2015, according to plans revealed by the public transport authority MIVB last week. The automatic trains would be able to follow each other more closely, cutting travel times. "When you have drivers, it's more dangerous," an MIVB spokesperson said. The new trains would come on Lines 1a and 1b and cost €50 to €75 million.

FIFTH COLUMN

notes on politics



Malgoverno

Ford is cutting 800 jobs in Genk, while Arcelor Mittal is cropping its workforce by 650. More than 200 employees will be made redundant at Philips in Turnhout, and Bekaert is shutting down its Hemiksem factory, with the loss of 200 jobs. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The international economic crisis has hit Flanders hard. This is not surprising, given its open economy. It also coincides with a period of political uncertainty — there is still no agreement between Dutch and French speakers on institutional matters. This problem has been rumbling on since the federal elections of 2006.

Last week, a book was published on Belgian politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s titled *Regeringen die niet regeren* (Governments That Don't Govern). Belgium had no fewer than seven governments between 1977 and 1981. This period, referred to by the Italian term *malgoverno*, was one of linguistic conflict and soaring public debt when successive governments failed to get a grip on the problems.

The book's publication is timely. "A government that does not govern" is a perfect description of the current deadlock. The recent economic crisis — which the authors Wim Heylen en Steven Van Hecke cannot have anticipated while writing the book — makes for a rather scary similarity. For the first time in years, the budget is in the red.

Of course there are differences between then and now. One of the biggest is that this country now has regional governments with distinct responsibilities. They continue to function even when there is a federal crisis. But another difference is less comforting. Thirty years ago, the power balance between large parties and political families was clear to everyone, but today there is no longer a truly large party in Flanders, but rather a handful of medium-sized parties involved in a constant power struggle. Political families across the language border are no longer relevant, either. In the past, the crisis was usually brought to an end by a particular shock, often caused by external factors. In 1982, the Belgian franc was devaluated. At the turn of the century, the Maastricht treaty made lower public debt a condition for entrance into the euro zone. As a result of these two shocks, Belgium slashed public spending. It was a painful process, but it brought positive results. As former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene noted recently: "Without the euro, Belgium would be Iceland today."

Anja Otte

Media companies using crisis as excuse, says Ghent professor

The major media companies are using the global economic crisis as an "excuse" to carry out rationalisation within editorial departments, according to one of Flanders' leading media academics. Karin Raeymaeckers, professor of media studies at the University of Ghent, says companies are using the crisis to push through reforms that have been on the table for some time. "The present situation doesn't explain why a quarter of the journalists of *De Morgen* have to disappear. That doesn't correspond to reality," she said.

In recent weeks both *De Persgroep*, which publishes *De Morgen*, and *Corelio*, which publishes *De Standaard* (and also *Flanders Today*, not affected by the announcement) have announced job cuts. Both companies blamed the economic situation and its effect on advertising revenue. Last week Flemish minister-president



Kris Peeters received representatives of the media companies to discuss the situation. He also plans to meet with journalists and other print workers.

"Let's be clear," Raeymaeckers said in an interview with financial newspaper *De Tijd*. "Corelio and *De Persgroep* are not companies in financial difficulties. Look at *De Persgroep's* plans to buy the ailing Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad*. That's not something you do if you're suffering yourself."

Instead, she said, the media groups were carrying through long-standing plans to move to a more American-style system whereby each title no longer has its own editorial team, but rather one editorial department which delivers editorial to various titles. "In that one editorial you would

still have knowledge segments. Look at what is happening now: *Het Laatste Nieuws* provides sports news to *De Morgen*, and *De Tijd* shares economic news. If you accept that *De Morgen* doesn't need an economic or a sports editorial section, then indeed they have too many staff."

Meanwhile TV broadcaster VMMA, which owns VTM and 2BE, announced it would cut 28 jobs, again as a result of falling advertising revenue. Director-general Peter Quaghebeur (pictured) said the situation had got worse in the fourth quarter, and the gloomy outlook was expected to last through 2009 at least. VMMA is owned jointly by magazine publisher Roularta and *De Persgroep*. The cuts will come in the television sector, where some 430 people work.

How well does Flanders perform?



Child care

Flemish daycare for pre-school children has scored a disappointing 6/10 in a new report by UN children's organisation Unicef. The Innocenti report card sets 10 benchmarks for judging daycare in advanced nations, such as entitlement to parental leave, priority for the disadvantaged, access for under-threes, training for all staff, public funding and outreach for critical services. Flanders performed badly on parental leave, lack of a national policy plan, spending less than 1% of GDP, level of staff training and child-adult ratios. "Only six OECD countries meet eight or more of the benchmarks and they are the same six countries that top the table of government expenditures on early childhood services (Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, France and Norway)," the report concludes.

www.unicef.org



Robotics

Belgium has more robots per head of population than the United States, and nearly double the European average, according to a survey carried out by the International Federation of Robotics. Belgium has 89 industrial robots per 10,000 manufacturing workers, compared to a European average of 50, and a US total of 86. Japan has by far the most, with 295. At the end of 2007 about one million industrial robots and 5.5 million service robots were in operation worldwide. By 2011, the federation says, the total will have grown to more than 18 million.

www.ifr.org



Corruption

Belgian companies are the least likely to resort to bribery when dealing with foreign officialdom abroad, according to the latest Bribe Payers Index issued by the corruption watchdog Transparency International. The report surveyed executives from 22 leading trading nations on their use of bribery to oil the wheels of foreign trade. Belgium came out as least likely to bribe, above Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Mexico, China and Russia were the most likely to pay bribes. The report looked at three common types of "bribery": money paid to high-level politicians and parties; money paid to low-level officials to "speed things up"; and using personal family contacts to win public contracts.

www.transparency.org



Environment

Belgium scored 25th place out of 60 nations in this year's Climate Performance Index, calculated by the watchdog group Germanwatch – a fall of ten places on last year's results. The top three places were empty. "No nation did enough to prevent climate change," the report says. "Carbon dioxide emissions increases are running far ahead of all the promises and policies to reduce them." The four best performers were Sweden, Germany, France and India. At the bottom of the list, as always, are Saudi Arabia, Canada and the United States. Belgium's low place was blamed on the lack of policy on tackling climate change, which is considered too expensive and too difficult to implement.

www.germanwatch.org

€1 million for suicide prevention

The Flemish government has set aside a budget of €1.1 million for suicide prevention, faced with the problem of a suicide rate higher in the region than in most European areas. Three people on average die in Flanders every day from suicide, according to Professor Chantal Van Audenhove of the University of Leuven (pictured). For people in their twenties and thirties, and for men in their forties, it is the main cause of death in the region. "In Europe, the East European countries are in the lead," Prof. Van Audenhove said. "Belgium follows close behind."

And while the numbers of dead fell in 2006 for the first time in years, the number of attempts continued to rise. Suicide experts do not subscribe to the conventional wisdom that suicide attempts are "a cry for help" not to be taken seriously. Most successful suicides have already had a history of failed attempts.

One of the government's main targets is to cut the number of suicides by 8% by 2010, compared to the year 2000. The money will be used to improve the diagnosis and treatment of psychosis, which accounts for many if not all suicides. Schizophrenics, for exam-



ple, have a much higher rate of suicide than the general population: according to estimates, about one in ten commit suicide within the first ten years of diagnosis. For younger schizophrenics, the suicide rate is up to 40 times higher than average.

The approach of the region's health minister, Steven Vanackere, is based on a two-year pilot project being carried out in Halle-Vilvoorde, where efforts are made to track and treat psychosis among young people. The region has five times more psychiatric admissions than average, and the prescription of antidepressant drugs has doubled in ten years. Vanackere described the situation as "a major mental health problem in Flanders".

The Halle-Vilvoorde project will be extended, and from April next year two more care areas will be included. By 2010 the system will be extended to three areas, covering 300-350 clients. The policy is a strong one," Professor Van Audenhove said. "But a broader focus is needed. Suicide prevention is not solely the responsibility of the health ministry. Justice, education and employment could all take measures, and at least work together."

Bach wins Klara Top 75 by a landslide

This year's Klara Top 75 has been won by JS Bach, with no fewer than three entries in the top ten, and eight in the list as a whole, ahead of Mozart with seven and Beethoven with six. The list is compiled from listeners' submissions, and there were twice as many this year, Klara said – over 17,000 in all. The increased numbers only confirmed Bach in his unassailable position, however.

The Top Ten:

1. Johann Sebastian Bach: St Matthew Passion BWV 244 - Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder
2. Johann Sebastian Bach: Cello suite BWV 1007 - prelude
3. Johann Sebastian Bach: St Matthew Passion BWV 244- Erbarme dich
4. Giovanni Battista Pergolesi: Stabat mater
5. Gregorio Allegri: Miserere
6. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Requiem - Lacrimosa
7. Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano concerto no. 5 "Emperor" - Allegro
8. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Clarinet concerto - Adagio
9. Henry Purcell: Dido and Aeneas - When I am laid to earth
10. Gabriel Fauré: Requiem op. 48 - Pie Jesu

online

www.klara.be



Brussels brushes up

The House of Dutch is intent on making city shopkeepers and sales assistants more bilingual



Brussels shopkeepers can sign up for specialised Dutch courses in order to better serve their customers

Denzil Walton

"In schools in the Netherlands we learn that Brussels is a bilingual city," says Bart Feenstra, an IT projects manager at Fortis. Armed with that knowledge, he visited Brussels for a weekend. Near the Grote Markt, he entered a shop to buy a drink and found that the shopkeeper couldn't understand or speak a word of Dutch. "My French was almost non-existent, but eventually we managed to communicate in Spanish!" he recalls.

Jikke Ybema, meanwhile, arrived in Brussels from the Netherlands in the early 1990s to study and was surprised to discover that this lack of Dutch also extended to the big supermarket chains and do-it-yourself stores. "I was also amazed to find that employees in my bank branch were unable to speak Dutch," she adds. "Even now my local bank cannot provide that service."

Such experiences are all too common and tend to make a mockery of Brussels being a bilingual city. That's why the Brussels branch of the House of Dutch is actively trying to improve the situation by encouraging shopkeepers and sales assistants in Brussels to speak Dutch.

One of their methods is a "Dutch for Shopkeepers" course, which began at the request of partners such as professional and trade associations, district committees and shopping centres. "Language courses are much more successful if they are organised internally, such as for employees of a shopping centre, or if they are focused on a specific sector," says Jona Hebbrecht, press and communications officer at the Brussels House of Dutch. The organisation also runs Dutch courses specifically targeted at pharmacists, hospital employees, waiters and young people.

Another recent development is a pocket dictionary called *Prêt à parler*, which provides an overview of key Dutch phrases and basic vocabulary that a shopkeeper might need on a daily basis. It follows the same format as *Horeca Dutch*, the successful pocket dictionary for the food and drink sector.

Courses are structured for everyone from complete beginners to more advanced students. Currently running at the Westland Shopping Center in Anderlecht is an advanced course for sales assistants. It's the fifth such class organised at the shopping centre. "The courses at Westland have proved very popular and successful," says Hebbrecht. "There is a fixed group of around 30 sales assistants who have been attending for more than two years. Over half of these have graduated and will be able to assist their customers with their Christmas shopping in Dutch." Similar courses have been held at Woluwe Shopping Center, while a new course will start next year in City 2.

The Dutch for Shopkeepers course is organised in cooperation with the job training agency Syntra Brussels and with the financial support of both the Brussels and Flemish Regions. The lessons are classroom based but differ from traditional courses in that the emphasis is on the improvement of speaking and listening rather than writing. "The aim is to help students to attend to the needs of Dutch-speaking customers as efficiently as possible," says Hebbrecht.

On the basis of these and other targeted incentives, the House of Dutch is attempting to help Brussels play its role as the capital of a country with two large language communities. The ultimate aim is that more people will feel truly at home in Brussels, which can only benefit all of us. Let's hope that Bart and Jikke soon notice the difference.

online
www.huisnederlandsbrussel.be

KBC staff tighten belts to save jobs

Staff at the Leuven-based bank/insurer KBC have been asked to accept severe cuts in wages and staffing to help the group get through a difficult 2009. The bank's savings plans were presented to unions last week.

The main measures include a stop to all hiring in Belgium, the partial loss of bonuses and a strict evaluation of all non-core activities to ensure they are profitable enough to continue.

The package, unions have been told, is an attempt to avoid compulsory redundancies. However, the freeze on new recruitment will effectively mean a staff cut of about 350 jobs – the number of people who leave the company every year. KBC employs 60,000 people worldwide, one-third of them in Belgium.

As for the other measures, no exact details were available. The evaluation of activities will be an ongoing process, while the extent of bonus cuts will be decided only after consultation with unions, the company said. Bonuses form an important part of remuneration packages in the banking sector, so the measure will be sensitive. The board has already set an example by voluntarily declining to take bonuses for 2008.

"Our point of departure is the maintenance of maximum employment," bank spokesperson Viviane



Huybrecht commented. "We are making a common effort in that direction, from the board down to the most junior executive. But the idea is that the strongest should make the biggest effort. We are also assuming this will be a temporary measure."

The company hopes to reach an agreement with unions by Christmas. "I'm pleased there will be no sackings," said the union representative. "But you can't be really happy about these measures." Unions stressed that they were not willing to "write a blank cheque" for management's measures, which must also be of a temporary nature.

Diamond sector cuts jobs as demand drops

The body that represents the Antwerp diamond sector is to cut 24 jobs in its own administration, it announced last week. The Antwerp World Diamond Centre (ADWC) will lose staff at the certification labs run by subsidiary HRD. "The import and export of cut and rough diamonds had gone down drastically in recent months, and there is less demand for certificates," said spokesman Philip Claes. "We need to reduce capacity to the level of demand. This decision is necessary to guarantee the future of our business."

The ADWC is the biggest single employer in the port city's diamond sector, with 320 staff. Ten of the 24 jobs will be within the ADWC, with the rest going

from HRD, where staff have been working part time since mid-November.

Unions described the cuts as "unacceptable" and called for job-sharing measures to be taken to prevent redundancies.

Meanwhile, job cuts were also announced at the Antwerp offices of the International Gemmological Institute, where 15 employees will be terminated. The IMI employs 450 people worldwide, including 70 in Antwerp, where it also provides certification services. "This is the first time since 1980 we've had to do this," said IMI spokesman Roland Lorie.

Giant-killer plans massive lawsuit

Continued from page 1

billion.

The federal government then entered into negotiations with BNP for the sale of the 49.9% share it had taken as the price of its intervention. A previous court action by Modrikamen was defeated before the commercial court of Brussels, which essentially ruled that the government had acted in the face of *force majeure*, making a consultation with shareholders impossible. But now the appeal court has recognised that the rights of "stakeholders", including staff, account holders and shareholders, had been breached. The court has suspended the sale to BNP Paribas until 12 February, the deadline for an extraordinary meeting of shareholders.

In the meantime, the government was considering, as *Flanders Today* went to press, what legal steps it would take. One option will be a formal objection to the presence of the case's lead judge, Paul Blondeel, on the grounds of "irregularities". Modrikamen, at the same time, was considering legal action to recover the €18 billion he maintains shareholders were deprived of in the sale, plus interest. The damages would come, he said, from the Dutch and Belgian governments, from BNP Paribas and from the former directors of the Fortis board, who set the whole disastrous affair in motion in the first place.

"I would estimate that Fortis shares could be worth €2 or €3 on the market, while the intrinsic value of the sale was about €10 a share," Modrikamen said. "I would guess that the Belgian govern-



Lawyer Mischaël Modrikamen

ment sold Fortis to the Dutch and the French for something like €18 billion under the true value. The government needs to call all of the parties together and begin negotiations over. We still have two months to work out new terms for a sale."

Vlerick 10th best business school in the world, says FT

Flemish school scores top marks for international mix

Stefano Siggia

The Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School was recently ranked 10th in a list of the top European business schools compiled by the *Financial Times*. "The credit goes to many people who have worked here over the years," Vlerick's dean, Philippe Haspeslagh, told *Flanders Today*.

The first place in the rankings went to HEC of Paris, while the London Business School came in second. Several other Belgian schools made it onto the list – the Brussels-based Solvay Business School at number 22, the Antwerp Management School, which ranked 52nd and the IAG-Leuven School of Management in 58th place.

The list was based on five other rankings previously published by the *Financial Times* which looked at full-time MBA programmes, Executive MBA programmes, Masters in Management, the open enrolment executive education rankings and the customised executive education rankings.

Vlerick rose six places in the rankings this year, mainly because of the inclusion of the MBA programme in the global MBA ranking. The survey ranked Vlerick in seventh place worldwide in terms of female student numbers, while it gained third place in terms of the mix of international students and the progress in careers after graduation. A full-time, one-year MBA programme at Vlerick brings together about 50 students from 30 different nationalities, with an average of seven years of international working experience.

In another survey by *The Economist*, Vlerick also shot up the rankings, reaching 14th position worldwide for its programme compared to 21st place in 2007. The improvement was mainly due to positive evaluations by students who say that the courses were "more exciting".

This year's rankings have consolidated Vlerick

Management School as the number one business school in Belgium. Haspeslagh: "Vlerick has been an entrepreneurial business school for more than 50 years." He adds that Vlerick has strong links with the Catholic University of Leuven and with Ghent University. In addition, it has the largest faculty of any Belgian business school and can successfully merge research and theory with practical experience.

"We are aiming to continue to improve the school," Haspeslagh says. Vlerick expanded its staff by 15 this year and is pushing forward its internationalisation plans by developing the MBA exchange programme at its campuses in St Petersburg and Beijing.

The school also plans to internationalise its MBA programs in Leuven. Haspeslagh refers to this as: "acting and behaving like one Vlerick." The aim is to strengthen the alumni association – which has not been efficiently coordinated up until now – and bring together all the campuses and programmes to create one culture. In terms of research, Vlerick aims to create closer ties between the people working and studying in different disciplines.

When asked about making the *Financial Times* top 10, Haspeslagh says he does not attach too much importance to the results. "Rankings are quite volatile; they do not capture

everything in the school," he says. "Next year they could be different."

"However," he concluded, "it is better than doing badly."



Philippe Haspeslagh heads one of Europe's best business schools

FLANDERS ONLINE



Shoppers slow to connect

Some 51% of Belgians with Internet access shop online, according to a study of 2,000 people by InSites Consulting and the Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School. However, barely 4% actually finalise their purchases on the internet, while 91% still prefer to shop in physical stores across town.

The problem is apparently not the customers themselves but the way the cyberstores are set up. The over-abundance of information and the great time it takes to search for the right product eventually leads to customers giving up and going to a real shop instead. "There is no tradition of distance buying in Belgium," says Gino Van Ossel, professor of Retail Marketing at Vlerick Management School.

Most Belgian customers tend to go online to research products rather than to buy them. According to the study, the final purchasing can take anything from 14 days up to three months, depending on the product.

The process begins with an orientation phase in which the customer hunts down information. The second phase involves the comparison of different alternatives and the final choice of the one they like. The study shows that 82% of the customers interviewed are inclined to choose a specific store, while two out of three simply buy the products, regardless of the store.

The behaviour of Belgians online is more centered around research than actual buying. Van Ossel argues that one of the reasons for this is that Belgians do not have a tradition of mail order shopping. "Mail order was never popular," he explains. "The Dutch, for example, have a tradition of mail order and their online purchases are much larger."

The research shows that the main problem with online shopping in Belgium is that websites are not user-friendly. The survey looked at 120 national and international websites in terms of ease of navigation and search. The Belgian sites scored 24% lower when it came to the accessibility of information and 30% lower for the total amount of information provided.

The solution, according to Van Ossel is: "to design a website with the logic of the consumer and go from a multi-channel to a cross-channel approach in which the internet, the call center and the shop are fully connected." **S.S.**



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Ian Mundell

You've got to admire Roger Raveel's nerve in putting on this joint exhibition with James Ensor, one of Belgium's most celebrated artists. At first glance, it appears to leave him open to accusations of ego tripping, or at least match fixing, since he can pick the sides in the old man's absence and enjoy the advantage of playing on home turf in his own personal museum.

Fortunately, that's not the feeling you get during most of *Ensor & Raveel: Kindred Spirits*. Instead, the exhibition at the Raveel Museum in Machelen-Zulte, East Flanders, presents a pleasing and thought-provoking juxtaposition of work by two idiosyncratic artists, tackling similar subjects and testing the limits of artistic convention.

Thanks to Ensor's longevity, the two men overlap by more than 20 years, yet at least two generations separate them as artists. Ensor was born in Ostend in 1860, remaining a loyal resident of the Flemish coastal town until he died there in 1949. His work was initially inspired by the Impressionists, but, through the 1880s and 1890s, he developed a freer, frequently grotesque style of painting that drew on local influences such as carnival masks, religious processions, and the people who flocked to Ostend's beaches. Often satirical, this work had a strong influ-



When Roger met James

Contemporary Flemish painter has it out with the ghost of Ensor

ence on the Expressionist and Surrealist movements of the early 20th century.

Raveel was born in 1921 in Machelenaan-de-Leie, a village near Ghent, where he still lives and works. Introduced in the 1950s to Cobra movement artists like Karel Appel, Raveel soon took their bright, spontaneous style of figurative art in more abstract directions. From the early 1960s, he started to incorporate real objects in his work, producing a dialogue between artefacts, the environment and the painted image.

Performance became part of Raveel's method in the early 1970s, with "happenings" commenting on ecological themes. He was still at it in 1990 when he rode a painted wardrobe on wheels through Brussels to mark the 50th anniversary of Belgium's entry into the Second World War.

In looking for the areas of contact between Ensor and Raveel, the exhibition produces some fascinating combinations of paintings. In one room, you have Ensor's "Groot Marine - Zonsondergang" ("Big Blue - Sunset") from 1885, a large impressionistic treatment of a sunset that has a sky of rust-tinted greens and blues bleeding into the sea, with only a sliver of the disappearing sun to mark the boundary between the two.

Next to it is Raveel's "Ostende" of 2002, with a flurry of white paint in the centre of the canvas producing a similarly impressionistic view of the waves on the beach. Yet there is also a streetlamp in the foreground with a mirror glued to the canvas where its

glass should be and encroaching areas of white space at the fringes. (The empty white square is one of Raveel's most persistent motifs.)

In both cases, the artists are struggling with the dead weight of a traditional subject – a seascape – pushing at the boundaries of what the art of the time will allow and trying to connect with their own experience of the world.

The outcome is even more striking in the pairing of Ensor's "Gezicht op Mariakerke" ("View on Mariakerke") from 1901 and Raveel's "Landschap" of 1955. There is no struggle in Ensor's view of the village of Mariakerke; it's the sort of landscape that an amateur might turn out working from a postcard. Raveel's abstract landscape is a different matter: an angular black arch on layers of textured and tinted white paint. It may not be clear where the view is, or even what it is, but it definitely feels like a landscape. Raveel's canvas contains less information than Ensor's, but much more conviction.

Perhaps the most intriguing pairing, though, is Ensor's "Mijn dode moeder" ("My Dead Mother") of 1915 and Raveel's "Herinnering aan het sterfbed van mijn moeder" ("Memory at the Deathbed of My Mother") from 1965. In Ensor's view, the foreground is taken up by a detailed depiction of a tray of medicine bottles, while the profile of the old woman fades in the background. Raveel's memory similarly has the woman fading from view, reduced to a line of profile and a

strikingly vivid hand on the coverlet. The bed, however, literally leaps out of the canvas: Raveel has fixed two of the bed posts to the edges of the frame.

Kindred Spirits is full of common interests, where Ensor and Raveel home in on the same subject, coming up with similar or radically different thoughts. They share an interest in processions, in the coast and in figures drawn from behind. Both men repeatedly painted or sketched elusive self-portraits – Ensor hiding himself in shadows, Raveel covering his face with fragments of mirror.

The one interest they cannot share is each other. Raveel has produced images of Ensor and variations on Ensor's work such as his treatments of "De Dronkaards" ("The Drunkards") of 1910, which appear together here. There's even a seascape teasingly titled "Kun je nog volgen, James?" ("Can You Keep Up, James?") from 1968-69, hung next to a similar Ensor scene from 1880.



Battle to the deathbed: Raveel's memories of his dying mother above, and Ensor's below

Only a keen sense of gallery etiquette and a poor command of colloquial Flemish prevented me from pencilling underneath "I'm way ahead of you, Roger". That's not because I think Ensor is necessarily way ahead of Raveel but because the exhibition lacks Ensor's riposte. This inevitable absence is perhaps the only shortcoming of a thoroughly intriguing show.

Until 22 February, Roger Raveelmuseum, Gildestraat 2-8, Machelen-Zulte

online
www.rogerraveelmuseum.be



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FILM

My father, my self

Generations join forces on and off screen for *Christmas in Paris*

Lisa Bradshaw

Talking to Hans and Benjamin Royaards is a bit like watching a tennis match. Your head goes back and forth while they finish each other's sentences.

A long-time Flemish stage and television actor, Hans makes his directorial debut with *Christmas in Paris*, which releases in cinemas on 17 December. The idea for the film had been lying in a drawer for 15 years, and Hans had forgotten about it. At 56, he never had any intention to turn director.

In the end, he not only wrote the script and directed the film; he plays one of the characters. "I thought it was all too much and didn't want to do it," he says. "The whole thing happened because Benjamin wanted it."

Benjamin, at 24, produced the film and hired a school friend to serve as director of photography. The team brought on the octogenarian comic Gaston Berghmans to play the lead, and, together, this mix of vastly different generations put together a tender film about troubled relationships – between vastly different generations.

Berghmans is easily Belgium's most famous comedian. He was a long-time stage performer and made several films and TV specials with the late Leo Martin. Some of the duo's skits reached iconic status and are still quoted by the Flemish today, much like *Monty Python*. "Gaston said in the beginning that he found it wonderful that such a young generation would want to do the film with as old a person as him," says Hans. "All of these young people lifted up this older man with their energy and made his dream a reality, to star in his first dramatic film."

Christmas in Paris is about a troubled Flemish teenager who escapes from a juvenile facility and goes in search of his grandmother. Circumstances lead him to an aging



comic, played by Berghmans. The original idea came to Hans in the early 1990s when VRT asked him to make a short film about a teen and an old man. That project was cancelled, but a story with similar characters started developing in Hans' brain.

When a competition offered the chance to submit a film treatment, Benjamin pushed his father to take his notes out of the drawer. "Why not fulfil a dream you've always had?" he asked. Their treatment made it into the

top 12 of 150 candidates, and they were invited to submit a full script.

When the script was not chosen to be produced, Benjamin, who founded the production company Untouchable Films a few years ago, decided to produce *Christmas in Paris* himself as his first feature project. Unlike most Flemish films, they were not awarded any public money, and Benjamin managed to secure the entire €1.8 million through private funders.

Benjamin: "One time, when I was about 12, I was sitting in the cinema, and I thought, 'I want to see my name up there on the screen.'" Thirty years earlier, Hans did the exact same thing. "I had to have a son to make my dream a reality," smiles Hans. Hans also called on his son for inspiration in writing the teenage character. "Benjamin was a difficult boy," he says. "There was a period when he was so difficult that his mother said we should put him in an institution. I always thought: what would have become of him if we'd done that?" The film explores this, as well as what it's like for a boy to lose his parents. "I lost my father when I was 15," explains Hans. "Wanting a father and missing my father, that's in the story, too. And there are other little things. It's much more personal than people think."

The film is part road trip, part inner journey. "I'm looking for the dream inside people," says Hans. "Everyone has a dream,

no matter who you are. These characters are all rough on the outside, but on the inside they are very different. They look and they try, and they want something else. That's what makes stories interesting to me."

Father and son come from a long line of stage and film talent. The Royaards are an acting dynasty in the Netherlands, where Hans' father is from. In fact, it was Hans' uncle Jos Gevers, a comic legend in the Netherlands, who, 60 years ago, convinced Berghmans to quit his job at the Antwerp docks and get up on stage himself.

"In the Royaards family, we can move mountains," smiles Hans. That's typical for the members of my family – to get what you want and to believe that things..."

"...are possible," finishes Benjamin.



Review

The first 10 minutes of *Christmas in Paris* is an exciting sequence: 16-year-old Nick flees a burning building and crosses the wintery Ardennes. He digs up a burlap sack in the woods that contains a gun, jumps from an overpass atop a moving train and shoots a bullet into the air with a loud whoop of victory. The camera sweeps across huge bodies of water, the wind blows furiously. A beautifully mysterious mood is set.

About the time that Nick (Mattias Van De Vijver) is shooting his gun, the elderly Leon and his ever-present wooden dummy are being booed off the stage in Wallonia. He's drunk and, besides, he can't speak French. On his way home to Antwerp, the washed-up comic runs his car into Nick on a dark road. The boy isn't hurt, but he does demand a ride.

The pair form an unlikely duo while Leon (Gaston Berghmans) tries to help the delinquent find his grandmother and discover what happened to his parents – an experience that put Nick into institutions for most of his young life.

The retired concert pianist Alice (Chris Lomme) – who used to spend every Christmas dancing in Paris – is half afraid of her grandson, Nick, but equally intrigued. She insists on taking the pair to the city of lights for the holiday. Tears and revelations – and a little romance – ensue. (Plus, a bonus performance by Belgian jazz great Toots Thielemans.)

Christmas in Paris is the final film of the superstar Flemish comic Gaston Berghmans. The 82-year-old announced long ago that he wanted his last role to be a dramatic one, so he could prove his acting talents. He got his wish and, as Leon, he indeed delivers. His incessant drunken slurs and ongoing consternation at having to deal with these new, difficult people are a nicely balanced mix of comedy and tragedy.

The performances overall are strong, but, alas, they cannot save a film that, after such a good beginning, slides steadily into clichéd dialogue and uncontrolled emotions. The title suggests a sort of Hollywood sentimentality, and that is ultimately just what you get.

online
www.christmasinparis.be

CITY TRIP



D. de Kieffh / Aerisne Wanden

Where Flanders began

Done Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges? Then it's time to explore Kortrijk

Denzil Walton

One day is not enough in Kortrijk, which is why there are so many hotels and bed & breakfasts in and around the city in the southeast of West Flanders. Within Kortrijk's boundaries lie no fewer than 200 protected monuments, two of which are world heritage sites, plus about 100 valuable facades and statues.

In Kortrijk, three major museums and numerous smaller ones are complemented by windmills, a rose garden, a skate park, and in the summer you can go on boat trips. It also has a large pedestrian precinct, an attractive shopping centre, and it's packed with restaurants and cafés. What other Flemish city can boast a guide book to places to eat that stretches to 128 pages?

A good first port of call is the Visitors' Centre in the Begijnhofpark. It's open every day throughout the winter, and you can pick up all the brochures, leaflets and maps you need to make the most of your stay. To become acquainted with this attractive city, a three kilometre city walk starts at the centre and gives you a quick tour of the key sights.

If first impressions are all important, the city walk certainly succeeds by leading you first to the massive mediaeval Broel Towers that guard the River Leie. The southern

tower was built in 1385, the northern one 30 years later, and they are the only remnants of the old city's fortress.

In Budastraat, take a peek through the monumental gate of Our Lady's Hospital, founded in the 13th century, to see the

ancient cloister. In the Grote Markt, visit the late Gothic Renaissance Town Hall, the façade of which is decorated with sculptures of the Dukes of Flanders. Visitors are free to enter and wander around the rooms (the administrative offices are elsewhere). The beautiful aldermen's hall contains a 16th-century mantelpiece with intricate carvings, exceptional stained glass windows, and murals displaying Kortrijk's rich history. Remember to look up at the ceiling – see if you can spot the naked woman in a bath.

Also in the Grote Markt is the Belfry, one of Kortrijk's two UNESCO world heritage sites and a remnant of the city's mediaeval cloth hall built in 1307. To visit, you have to sign up for a guided tour. Even if you don't, you will still be able to hear the 48-bell carillon and the two copper figures Manten and Kalle strike the hour.

For a few minutes of peaceful meditation, two churches are on the city walk. Inside Our Lady's Church, where the Flemish poet Guido Gezelle was once chaplain, visitors can admire its rich baroque architecture and numerous treasures such as Antoon Van Dijck's "Raising of the Cross". Outside the church are the remains of a 14th-century defensive wall.

Worthy of mention in St Martin's church, which has been rebuilt and restored many

1302 and all that

During the last two decades of the 13th century, Flanders was plagued by unrest, with conflicts arising everywhere. Matters came to a head when King Philip IV of France declared war on Guy of Dampierre, Count of Flanders. In 1300, the county was annexed to the crown lands and came under the rule of the French governor Jacques de Châtillon. On 18 May 1302 the citizens of Bruges, who had been exiled by the occupying French troops, returned to their city and slaughtered the French garrison.

That certainly got the attention of the French king, who could no longer sit by. He ordered the French army to head for Kortrijk. Facing them was the Flemish militia. Both armies numbered around 10,000, but the French side consisted of heavily armoured cavalry, whereas the Flemish one consisted mainly of tradesmen.

During the battle on 11 July, the Flemish had chosen strategic positions between streams on an open plain called the Groeningheveld. This made it difficult for the French cavalry to force a break-through. Hindered by the swampy ground, the knights stumbled over each other and their own infantry. The Flemish seized the opportunity and slaughtered the fleeing French. And that's when Dutch became the official language of Flanders.

Among the trophies were numerous golden spurs from the French knights, hence the name of the battle. In the 19th century the commemoration of the Battle of the Golden Spurs became a symbol of the struggle for Flemish recognition in a French-dominated Belgian State. In 1973, the 11th of July was declared the official Flemish holiday.



Kortrijk's city-defining Broel Towers (above); the "City of Architecture and Design" tour takes you through the Doorniksestraat tunnel (above right); city youth appreciate the style of the American-designed skatepark (right)

times since its first stones were laid in the 12th century, are its 16th-century tower, paintings from the school of Rubens and a beautifully carved 17th-century pulpit. Its tower contains the city's first carillon, which was transported from the cloth hall.

The city's second UNESCO site is the St Elizabeth Begijnhof. Its 40 picturesque baroque houses from the 17th century are grouped next to St Matthew's chapel, which dates back to 1464. These communities of women, who devoted themselves to prayer and good works, arose across the Low Countries in the 12th and 13th centuries, and this one was founded by Joanna of Constantinople in 1242. Beguines were not nuns: they did not take vows or renounce their property, and many of them brought their children with them. They supported themselves through manual labour and lived in the Begijnhof under the auspices of the oldest beguine, who was referred to as the *Grootjuffrouw* (a kind of Mother Superior).

In St Elizabeth, the *Grootjuffrouw's* house is now a museum filled with memorabilia. Take time to pop into the chapel, where you can see one of the oldest organs in the Benelux. It was built in 1678 and restored in 2002.

The city walk draws to a conclusion with a visit to the Groeninge Gate, which was built in 1908 to commemorate the 1302 Battle of the Golden Spurs. Walk through and admire Godfried Devreese's bronze monument portraying the Virgin of Flanders as she attempts to subdue the Lion of Flanders.

To explore more of Kortrijk's architecture, a booklet available from the Visitors' Centre describes a cycle route to 27 buildings of interest. Cycles can be hired from Mobiel,

57 Minister Tacklaan.

Also located in the Visitor's Centre is the Kortrijk 1302 Museum. Under the theme "Seven Centuries in One Day", this multimedia museum tells the story of the Battle of the Golden Spurs that was fought near Kortrijk on 11 July, 1302. An in-depth audio guide in English, Dutch, French or German introduces you to Gilles Le Muisit, the old Abbot of the Abbey of St Martin in Tournai. He sets the scene regarding the war between Flanders and France, the social unrest in the Flemish towns and, of course,

the great battle that led to 11 July becoming a national symbol.

Children will probably appreciate getting to know the weapons used, such as the *goedendag*. This was a sturdy wooden staff as tall as a man and topped with an iron spike. Also helpful is a gigantic scale model of Kortrijk and the battlefield. The seven centuries theme is explained at the end of the tour in an entertaining 15-minute film in which Gilles comes to life and surveys the past 700 years, during which the battle has been portrayed in different ways.

The focus of the Broel Museum, meanwhile, is artists who lived or worked in Kortrijk, such as Roeland Savery, Karel van Mander and Kerstiaen De Keuninck, as well as a group of artists from the 19th century who painted animals. The museum is housed in a renovated 18th-century mansion on the Broelkaai close to the Broel Towers.

Kortrijk's third major museum is the Flax, Lace and Linen Museum, although it is closed now until 1 March. Located in a 19th-century flax farm, it shows the surprisingly fascinating evolution of flax cultivation, treatment and processing in Flanders. It also displays an extensive collection of lace and linen used in the lives of Flemish people from the cradle to the grave.

Don't for a moment think that Kortrijk is completely submerged in its past. It is also keen to promote itself as a design city by encouraging high-quality contemporary architecture. If exploring the city from this perspective is of interest, then you need to request the "City of Architecture and Design" leaflet from the Visitors' Centre.

This particular tour invites you to discover more than 50 contemporary buildings located throughout the city, including the De Kreun music centre, the new town hall, a hospital wing, court rooms and the extension to the Royal Academy. Also impressive are a rather snazzy inter-college footbridge and the skate bowl. The latter was designed by the American company Team Pain. This is truly where Kortrijk's 21st-century appeal is the strongest: even on a weekday, it's crowded with young skateboarders.

Coffee, tea or...

There are so many eateries in Kortrijk, it's tough to pick out just a few. Here are three of my completely subjective favourites.

Kortrijks Koffeehuis

Why? *A wonderful cup of coffee with a slice of honey cake and a chocolate, all in a relaxing ambience.*

In 2006, the proprietor of Kortrijks Koffeehuis, Peter Deprez, won the first-ever Barista Championships when he was judged as making the best cup of coffee in Belgium. His winning entry was a combination of espresso and a dash of syrup made from speculoos). The shop also sells a huge selection of coffees, teas, percolators, teapots, mugs and other accessories. – *Leiestraat 20*

Teaterkaffee

Why? *Quick, friendly service that provides excellent food at a good price.*

Teaterkaffee also offers free wireless internet. – *Schouwburgplein 4*

Café Rouge

Why? *The food is delicious and extremely well presented, and the service affable and attentive.*

On a cold, dark, winter's evening, just looking through the window of Café Rouge gives you a warm feeling. You won't be disappointed. Its cosy atmosphere, comfortable chairs and stylish red décor create a perfectly relaxing place to dine. It's a brasserie, restaurant and tea room, so it serves a wide variety of meals. – *Sint-Maartenskerkhof 6A*

online
www.kortrijk.be

Classical & New Music

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
DEC 21 15.00 Maarten Engeltjes, counter-tenor; Israel Golani, lute: lute songs by Dowland and Purcell

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
DEC 17 20.00 Quatuor Ysaÿe with Pascal Rogé, piano: Franck, Fauré
DEC 18 20.00 The Netherlands Bach Society, conducted by Jos van Veldhoven: Bach, Crüger, Heinichen
DEC 19 20.00 Ysaÿe Quatuor with Pascal Rogé, piano: Debussy, Fauré, Franck

Koninklijk Circus
Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15
DEC 20 15.00 Les Valses de Vienne with the Budapest Strauss Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Lajos Blájzy, with Roberto Galbes, tenor, and Ballets Viennois Pannonia

Bruges

Concertgebouw
’t Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be
DEC 17 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Bo Holten, with Claire Chevallier, piano: Rossini’s Petite messe solonnelle
DEC 21 15.00 Ensemble Explorations: Messiaen’s Quatuor pour la fin du temps

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
Concerts at 20.00:
DEC 18 Liège Philharmonic, conducted by Louis Langrée, with Benedetto Lupo, piano: Schumann’s Concerto for piano and orchestra op 54, Bruckner’s Symphony No 9
DEC 19 Christmas concert: Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by Zdenek Mácal, with Isabelle Faust, violin: Mozart’s Concerto for violin and orchestra No 4, Mahler’s Symphony No 1
DEC 21 18.00 Charity concert for Mekong Plus: Brussels Capital Orchestra, conducted by Robert Janssens, with guests La Badinerie, Il Diletto Vocale, Ré Bécarre and Brussels’ Children’s Choir

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
DEC 18 20.00 Christmas concert: Brahms’ Liebesliederwalzer op 52

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
DEC 18 20.15 Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Bo Holten: Rossini’s Petite messe solennelle
DEC 19 20.00 Huelgas Ensemble, conducted by Paul Van Nevel: Petrarch’s Trionfi, De Lassus

Miniemengerkerk
Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84, www.minimes.net
DEC 21 10.30 Miniemengerkerk Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Benoît Jacquemin: Bach’s Magnificat

Royal Conservatory of Brussels
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
DEC 18 16.00 Flemish Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Henrik Schaefer: Respighi, Martin, Schubert
20.00 Vlaanderen International, conducted by Etienne Siebens: Legley, Hindemith

Zaal de Maalbeek
Oudergemlaan 90; 02.734.84.43
DEC 19 20.00 Kristiaan Van Ingelgem, organ: Christmas concert

Dilbeek
Westrand Cultuurcentrum
Kamerijklaan; 02.466.20.30, www.westrand.be
DEC 19 20.30 Capella Sint-Petersburg

Ghent
Lakenmetershuis
Vrijdagmarkt 24-25; 09.224.10.75
DEC 19 20.00 Het Bezoek van Peter Ritzen, piano with the Moscow Chamber Soloists

Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
DEC 19 12.30 Magnificat Anima Mea: German cantatas for Christmas time

Groot-Bijgaarden
Sint-Egidiuskerk
Gemeenteplein 1b; 02.466.95.56, www.singhetscone.be
DEC 20 19.30 Christmas choir songs from Europe

Oosterzele
Ankerkerk
Bavegemstraat; 09.362.94.25, www.cklvr.be
DEC 19 20.00 Ceremony of Carols by Benjamin Britten for piano and choir

Roeselare
Cultureel Centrum De Spil
Spilleboutdreef 1; 051.26.57.00,

www.despil.be
DEC 19 20.00 Cappella Pratensis: Kerst voor de Keizer (Christmas for the Emperor)

Opera

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
Until DEC 30 15.00/20.00 Falstaff by Verdi with the Flemish Opera Symphony Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Enrique Mazzola

Brussels

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be
Until DEC 21 15.00/19.00 Rusalka by Dvorak with De Munt Symphony Orchestra

Jazz & blues

Antwerp

Arenberg Theatre
Arenbergstraat 28; 070.22.21.92
DEC 20 20.15 Wacko is Back

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
DEC 18 20.30 Cram with Touria Hadraoui
DEC 20 20.30 Massot/Florizoone/Horbaczewski

Brussels

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
DEC 19 12.30 Nelson Veras, guitar; Pierre de Bethmann, piano (Piknikmusik) **DEC 20-21** 20.15 Soledad

Musical Instruments Museum
Hofberg 2; 0475.76.23.32, astoriaconcerts@skynet.be
DEC 18 20.00 Ensemble Picevole, Tuur Florizoone and Philip Catherine
21.30 Chantal Acda, classical, folk, jazz and chanson

Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
DEC 17 22.00 Caribe Con K, Caribbean music
DEC 18 21.00 The Singers Night
DEC 19 22.00 No Vibrato Quartet
DEC 20 22.00 Valentine’s Day, pop, jazz
DEC 22 22.00 Master Session
DEC 23 22.00 Da Romeo & The Crazy Moondog Quartet

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
DEC 17 MDM Band
DEC 18 Marc Sperber Project
DEC 19 Larry Coryell Solo Concert
DEC 20 The Swing Dealers
DEC 23 Dapoerka

Eeklo

N9 Villa
Molenstraat 165; 09.377.93.94, www.n9.be
DEC 19 21.00 Big Jay McNeely & His LA All Stars

Ghent

De Centrale
Kraankindersstraat 2; 09.265.98.28, www.decentrale.be
DEC 19 21.30 Odemba OK Jazz All Stars
DEC 21 20.00 Marie-Anne Standaert Trio

Leuven

30CC Schouwburg
Bondgenotenlaan 21; 016.23.84.27, www.30CC.be
DEC 19 20.00 Ricominciamo, Italian blues

Lokeren

Lokerse Jazzklub
Gasstraat 27; 09.348.32.78, www.lokersejazzklub.be
DEC 21 21.00 The New Orleans Train Jazz Band

Wuustwezel

Goorblues
Bredabaan 908; 0476.39.319, www.goorblues.be
DEC 19 21.00 Cora Lee Live

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

Aalst

De Werf
Molenstraat 51; 053.73.28.12, www.ccdewerf.be
DEC 20 20.00 Flip Kowlier

Antwerp

Petrol
Herbouvillekaai 21; 03.226.49.63, www.petroldclub.be
DEC 20 20.00 The Sedan Vault

Sportpaleis
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
Until DEC 27 20.30 Clouseau Crescendo

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be
DEC 18 20.30 Gloria, Christmas songs by Dick van der Harst

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be
DEC 18 14.00 Barbara Dex, country music
DEC 20 20.30 Rocco Granata
DEC 21 20.30 Ik val...Val in mijn armen (I Fall, Fall in My Arms) with Els Dottermans and Wim Opbrouck, American country classics

Hof Ter Lo
Noordersingel 30; 03.543.90.30
DEC 20 13.00 Belgian Independent Music Festival

Bruges

Concertgebouw
’t Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be
DEC 19 20.00 Mavis with Claron McFadden, rock, jazz, chanson and contemporary
DEC 21 20.00 Rob de Nijs ‘Eindejaar Special’

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
DEC 20 21.00 Exit’08 with Gorrillaz Sound System, Ashanti 3000, Benga and many more

Fuse
Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
DEC 20 23.00 Loco Dice. Camea, Dana Ruh, Namissy

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
DEC 18 20.00 Rap Session #1. High Places
DEC 20 20.00 Total Respect: Girls in Hawaii, Las Buenas Ondas, Veence Hanao, Cleo, Duplex

Vorst-Nationaal
Victor Rousseulaan 208; 0900.00.991
DEC 21 19.00 Tarkan

Dendermonde

Belgica Theater
Kerkstraat 24; 052.20.26.40, www.ccbelgica.be
DEC 19 20.00 Willem Vermandere

Ghent

Café Video
Oude Beestenmarkt 7, www.cafevideo.be
DEC 17 21.30 Ondine

Hotsy Totsy
Hoogstraat 1; 09.224.20.12, www.hotsytotsy.be
DEC 18 20.30 SAF, musical poetry

Kinky Star
Vlasmarkt 9; 09.223.48.45, www.kinkystar.com
DEC 21 21.00 Karoshi
DEC 23 21.00 De Predikanten

Kunstencentrum Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
DEC 18 22.00 The Germans

NTGent Minnemeers
Minnemeers 8; 09.223.22.27
DEC 18 21.00 Galashow Urgent.fm
DEC 19 21.00 Freddy’s Lust for Life

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
DEC 22 20.00 Sarah Bettens

Hasselt

Grenslandhallen
Gouv. Verwilghensingel 70; 0900.69.900 www.soulwaxmas.be
DEC 20 19.00 Radio Soulwaxmas: Soulwax, with other musical guests

Heusden-Zolder

CC Muze
Dekenstraat 40; 011.80.80.89, www.muze.be
DEC 20 22.00 Triggerfinger

Koksijde

OLV ter Duinenkerk
Kerkplein 2; www.koksijde.be
DEC 19 20.30 Christmas concert with Herman Van Veen

Sint-Pieterskerk

Koksijde centre; www.koksijde.be
DEC 20 20.00 Christmas concert with Paul Rans and British carolers

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44, www.dekreun.be
DEC 18 20.00 Alex Vanhee

Leopoldsborg

CC Leopoldsborg
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.ccleopoldsborg.be
DEC 21 20.15 Deep River Quartet: Oh Holy Night

Poperinge

Het Mysterie
Abeelsweg 29; 057.36.35.80, www.freewebs.com/hetmysterie
DEC 20 One Less

Roeselare

Cultureel Centrum De Spil
Spilleboutdreef 1; 051.26.57.00, www.despil.be
DEC 23 20.00 Sarah Bettens

World, Folk

Brussels

La Soupape
A De Wittestraat; 02.649.58.88
DEC 20 21.00 Karim Gharbi

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.226.12.57
DEC 19 Tribute to Oum Khaltoum and Mohamed Abdelwahab with Zirieb Orchestra

Ghent

De Centrale
Kraankindersstraat 2; 09.265.98.28, www.decentrale.be
DEC 20 20.00 Oduz Aksaç (Turkey)

Leopoldsborg

CC Leopoldsborg
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.ccleopoldsborg.be
DEC 23 20.15 Loubistok (Ukraine)

Ninove

Hospitaalkerk
Burchtstraat; 054.34.10.01, www.ninove.be
DEC 19 20.30 De Fragilitate: Songs from mediaeval Finland

Dance

Brussels

Vorst-Nationaal
Victor Rousseulaan 208; 0900.00.991
DEC 30 19.30 Saint Petersburg Ballet in The Nutcracker, with music by the Ukraine National Philharmonic

Don't miss this week



Flemish Symphony Orchestra
18 December, 16.00, Royal Conservatory of Brussels, Regentschapsstraat 30. Tickets from 050.84.05.87

In its end-of-year programme at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, the Flemish Symphony Orchestra starts with a piece by Respighi – *Gli ucelli*, based on birdsong – and ends with the massive Ninth Symphony of Schubert. The work might have been forgotten if not for the efforts of Schumann and Mendelssohn to preserve a symphony that marks the place where classicism and romanticism meet. In between, the brass players perform the *Concerto for Seven Wind Instruments* by Frank Martin, a *concerto grosso* inspired by Bach. A programme on three levels, ranging from the intimate to the spectacular, with guest conductor Henrik Schaefer.

Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30, www.wolubilis.be
DEC 19-20 20.30 National Ballet of Marseille in Métamorphoses, choreographed by Frédéric Flamand

Theatre

Alseberg (Beersel)

CC De Meent
Gemeenveldstraat 34; 02.359.16.00
DEC 20 20.15 Opgenomen (Admitted) by Dirk Denoyelle, comedy and political satire (in Dutch)

Antwerp

Antwerpen X
Berchem, Antwerpse Ring; 070.344.555, www.daens.be
Until JAN 18 Daens: The Musical (in Dutch with French surtitles)

UZ Antwerpen (University Hospital)

Wilrijkstraat 10; 015.34.94.36, www.hetfirmament.be
DEC 20 14.00 Project Hayat: Puppet theatre stories from around the world

Ardooe

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82, www.deschaduw.net
DEC 19 20.30 Iwein Segers, comedy (in Dutch)

Brussels

KVS Box
Arduinkaai 9; 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.be
DEC 17 20.30 Union Suspecte and Abattoir Fermé in They Eat People (in Dutch)

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.be
DEC 18-28 20.00/15.00 Singhet ende weset vro, musical theatre staged by Ruud Gielens, music by Zouzou Ben Chikha (in Dutch with French surtitles)

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be
DEC 17-20 20.30 Wintervogelchen, written and staged by Jan Decorte (in Dutch)

Ghent

Capitole
Graaf van Vlaanderenplein 5; 0900.69.00
DEC 21-28 Annie: The Musical (in Dutch)

Theater Tinnenpot

Tinnenpotstraat 21; 09.225.18.60, www.tinnenpot.be
DEC 17 20.00 Die zucht zopas (She Just Sighed) (in Dutch)

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.20, www.vooruit.be
Until DEC 20 20.00 Toneelgroep Ceremonia presents Smoor (in Dutch)

Leopoldsborg

CC Leopoldsborg
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.ccleopoldsborg.be
DEC 18 20.15 Janine Bisschops - De Borstenclub (The Breast Club), a moving and humorous look at breast cancer (in Dutch)
DEC 19 20.15 Ronald Goedemondt in Dedication, comedy (in Dutch)

Strombeek

Cultural Centre
Gemeenteplein; 03.235.04.90
DEC 20 20.15 Geletterde mensen (Literary People), featuring Ramsey Nasr and Mauro Pawlowski

Visual arts

Aalst

Centre for Centemporary Art
Houtkaai; 053.70.97.73
Until DEC 20 Rocaille/ Gereedschapskist & Le Vase-entrepôt, new sculptures by Freek Wambacq

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.260.99.99, www.muhka.be
Until JAN 4 The Order of Things, group show questioning the use of archival images

Modemuseum (MoMu)

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70, www.momu.be
Until FEB 8 Maison Martin Margiela (20) The Exhibition, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the famous fashion house

Zilvermuseum Sterckshof

Cornelissenlaan; 03.360.52.52
Until JAN 18 Fifties Silver, Belgian civil and religious silver design from 1950 to 1970

Bruges

Groeningemuseum
Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43
Until DEC 31 Leuven Loans, 15th- and 16th-century paintings and woodcarvings from Leuven's Van der Kelen-Mertens museum
Until JAN 4 Stradanus: Artist at the Medici Court, retrospective of Bruges-born artist Johannes Stradanus, with paintings, drawings, prints and tapestries

Brussels

Argos Centre for Art and Media
Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03, www.argosarts.org
Until JAN 3 Interstitial Zones, 15 artists offer a critical alternative to the mass media's coverage of modern history

De Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art

Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.35
Until JAN 11 Réfléchir le monde (Reflecting the World), photographs, video and installations by contemporary French artists on the occasion of the European Union's French Presidency

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
Until DEC 21 Ware Liefde! (True Love!), group show

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until DEC 31 Design Verpakt, jewellery, home fashion and other objects by contemporary Flemish designers

Flemish Parliament

IJzerenkruisstraat 299; 02.552.40.43
Until DEC 20 Screenworlds, contemporary Flemish photography

ING Cultural Centre

Koningsplein 6; 02.547.22.92
Until MAR 15 Oceania: Signs of Ritual, Symbols of Authority, sculptures, masks, artefacts, weapons and utilitarian objects from Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until MAR 8 Continental Superstar, mechanical organs from the Ghysels collection, with recreated dance floor, bar and lighting

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11, www.fine-arts-museum.be
Until JAN 4 Meunier in Séville, 80 paintings made in Spain by 19th-century Belgian artist Constantin Meunier
Until JAN 18 Landscapes and portraits by Belgian artist Lismonde
Until FEB 15 CoBrA, major retrospective on the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Cobra movement

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until MAR 31 That's Opera: 200 Years of Italian Music, a look behind the scenes of the making of an

opera, travelling exhibition by music publishers Ricordi

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33, www.wiels.org
Until FEB 22 Un-Scene, works by young Belgian artists

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until DEC 21 Glans en duister (Glossy and Dark), photographs by Eric Standaert
Until DEC 21 Harold Lloyd, tribute to the famous American actor and director (1893-1971)

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until JAN 26 100 years Demeyere, stylish cooking utensils by the Belgian manufacturer
Until JAN 26 Retrospective of German Jewellery designer Hermann Jünger (1928-2005)

Kunsthal Sint-Pietersabdij

Sint-Pietersplein 9; 09.243.97.30, www.gent.be/spa
Until MAR 29 Flemish wall tapestries from the 15th and 16th centuries

Museum of Fine Arts

Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be
Until JAN 18 Giambattista Piranesi, prints by the 18th-century Italian architect and artist

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.be
Until JAN 3 Faux Jumeaux (False Twins), carte blanche to Belgian artist Michel François
Until JAN 18 Anyth_ =, paintings by Werner Mannaers
Until FEB 22 The Absence of Mark Manders, installation by the contemporary Dutch artist
Until FEB 22 Pluto, installations by contemporary German artist Max Sudhues

Hasselt

Modemuseum
Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21
Until JAN 4 Ten dans gevraagd (Invitation to Dance), dance costumes by fashion designers and artists from 1920 to the present day

Z33

Zuivelmarkt (Beguinaage) 33; 011.29.59.60
Until JAN 4 The Great Exhibition Part 1: Europe, a project by Ives Maes linking world exhibitions to science fiction

Maaseik

Maaseik Museum
Lekkerstraat 5; 089.81.92.99
Until MAR 31 The Terracotta Army of Xi'an: Treasures of the First Emperors of China, warrior sculptures from the world-famous Terracotta Army shown with 200 artefacts from the Qin and Western Han dynasties

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum
Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00
Until FEB 22 Ensor & Raveel: Kindred Spirits, drawings and paintings by the Belgian artists

Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum
Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75, www.speelgoedmuseum.be
Until JAN 4 50 years and 3 generations of building with LEGO

Meise

Kasteel van Bouchout, Meise Botanical Garden
Nieuwelaan 38; 02.260.09. 20
Until FEB 1 Plantenportretten (Plant Portraits), watercolours by the garden's illustrators

Get your tickets now for...



Death in Venice

15-29 January, 19.00, De Munt, Muntplein, Brussels.
Tickets from 070.23.39.39 or www.demunt.be

Benjamin Britten postponed much-needed heart surgery to finish work on his last opera – a poetic irony, considering the lead character is a gravely ill German novelist looking for inspiration in the City of Water. Completed in 1973, Britten wanted to differentiate his adaptation of the 1912 novel by Thomas Mann from the famous film version released two years earlier. This led to a marvellous interpretation of the young Tadzio – the object of the novelist's silent affection – as a non-singing part, played by a dancer. This new production by London's English National Opera literally channels Venice onto the stage – both its beauty and its ultimate death knell.

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11
Until AUG 31 Omo: People & Design, Hans Silvester's photographs of south-western Ethiopia's nomadic tribes and objects from the museum's collection

Festivals & special events

Aalst

Aalst on Ice: Christmas village and covered ice skating rink
Until JAN 4 on Grote Markt
www.lavera-events.be

Antwerp

Christmas Market
Until DEC 28 on Groenplaats and outdoor skating rink on Grote Markt
www.antwerpen.be

Jewish Culture Festival: Exhibitions, theatre, music and film exploring local and international Jewish life
Until DEC 2009 across Antwerp
www.joodscultuurfestival.be

Brasschaat

Christmas Market
Until DEC 21 around the Church of Brasschaat-driehoeki
www.kerstmarktbrasschaat.be

Bruges

Christmas Market: the annual market, plus outdoor ice skating and outdoor concerts
Until JAN 4 on Grote Markt, Simon Stevinplein, Arentshof and the Gruuthuse Museum courtyard
www.brugge.be

Moscow Circus on Ice

DEC 23 15.00 at Concertgebouw, 't Zand 34
0479.31.84.55, www.concertevents.be

Snow & Ice Sculpture Festival: A glacial fantasy world created by 40 international ice sculptors, with refreshments available from the ice bar
Until JAN 11 at the Bruges train station square
www.icesculpture.be

Brussels

Radioboeken: Eugène Savitzkaya and Kris Lauwerys of France read their new work aloud for a public recording
DEC 18 20.00 at Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein
02.641.10.20, www.radioboeken.be

Winter Wonders: Annual Christmas market with ice skating rinks, big wheel and sound and light show
Until JAN 4 on Sint-Katelijneplein, Vismarkt, Beurs and Grote Markt
www.winterwonders.be

Eksaarde-Lokeren

Alternative Christmas market: Local art and hobby market with Christmas and folk music, workshops and more
DEC 21 from 11.00 at Uilenestje Sporthal, Muylaertstraat 17

Ghent

Christmas Market: annual market plus outdoor ice skating
Until DEC 30 on Sint Baafsplein and Emile Braunplein
09.221.45.28, www.gent.be

Night Walk through illuminated Ghent

DEC 20 19.00, begins at entry to Belfort, Botermarkt
09.225.38.53, www.masereelfonds.be

Hasselt

Christmas Market
Until DEC 30 on Molenpoortplein and Leopoldplein
www.hasseltlokaal.be

Houthalen-Helchteren

Kunstkerstmarkt: Christmas market with art in the inner courtyard of Ter Dolen Castle
DEC 20-21 at Kasteel Ter Dolen, Eikendreef 21
www.terdolen.be

Koksijde

Mediaeval Winter Event: Food, drink and activities in mediaeval costuming
DEC 23 at Ten Duinen Abbey Museum

Outdoor skating rink

Until JAN 11 on Theaterplein
058.51.29.10, www.koksijde.be

Leuven

Christmas Market
Until DEC 21 on Monseigneur Ladeuze and Herbert Hoover Squares
016.23.71.41, www.leuvenkerstmarkt.com

Oostduinkerke

Music for Life: Charity event organised by Studio Brussel, with sport and music activities, plus after-party, to benefit the Red Cross' refugee programme
DEC 21 from 11.00 at Sportpark Hazebeek, www.stubru.be

Ostend

Christmas market: Numerous festive stands and outdoor skating rink
Until DEC 24 on Wapenplein
www.eindejaarinoostende.be

Winter Warmth at the Sea: Ice sculptors, craft workshops, a falconry display, wood carvers and evening entertainment
DEC 19-21 at Ostend Tennis Club, Koninginnelaan 83
www.winterwarmte.be

INTERVIEW

“Every human being is a potential murderer”

Jef Vermassen is Flanders' most famous criminal lawyer. He works in the assizes court, which handles the most violent of crimes.

Jef Vermassen's clients these days tend to be relatives of the victims of crime, such as David Van Gysel, the postman bullied into taking his own life; Luna, the little girl gunned down in the street in Antwerp by a neo-Nazi; Guido De Moor, the train driver stomped to death by youths on an Antwerp bus; and Els Van Dooren, the parachute enthusiast who died when her chutes failed to open, allegedly after being tampered with by a love rival.

In the past, Vermassen represented the defendants, most recently the elderly woman nicknamed Wiske who beat her husband's head flat with a hammer before slitting his throat four times. She got off. Vermassen has got 15 of his clients off – a huge number in a system where cases only come to court when the prosecution is sure it has a cast-iron case.

Vermassen is also the author of the 2004 book *Murderers and Their Motives*, which has sold 15,000 copies in Flanders and is undergoing translation into French and English. It has made him the first port of call for many media when murder cases come up and turned him into a sought-after speaker.

You're famous for claiming we're all murderers on the inside.

What I said was that every human being is a potential murderer. Most murderers I have dealt with are very normal people who would never have thought themselves capable of such a crime. They have a clean record, they've never been in trouble with the police. Then along comes some tension in a relationship, which leads to an increase in stress to immense levels.

These people are characterised by severe suffering and remorse after the fact, as well as bewilderment at what has happened. They're quite unlike psychopaths,

for instance, whose first instinct is to try to justify their actions. In a moment of conflict, most people have an instinct not to do harm, but the potential for violence is there.

You've also pointed out that murder is usually a matter between intimates.

I've spent 17 years collecting data on murders and attempted murders from the newspapers. It's the biggest research project of its kind in the world. You may wonder about the wisdom of using the newspapers, but their information is very good when it comes to the facts of the case – who and when and what happened. The statistics compiled by the government are very late and incomplete. The newspapers are ironically much more accurate. Eighty percent of killers are well known by their victims. At least that many: there are unsolved cases, like the murder of Annick Van Uytsel [a young woman murdered while cycling home from a party more than a year ago] where we just don't know what relationship if any the killer had to her.

People have been made to believe that it's not safe to be out on the streets at night. But the figures show it's far more dangerous inside your own home. That's where most physical crimes take place: murders and assaults and domestic violence, which is just assault by another name. About one in three of these crimes are carried out by a partner or an ex-partner. So the home can be especially dangerous when things aren't going well. Then you see fighting, shouting, people not listening. The tension mounts, and something snaps. The chances of a murder taking place are increased in a couple for whom the main activity has become fighting. Because the fighters become very accomplished: the more you fight

with someone, the more effective you are at scoring points. Until one day the aggression, hostility and frustration boil over and turn to violence.

You always hurt the one you love. How do we avoid becoming murderers?

Most of the time, the critical moment comes at the weekend, especially over long holiday weekends. And alcohol is often a factor. If you don't want to be murdered by your partner or another family member, the best thing you can do is make sure you're not home at the weekend. I believe in the goodness of people. We are all capable of murder – not a contract killing or a robbery-murder, but we are all certainly capable of the murder of a partner. But in the end there are not so many murders. Most people do resist, so the chances are very small.

Your reputation is such that your very presence in court is a major factor in whether your client will get off. How do you know you're representing the right person?

There are people I would never defend. I always meet a potential client to see if it clicks between us. This sort of relationship is too important not to take seriously. There's a whole group of people – like psychopaths – whose personalities are not appealing. They're just more difficult to get on with. However, they have to be defended too; that's a fundamental aspect of the legal system of a free society. But they don't have to be defended by me. They usually end up being assigned a representative.

I myself don't take on those kind of assignments. When I was a young lawyer starting out, the law was that an accused person had to be defended by someone from the region where the trial was taking place. I was a member of the bar at Dendermonde, but the assizes court was in Ghent.

So you only take on defense cases when you believe that



the person is innocent?

I've pleaded about 80 cases before the assizes court, and I've had about 15 acquittals. Some of those were genuinely innocent of the crime, but some were also covered by Article 71 of the criminal code, which says that anyone who is not responsible for his actions cannot be punished. That means the mentally ill, but it could also mean someone who is subjected to irresistible pressure. I recently argued the case of a 79-year-old woman who had suffered a half-century of abuse at the hands of her husband, until one day she killed him. She was acquitted; although she was guilty of the fact of killing him, she was not guilty under the law. I argued that she was also a victim, and the jury went along with that point of view.

What's the one thing people understand least about your job?

I'm not playing tricks with the jury's minds. It's not a show or theatre or an act. An assizes trial lasts about a week – an entire week of evidence, morning to night – and the jury sees and hears the whole story from all sides. That is the whole point. The media can't cover the whole story, and the public can never know what the jury knows. However you think you would have voted, you can't know better than the people who did vote. I don't win cases, the facts win the case.

Interview by Alan Hope

online
www.jefvermassen.be

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Keep it in the family

"Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, was a distant relation. We have a bad image of the guy, but he was the life and soul of family gatherings."

Philippe Geubels
Flemish comedian
on the quiz show *De slimste mens* on VRT

Lousy laws

"If we built bridges in this country the way we make laws, there would be a lot more traffic accidents."

Philippe Lambrecht
secretary-general of the Union
of Belgian Enterprises

Sorry

"I offer my apologies for this unacceptable error. This is a severe blow to the credibility of the justice system."

Jo Vandeurzen
justice minister
after a procedural error almost
saw an accused killer freed

Special Issue: The Best of Bruges

Snow&Ice Festival

The Flemish

Primitives

Pieter Aspe

B&Bs

Shops

Cafés

Restaurants

next week in Flanders Today