



# The extraordinary weekend of Mons

Every year, when the spring arrives, the chocolate and its different flavors invade the streets of Mons for the sweeter weekend of the year. This time *La Fête du Chocolate* (The Chocolate Festival) took place the days 24 and 25 of March, sharing the date with the traditional and folk festival *Le Ducasse de Messines*.



Sara  
Sánchez  
González

# La Fête du Chocolat

## in Mons

Since the beginning of time, *La Fête du Chocolat* has been a real translation of this village and its success is increasing. This original initiative, developed by the ASBL *Piétonnier*, the Municipal Department of Economic Development and trade associations of Mons, is part of a calendar full of events and animations.

The rhythm of the historic center of this village, located near the board of France, becomes fast and crowded, including special chocolate menus in the restaurants, tastings, contests of cruises, spectacles and music.

The Chocolate Festival consists in the promotion of traders whose products are related to chocolate and sweets. Every year in March, Belgian chocolate tra

### **The Chocolate Festival offered more than 1.000 types of truffles**

ders and artisans invite citizens to a delightful walk to explore their creativity and expertise.

Most of stands, located in two main streets in Mons *Le Piétonnier* and *La rue de la Coupe*

made into a gourmet walk, sold chocolates, pralines, chocolate lollipops, traditional Belgian *cuberdons*, spreads, soft cookies, beer and chocolate liqueurs, sweet spirits as “Pee bee” and teas and coffees all around the world. Notable were the truffles, with more than 1.000 flavors as walnut, coconut, red fruit filling, Grand Marnier and almond, Speculoos, coffee, smoked tea, cognac, praline, Calvados cream and champagne.

Another of the interesting things that make this festival famous is its interest in catching public at-

tention and seeking their participation.

This edition offered a wide list of activities to do during the day and the walk between stands. First of all, shops opened also on

### **The participation of the audience is very important**

Sunday from 12:00 to 18:00 and secondly, children could participate in activities in which they became little “gourmets” and sweet artisans.

The stand *Chocoland* offered



children the chance of participate in activities as chocolate painting, making candy fun, tips, truffles and magical biscuits.

## SPECTACLES AND DEMONSTRATIONS

### Saturday 24

On Saturday 14 of March at 13:00, there was a mini representation of *Les Mangeuses of chocolat* (The eating of chocolate). This is a piece of Philippe Blasband, a filmmaker and a writer in French language from Belgium, performed by the troupe "Le Jardin Imaginaire".

The piece is related to three young, tasty and strong character women in different backgrounds but with the same obsession, who are in a therapy session to fight against their vice, the chocolate. The same piece was performed on Sunday 25 at 13:30, 14:00 and 14:30 in the courtyard of l'Hôtel de Ville of Mons.

### A giant chocolate cake is one of the most important attractions of the Festival

Later, at 13:15, visitors enjoyed of a demonstration of cooking chocolate by Maxence Poulot,



Girl participating in a workshop offered by Chocoland

one of the most famous confectioners in Belgium.

Also on Saturday 24, one of the most important events took place. At 15:30 a giant cake was made by l'École Hôtelière de Saint-Ghislain. This giant cake is famous in this festival, and every piece of the cake is sold to the visitors for 1 euro. All the money raised is intended for the benefit of disad-

vantaged children.

### Sunday 25

On Sunday 25, three demonstrations delighted the audience. The first, at 14:45, was *La cuisine* (cooking) performed by Marie Christine Maillard. She is a singer whose last success has been "Blues Chocolate", one music spectacle. Her CD was on sale in one of the stands of the festival.

“

*My spectacle is an orgy of bossa rhythms, wing, gypsy jazz, blues, tango flavor, rumba tequila, a hymn to the cream, all spiced up by musical culinary gibberish.* ”

Marie Christine Maillard

The second one was at 15:00, a demonstration of Marcel Leroy. This show was very well received. I was really surprised when the entire audience cheered enthusiastically because of a girl dressed as a bride appeared.

Her dress, accessories, wedding

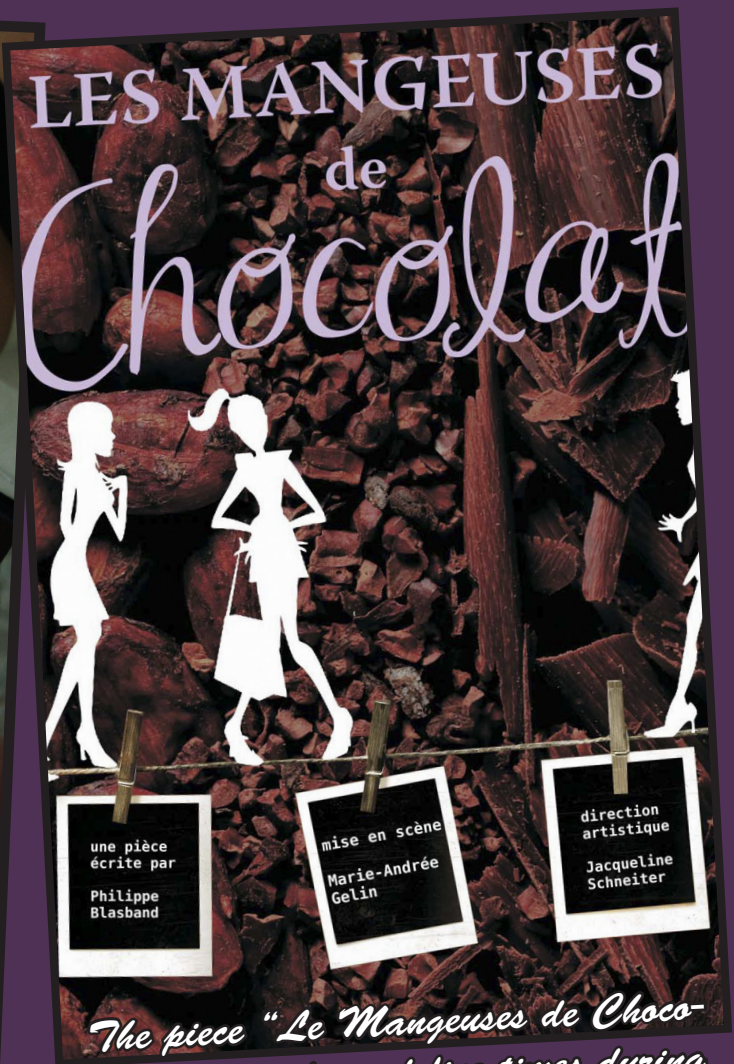


The famous Belgian cuberdons in several flavors

Continues in page 5



*The feast of chocolate offered live demonstrations of cooking chocolates*



*The piece "Le Mangeuses de Chocolat" was performed five times during the weekend*



*The price of every sold piece of this giant cake was intended for the benefit of disadvantaged children*



Wedding dress made by Marcel Leroy for his demonstrations in Mons

*Continues from page 3*

bouquet and decorations of her skin were made of chocolate, mostly white chocolate. Next to her, two princes carried up two little white chocolate heels. The high temperatures and the sun of that Sunday didn't ruined the magic moment in which the bride walked and the principles gave the heels to the audience. A friend and I were the lucky people of obtaining these sweets elaborated by the great chocolate artisan Marcel Leroy.

The last cooking demonstration of this chocolate festival was at 16:00. It was performed by Franco Lombardo of *L'espace goût*

(Space taste), Sandra and Sandrine de *Comme un Chef* (As a Chef).



My friend with the chocolate heels made by Marcel Leroy

## NOTABLE STANDS

Besides the stands of traders and sweets and chocolate shops, four more stands captured the attention of visitors.

Notable was the Choco Bar, one stand in the middle of the pedestrian street where people could buy a mix of fruits as strawberries, bananas and pears, or the

## Thousands of visitors from Belgium and France arrive Mons every March

famous Speculoos and gummy clouds with melted black, white or milk chocolate. A small packet of this cost 3 euro, but surely you couldn't leave the festival of Mons without tasting it. With the bought of one packet or a milkshake there, clients received a recipe book of desserts and meals with chocolate.

## One of the stands sought signatures to support the candidacy of Liège of the Expo 2017

Another place to stop before leaving the village which was announced in this last edition of this chocolate festival is *Le Salon des Lumières*. This salon is a new gastronomic creative bar.

As one of the waitresses, dressed with vintage English clothes, explained "*Le Salon des Lumières* is intended to create the world of the Enlightenment, as we were living in the refinement of the 18 century, setting with the friendliness of the dishes. It is a



Waitresses from Le Salon des Lumières in The Fête of Chocolat

“

*Le Salon des Lumières is a place where tickle our senses and enjoy the serenity of its cocoon of gold, as we were living in the refinement of the 18 century.*

”

bar with large gas chandeliers in the candlelight and mirrors that offer large infinity, drunkenness and eclectic melodic open the doors to eternity. *Le Salon des Lumières* is a place where tickle our senses and enjoy the serenity of its cocoon of gold”.  
 Certainly, I think it was a good



A signature, a chocolate

**Traders invited visitors to a delightful walk to explore their creativity and expertise**

and original place where enjoy some refreshing, wine or aperitifs.  
 Two more stands that were not ignored by the visitors were the one owned by the Make a Wish Foundation, whose sells where used to grant the wishes of children with medical conditions that endanger their lives, and the other that collected signatures to support the candidacy of Liège for the Expo 2017. Person who signed, person who received a chocolate as a present, a sweet way of getting support...



In the stand of Make a Wish Fundation children could make a photo with a “dog”

My chocolate recipe tip from Mons...

# Macaron au Chocolat



## Ingredients:

### PATE MACARON

- 100g of almond powder
- 100g icing sugar
- 10g of cocoa powder
- 10g of water
- 25g sugar
- 40g egg whites

### CHOCOLATE GANACHE

- 100g dark chocolate
- 70g milk
- 20g butter

## Prepare the ganache

- Boil milk in a saucepan
- Remove from heat and add the chocolate 3 times stirring constantly with a whisk.
- When the mixture is slightly warm (around 60°C), add butter.
- Put the ganache at ambient temperature in a dish (+/- 2 hours).

## Prepare the macarons

- Mix the almond powder and cocoa with the icing sugar with a whisk.
- Make meringue by cooking sugar and water to 118°C and beat the whites at the same time. When sugar is cooked in syrup (118°C), pour over the egg whites until stiff but not too firm, while continuing beating the mixture until it is completely cooled.
- Stir in the composition of almond powder/cocoa/powder sugar in the meringue, delicately bringing them from the middle to the edges. The mixture must be homogeneous, but be careful not to fall to the meringue.
- Put the dough in a pastry bag, and draw little heaps on a baking sheet lined with baking paper. Leave crust at ambient temperature (+/- 30 min).
- Preheat an oven at 140°C and bake for 12 min.
- Defourner macarons and cool on a rack.
- Garnish with a ganache macaron shell using a pastry bag and close with another shell.



**The Ducasse traditions mark, as La Fête du chocolat, the return of spring. In this date, in Mons, everyone knows that the Sunday closest to March one doesn't leave the capital because it is the *Ducasse de Messines* of the region of Hainaut.**

*Le Ducasse* (etymologically, “Ducasse” comes from “Dedication”) *de Messinnes* today is like a love story between three factions: the religious with the pilgrimage, the secular party with the popular festival, and a handful of volunteers who want to keep breaking of Messines originates from a religious event which caused the flow of Mons and their neighbors (even French) in the parish church of Saint Nicolas du Bertaimont suburb from 1620. It was a large gathering of people who came on pilgrimage to Our Lady.

### History

In the early seventeenth century, a small painting of the Virgin is placed in a small chapel located in the cemetery surrounding the church. Soon, this place becomes a very important place of pilgrimage. Miracles are recorded in 1620. It was decided to place the table on the high altar in August 1622. Surrounded by shops and religious images, the carts and donkeys were bringing the sick and homeless every July 2 each year. The festivities begin then. These are the premises of Ducasse.

In 1668 a new church was built near the street Bertaimont (now the parking of the bank Dexia), with the materials of the old building. Then, the carnival moved to the city, but would be located only around the church. In 1771, the date of exchange pilgrimage. It goes from July 2

to 25 March, which is then holiday would. Local residents saw this as their patronal feast day, in the eighteenth century it became one of the most popular of the city. Temporarily suppressed during the Revolution, the Ducasse de Messines returned with the restoration of public worship, but in the Recollet Church (as today), the Previous having been demolished.

Gradually, the pilgrimage loses its fervor, but the festivities are growing. On the outskirtsn the church, the merchants of religious items and a few flower stalls out on the forecourt. Then they'll all along the street Bertaimont, now take up the surrounding streets. In the first half of the nineteenth century, in addition to quarantine, damask, auricles, violets, camellias, aïttes (daffodils), one sees small ob-



jects that bring joy to children: the nightingale, the mill of cardboard, saudart, the wa-wa and the gayole.

## 389<sup>e</sup> DUCASSE de MESSINES



Promotional poster of this edition

### The objects of Folklore

These objects are the memories of old toys manufactured by Messina unemployed during the winter. They sold them for the Ducasse and thus ensured a small additional income. This year, they were on sale on Sunday 25 of the Ducasse, in the heart of the flowers and plants market that placed at the end of La Fête du Chocolat. The most important are:

- > Mill: Bones of wicker and bamboo covered with colored paper, adorned with small wings that rotate in the wind.
- > Gayole: Small wooden cage containing a stylized bird. This object reminds finch cages that once hung high on the facades of houses so that predators cannot reach them.
- > Wa-wa: Small cylindrical cardboard box closed on one side, covered with wallpaper and con-



Traditional Flower market of Mons in March 24 and 25

nected to a stick by a string.

> Sodart: Small wooden soldier carved by hand, dressed in different uniforms of the regiments stationed in Mons.

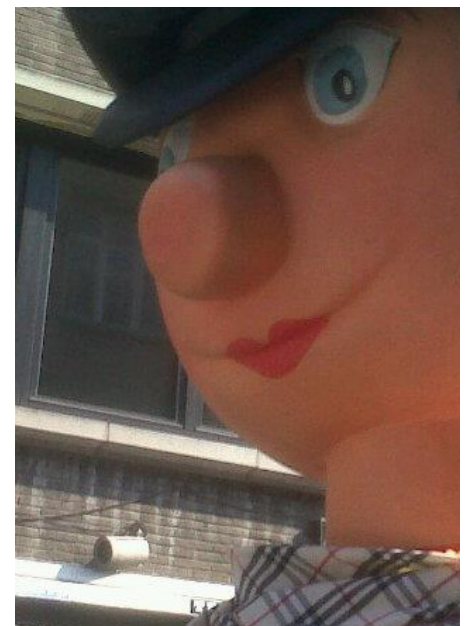
> Rossignol: Small hollow clay pottery, pierced with six holes and fitted with a spout, and filled with water. By blowing the nose, it produces a melody similar to the nightingale's song.

### The procession

Moreover the flowers and plants market, giants go through streets accompanied by a brass band. Two giants Batisse and his wife Lalie Lariflard and their children Biloute and Trinette arouse liveliness and fun in the area and along the streets to the town in this festivity. Batisse and Lalie represent a typical pair of servants, the hero *bétième* (puppet theater in the 19th century). They measure 4.20 m and weight about 100 kg. Biloute and Trinette, the children, weight 50 kg and measure 3.20 m. As tradition dictates, Biloute does some tricks and approach for children to kiss. They all are the ambassadors of the folklore and traditions in Belgium and abroad.

The group that accompanies them was called "The Great Dépindeux of GAYOLE" in memory of those fowlers who were very large, so citizens hung their gayoles very high, to prevent theft and animals.

On Sunday 25, their first departure was at 11:00 and the second one at 15:00. Animation, giants, music, visitors, citizens and a brass band departed from The Church of Messines along the flowers market to the Grand Place of Mons, dancing and playing music.



Biloute, "le petit géant"